

The

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

NEWSLETTER

Number 52

Price 65p



Going on retreat

inside we investigate
the retreat habit

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 para-

mount. 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, metal-work 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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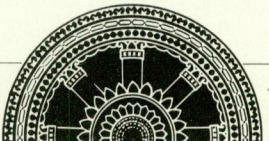
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Editor

Nagabodhi

Facets

Nicolas Soames

Distribution

Jayadeva

Internal Advertising

Ashvajit

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President

The Ven. Maha Sthavira

Sangharakshita

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Editorial

It is almost impossible to overstate the value of going on an FWBO retreat. The trouble is, it is also almost impossible to tell you what a retreat will be like, if you have not already been on one.

It is possible, of course, to explain how the days of a retreat are filled, what sort of things people do, and it is possible to suggest that all the activities, combined with the kind of friendships that get formed on a retreat, have a very powerful effect on those who are there. But it is hard to predict, and even harder to communicate just exactly what that effect will be, and what it will feel like. Unless you have been on a retreat, and experienced for yourself what a retreat can do for you, the fact is that you are probably unaware of those aspects of *yourself* that will come to light, and flower under those conditions.

To experience your own peace of mind, your own 'higher' emotions, your energy, and to catch a glimpse of your own true potential, is possibly the most ecstatic thing you can do. To see habitual thought-patterns giving way to fresh, original insights; to feel face and body armour dissolving, leaving you feeling relaxed, light, and free; to realise that entrenched undercurrents of resignation and cynicism can make way for a new basis of optimism and determination; such discoveries are frankly life-changing.

It is one thing to hear about, or think about concepts like 'growth', 'human potential', 'true individuality', and so on, but it is quite another thing actually to get a taste of what lies behind the words. If you sincerely put yourself into a retreat you are more or less certain to get that taste. You may not see the highest peaks, or touch the ultimate truths, but you will find out how much there is to yourself and to life that is there waiting to be explored.

A retreat may delight you, or it may shock you. As a contributor to a recent *Newsletter* had it, you may find yourself 'diving down wells, or bathing in the sky', but whatever happens, you will be deeply affected, deeply confronted by the possibilities that lie within you.

This issue of the *Newsletter* is an attempt to tell you what FWBO retreats are about — what kinds of retreat there are, who goes on them, what happens on them. But it will not tell you what a retreat actually feels like. *That* you will have to find out for yourself. Believe me, it is well worth it.

Nagabodhi

Contents

Features

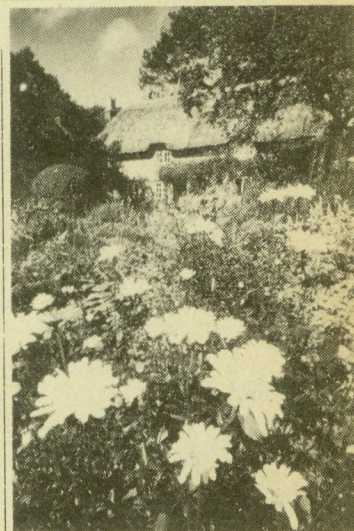
What is a Retreat?	3
"Open Mixed Beginner's Retreat?!"	5
Women Together	7
The Vajraloka Experience	8

Facets

Centres, Communities and Co-ops News	10
AFI — Report, Women's Mitra Event, Manjushri Institute, Politics of Loving	14
"Hang on to your hats"	19

Review

Tibet Exhibition	22
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Front Cover: Vajradipa/Ananda

What is a Retreat?

The newcomer to the FWBO, whether through the pages of the Newsletter, or through visiting one of our Centres, Co-ops or communities, or through talking with a Friend, will almost certainly come across various words, ideas and practices with which they may be completely unfamiliar; or if not completely unfamiliar, then their understanding of them will be at best rather vague and hazy.

Part of the confusion arises because the words or expressions are not peculiar to the FWBO, and have acquired many connotations over the years. Words like 'spiritual' and 'religious' for example, have largely Christian overtones, but as yet we don't have better alternatives, and so continue to use them.

Another such word or expression which you won't go far in FWBO circles without encountering is 'retreat', or 'going on retreat', since retreats play such a central part in FWBO activities. Unfortunately, this word too carries rather ominous overtones, of dark, dim monasteries shrouded in gloom. In this article, therefore, I would like to look at the subject of retreats in a fairly general way, so as to give those of you who have not been on a retreat, some idea of what is involved, at least so far as FWBO retreats are concerned.

Before doing this, though, it is perhaps worth mentioning that religious and spiritual traditions of all ages have always given great importance to the need for periods of solitude and retreat, periods of retirement from normal, everyday life. The Buddhist tradition is no exception here, and retreats of one kind or another have been practised in all schools, down through the ages, whether as three month rainy season retreats in India, (as happened during the Buddha's time), three year, three month, three day ones in

Tibet, or three day *sesshins* in Japan or America.

The FWBO too, ever since its inception in 1967, has always stressed the importance of retreats, long before co-ops, and communities were even thought of. In stressing this importance, the FWBO is not merely following tradition, even a Buddhist tradition, but rather is responding to the needs of people living under modern Western conditions.

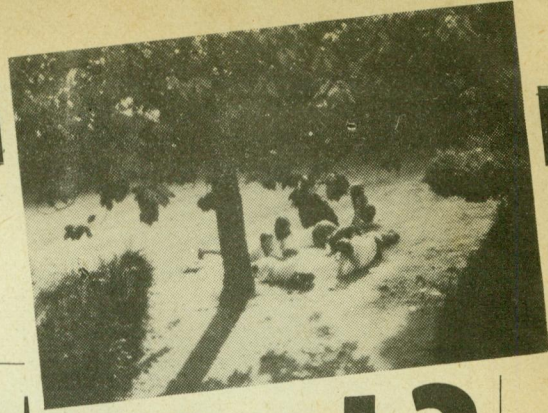
The FWBO exists to encourage and promote individual growth and development; the realisation of the individual's highest human potential. It provides practices and situations which make this easier, which help the individual to have a better knowledge and understanding of him or herself and others and help him or her relate and communicate more fruitfully and lovingly. This then is the broad base underlying all FWBO activities, and is in fact the *raison d'être* of the FWBO itself.

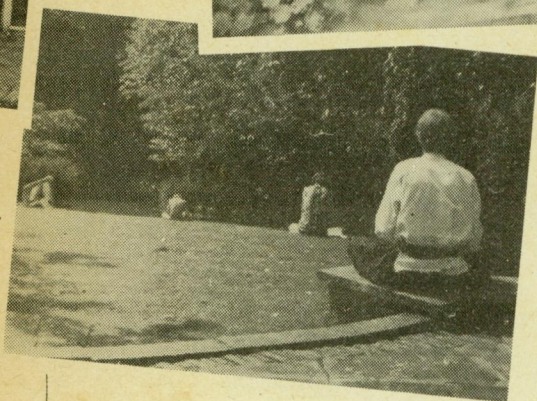
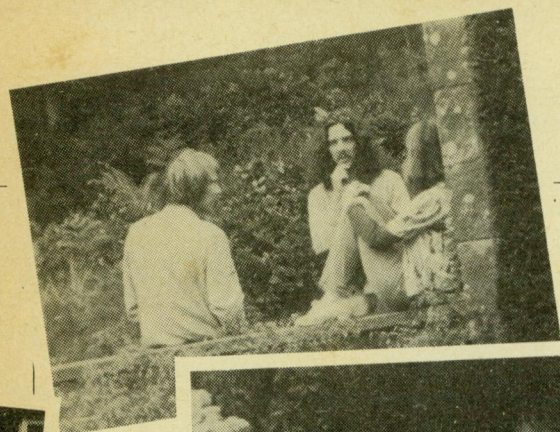
So what part then do retreats play in this process? How do they further the development of the individual's higher human qualities? What in fact *are* retreats? In its

simplest terms a retreat means that for a period of time one 'retreats' from one's normal, everyday, routine, activities, and pursuits, which are often fraught with worry and anxiety, or which may be just plain boring. This retreating may involve a change of location such as going to the country, or into the mountains, or to the sea, as these situations have a naturally tranquillizing and harmonizing effect. In any case the object is to give one time and space to contact and experience oneself in a deeper and more meaningful way than is normally possible, surrounded as we are by so much extreme stimulation, whether in the form of newspapers, radio and television, our work, or even just other people.

This, very broadly speaking, is what a retreat is about. Most retreats will normally have a structure or framework, a programme of

activities, which help make all this possible. This framework will almost always include meditation, and according to the type of retreat, a mixture of lectures, discussion, Hatha Yoga, communication exercises, study, devotional practices, and so on. Retreats vary considerably, as will the experience of the participants. Some people for example may feel the need or desire to be completely alone for a period of time and so may decide to do what we call a solitary retreat, which could be for anything from a weekend to 3 months, or even longer. This normally involves going to some remote place,





Images from a Keffolds retreat
Nagabodhi

where one won't be disturbed by any outside factors, and where one is able to devote all one's time to meditation or study, or to just doing nothing.

Another person may prefer to go on a group retreat for a week or two, perhaps feeling the need for the encouragement and support of others, and also wanting an opportunity to deepen their communication. Yet another person may want something quite different again, and so on.

It is for these reasons that over the past fourteen years, the FWBO has developed many different kinds of retreat; not just for the sake of novelty, but in response to people's needs, and one can to some extent see the history of the FWBO in terms of its retreats, since they both reflect and contribute to developments in other areas of

the FWBO.

The late sixties and early seventies, for example, was the period of large general retreats, held twice a year in Haslemere, where the programme was fairly light. You could come for just a day or two of the two week period. Not too much was demanded of you and there was usually time for afternoon tea in the village, strumming a guitar, or even lovemaking in the woods, in between the periods of meditation. These were early days for the Movement.

But as the Movement grew, as more and more people began to feel the effects of meditation and Bhante's teachings, it became clear that more intensive retreat situations were needed and wanted. In order to reduce the amount of unnecessary distraction and thereby intensify meditation practice, some

people decided to experiment with 'single-sex' retreats. This was something of a turning point and retreats began to be seen in a much more 'serious' way. Single-sex retreats were so much appreciated, by both men and women, that they are now very much the norm, with the exception of introduction 'mixed' retreats for newcomers.

Study seminars too began in the early seventies, with the Ven. Sangharakshita leading groups of Order members in an exploration of various Buddhist texts. These seminars, as distinct from retreats, very much emphasised study, although meditation was also practised of course.

During this period too, solitary retreats became more and more popular, as people set-off for the more remote parts of Wales, Scotland and Cornwall, and these have proved so popular that one now has to book-up cottages and caravans months in advance.

All these developments reflected a growing maturity and depth in the Movement that started in the early 70's. A maturity that was light, not sombre; which saw higher human development as an ideal that was feasible, which could be achieved. This maturity was reflected not only in centres, but also in the emergence of communities and co-operative businesses.

A retreat then, is really a situation where a number of elements such as meditation, lectures, discussion, yoga, beautiful surroundings, and so on, are carefully interwoven and blended in order to create an environment which is conducive to self-awareness and happiness. Attractive natural surroundings can help us to feel more relaxed and at ease. This in turn helps us in our meditation practice, which then feeds our communication with other people, and so on. In fact it is

often under such circumstances that many people first realize just what meditation can be, and are often surprised to find themselves communicating with others in a friendly and relaxed way.

'But', some of you may ask, 'even if all this were possible, is it not all just a bit fanciful, a bit unreal? Are we not just blinding ourselves to the realities of everyday life, escaping into some blissful self-deception? After all, the very word retreat smacks of escapism'. The answer to this must be that we *are* escaping when we go on retreat; we are, after all, retreating from our homes, our jobs, our families and so on. But sometimes these can seem like situations which imprison us, which oppress us, which tie us down. And even if this isn't the case, might it not be a good idea, a worthwhile experiment, to leave them behind, just once in a while anyway? It is important to remember here, that on a retreat one isn't just retreating *from* something, escaping in a negative sense — though sometimes even this may be quite valid; one is also retreating *to* something, escaping if you like, *to* something. Something which, in fact, we all too rarely experience, at least in the most positive way: — *ourselves*. Caught up as we so often are in the turbulence of everyday life, we are often alienated from ourselves; from our feelings, our thoughts, our emotions, and, consequently, from other people.

A retreat gives one a chance to make contact with oneself in a way that isn't normally possible. It is a near perfect environment where all the factors supplement and augment one another in helping us experience our own heights and depths with greater clarity and joy. Why not try one?

Mangala

While the rest of the country celebrates Christmas, with family and funny hats, rich food and poor television, fifty or so people will be taking part in the FWBOs winter retreat at Seaford in Sussex.

At first glance, the ten-day programme seems quite austere. The people on the retreat, most of them beginners, will rise early every morning for meditation. They will use blankets to keep themselves warm in the meditation room, and to pad their knees against the hard wooden floor. The rest of the day will be full, with discussions, Yoga, communication exercises and more meditation. In the evenings, while the BBC or ITV broadcast comedy shows and films, the retreat will settle down to a series of talks on aspects of Buddhism and meditation.

The programme is geared for beginners, and does not assume any previous experience of meditation. It sets out to provide an introduction to meditation, and to extend that until, by the end of the retreat, people will have a substantial taste of what meditation can do.

It is not the easiest way to spend Christmas, but making the effort, along with the others on the retreat is invigorating and satisfying. One woman on last year's retreat finished her stay, went home, then promptly turned round and came back for more.

Retreats like this are held every Christmas, and during the summertime too. Matthew Evans and Catherine O'Rourke were both on the big introductory retreat that was held, also in Seaford, this summer. Here are some of their comments.

Matthew

I had spoken to a couple of people who had been on the previous year's retreat who told me that it was all very sparkling and enjoyable. So

that is what I was expecting when I went along this year. Maybe a part of me thought that it would be a bit of an escape, but once I actually got there, I found that that was not where my emotional state was at all! I was going to have to go through something for myself, something far more basic. I had to combat the fact that I was feeling very alienated from the situation I was in.

For me the retreat was an extremely varied experience; I'd never had such a wide variation of emotional states in such a short time. I was quite exhilarated on occasions, and also quite desperate on occasions. It was all very crucial!

The meditation helped to open me up and sharpen my awareness of myself. Whereas I was expecting to get into some fairly glamorous *dhyanic* states, I soon realised that I had a lot of emotional material to deal with. Once, when I did the *metta bhavana* (the development of universal loving kindness meditation practice), I felt like crying. That was a bit of a shock. I think that experience sums up the retreat for me, because I realised there that Buddhism can't just be an intellectual thing. It has very much to do with changing the emotions as well.

I found it difficult to reconcile my intellectual desire to change with my emotional inability to relate to the other people on the retreat. I was actually quite isolated. After a communication exercise I realised that I was feeling quite sad about this. I told a few Order members, which was a help, and I realised that I had

"Open Mixed Beg

This is how our adverts describe the first kind of

to go out and talk to people, rather than expecting the situation to do it all for me.

On a couple of occasions I was feeling very blissful in a way which came to me as a surprise. I was quite amazed at how still everything was, how clear, how limpid, that I had the capacity to be like that. In any similar experience I had had in other circumstances — say in a beautiful natural setting — there had always been a certain lethargy or drowsiness which tainted things. On the retreat I felt alert, in a very positive way. To see that possibility, despite the lower emotional chummings, made me feel that there must be a lot more where that came from. That made me want to persist.

I liked the simplicity of the life, the constructive routine. I liked the sense of direction: spending a certain amount of time feeling that I was doing something quite strong, with other people. One of the main things that came out of the retreat for me was the realisation that I had always been rather negative, in that I had only *thought* about changing previously. I now wanted to be more positive. I wanted to *act*.

At the moment that means actually doing something that helps other people, as well as helping myself. I learnt from the retreat that it is no good trying to work out just what I need. That has first of all to be accompanied by action, and secondly it has to be oriented towards others. This seemed to come out of the work periods. Working in teams with other people I learnt to be more co-operative, and I learnt to see the value of working from a good state of mind. I am now working with Aid for India as a direct result of this. I can do things which have an effect on other people's well-being.

I found the pujas very strong, and I began to enjoy them. What I particularly enjoyed was the fact that each puja seemed to reflect the mood that I was in; I could actually see more of myself through them. I didn't know much about summoning up the



Summer tea at Seaford, 1980
Roslyn Smith

inners' Retreat?!"

retreat that many people come on. What are they?

states necessary to each part of the puja, but it was enjoyable to be in a sort of devotional state: a state which I had pretty rigorously repressed previous to that. It was great to have that as a part of my life, rather than seeing it as being set apart as a sort of ritual.

I started the retreat thinking in therapeutic terms, and I saw Buddhism as having mainly to do with psychological change. But during the retreat I got much more in contact with the sources. I definitely felt that I wanted to take this particular path, and became much more interested in the further stages, rather than being preoccupied with my problems.

During the retreat the ideal of Enlightenment began to seem relevant. I began to see a little of how the path works for other people who were a little farther along. I began to really appreciate them, and I wanted

to aspire to that myself. I suppose that I was taking them as my ideal more than the Buddha, but I think that that started to make me a Buddhist.

Cathy

In a way I thought it was crazy — that I just shouldn't bother, but in the end I decided to go for the last four days of the retreat, simply to see what it was like. I knew that there would be Yoga and meditation, but other than that I had no idea what to expect...

I think that I had been looking for something for a long time, and I had got a feeling of it when I started coming along to the London Buddhist Centre. I was just beginning to get some feedback from my meditation — I was getting more in touch with myself, but I thought that to get something more intense I would need discipline.

I had heard that there would be a bit of a regime, like getting up at 6.30, and having all

of the time very scheduled, and I was a bit nervous about it. But once I was there, it was something that I really liked. I tend to daydream when left to myself, but on the retreat I was forced to use all of my time creatively. When the breaks did come, I really needed them in order to think constructively.

I arrived at the retreat on the Saturday at lunchtime, but by the evening I was already really into it. There was a lot of momentum, a lot of good feeling in the place. Everybody was smiling, there was a lot of eye contact. I knew very few people there, but I found that I was making friends very quickly and easily. I had always considered the spiritual life — any insights that I'd had — to be a very private affair, something to be protected, but at Seaford it seemed that you could actually talk about these things to others, and they would respond and be in sympathy. They had had their experiences too, so you could actually grow together. One and one made three!

I came back home feeling very high and very in-touch with myself. I went around Brixton, where I live, smiling and keeping up that eye contact with people. But they took it in so many ways! I would sometimes get followed, or people would get very hostile. People's reactions were amazing, just because I was looking really happy. I hoped that I would never come down from that state of mind, but after a week I gradually began to. I became aware that I was losing some of what I had gained, and that's why I de-

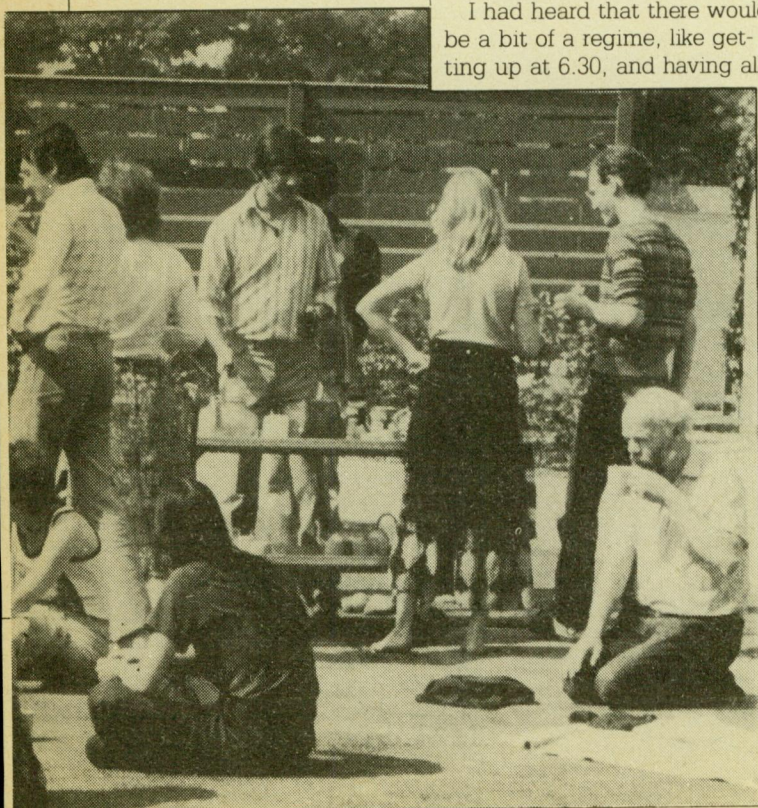
cided to move into a community.

I think that the most important aspect of that state of mind, as regards other people, is trust. I think that was the strongest feeling I had about being with the people there. For instance, I could leave my watch in the bathroom and know that it would not get stolen! I don't usually have that sort of trust. It's really nice to be with people you can just be open with, and be yourself with. Feeling like that has changed me a lot, because opening myself up allowed me to find some sensible alternative to what I have been — alternative emotions, attitudes, ways of living, without needing to be over-protective.

When I left the retreat it seemed that many of the things that people were putting their energy into out in the world was so senseless. Everyone seemed to be involved in one big, fat distraction from something very important. On the retreat I think I got a sense of something that was more urgent, more objective, and more necessary: *myself*. Maybe it's as simple as that.

This is something that I sometimes feel when I'm painting, that behind all appearances, behind attitudes and conditioning, there is something just overwhelmingly true. It's like being at home, being very happy, with a purpose. It is like the truth, and everything else is a very poor substitute for that truth. And the truth has a sort of urgency about it. When you're in touch with it, it is what life is all about.

Bringing together the ideal and the mundane has always been a difficulty for me, but the retreat made me feel that it is possible. It made me believe that there is a way you can live which will actually put you in touch with yourself, and heighten that truth in yourself.



Women Together

I must confess that when I first saw a poster advertising a Women's Retreat in 1974, I didn't take it very seriously! I think it was only the second or third women's retreat to be held in the Friends, and having only heard of, or been on, mixed retreats, I thought this probably wasn't a very important event and I'd wait to go on the next 'proper' retreat! This says something for my conditioning, but it's interesting that I've always enjoyed and valued women's company, or at least the friendships I've had with particular women. But I'd still unconsciously succumbed to the idea that if something didn't have men involved, it wasn't very important. I shudder to remember this now!

However, realising that I'd dismissed this first opportunity rather thoughtlessly, I decided I would attend the next womens' retreat and since then I've attended most of the main womens' retreats, culminating in the first Ten Day Order/Mitra Event for women, held at Seaford this summer, which nearly eighty women attended.

Seven years ago there were very few women Order members, with the confidence and experience needed to build up, organise and lead womens' retreats. However, quite quickly, women's retreats became regular events on the programme at Pundarika, the one main FWBO Centre at the time. Dhammadinna led most of these retreats at Court Lodge (a large house in Kent owned by an Order member's parents), or places that we'd hire for the occasion. One place I remember particularly was Hengrave Hall, which was an ecumenical Christian community where retreats were also held. Their annexe was hired for our retreat. Looking at their programme of retreats I noticed that both of the retreats to be held just for nuns were to be led by a male member of the clergy. I felt quite angered by this — that the nuns couldn't

have a senior nun to lead their retreat. I also felt glad that in the 'Friends', womens' retreats were led by women Order members. This reminds me of a letter I received a few months ago from a woman mitra in Scotland, just after a womens' Mitra Weekend at the London Buddhist Centre. She wrote, "I was thinking about what you said in your 'exhortation' last weekend — about women tending to see themselves as spectators rather than actively contributing to a situation. I'm sure it's true generally speaking, and especially with regard to anything religious. It reminded me of how I felt the first time I saw a woman lead a meditation — I was quite taken aback. And it made me realise that I had *never* seen a woman take an active part in any kind of religious ceremony — but also that I found it rather odd, not quite correct somehow! Yet, consciously, I had never thought of it that way."

On many occasions I've reflected how important it is that what happens in the Friends with regard to womens' retreats, communities and other activities is determined by the women themselves. Obviously the Ven. Sangharakshita is interested, gives advice, and

makes comments, but ultimately it's the women who make the decisions and get things done.

The retreats in those days were usually fairly small, with under twenty people on them. Most of the women would come through the Pundarika Centre. After my initial lack of enthusiasm, I soon became a regular attender of women's retreats. By 1976 I had become ordained and was helping to organise these retreats. I must say that they weren't always smooth sailing! Compared to womens' retreats these days, when most women come prepared to put themselves into the programme and their meditation, some of the women then would be less than wholehearted. For example, at that Hengrave Hall retreat, quite a few of the bedside lockers were crammed with chocolate and biscuits which were tucked into at every available opportunity, and some of the women had to be rather strongly encouraged to go into the shrine-room! However, I would look forward to them with relish, particularly, I think, for the opportunity to get into my meditation practice more wholeheartedly, and for the chance to be with other women who, for the most part, took their lives and themselves seriously.

I remember the first time we made all the offerings mentioned in the Confession of Evil chapter of the *Bodhicaryavatara*. I think there are thirty-two of them. Dhammadinna made a list and asked us to make two or three offerings each. We spent the afternoon deeply engrossed in creating jewel trees, bathing palaces, celestial clouds, jewelled parasols and other magnificent

offerings. Most of us changed into something colourful and festive for the puja (something which up until then I think most people didn't bother much about) and I felt very touched as each person came forward and offered one of these beautiful, carefully made items. At the end of the puja the shrine was overflowing with colour and beauty. Since that occasion I've been on several women's retreats where we've made all these offerings and each time I have a strong feeling of devotion and also closeness and warmth for the other women involved in this practice.

1977 was an important year for women in the FWBO. We started two new ventures — a large womens' community in Wanstead, East London (Amaravati), and a retreat centre near Norwich in Norfolk (Mandarava). We now had two semi-permanent centres for womens' events, Amaravati being housed in a short-life property owned by the Department of Environment, and Mandarava being leased to us for a few years by a woman mitra. It certainly made a difference having our own country retreat centre. Conditions were basic — besides the house, the sleeping quarters were two caravans, converted railway wagons, and a chicken hut! But we did have a beautiful big shrine-room, converted from a barn. The retreats we held there, particularly in the summer, I remember fondly. During the work periods on one retreat we painted the outside of the house in dazzling sunshine. And there was a never ending battle between the scythes and nettles! But it was good to do work on a place

which we knew, at least for the time being, was our own retreat centre.

We also held weekend retreats at Amaravati and, by now, at both places we had women coming to visit from all over Britain, and a few from abroad. We do not at present have our own womens' retreat centre but are working towards buying a place by Spring 1984, which we foresee as a centre for many womens' activities.

Our experience of womens' retreats has been broadened further over the last few years by having study seminars with Bhante — two at Padmaloka last year being particularly happy and memorable events. We've also had several retreats at Vajraloka, concentrating esp-

ecially on meditation. The first retreat I went on at Vajraloka was just with other women Order members. As we sat there in the shrine room, hour after hour, sometimes counting our breath, sometimes developing Metta for all sentient beings and sometimes clicking our beads as we chanted the mantra of the particular Bodhisattva whose visualisation practice we were doing, I felt this surge of inspiration as it struck me that here were twelve women who really wanted to go beyond their conditioning, who were really serious about their spiritual practice, who were actively working towards Enlightenment!

So often in our society women do not value each other's company — perhaps partly owing to being afraid that if they are left just with other women, nothing much will happen, which can be true if you're used to looking to men to 'make things happen'. Unless you are a highly evolved woman, the temptation is always there when men are around to fall into some old familiar pattern of behaviour, for example: 1) becoming limp and passive, 2) becoming over assertive and competitive, 3) becoming infatuated — all of which usually lead to 4) becoming alienated from your self experience! So I think it is encouraging and even inspiring to have the opportunity to go on a retreat

with other women and learn to discover and develop one's strengths and to recognise one's weaknesses in a relatively clear atmosphere. It feels good to be with other women happily and wholeheartedly practising together and thoroughly rejoicing in each other's company. As an example of this, I'd like to refer you to the Facets Section of this *Newsletter* where I have written an account of the womens' ten day Order/Mitra Event, held this summer. I think this will help to convey the spirit of what a womens' retreat can be like.

So if you see a poster advertising a women's retreat at your local centre — I can assure you, it's *serious*! Perhaps one of the most serious things you could do in your life, and one of the most enjoyable.

The Vajraloka Experience

Retreats can be divided into two categories, two levels: those in which we rely to some extent on the momentum of the collective energies of all those participating to give *us* momentum for our practice; and secondly, those in which we cannot rely on that. We could call the first category 'collectively motivated'; the second, 'self motivated'.

It should be understood right from the start that, in both cases, it is our own effort that counts — there is no possibility of the group energy doing it for us. But retreats of the first kind give us more *support*. This is especially helpful at the beginning; and from time to time experienced meditators can benefit from them too. At home, for example, it might not be very easy to get up and do two sessions of meditation, but we can on retreat — because

everyone else is doing it! And in the shrineroom too we are more inclined to collect ourselves and concentrate our minds, since we are aware that when we relapse into distracted fidgeting, everyone else knows it!

The second type of retreat is for the more experienced.

It can be very beneficial to meditate without that support — so long as we can, in fact, do without it. There are two advantages here: first of all, we train ourselves to be independent, to be able to make progress without outside help. Secondly, and more positively, we will be in a better position to experience ourselves, our real thoughts and emotions, when we are away from that support. The strong momentum of the first kind of retreat will certainly help us to experience more of ourselves than usual, probably in a more psychological way —

but to contact ourselves deeply, to contact the most subtle parts of ourselves, the second type is more effective, if we are ready. There are two kinds of such a retreat: the 'pure' form, which is to say a solitary retreat; or a stay at Vajraloka, the FWBO's meditation centre in North Wales. Vajraloka comes into this category in a special sense that I will explain later.

To go on a solitary retreat means to live completely alone for a week, a month, or more, with the aim outlined above in mind — *to experience ourselves*. We give ourselves the best possible conditions for meditation. It is important in this case, to take a responsible attitude which means being happy to accept ourselves as we find ourselves: after all we do not know what we may discover. We must be spiritual pioneers, adventurers, otherwise our retreat will be ineffective. We must be ready

to experience, accept, change.

For most people, their first solitary retreat is their first experience of solitude. To be alone in this way for the first time — to realise that we are *alone* for the next whole month or more — is an indescribably joyful feeling. The joy consists in the realisation that we are now completely free to be ourselves. Essentially, we may have been as free before, but now we really *feel* free. It is that joy which allows us to experience that mystery: ourselves, more truly than we are able to in human society — more even, in some respects, than we are able within the spiritual community, among others practicing the Dharma.

No wonder all the great sages and yogis, like Milarepa, have spent so much time alone. Alone, we experience, *without interruption*, the comings and goings of our emotional life, and a clearer patterning of the

workings of our thought, against the background of our daily retreat activities. It is a good idea to meditate, although there is no need to do a great deal more than usual — unless, like Milarepa again, that seems to you the best way of using the time. Just being there, simply being aware, is everything. 'Doing nothing' becomes a most significant and rewarding form of *activity*.

A retreat at Vajraloka contains a number of the elements of our second kind of retreat. One certainly feels more on one's own than on the usual kind of retreat: Vajraloka has its own atmosphere, which is very helpful to our meditation, but it is not a group atmosphere. Perhaps this is because all the guests arrange their stays separately. They have come because they needed a retreat at this particular time. There is a feeling of individual initiative and purpose.

There is also space to be ourselves and to experience ourselves. Quality of meditation, rather than quantity, is emphasised: the daily programme is structured so that, apart from four periods of meditation throughout the day, and a work period, we can arrange our time as we find best. If we want, and if we let the retreat leader know, we can meditate on our own. There is plenty of time for walks, extra meditation, or just doing nothing.

A very noticeable aspect of life at Vajraloka is its sense of timelessness. The retreat there has been going (in one form or another) since May 1980! The 'ongoing retreat', Vajraloka's unique feature, means that it is available for men to use at any time — and if they want, they can stay on longer than they had originally planned. When one does leave, there is a feeling that one is leaving part of oneself behind, in a kind of



Vajraloka

Vajradipa

parallel existence; returning, one re-enters the same timeless world.

Anyone who can recall what being on retreat is like will know that this being 'out of time' does not mean a sort of frozen, everlasting sameness. On the contrary, life out of time has more warmth and depth. My feeling is that in that dimension *all our acts become more potent*. The more aware we become of our actions and the motivations that lie behind them — and this is exactly what happens on retreat — the stronger will be their influence over the rest of our lives.

*'Better than a hundred years lived in ignorance, without contemplation,
Is one single day of life lived in wisdom and deep contemplation.'*

— *Dhammapada, v.111*

Within that overall atmosphere, a number of factors combine to give our minds as few distractions as possible, so that we are on the whole far more 'one-pointed' than we usually could be. For one example, Vajraloka is single sex: usually for men, though there are women's retreats (2½ months in 1982) too. Everyone there is expected to observe chastity. In the conditions there, in which one is unlikely even to see a member of the opposite sex, that is not difficult — less so than some of us might imagine. Believe it or not, we may go for days without even thinking about sex! The contrast in atmosphere with, say, London, is complete. Here it is possible to

experience the *Brahmacarya* precept fully — we not only refrain, as far as we can, from sexual activity (bodily/vocal/mental), but we will feel more sexually whole. That means that we will be in natural harmony with the opposite sexual poles within ourselves.

Not reading is an interesting experience (no casual reading matter is allowed at the Centre). There is no escape from ourselves! Faced with the sort of state in which we would normally reach for, and bury ourselves in, the nearest magazine (perhaps feeling a bit anxious or bored), we simply have to fill that awkward gap with — ourselves. But it is best to really *be* bored, if that is our feeling. We become more whole by accepting and experiencing every side of ourselves, not by avoiding ourselves (a maxim that does not only apply to the avoidance of 'escapist' reading). With no words to digest, our minds become richer, more receptive, and more amenable to being worked on in meditation.

To complement all this is the surrounding countryside: hills, valleys, rivers and woodland. Far from being a distraction, these seem to reflect our state of mind as we emerge periodically from the shineroom.

The other main feature of Vajraloka which adds to our feeling of non-distraction and enhanced individuality is the silent period. Something we learn from this is that speech sometimes actually hinders communication. Most of the time we are hardly aware of the amount that we both receive

and communicate *non-verbally*. On retreat, with our clearer consciousness, we can see this much more. Of our everyday speech more than we think arises out of an almost animal, territorial, need for reassurance. Again, it does not help us or others to fill the awkward empty space we sometimes feel — it is better simply to experience it.

At midday, it can seem a shame to start speaking again. But no doubt if we did not do so the unrelieved silence would then lose some of its magic. The silence begins again half an hour before the evening meditation. There is a reason for this which we can apply to our practice at home. If we go straight from maximum bodily/vocal/mental activity into minimum activity (meditation practice), there will be a jarring effect. We probably start off 'speedy' and end up dull. We should allow space for relaxation, without too much conversation, for some time before meditating, and we should also allow space *afterwards* — before starting work or other activities. If we do not do this, not only will the meditation itself be dull, distracted and difficult, but it will tend to put us off meditation altogether. Not allowing space is a bad habit that is easy to get into, and could have disastrous consequences. Most of us have very little time for our practice — at the same time it is our practice which keeps our spiritual life alive. That time is very precious then, and we should make it as likely as possible that it will be effective. Organisation, self-organisation, is the answer. This is vitally important.

We can learn all this at Vajraloka: it is a place not only where we are likely to meditate best, but also one in which we can train ourselves for practice at home. In the long run, it is probably that daily practice that counts for most.

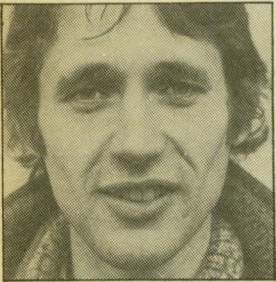
FACETS

Europe

LBC

The full moon night of September saw the departure of Prakasha from the chairmanship of the FWBO in Bethnal Green, and the appointment of Kulamitra in his place.

At a festive event at the London Buddhist Centre, Prakasha was presented with a framed poster than-gka of Manjughosha, a vajra and bell, seven puja bowls, a bone mala, a skull, Tibetan incense and a copy of *The Cult of Tara* to mark the work he has put into the Centre over the past two years.



Prakasha Vajradipa

He is now in Wales, firstly on a three-month solitary retreat at Tydden Rhydderch; then he will join the Vajraloka community.

Prakasha's main work over his two years was to stabilise the material side of the LBC and the surrounding communities and co-ops; he was closely concerned with the Pure Land Co-op and the Phoenix Community Housing Co-op, so in that sense he was more of an administrative chairman than one who concentrated on public classes.

New Approach

Kulamitra intends to take a different approach. 'I think we have gone about as far as we can in the direction of material stability and growth,' he



Kulamitra Vajradipa

remarked. 'That kind of work takes a lot of time and energy, although you do need something solid and stable from which to expound the Dharma.'

'It does help you to grow and develop, but the danger is that you get so involved that you forget the ideals and the purpose for which you started the work.'

'The time has now come,' he said, 'for the emphasis to be put once more on the public classes. I am convinced that we need to go back to the beginning and start again, to start looking at what we are doing and the way we are teaching.'

'For instance, are we really teaching meditation to beginners in the best way? Are our classes the most effective way of communicating the Dharma?'

'I have come into the chairmanship with an open mind. I do know that there have been difficulties — that Order members have not had time in the past to prepare talks properly, and prepare for meditation classes, and I want that to change.'

'But I also know I don't want to come to any immediate decisions.'

With Vajrapushpa, Dhammarati, Atula and Parami, Kulamitra is going to consider different approaches which might be used in the LBC, though he doesn't expect to find anything drastically wrong. 'But I think things are going to change quite a lot,' he said firmly.

Personal contact

He expects that emphasis will be put on two particular directions. Firstly he hopes there will be an increased number of courses rather than just classes — it was clear that the Tuesday Regular class in particular suffered from a lack of direction, and was, perhaps, too open ended.

It was also felt that some classes were too big, allowing little of the vital personal contact. So, over the next terms there will be more courses run for specific periods on meditation and Buddhism.

He also hoped to see more workshops on a variety of subjects, stretching from Buddhism and Politics and Right Livelihood to *Sesshines* as well.

He is also committed to making more use of the LBC at weekends, and during the day with day retreats and daytime study.

On a wider front, he says unequivocally: 'I want the London Buddhist Centre to become a known quantity in London, so that if people want to learn to meditate, they know where to go; and if they want to know more about Buddhism, they know where to go.'

Going out

A cornerstone of his chairmanship will be the commitment to attracting more people along to the

Centre, but also for Order members from the Centre to go out more into the outside world and give more talks around London.

On a financial level, he feels it crucial that the LBC does more than just break even — not less because parts of the Centre are now in need of re-decoration, he commented.

Kulamitra, who is now 26, has been an Order member for nearly five years after first coming in contact with the FWBO in Norwich. He was a student in Social Studies at the University of East Anglia, but left after two terms.

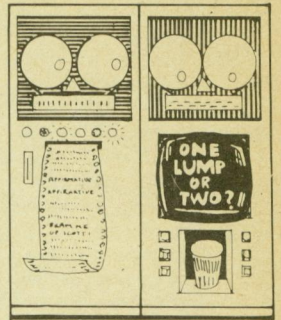
He is perhaps best known for setting up one of the most successful ventures the FWBO has ever run — Aid for India, which, after little more than a year of operation, has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for the medical and Dharma centre in Pune.

Computing Co-op at the LBC

As an initial exercise, a fledgling computing co-op is undertaking the systems analysis of two of the co-op businesses around the LBC.

'We haven't decided on an area in which to specialise yet,' said Kit Emmett, 'but the FWBO co-ops are a good place to start.'

'There are five of us with computing experience, in-



heat resistant ●●●
terested in forming a co-op, but we would like more people.'

'We feel that computing work can be a Right Livelihood activity and earn a good income for the FWBO,' Kit added.

ARYATARA

Many people have asked us since we opened why we have called our new restaurant 'Hockneys'. 'Hockneys' is named after the British artist David Hockney. When we started thinking about the new name for our restaurant we knew we didn't want to call it 'The Garden' (which was the name of our previous restaurant), partly because we don't have a garden but also because we wanted to make a really fresh beginning in our new premises. We knew as well that the name had to express what the restaurant was.

One of the things we wanted was to have a place not just where people could eat, but to create a complete environment, a whole atmosphere that was beautiful and uplifting to be in. When seeking a name we thought immediately of naming the restaurant after an artist and designing it in his style. One of our first ideas was 'Cafe Seurat' — after the French post-Impressionist. However none of our ideas was entirely satisfactory, none of them seemed 'right'. Then we came



A Dharma day play at the LBC (?)

Vajradipa

upon David Hockney.

Up to date

David Hockney's paintings have a particular quality of light, brightness, colour and space. They also display a really healthy and human quality. Another great thing about David Hockney is that he is a contemporary painter, an artist of the eighties, and we feel that it is important to be contemporary, to express ourselves in a way appropriate to the times. So we've tried to express the kind of qualities found in David Hockney's work in our design of 'Hockneys'.

A very important feature of that design are the pictures that we've hung. Downstairs there are two reproductions of paintings by David Hockney and upstairs we've hung some unique prints, mostly from Picasso's Vollard Suite, but also prints of work by Matisse and Miro. Both

Picasso and Matisse have had a great influence on David Hockney. In many ways Hockney seems to continue their tradition. The prints were made especially for us by Mike Sida. Mike's prints are not just copies; in various ways through the photographic process he has added to what was originally there. We are very grateful to Mike for the work that he has done for us.

In our last Newsletter report I said that we had encountered financial difficulties which meant that we had to cut back on our plans for our complex in Croydon. Actually our new plans have worked out perfectly. Our restaurant Hockneys is doing very well indeed. It's the only place in the area, maybe even in London, of its kind. The next stage of the operation in Croydon is the creation, at the back of the

building, of a studio that we want to call 'Open Space'. We want the place to function as a kind of arts studio with exhibitions, lectures on art and literature, as well as yoga courses, meditation classes and introductory courses on Buddhism.

More energy

Next year a lot more of our energy will be going into our Centre. This does not mean that energy will be taken out of the Co-op; we will create more energy for the Centre. The first thing we will do is an extensive advertising campaign in Croydon and the surrounding area. We are going to re-decorate and renovate Aryatara, our Centre in Purley, completely. Then, in addition to our classes there, we will be holding a beginners' class every week in Streatham at Kalpadruma community. We will also be holding a meditation course in Sutton at the Sutton College of Liberal Arts.

Also in January we will be starting a series of live talks at Hockneys. The restaurant area in Hockneys is a large area and ideal for lectures. The first series of talks will be given by Devamitra on the Tibetan Wheel of Life. The series is called the Mirror of the Mind. Titles and dates for the talks are: 22nd Jan. Reflections of Reality — Concepts and Symbols; 29th Jan. Gods, Titans and the Wish-fulfilling Tree; 5th Feb. Perspectives of Hell; 12th Feb. From Animal to Man; 19th Feb. Beyond the Wheel — from Man to Buddha.

In short FWBO Surrey is entering a much more outward going phase.

W. LONDON

After a year in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Swiss Cottage, the West London Centre was on the move again at the beginning of the

autumn term, holding classes in the London Montessori Centre, Balderton Street, W1.

Beginners classes are held on Tuesdays and Regulars on Thursdays, and they have proved 'fairly successful' despite the temporary nature of the centre — every night a shrine has to be set up and dismantled.

'It is quite an interesting experience for us,' said West London chairman Ratnapala, 'converting two rooms into an FWBO Centre in 10 minutes. It certainly has made us appreciate what a permanent centre really means.'

Year of the Centre

As with other chairmen, he too feels that 1981 was the year of the co-op, and 1982 he predicts to be the year of the Centre. Takings in Friends Foods in Notting Hill Gate, a women's co-op, have improved by one-third, and the break-even figure is now being reached regularly.

The men's business, Friends Gardening, is also planning for expansion, putting in bids not just for small maintenance work but fairly large-scale landscaping projects.

The success of the co-ops means that Ratnapala can now work full time on maintaining classes and searching for a new permanent centre in West London.

S. LONDON

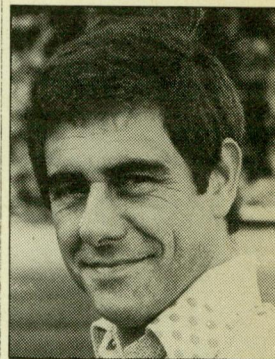
In an attempt to make an impact on an area of London not served by the FWBO, — South East London in general and Greenwich in particular — four Order members are trying a different approach to the general pattern set by the established centres.

Ratnapala, Atula, Hridaya and Punyavati have been running beginners meditation classes in Charlton House,

Charlton Village, the beautiful James 1st building which is now a Greenwich Borough Community Centre.

No Kesas

Each Thursday, throughout the Autumn term, the four Order members have held classes mainly on meditation, but also involving some Dharma instruction as well. However, it was decided that no shrine would be set up, and all the Order members are addressed by their English names — although Ratnapala as leader does wear a kesa.



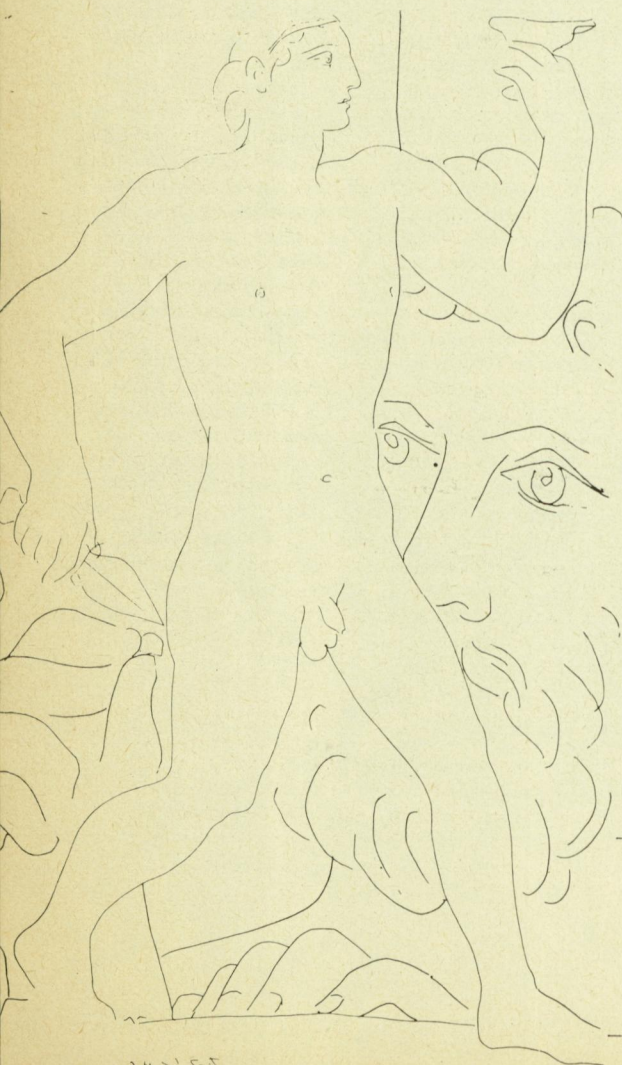
Ratnapala

Vajradipa

'What we didn't want to do was to put people off right at the beginning,' said Ratnapala, who feels that the experiment is working. There are on average about 10 people, not counting those supporting, and they come from all social backgrounds, and are all ages.

NORWICH

After five challenging, but often fruitful years, FWBO Norwich has relinquished its lease on Oranges, the vegetarian restaurant in the centre of the city. Faced with a new lease which included a tripling of the rent and no assignment clause (which meant the Centre would be committed to running it for the next five years), the chairman, Abhaya, and the council have decided to look at other right livelihood prospects.



One of the Picassos at Hockneys

This has not been an easy year for Norwich, which has seen a number of changes of community members and dropping attendance figures at classes. But during the Autumn months, particularly since the decision over Oranges, there have been noticeable improvements.

Picking Up

A Dharma course run by Abhaya — the second this year — proved particularly successful, as did a beginners' retreat attended by a larger number than has been usual over the past year or so.

This has been reflected in increased attendance at classes by both beginners and regulars, and the Yoga Studio, run by Brian Platts and Andrée Ratzer is now paying for itself.

'There is much more confidence around the place now,' said Abhaya, who feels that the major question of the very survival of the Centre is now over.

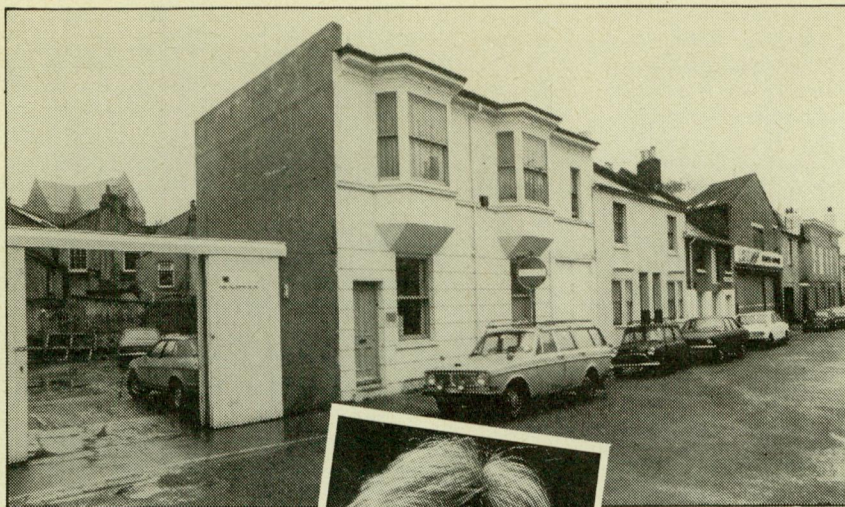
Having given three public talks in the Assembly House in the City, and talked at a number of schools, Abhaya feels the FWBO presence in Norwich remains strong.

BRIGHTON

The projected changes in Brighton are beginning to take place. After nearly 5½ years as Chairman of FWBO Brighton, Mangala is to leave in December, initially to go to India, where he may decide to stay.

Now that his work designing Hockneys and the new Croydon Centre is nearing completion, Devaraja, who has been visiting the Brighton Buddhist Centre for some months, taking classes and meeting the Friends and mitras involved with the Centre, is to become the new chairman.

Devaraja feels strongly



Brighton

Vajradipa

that the time is right for FWBO Brighton to think in terms of expansion, and his immediate aim is to form a building team, and to find larger premises to house a growing men's community. Ideally, this would be located a short distance from Brighton.

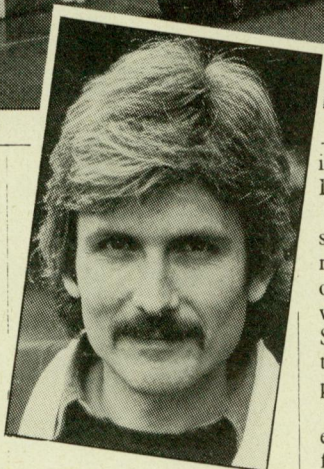
'This will mean that the present Centre facilities can be greatly extended, giving much larger shrine and reception rooms, office space and a study room,' remarked Mangala.

For the last five months, a women's community has been living at the Windhorse Emporium, the shop which sells clothes, jewellery and books. The initial plan was to sell the shop in the summer, but it has been kept open and will now continue to function until the end of the year at least. The women's community will continue to live there until the building is sold.

Marichi and Punyavati from London and Croydon have been running classes and retreats for the women.

New Blood

With just Mangala and Surata as the resident Order members in Brighton, the Movement in the town has needed more representation from the Order, and the Centre is



Devaraja

Vajradipa

looking forward to the return of John Rice and Simon McIntyre from Tucson where they have been ordained.

'So with a new chairman taking over, and two fresh new Order members, 1982 looks very promising in Brighton indeed,' said Mangala.

GLASGOW

In a new fund-raising venture for the FWBO, a charity shop has been opened in Sauciehall Street, Glasgow, in aid of the Centre just a few doors away.

Charity shop

The shop, which opened particularly for the Christmas market, was stocked with Friends Trading goods and other merchandise of varying description, and it is hoped that £1,000 will have been raised with-

in the period 7-20 December.

Run entirely by women, success could mean that more effort will go into opening similar shops elsewhere in the city — the Sauciehall shop was given to the FWBO on a temporary basis only.

Otherwise, the main effort continues to be on fund-raising for the new Centre. Not as much money has been raised through covenants as had been hoped, but fortunes are better in other areas, with Ink, the print and design business, doing well, and a new community for five men having opened.

A new place has been found for the annual Christmas Retreat led by Ajita (December 24-January 7) at an old lodge in a very remote area 100 miles north of Glasgow. It is possible to see Skye from the house.

PADMALOKA

The new large shrineroom at Padmaloka — one of the biggest in the entire FWBO movement — was used for the first time in October during the mens' Order/Mitra event, led by Ajita.

The use of the large barn (which previously had housed the candle work-

shop) as a shrineroom enabled the Order/mitra event to take on a new character — instead of concentrating on study as in the past, it was very much a meditation retreat.

100-Seater

The new shrineroom, which will easily seat 100, has much of the character of the shrineroom at Vajraloka, though it is larger in size.

At the moment, there is much work still to be done. 'It is basically just a usable shell — it is far from finished,' said Kovida. 'The roof has to be taken off and renewed, and underfloor heating installed.'

The Padmaloka community has been smaller than usual while the Ven. Sangharakshita, Subhuti, and others have been away in Italy. Much of the time, explained Kovida, has been spent in the new candle workshop which is housed in the re-built barns, coping with a sudden influx of late Christmas orders.

VAJRALOKA

Vajraloka moves into 1982 in a stronger position than it has ever been before, reports Kamalashila.

There is now a full community — Kamalashila, Vajramati, Vimalamitra, and Prakasha — and major repairs to the barn roof have been completed which makes a great difference visually to the retreat centre as a whole.

But there have been other developments as well.

On the 'phone

Vajraloka now has a telephone (049.081 406) but in order that the continuing meditation retreat will not be disturbed by incessant calls, it will only be answered between 2pm and 4pm, the work period.

At other times, an answerphone machine will be in operation. 'This

means that people can make instant bookings, and it will make administration easier for us,' said Kamalashila.

During the summer period, the meditation centre has been quite well attended, and a good meditative atmosphere has been maintained. A number of people came from outside the FWBO movement as well as from the Movement itself, and this the community regards as an important development.

More tours

'From next year we are going to advertise in the Middle Way and also tour non-FWBO centres, giving talks and a slide show,' said Kamalashila.

'This will mean that the FWBO can enlarge its sphere of contact — meditation is one thing we do have in common with other Buddhist groups,' he added.

The next few months will be spent working to upgrade the facilities to better standards. The community feels that ideally everything should be simple and easy to keep clean, but not unnecessarily austere or spartan.

TUSCANY

Brief reports from Tuscany while the three month retreat was in progress have showed that the event has been eminently successful. There were substantial periods of study, meditation, and silence, but an important element were the talks given by those attending the course.

A full report will be carried in the next Newsletter, but in the meantime those who were ordained were: Gerald Burns (*Khemaloka*), Rudiger Jensen (*Dharmaloka*), Dave Luce (*Saddhaloka*), Michael Scherke (*Dharmapriya*), Alan Angel (*Devapriya*), Pete Hill (*Jinapriya*), Malcolm Webb (*Sudhana*), Andy Friends

(*Subhadra*), Steve Francis (*Sumitra*), Peter Fletcher (*Sihrananda*), Mark Bowden (*Prajnananda*), Bob Jones (*Vajraketu*), Dave Brennan (*Vajrachitta*), Pete Shann (*Vajrananda*), Ciaran Saunders (*Ruchuraketu*), Clive Pomtrett (*Kevala*), Brian Duff (*Dharmavira*), John Rice (*Yashopala*), Simon McIntyre (*Yashodeva*), Johnny Baker (*Yashomitra*).

HOLLAND

The small village of Asenray, right on the German border in the south-east of Holland, was the setting for the latest Dutch retreat.

16 people attended this retreat, seven of them taking their first taste of FWBO activities. The weekend, led by Nagabodhi, Kulananda and Vajragita, followed the mixed programme of an introductory retreat: meditation, pujas (in Dutch), communication exercises, work, discussion and time for walks in the lanes getting to know each other. The mixture of newcomers and, by now, fairly experienced Friends meant that a supportive and directed spirit entered the retreat very quickly. The hired house was probably the best venue to which we have yet had access, and luckily the owners are keen to let us use it quite regularly — at a specially reduced rate.

A new Mitra

On the Monday night following the retreat, 12 Friends gathered in De Bilt, a town on the outskirts of Utrecht. In the context of one of the now regular 'Monday meetings', Nagabodhi conducted the mitra ceremony of Carla Remign from Rotterdam.

'There are now two Order members and one mitra in Holland,' says Nagabodhi. 'After our latest retreat, and after sensing the atmosphere at

that Monday night meeting, I felt that the FWBO is really becoming a presence there, despite the fact that we have no centre yet.'

USA

BOSTON

When Manjuvra returned to Boston after leading the Summer Retreat in Seaford he had a companion in the shape of Devamitra, who was to join the Boston community for a three to four month stay.

Devamitra suggests that his greatest contribution to our activities there is to have discovered a cleaning agency which now provides three members of the community with well-paid part-time work. In fairness, however, it should be added that as well as making a powerful contribution to the life of the Centre and the community, Devamitra has also given a series of talks at Harvard University on the Tibetan Wheel of Life.

New Centre

The best news from Boston is that a new Centre has been found in a far more central and attractive part of the city than Savin Hill, where the community is to be found. Once work on the premises has been completed, the Order members expect to see a significant increase in public interest in their activities.

India

A students hostel, attached to Malind College in Aurangabad, was the venue for the biggest retreat held yet in



Retreat work-period

Sagaramati

India. One hundred and four people from various parts of Maharashtra, plus one from Gujarat, spent a week together in the circular, horse-shoe shaped hostel building, studying, communicating, and meditating. For many it was their first real taste of the Dharma (in India, incidentally, we use the Pali *Dhamma* as the word *Dharma* has too many Hindu associations). On the final day of the retreat a bus was hired to take around sixty of us to visit the famous Ajanta Caves, situated about 100km north of Aurangabad. After the visit to Ajanta many of us wished that one day these caves would cease to be a mere tourist attraction and would revert to the use that their inspired creators sweated for — i.e. secluded meditation and study retreats. After all, we may have many more than a hundred and four people next year.

Coming Soon

Out in India, though, the main event looming large and bright on the horizon of everyone's consciousness is the forthcoming visit to India by the Ven. Sangharakshita, in late December. In Pune it feels as if we are preparing for a great on-going festival rather than making arrangements for the many, many talks and visits that Bhante will give. Most of these will be held in and around Maharashtra including Pune, Bombay, Aurangabad, Manmad,

Busaval, Nanded and many other places, as well as Ahmedabad, Amjer and Delhi. In anticipation of Bhante's visit Lokamitra has been busy giving talks in all these places and receiving a tremendous response. People are bubbling over with enthusiasm to see and hear Bhante. Our publications have also been affected, and as well as bringing out a Marathi translation of Bikkhu Dharmaratna's *Buddha and the Caste System*, we have published five thousand copies of our latest *Buddhaya* Marathi magazine, which is very much appreciated by Maharashtrian Buddhists for its Dharmic content. In January last we were only publishing two thousand copies. Outside of Maharashtra Purna has been making regular visits to Ahmedabad.

Changes

The community in Pune has undergone some changes recently. In November Sagaramati returned to Engand after a stay of eleven months. Jyotipala has returned to Pune after spending some months in the north of India and will be staying for the duration of Bhante's visit. A mitra from England, Glyn Ivens, has also joined the community to assist with general administration, housekeeping, cooking etc. And a mitra from Bombay, B.B. Jardhav, has also moved in and will be looking after the ever increasing administrative side of our publishing work.

Sagaramati

AfI - more appealing than ever

The Aid for India fundraising team are at present involved in the 1981 Autumn appeals. The signs are that we are making even more money, per fundraiser, than on our last effort, and nearly twice as much as on our first attempt last year. Several changes have taken place within the appeal to enable this to happen.

Firstly, nearly the whole team is living together in a community. This provides an environment that is both supportive and stimulating for those involved. People on previous appeals found it quite difficult to keep up their meditation practice. The community is a considerable help with this and the timetable includes a daily double meditation, and regular Pujas as well. The positive effects of this have been quite considerable.

The community has also provided a basis for people helping each other. This always happened in the past but not to the extent that it is now possible. This has born fruit in objective terms because we increased the overall team target halfway through the appeal; and beat it too! This kind of thing is not possible without strong personal commitment from all the people doing the work and I am constantly astonished and grateful for the depth of commitment in the people who come forward to do this work. At last, with the community and its activities we have the means of putting that commitment to truly effective use.

Another major change has been the alteration of our working hours. In the past we knocked doors during the day and went to appointments in the evening. We now work only in the evening. With the extra time we now have we are able to have a weekly team 'Reporting in' and also two

sessions of Karate a week. The Karate enables us to keep physically fit as well as letting off steam in a controlled way. We are extremely lucky to have found a member of the English National karate Team for our instructor. His particular style is described as the 'Way of

Peace' and his whole approach gives the lie to the idea that in order to be a good Karate teacher you have to be an out and out sadist! Both men and women have found these classes extremely beneficial. We hope to keep this, or at least some form of regular exercise, as part of the Aid for India fundraising programme. We are also thinking of adding a drama class to the next appeal if it can be arranged.

In financial terms we have

raised covenants to the value of over £100,000 in eight weeks. This is nearly the equivalent of £2,000 per person per week. Aid for India has more to offer people than ever before and in return the fundraisers have responded magnificently.

If you would like to be part of the next appeal we shall be holding training courses in early April, May and June 1982 for 3 eight week sessions. It is hoped to have a women's team working from a women's community too. The course for the women's team will be at the beginning of May. No women have been involved this Autumn and I am pleased to say that we have already received feminine commitment for Spring 82. Could we please have some more?

The Aid for India support team will be doing a nationwide recruitment tour in the New Year.

On another aspect of the Appeal, the support team have been busy recently publishing the annual newsletter for all our donors. This will come out shortly. We are particularly grateful to Nick Soames for going to Pune at his own expense to write about the Project and taking the photographs. He has done an excellent job.

Liz Pankhurst has taken over the monstrous task of the office administration. For the first time we have someone in the office who can be relied on to see what the problems are and deal effectively with them.

Aid for India Appeals are fit and well. If those of you who can will come and help in 1982 we shall attempt to make them even better next year and so provide a firm financial basis for Lokamitra's work amongst the scheduled castes in Pune.



The Aid for India team

Vajradipa

The recent women's retreats at Vajraloka rendered the resident mens community temporarily homeless. We spent a week of our exile at the Manjushri Institute, which is a centre of The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (that is, the 'outwardgoing aspect' of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism) near Ulverston in the Lake District.

With Vajraloka now about to open its doors to practising Buddhists from outside the FWBO, and since we will be talking and showing slides of Vajraloka to Buddhist Groups up and down the country in the Spring, we all thought that it would be worthwhile to spend some time with some other Buddhists with a different approach to our own. The fact that we were homeless made that 'good idea' a definite decision.

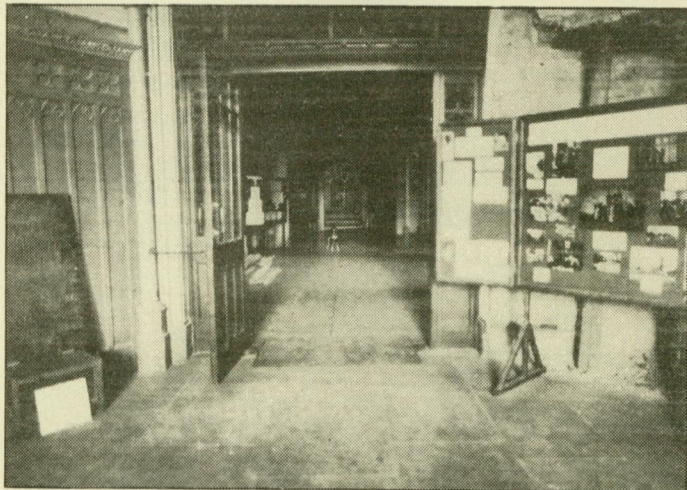
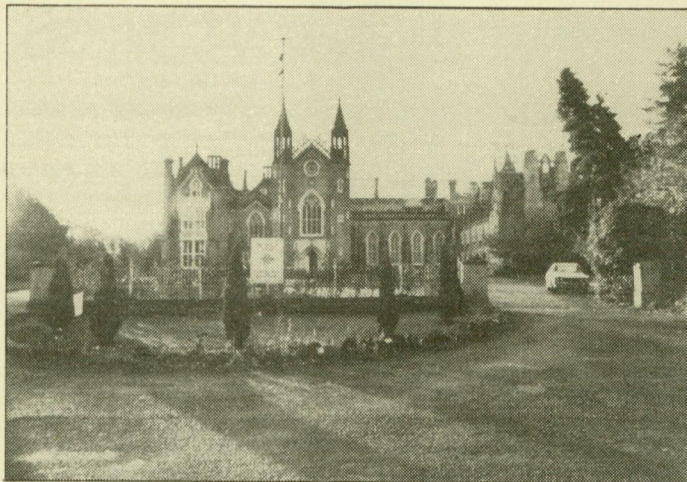
Stream of Visitors

It was an enjoyable week, and a lot happened during it — there is no space here to give more than a sketch of the large community (a mixture of up to eighty novice and fully ordained monks and nuns, committed lay people, visitors attending courses as well as a constant stream of casual visitors like ourselves, day visitors and, during the season, tourists), and the enormous Gothic mansion with its towers, gargoyles, battlements, impressive halls and stairways — that houses them all. Much restoration work remains to be done. The dry rot that took years to beat at the London Buddhist Centre was nothing to this! The setting is beautiful — in mature, varied woodland by the sea shore of Morcambe Bay.

Special Effort

The community members were friendly, and several made a special effort to get to know us. We met the two resident

Manjusri Institute Visit



The Manjushri Institute

Vimalamitra

lamas, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and Geshe Jampa Tegchok, whom we presented with a golden-framed image of Manjughosa.

For a number of years now at the Institute there has been an emphasis on study — intensive study of the Dharma as handed down by the Gelugpa tradition. This could be felt in the intellectually acute atmos-

phere: most are studying more or less full time.

Criticisms

Our most notable group discussion with members of the community was on the subject of some quite serious criticisms made in the FWBO Newsletter (the one entitled 'Criticism: the Fierce Friendship'), on various aspects of the Manjushri Insti-

tute. Some community members had accepted as partly valid one of the criticisms made, but much had been misunderstood. In the circumstances this was probably inevitable. I felt that for anyone who has taken up the whole method of a particular eastern Buddhist school, it may well be hard to understand our point of view. Such a method will not involve a deep understanding of Western Culture.

For that reason, my main conclusion from the visit has been that regular, friendly, personal contact between our own and other Buddhist movements should be encouraged. The Newsletter is obviously an important medium, but a great deal more is communicated through an actual meeting. Criticism can only be effective on the basis of friendliness and openness, and our dealings with other Buddhist groups should reflect this. We also have more to communicate than criticism.

The other fact that was made especially clear to me was that, as the Dalai Lama said to Nicolas Soames at a meeting reported in the last Newsletter, our responsibility is Western

Western Buddhism

Buddhism. The concern of Tibetan and other groups such as the Manjushri Institute is first of all to preserve and practice their own branch of the tradition so that it is not lost. For them it is not yet time for Western Buddhism, although, as Geshe Kelsang said to us, that is the future goal.

So in a number of years' time, the fruits of their efforts may well be influencing a truly Western Buddhism. For this reason too, then, we should not only be fulfilling our own unique responsibility in the Buddhist Tradition, but also keeping in some contact with groups like the Manjushri Institute.

Politics and Consciousness

A workshop called the 'Politics of Consciousness' was one of the busiest events of the LBCs winter session.

The high attendance and later discussion showed a real concern over issues like unemployment, nuclear arms, and the place of Buddhism in an increasingly uneasy and politically polarised country.

The day began with a session of meditation — the *metta bhavana*. After that a short talk set the ground for a day of discussion. The talk drew much from Erich Fromm's writing, and summarised his account of the development of capitalism from the earlier economic structures of Medieval Europe. As a psychologist, Fromm is especially concerned with the effect which patterns of social organisation have on individual consciousness. Fromm's well documented picture of the increasing isolation, impotence, and egocentricity of people, the result of a developing capitalist economy, is a startling one.

Our own co-ops and communities can surely benefit from a clearer understanding of how profound an effect our work, our home lives, our organisations have on our experience of ourselves and the world.

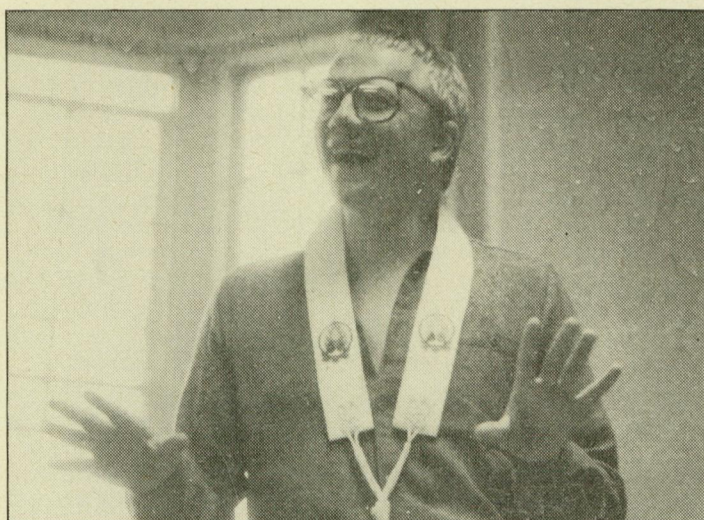
Any attempt to communicate the Dharma widely, to set up the conditions which let people change, has to take into account those influences which already exist to hinder growth.

The afternoon's discussion, moving away from the theoretical and historical, to the present and the practical, was more complex and less satisfactory. Perhaps the greatest stumbling block was recognised to be the tension between the 'individual' and the group.

The aim of Buddhism is the Enlightenment of every individual, Labour Party mole and the most reactionary Tory included. Conventional political parties, on the other hand,

the local unemployed resource centre, afternoon classes with a creche, considering our relationship with the co-op movement and so on.

On another front, a number of Order members, mitras and



Dhammarati expounds

Roslyn Smith

pitch their power and interests against those of other parties. For political parties this opposition is a step towards a solution; for the Buddhist it is the essence of the problem.

Meantime, growing unemployment turns a generation of children into dispirited, increasingly conservative adults. Can we act to counter conditions which make it more difficult for people to grow?

Inconclusive discussion was perhaps the inevitable result of this first exploration of these issues, and a second, extended workshop is planned for the next session to take the discussion deeper.

A similar study group, on 'Buddhism and Politics', took place on the November Order weekend. The discussion was more practical, and the first tentative suggestions were made; setting up contact with

friends left from the LBC to take part in Britain's biggest ever anti-nuclear demonstration, and the LBC organised a meditation workshop as part of Reading University's students' 'Peace Week'.

These growing 'political' tendencies have themselves sparked off some controversy in the Movement. The critics have gone so far as to describe them as 'Not Dharma', a sidetrack — if not an actual degeneration of Buddhism's real spiritual concerns. The supporters on the other hand regard them as unavoidable considerations for anyone trying to communicate the Dharma in this culture, unavoidable for a Movement, one of whose stated aims is to set up a 'New Society', the conditions which let as many people as possible grow into whole human beings.

Art of loving

Most people think that love is something that one 'falls into' if one is lucky, rather than something that has to be consciously developed, said Mahamati in a talk on *The Art of Loving* given at a number of British FWBO Centres during the autumn.

Taking as his base Erich Fromm's book *The Art of Loving*, Mahamati explored the theme of love first of all at a Padmaloka Order/mitra Event, then in an extended manner at Aryatara, the LBC, West London, Norwich, and Brighton.

He said that the problem of love is often regarded as 'the problem of being loved, or finding a suitable object to love, rather than the problem of loving, developing the capacity to love, becoming a loving person.'

Love, he argued, was a way of overcoming separateness and isolation as well as being, in the long run, a necessity for the physical survival of humanity — an important element in the light of the way man is currently balanced on the edge of catastrophe.

He pointed out that this attitude towards love has been emphasised in the FWBO from the very beginning, with the importance placed on the *metta bhavana* meditation practice (the development of loving kindness).

He concluded that love is an art which required all the necessary pre-conditions for success (as in other arts) such as self-discipline, patience, concentration, and making the art a matter of ultimate concern.

The talk is to be expanded into an issue of *Mitrata* at a future date.

Women's Order/Mitra event

The ten day Women's Order/Mitra Event held this summer was, I think, the best women's retreat we've ever had. We'd had quite a number of weekend events for women mitras and Order members but this was the first long one. Quite a bit of preparation went into the Event, which was to have a programme of meditation and three hours study each morning, and then in the afternoon a choice of various workshops or free time, then meditation, supper and talks given by Order members, followed by puja. There were also going to be two Ordinations around the middle of the Event.

On the first day the sky was blue, it was very warm, and amongst the Order members who'd got to the school in Seaford early, there was an air of excitement and slight nervousness in anticipation of such a large scale event. I was to lead the Event and I must say that the thought of sitting out in front of nearly eighty women was rather over-awing at times. And yet, once we'd started and everyone was sitting in the shrineroom, I felt my nervousness subside. Instead I felt a joy that here were seventy-eight women who had come together to practise the Dharma. There was an atmosphere of whole-heartedness right from the first puja. The study groups were on the Perfection of Contemplation, Meeting Spiritual Friends, *The Precepts of the Gurus*, The Perfection of Patience and of Strenuousness the *Survey of Buddhism* and the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa*. Being able to study every day you build up a relationship with the other members of your study group and of course with the text you are studying. Things you discuss turn around in your mind during the day — they affect what you see and do. You begin to see, for example, as you study the Perfection of Patience, how your attitude to others is one of expectation rather than acceptance, that you tend to make things

happen rather than risk what might occur if you were a bit more relaxed and receptive. And as you wrestle over a knotty bit of Dharma in the study group, you feel your mind stretching and opening up and a feeling of pleasure comes over you that you can spend your days in such a delightful and rewarding way.

The first day we had communication exercises in the afternoon — quite a spectacle — so many women sitting in pairs, gradually opening up to each other, sometimes a little shy, sometimes a bit tired, sometimes a bit angry! After

that there were various workshops in the afternoons. These were something we hadn't done before and wouldn't normally be included on a retreat programme. We had massage, yoga, chanting, dance, drama and swimming lessons for women who couldn't swim. Also, several women got together regularly to play music. I felt inspired by the atmosphere of women learning new skills and expressing themselves in different ways. To see two women talking avidly at supper about the drama group they'd just been to — faces radiant and alive — to overhear another woman telling how she swam a width for the first time today — another chanting the *Mangala Sutta* quietly to herself on the lawn — these things were a pleasure to experience.

There were ten talks given by Order members on subjects ranging from 'The Sweet Mystery of Spiritual Friendship' to 'The Freedom of the Prajnaparamita'. The talks in-

cluded two symposia, one with the intriguing title of 'Woman from Eve to Bodhisattva'. In the last talk of this symposium, Punyavati gave inspiring examples of Enlightened women from Buddhist history and then brought things closer to home by going through the names of each of the Order members present and explaining their meaning, saying that *we* were the women who would inspire women in the future by our examples. In many of the pujas we were treated to readings from the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa* by Vimala.

Around the middle of the Event, Bhante came to perform the private and public ordinations of Carolien Eykman, who comes from Holland, and Ulla Mikkonen, who comes from Finland and now lives in London. We prepared for the private Ordinations with an afternoon of silence. The next day, when the public Ordinations were to be held, was very festive. Bhante first performed six Mitra ceremonies, talking a lot about the importance and relevance of this step. Then came the public Ordinations when Carolien and Ulla became Vajragita and Vajrapushpa — *Vajra* meaning indestructible, adamant, Transcendental — *gita* meaning song, and *pushpa*, flower. Bhante commented that there were now sixteen women Order members present at the Event — the most ever assembled in one place! Afterwards there seemed to be lots of people rushing around with cameras, taking pictures of the new Order members.

On the last night we had a 'performance' from the drama workshop with audience participation at the end, and then moved over to the chapel where the musicians gave us the



chance to hear what they'd been practising during the Event. It was a moving evening. There was such an atmosphere of Metta amongst everyone and of encouragement. No-one pretended they hadn't noticed if someone played a wrong note, but there was much receptivity and communication between us. It made me think back to my school days and how little encouragement there was for expressing myself — always a

feeling that there was a set standard, a set way of doing things and if you didn't do it like that, you were wrong! I feel sure that the more we can generate this metta, this encouragement for people to be themselves, to realise their uniqueness and beauty, the more we will have a climate ripe for people to become more individual.

There was a very harmonious atmosphere on the Event for

most of the time — it almost seemed like the numbers were going down as the days went by and we became more aware of ourselves and of others. There was also a feeling of quiet confidence pervading the Event. A confidence that we could do something on this scale so smoothly, successfully and happily.

Ideally on a retreat the atmosphere should be one of Spiritual Community, that is,

where people are committed to working on themselves to become more conscious, more loving towards other people, and more energetic in pursuit of the good. I think this was the atmosphere on the Event. I had the feeling that almost every woman there was discovering new dimensions in herself, in the Dharma and in each other — that she wanted to be a New Woman — completely unfettered and free!

Retreat Calendar

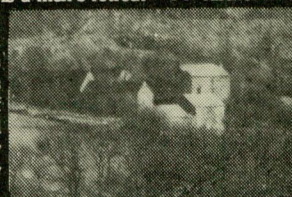
RETREAT CALENDAR 81 - 82

December 81	Padmaloka winter retreat	11 Dec - 2 Jan
	Vajraloka winter retreat	24 Dec - 8 Jan
	Women's winter retreat	20 Dec - 6 Jan
	Seaford winter retreat	23 Dec - 2 Jan
	Scottish winter retreat	24 Dec - 6 Jan
February 82	Women's event, LBC	20 - 21
	Pre-ordination event, Padmaloka	12 - 27
March	Men's event, Padmaloka	12 - 14
	Women's retreat, Vajraloka	12 - 19
	Women's retreat, Vajraloka	19 - 26
April	Order Convention, Seaford	4 - 15
	Chairmen's convention, Padmaloka	16 - 25
May	Women's event, LBC	20 - 23
June	Women's retreat, Vajraloka	4 June - 2 July
July	Scottish Summer retreat	(To be confirmed)
	Beginners' retreat in Scandinavia	9 - 18
	Summer retreat, Padmaloka	30 - 28 August
	Women's Summer event	30 - 13 August
August	LBC Summer retreat	(To be confirmed)
September	Women's event, LBC	18 - 19
	Men's event, Padmaloka	17 - 19
October	Women's retreat, Vajraloka	8 Oct - 5 Nov
November	Men's event, Padmaloka	26 - 28
December	Winter retreat, Padmaloka	17 - 8 Jan 83

Festivals

Buddha Day	8 May
Dharma Day	6 July
Sangha Day	1 November

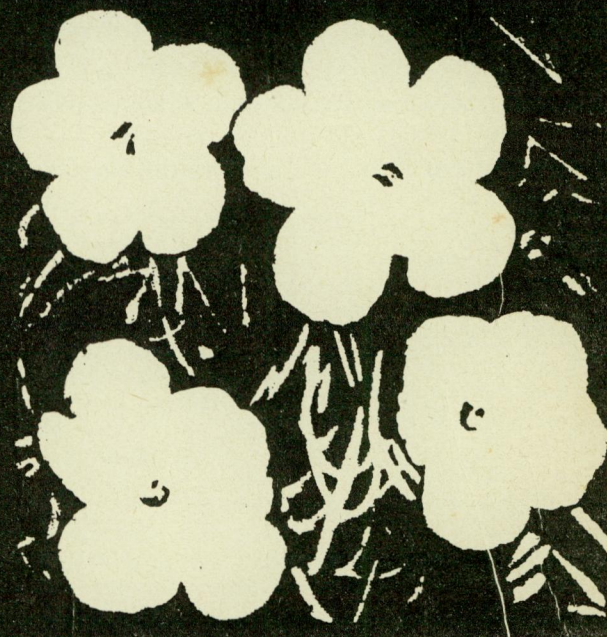
VAJRALOKA is a men's retreat centre, set in the hills of North Wales. There is a continuous programme of meditation and silence led by community members.



Come for a few days or a few weeks and deepen your meditation practice in ideal conditions. The cost is £6.25 per night.

Cheques payable to FWBO (Tyn-y-Ddol). *For details of women's retreats, phone The London Buddhist Centre: 01-981 1225.

This spring: Vajraloka



Hang on to your hats!

Nick Soames On tour with Lokamitra

6.30am, Monday. Pune. I am still a bit jet-lagged, but I want to get back to an ordered life as soon as possible after the disorder of the journey which has encompassed one double-booked flight, a ten-hour wait at Heathrow, an exploded engine in mid-air over Delhi (I saw the flames shoot along the wing when our 747 flew into a flock of vultures), and a 17-hour unscheduled stop in Delhi. I rise and cross the pathway to the opposite line of houses of the Ambedkar Society, a collection of small, simple square houses built for the Scheduled Castes on the outskirts of Pune. On the opposite side is a house which is used as the shrine room. Two mitras and Purna are sitting in front of the small, corner shrine, and Lokamitra is practising his Yoga next door. At 7am, the noise is unbelievable — cries, calls, singing, pots and pans clashing, the whole tumult of morning Indian society. It goes on unabated for minutes on end when suddenly, there appears a fissure of silence, broken after just a few seconds by a cock crowing about six inches from my ear, like some demonical Zen master screaming Kwatz!

Wednesday. AM. The bus has been shuddering for hours across the wide, flat plain of the Deccan Plateau, rich and fertile after the recent rains, with fields of corn and sugar cane. I have been accustomed to being stared at on local buses after my month in the Far East earlier this year, but this is quite different because Lokamitra's presence beside me, in his yellow robes and sun-darkened right shoulder, makes people stare with extra diligence. You can see their eyes and their thoughts roll

around in their heads. Like the ungainly, undignified rush and push for the bus, it is going to take some getting used to. Everywhere is a feast for the eyes: the bullocks swaying down the road, white except for their brightly painted horns — yellow, red, luminous blue and green, brass-tipped; the heavier, more stolid water buffalo, and as always in India, people — old, young, middle-aged, the small children with black protective unguent under their eyes and the women walking with perfect

posture, their saris speaking the elegance of centuries. The rains have been very heavy; we pass a ruined Hindu temple just visible in a mirrored plain of water. Further off, on a hill, out of danger of the floods, is the unmistakable dome of a mosque. We are on our way to Aurangabad where Lokamitra is scheduled to talk, and then to Bombay for more meetings. It is going to be a real hang-on-to-your-hats affair, but then this is India where fast and slow life, change and no-change, people and no-people merge into a confused melange where life just is.

Wednesday 7pm. We arrive at Aurangabad, three and a half hours later than expected, because we have had two punctures on the way. We get off the bus early, before the town, and walk through the open land around the cantonment, the old residences of the army which date from colonial days. Imperialism is stamped on the houses, even if these magnificent residences, with trellises and ornamented arches are named more mundanely Bungalow 1, Bungalow 2, Bungalow 3. We head for Bungalow 2, where Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the champion of the Scheduled Castes, lived while at Aurangabad setting up the University for the Scheduled Castes. It is now the home of Mr Dongre, a small, elderly, well-meaning man who welcomes us effusively. He once again begs Lokamitra to set up a centre and a school there, and once again offers his home and his help. Professor Baste and one or two other local people talk with us for a while.

Thursday, 5.30am. Lokamitra's digital alarm rings and we meditate for an hour. Hot lemon drink at 6.30, and, while it is still cool, we each follow our own practice — Yoga and Judo — until 8am. By the time we finish, the buckets of cold water which form our bath are more than welcome. Breakfast is at Professor Baste's home, 15

minutes away. His children prostrate in front of Lokamitra and offer him a flower. I, too, am offered a flower, a large, red bloom. Professor Sadar, a lecturer in chemistry at the University, talks excitedly about the prospect of setting up Judo classes there. 'We have 8,000 students here and they would all be very interested', he says enthusiastically. Lokamitra checks out the accommodation for the forthcoming seven-day retreat, we meet some local dignitaries, and then we part, he to meet more people, I to Ellora, the staggering series of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist Caves carved in the rock.

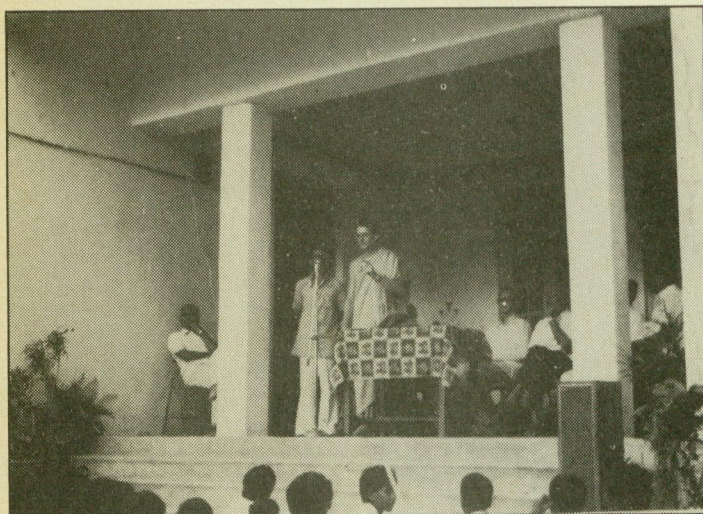
6pm. I return to Milind College where Lokamitra is due to speak, and enter the large hall. The 800 or so students sitting quietly rise with great applause as I step through the doorway... 15 minutes later, a tall Indian arrives and marches to the stage. On the table he lays a black cloth which is decorated with the Skull and Crossbones. I had heard that religious meetings in India are strange, and perhaps this was some weird Tantric rite, emphasising suffering and impermanence. But it appeared that this was a magician. He was booked as the first act, with Lokamitra as the second act of the evening. 30 minutes later, everyone is seated outside on the grass around a statue of Dr Ambedkar and Lokamitra is talking through an interpreter on impermanence, in clear, short sentences. As he leaves the platform, the magician walks on with his equipment and his skull and crossbones.

By 8.30pm, we have broken free of the crowd that has gathered around us after the talk, and walked through the darkness to the home of Professor Sadar, a mitra and a local organiser. A 29 year old, he has two brothers and two



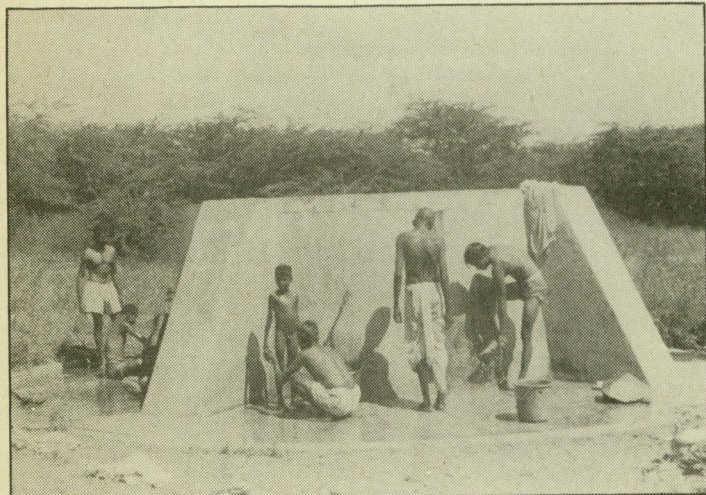
Chawls of Bombay

Nicolas Soames



Lokamitra talks in Aurangabad

Nicolas Soames



Morning Ablutions

Sugaramati

sisters, a mother and a father, all of whom are dependent upon him. His home is one room and one kitchen/sleeping room. We eat a simple meal of curry and rice with three others, including Kemmadhammo. While Lokamitra talks about the forthcoming retreat and Bhante's visit, I am asked to demonstrate Judo outside. It takes faith to do breakfalls in the pitch-dark street, unaware of what one is going to land on, or, worse, in. At 10pm, we set off through the backstreets to the cantonment. The moon has disappeared and it is pitch dark, but the pervasive scent of jasmine is strong as we walk through the silent streets to Bungalow 2. It is 11pm before we get to sleep.

Friday. 4am. Following a night of lost battles against the mosquitos, we are up again. In 45 minutes we are walking back through the streets, past sleeping cows, goats, people, dogs and cats to catch the 5.30 bus to Bombay. After 12 hours of bus and train — the story of which I will record when I have time to write a book — we arrive and meet Vimalakirti, one of the Indian Order members. By 7.30pm, we have found a real dump of a hotel, and left for Worli, a district of Bombay, where Lokamitra is due to talk. We stop, on the way, at the home of one of the most prominent of Buddhist politicians in a fashionable part of the city, and then head for the chawls.

I will never lose, I hope, the impression of my first sight of the chawls — multi-storey tenement blocks of crumbling, dirty concrete, separated by piles of filth. Smiling Indian faces crowd the corridors and doors open and close in curiosity. A 10 year old schoolgirl sits on the corridor floor doing her homework. There is no light in her room. We are given bottles of Thumbs-Up — the

Indian version of Coca Cola — in a clean, small room. It is the home, I am told, of a family of 20. I feel terribly humbled.

After an hour, we go to a poorer chawl, the Chawl of the Sweepers, where we are fed royally, with everyone watching. The talk follows. In a hut with a corrugated iron roof on a rough wood frame, children, women and men cram in, sitting on the floor, and looking in through the windows. It is raining outside. A garland is put around the statue of Dr Ambedkar on the table, and a similar garland around an image of the Buddha, by Lokamitra. Only now am I beginning to appreciate how much Ambedkar is revered by his people 25 years after his death. Few politicians can boast such love. Lokamitra talks with particular eloquence about the Dana (gift) of fearlessness and this seems to strike a strong chord in the audience.

Immediately after the talk, we run to catch the bus back to the hotel. I have a row with a fat, ugly hotelier who having given us a room for three and charged us through the nose, now demands an extra 50 rupees for a third bed. Lokamitra sleeps on the floor. Saturday.

It is difficult for a foreigner to appreciate what caste feeling really is. Often in restaurants you see signs stating 'All Castes May Eat Here', the English equivalent of which would presumably be 'Blacks Are Welcome'. I am now beginning to catch looks or nuances of speech which reveal the attitudes of caste Hindus to the Scheduled Castes, and my respect for Dr Ambedkar is increasing hourly. I am getting a glimpse, though I will never quite understand, of the level of courage present in Dr Ambedkar when he led 4,000 Untouchables down the steps to drink from the water of the Chavadar Tank on March 20,

1927. The tank was the preserve of the Caste Hindus and this act was one of the most blatant sacrilegious acts in thousands of years of caste history. Even now, decades after the practice of caste discrimination has been officially abolished thanks to the unstinting efforts of Ambedkar, the conversation and the newspapers are full of caste prejudice, attacks on low caste people. Hundreds of Scheduled Caste people, seeing no hope in remaining within the Hindu fold, are converting to other religions. Buddhism is quite strong in Central India, but in the south, Islam is gaining in strength with, reputedly, the help of bribes from Arab sources. There are many reports of Scheduled Castes converting to Islam for 500 rupees. The warm, emotional response of everyone who comes in contact with Lokamitra and Vimalakirti among the Scheduled Caste communities shows the immense possibilities for the FWBO here. This is a day of typical contrast. We breakfast with Prembanan Rupawatte, a leading political figure among Buddhist politicians; I then spend an extraordinary two hours listening to the life of Vimalakirti, who spent his early years living in a village not far from Pune, as part of the Scheduled Caste community where he was reviled, insulted, and treated worse than many animals. From there, Vimalakirti, Lokamitra and I pass an entertaining and marvellous afternoon with the Parsee Dinoo Dubash, in her elegant apartment by the sea, talking of the old days when she knew Bhante well, and when she supported the publication of Bhante's essay *Buddhism and Art* — of which she is the dedicatee.

By the afternoon, the day had hardly begun. We place our bags at the Siddharth Vihar by the Dr Ambedkar College of

Economics and Commerce at Wadar, a suburb of Bombay, where, as usual, Lokamitra is made very welcome, and asked to give a talk to the students — most of whom are Scheduled Caste, and many, nominally at least, Buddhist. We take the train (along with the entire population of India cramming into the carriage, hanging on the straps, on the windows and in the doorways) to Dharavi, known, with no exaggeration, as the worst slum in Asia. Originally the old tanneries of Bombay, Dharavi has 200,000 people packed into 20 square kilometres; there are all forms of crime, ill-health is rife, and facilities are minimal. Loka-

me with anger in his voice. Overhead, on the wall of the corrugated iron hut placed in a sea of mud is a picture of Dr Ambedkar and a picture of the Buddha. Sunday

I saw a man dying today. After a quick breakfast of Dosa and Chiri, a wheat porridge, Lokamitra, Vimalakirti and I walk to Dadar station on the way to Ulhas Nagar, a town on the outskirts of Bombay, where Lokamitra is due to talk. On the steps to the platform is a man in rags coughing up blood. There is a large pool at his feet and he is just looking at it in bewilderment. His thin body shakes and trembles. I walk on

mitra is addressed as Bhante, and the Ven. Sangharakshita is talked of with great reverence as Bhante Sangharakshita. On the two-hour trip back on an unbelievably packed train, Lokamitra is asked again if he is Hare Krishna.

We arrive at Siddharth Vihar five minutes after the talk was due to begin. We douse ourselves in water and rush to the hall. There are about 60 students waiting patiently — the smallest audience by far on the whole trip. I leave a little early, gather my things, and arrange to meet Lokamitra at the station. I arrive at the platform and wait for the train, glad to be alone for a bit, and not really relishing the five or six-hour trip, standing in a train all the way home. A blind and ragged couple shuffle past me, both in their early twenties, but thin, thin, thin. White, opaque marbles roll wildly in open eyes. The woman is behind the man, her right hand on his shoulder, their feet occasionally bumping. On the left shoulder of the man lies a wizened child who must have been about 18 months old but looks 80, her lined face lying exhausted on her father, her eyes vacant. I am no longer tired.

Lokamitra and I arrive in Pune at about 11pm. Lokamitra managed to get a seat — a Christian girl from a Pune Convent gave up her seat for him — but I stood and sat among the tribals on the floor. After a cup of tea by the station, we catch a rickshaw home, shaking through the dark, unlit streets towards the Parnakuti Housing Society. Without warning, the rickshaw swerves, avoiding a huge dead cow lying in the middle of the paved road. Lokamitra doesn't bat an eyelid. 'They get hit by buses,' he says. In my hot, sweaty mosquito net I sleep well that night, until the roars of the buffalo returning from milking wake me.



Children in Dapodi

Nicolas Soames

mitra and Vimalakirti have been invited by the Madras community — there are about 20,000 Madras Scheduled Caste people in Dharavi. But for the first time there had been a breakdown in communications, and the meetings have not been arranged. However, we meet and talk with members of the Dalit Panthers (Dalit meaning Depressed Classes; Panther taken from the Black Panther movement), and for the first time I come into contact with the growing militant spirit among the Scheduled Castes. 'We want to be treated as human beings,' one man tells

past him to catch the train. Ulhas Nagar has a thriving Buddhist community with a school run by two Singhalese monks. Lokamitra gives his best talk yet, stating the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. The Buddha, The Dharma, The Sangha, are not, he says, just different words for God, External Religious Observances, and Caste. The audience listens with great responsiveness; the points seem clearly understood. Vimalakirti translates with his normal forcefulness, and character.

Everywhere we move in the Buddhist community, Loka-

Heritage of Tibet

An exhibition at the British Museum

Exploding from the starkly lit, clinical room. Bursting out from the impersonal glass cases catapults the myriad riches and mysteries from another time and place. They dance out into the London afternoon these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all elegant and grotesque, delicate and awful, in silver, gold, bronze and clay.

All these hands communicate in a language of economy and vast, clear spaces. They speak. Hands



gesture, point, reassure, protect, beckon, call; who me? Hands timelessly issuing an open invitation, but does it still stand I want to know? A touch from such a hand could be unbearable or unbeatable.

Look out, these same hands wield choppers, clasp skull cups, drink your blood, and sprout vajras everywhere.

And here is a language of mouths; open mouth with huge teeth ready to swallow up your world, dripping red mouth with iron prong spurting furiously out. Mouths peaceful and smiling, enigmatic and solemn, mouths mouthing across time. You'll have to speak up a bit please with your ochred lips, your language is too crystalline for my sedge-filled ears.

Too late, a stomping, pendulous-breasted Black

Goddess is after me, thrusting her orange hair and chopper in my face, screaming blood she pursues the victim into a labyrinth of furious power. Ah, but here comes the dancing, dark ecstasy of the dakinis. Golden, studded with turquoise and bone, legs raised, sinuous arms reaching they leap still into the sky-scape of your heart, poised on pinnacle and crag. They dance, they fly, these graceful silver-filigreed creatures, spinning endlessly through unbounded universes, rising like bubbles to the surface of the known world.

Listen, violently harmonious singing thunders the air with a permanent orgasm of silvered Yab-yums, blending extremities in exploding embrace, multiple arms, legs, heads swarm together in a welter of totality while gilt ornaments threaded with precious stones shudder triumphantly. Stomp, stomp goes the huge monstrous slayer of Yama, seething and thrusting his bull-horned head upwards, grasping his red-haired partner in a halo of arms spread fan-like and fantastic. Quietly the silver skeleton, slim as a reed, sharp as a bone-crack arrow, dances out, hatched from flesh-sheath.

The skull beneath the skin, the fever of the bone un-stoppers your whispers of immortality.

Don't panic, a dream of

dragons distils your stupefaction. Quick, there they go, they are everywhere with their searching eyes, forked tongues and flaring nostrils. Swirling round silver spice boxes, undulating their red and gold way through thickets of foliage, waves and clouds. Curling round tea pot handles they dart out, glinting copper and turquoise, they twine round outlandish dancers' robes and slither up scabbards. They insinuate themselves round brass bowls, sliding slyly away with their secret unconscious treasures.

More treasure hides in ubiquitous lotuses, lurking deep-furled within petal folds, or emerging in full blossom on lids and pots, embossed on silver boxes, inlaid with beads, or blooming on talismans and swords. Gilt, glazed, filigree lotuses. Lotuses threading lightly through cracked old Thangkhas, amidst flaming blue Yamas, and hundred armed

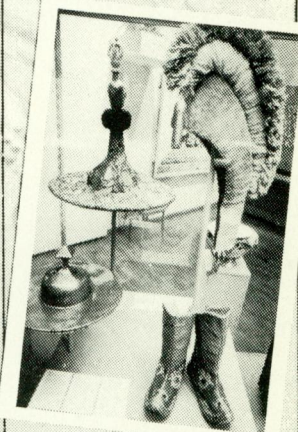


Protectors. Lotuses offering themselves for smelling at least, but could you pick them?

And now I've fallen out of depth in a deluge of weirdness which siphons away my judgement, compelled by bizarre ceremonial artefacts into a world with no bearings. The voices are mixed up, I don't know what is Tibet and what is Dharma, I feel uneasy. Trumpets of thigh bones and drums of human skulls clackety clack, jostle and dance, partnered by 3 metre long copper trumpets bulging with silver decoration and strange instruments studded with coral, lapis lazuli and rubies. On the side lines sit the swords and daggers, conch shells and magical objects, sea-monsters with mother-of-pearl eyes, vajras, malas, prayer wheels, incense burners. They over-feed me, gyrating with some unknown, peculiar purpose, jumping headlong at me with their unfamiliarity. Something is watching me; staring, wild eyes rivet me and down swoops the glitter-glare of masks, beastly and human. Smacking with the lingering heat of the strolling player and the monks' religious dance. They are in league with those heavy woollen ceremonial costumes and the tall monks' hats which breathe maroon and ochre, orange and blue, amidst the startling white grin of a human bone apron.

All around, pictures evoke alien culture — primitively elemental and dramatic. Vast sweeps of mountain dissolve surreptitiously into clouds, crumbling old monasteries lurk in hidden valleys, monastic cells swarm up hillsides like a

honeycomb in full flight and the eyes of the Stupa follow you round. Strange figures loom out, tough women poor and plain or rich with head-dresses and fine ornaments. Men bald and serious or with wigs and ridiculous hats and dresses... Spaced out with the smell and taste of this bizarre landscape, with the eruption into my bones of such rich strangeness, I begin to feel sick, until round the corner something familiar strokes my sleeve with unbridled recognition — an old wooden stupa, still spurting remnants of colour. But it's no good, I've got to get out of here. All in a mighty cluster this:



strange culture looms, it strides with elemental power across the ages, gestulating. It saturates your tastebuds until you can't stand the depth-charging of your guts any longer.

What can it all mean to me? How far can these alien forms become my forms? Can I borrow their mouths and hands, see with their eyes, swoop down into their shapes? Or shall I forge images from my own cultural life-blood whose taste I can feed on without indignation?

Amstee Fisher

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