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BUDDHISM AND WOMEN

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BUDDHISM AND WOMEN

There must be something more than a coincidental connection between the debate over the ordination of women currently splitting the Anglican communion of the Christian Church and the discussions taking place about the status of women in Buddhism—and, in particular, about the lack of opportunity for women to become bhikkhunis within the Theravada sangha.

Perhaps the connection is obvious. With the invention of reliable contraceptive techniques and labour-saving gadgets, and the evolution of an increasingly hungry labour market, this century has seen women becoming progressively freed from their traditional 'role' (as much feminist literature would have it) of mother/housekeeper, able—even required—to enter many spheres which were hitherto regarded as a strictly male preserve. The immediate roots of these developments may have been economic and social, but they have spawned an ideological and political wing which promises to be one of the more powerful cultural forces of our time. And if the influences of this movement now reach so far as to challenge even the accepted structures and forms of language we use each time we open our mouths or set pen to paper, then we should not be surprised to find those influences at work within our religious communities and institutions. Freed from at least some of the 'tyranny' of their biological conditioning, women are now asking, often with unarguable justice, to be regarded as equals—able to perform most of the tasks that men perform, able to think as clearly and creatively as men, able to aspire to and embody, the same ideals as men. Women now run banks and television companies, drive buses, vote, and so on. Why should they not become priests or bhikkhunis as well?

In the case of Christianity, the reasons are not traditional but theological, and strike right to the most sensitive—and contended—area of the sexual debate. In the case of Buddhism, however, the problem is entirely technical and pragmatic.

In Christianity the issue of the ordination of women is inextricably bound up with the very real issue of spiritual status. Women cannot be ordained priests, it is argued, because they are not men. They do not have the same spiritual status, even essence, as men. God has said so. A woman does not have in her, as a fact of her birth, that spark of spiritual potency that would empower her to turn bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (who was a man) or to act in other ways as an actual transmitter of divine power and authority. There is no suggestion here that a woman cannot pray, cannot experience the grace of God, cannot write inspired works, do good deeds, show kindness, turn the other cheek, or in fact practise—even exemplify—any of Christ's teachings . . . but there is more than a suggestion that because she is a woman, something is missing.

In the case of Buddhism, the whole issue of spiritual potency is irrelevant because Buddhism is not about power or authority. We do not need a priestly caste to act as an intermediary between ourselves and the Buddha. It is up to each of us to seek our own 'salvation'. All of us, men and women, can practise the Buddha's teachings. All of us can gain Enlightenment if we make the required effort, if we 'live the life'.

In the Theravada sangha, there is the practical fact that the women's wing—within which alone the ordination of women into that sangha can take place—died out some centuries ago. But even if there is resistance from some of the monks; even if a solution can only be found by stepping for a moment out of the waters and onto the shore of the river of history, surely it is not beyond the wit of man—or woman—to concoct a *spiritually* valid launching point for the bhikkhuni sangha, for those who wish to enter it? More than that I should not say. Thanks to Sangharakshita, who founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the Western Buddhist Order itself, it is really none my business.

A couple of days ago I was talking with Sangharakshita. He confessed that he was rather surprised that his paper, *The History of My Going for Refuge* had provoked so little discussion outside the FWBO. It was hardly reviewed in the Buddhist press when it came out in book form (though it is selling very well), and almost nobody from the Buddhist world wrote to him as a result of the many complimentary copies that he sent out. And yet in this paper he had spelt out the steps that took him from believing that one had to become a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni in order to practise the Buddhist life, to the point of realizing that one's Going for Refuge—or fundamental commitment—to the ideals, principles, and teachings of Buddhism, *and not one's lifestyle*, was the paramount factor in the spiritual life, to the founding of the Western Buddhist Order, an entirely new branch of the Buddhist sangha open to any man or woman who is willing and spiritually prepared to Go for Refuge.

Understood or not, 'accepted' or not, by the more conservative elements within the Buddhist world, that Order is now in its twenty-second year and has become a dynamic spiritual community, offering a real and undoubtedly attractive alternative to some of the more traditional models available. Within it, men and women enjoy equal 'status' and have access to the same opportunities and facilities for serious Dharma practice.

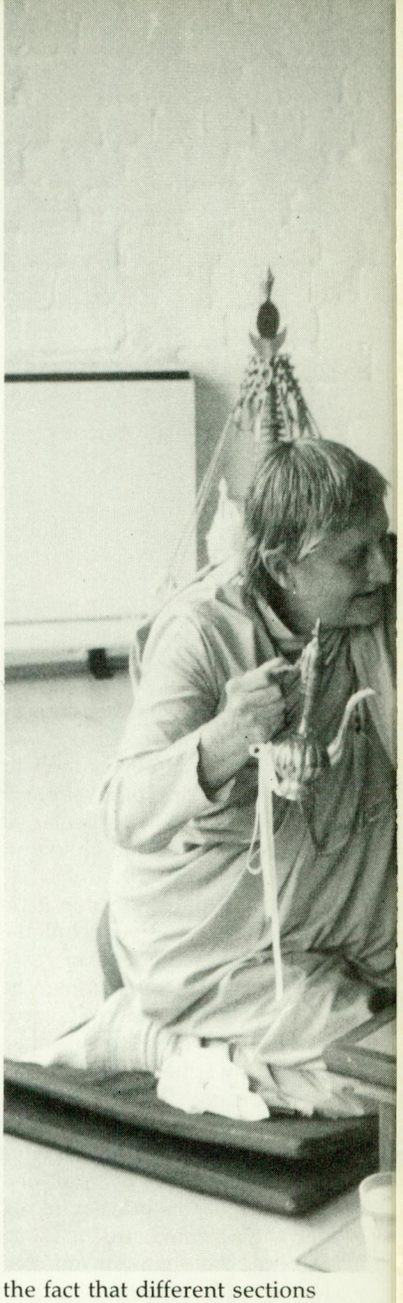
For that very reason, the experience of men and women within our Order is very similar. But there are also, necessarily, ways in which their experience diverges. I therefore asked Dharmacharini Sanghadevi, a senior Order member, and founder of the Taraloka Retreat Centre for Women, to take over the front end of this issue of *Golden Drum*, and commission a series of articles that would reveal something of that experience to Buddhists around the world. In time, I hope, a book or two will give this important subject the fuller treatment it surely deserves. Meanwhile I am very grateful to Sanghadevi, and to the five contributors, for their work. I am sure that all our readers—male as well as female—will find this issue stimulating.

Nagabodhi

WOMEN

IN SEARCH OF AN ORDER

Dharmacharini Dhammadinna wonders whether the current debate over the ordination of women into the Theravada sangha is missing the point



Issues concerning the position of women in Buddhism are currently being keenly debated throughout the Buddhist world. One of the main topics of discussion concerns the re-establishment of the bhikkhuni order (or order of 'nuns') as a means for women to commit themselves fully to the Dharma. There is support for this both in the East and the West among Dharma practitioners. Supporters maintain that the move is crucial so as to complete the four traditional divisions of the sangha, even if there are technical difficulties associated with recreating the bhikkhuni order in accordance with the Vinaya. Others believe that the creation of new orders is irrelevant since it does not provide a solution within the tradition. On top of this there is resistance from some sections of the bhikkhu sangha.

In the West, especially, where there are many women Dharma practitioners, the re-creation of the bhikkhuni order is obviously a controversial subject. Traditionally, the bhikkhuni order is subordinate to that of the bhikkhus. The fact that the bhikkhunis take extra rules, including the eight *gurudharmas* imposed by the Buddha, seems to many Westerners to assert the inferiority of women.

Thus the original creation of the bhikkhuni order is also a subject for debate. The Buddha certainly acknowledged that women could become enlightened. He was, however, reluctant to allow them to go forth, and only did so upon their acceptance of the eight *gurudharmas*. These precepts give primacy to the bhikkhus both socially and ecclesiastically. Opinions vary as to whether this passage is a later interpolation of the bhikkhus, or whether it reflects the cultural norms of the time of the Buddha. Many women firmly believe that since the Buddha acknowledged that women could gain Enlightenment, the crucial question is how to provide women with supports for their practice in the present cultural situation.

While the re-creation of the bhikkhuni sangha raises questions about the position of women in Buddhism, it also raises some much broader questions as to the value of maintaining the traditional sangha, as defined by the Vinaya, in the modern world.

The Buddha, shortly before his Parinirvana, said that it was necessary only to keep the major rules. Buddhism has, throughout its history, had to adapt to a variety of different cultures. It must be possible, therefore, for changes to take place concerning particular rules, provided, of course, that basic Dharmic principles are recognized and maintained.

It would seem that supporters of the re-creation of the bhikkhuni order may be making the common mistake of identifying the spiritual life with ordination, monastic life, and the number of precepts taken. The result of such a view is a sangha divided by the fact that different sections take a varying number of precepts. What seems to be necessary is to discover some common ground which can unify the sangha spiritually. If, for example, we place Going for Refuge as the central act in our spiritual lives, and our ethical practice in terms of precepts and lifestyle as an expression of that Going for Refuge, the result is a sangha united by spiritual commitment, even though this may be expressed in different ways.

It was Sangharakshita's understanding of the significance of Going for Refuge which inspired him to found the Western Buddhist Order in 1968. In this order the act of Going for Refuge is expressed ethically through the taking of the ten precepts under which all aspects of the transformation of body, speech, and mind can be subsumed.

Sangharakshita began to appreciate the significance of Going for Refuge from his contact with Tibetan

Ratnashuri conducts Muditashri's ordination at Taraloka

Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhists place an emphasis upon Going for Refuge to the extent of making it a crucial part of their foundation practice. He also discovered that married Lamas could be as spiritually committed as monks. Moreover, he was deeply impressed by the sincerity with which the ex-Untouchable Buddhists of India, who were mainly lay people, took Refuge in the Three Jewels.

The Western Buddhist Order consists, therefore, of both men and women who go for Refuge and take the same ten precepts. Women within the Order are as free as men to practise and express their commitment, and are not subordinate in any way.

Since in the Western Buddhist Order we are trying to avoid the creation of a false—or at least superficial—distinction between monastic and lay followers, the re-creation of the bhikkhuni order would seem, from this perspective, to be unduly concerned with lifestyle rather than with central commitment. From this point of view it can also sometimes seem that a great deal of energy is going into re-creating something which cannot offer women practising in the modern world the best opportunity for commitment.

Although the Western Buddhist Order is a mixed order, we have discovered, from experience, the value of women-only Dharma activities. These began as an experiment in 1972. Now they are a central feature of women's practice in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. We have also formed women's communities and right-livelihood businesses. Since those early days our activities have gone from strength to strength. We have raised funds for, bought, and established a women's retreat centre, Taraloka. We run our own pre-ordination courses for women, which this year will culminate in ordinations conducted by senior women Order members. Today, women coming along to our Dharma centres quickly accept and enjoy women-only activities because of the obvious support and strength they provide.

Single-sex activities in the FWBO are therefore not merely a support for celibacy in the narrower sense. They benefit all women whether single, celibate, or with relationships, children, and family. It is by taking part in these activities that we gain confidence in ourselves as women, free from the distorted images of femininity prevalent in society. It is here that we can also develop the spiritual friendships which are so essential to our spiritual lives.

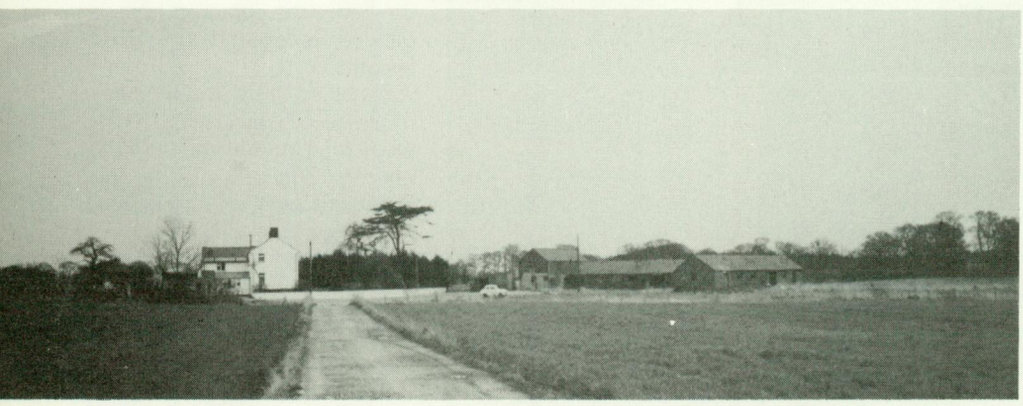
Practising the Dharma together we take a middle way and avoid the extremes of some forms of feminism. We are not trying to become like, or equal to, men—in their conditioned aspect, nor are we lauding spiritual femininity as the paradigm of spirituality. The strengthening of our confidence and friendships also helps us to relate more straightforwardly and co-operatively with men. The more independent of each other men and women are, individually and collectively, the better the communication between them tends to become.

Looking at the discussions taking place concerning women in Buddhism, and at my own experience within the WBO as a woman, I am more convinced than ever that we have something special to say, and to offer to the Buddhist world. The Order offers a middle way between the traditional subordination of women within the sangha, which no longer seems appropriate, and a demand for equality in a purely secular sense. Within the FWBO all women, regardless of lifestyle, can fully commit themselves to the spiritual life and find friendship and the strength of collective practice alongside other women. As women in the Order we are free to conduct our own affairs, as well as to lead and take part in mixed activities at centres. Naturally, we also have a voice in the overall shaping and direction of the FWBO.

I therefore tend to disagree with the notion of recreating the traditional bhikkhuni order for women. At worst, this could not only sanction traditional cultural attitudes towards women, but also emphasize the split between monastic and lay women—at the expense of the central principle of commitment. Perhaps we should not be afraid to create new styles of order, in keeping with the principles of Buddhism. We could be inspired to seek to create a new type of Dharma worker, and a sangha which offers independence, friendship, and commitment to women as well as to men

In The Realm Of Tara

Dharmacharini Kulaprabha invites you to Taraloka



Wherever your starting-point, the last few miles of the journey to Taraloka are the same for us all: through green, rolling Shropshire pasture-land with the Welsh border hills just visible on the horizon. You could be arriving for a Yoga retreat or a study seminar, a weekend's introduction to Buddhism, or a fortnight of intensive meditation practice, a Going for Refuge retreat to help prepare yourself for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order, or a Friends' retreat exploring some facet of the Buddha's teaching. Last year 660 women came to Taraloka from all over the world.

The approach to Taraloka is down a farm track. Ahead of you is the white community house and the low, redbrick buildings of the Retreat Centre itself—once the barns and outhouses of Cornhill Farm, some of them still awaiting transformation. The woman welcoming you will probably be a member of the resident community which organizes the retreats; the Order r-ember leading your retreat may also live there or she may have been invited to Taraloka especially for this retreat. Whatever the event, the next day's first cup of tea will in all likelihood be followed by early morning meditation in the shrine-room. When I first visited Taraloka, in 1986, that shrine-room was a two-storeyed barn open to the elements and needing attention to its weakening timbers. A later visit saw me helping the (female) building team spread a lorry-load of concrete over the barn's foundations—which are now overlaid by the beautiful beechwood floor.

Breakfast follows the meditation session and washing-up follows breakfast. The pattern of the rest of the day will depend on the theme of the event, using the various rooms in the Centre, sometimes spilling over into the community house if more space is required, and returning at intervals to meditate in the silence of the former barn. In the afternoons you may wander off along the canal tow-path or follow the disused railway line to the local stretch of wild peat moorland—perhaps alone, perhaps with a companion; it could be someone you may never have met before yesterday, or an old friend with shared memories of previous retreats.

From time to time you will realize that your retreat is going on alongside, though separate from, the normal day-to-day running of the Centre's office. Sanghadevi, the chairwoman, has seen the resident team grow from the original four founder members who moved into Cornhill Farm in 1985 to the present international team of nine women. Some of the community may be on your retreat but others will be planning future retreat programmes, mailing publicity, ordering food supplies, organizing the next stage of building work, or perhaps following a course of personal Dharma study. At present Taraloka is the only centre of its kind in the world and Sanghadevi hopes that with time its influence will be felt not only within the FWBO but within the world as a whole. She is also keen to help it become known within the wider Buddhist world.

A retreat is a chance to be yourself, to give of yourself to the retreat as a whole, and to allow yourself to accept the benefits of the place, the people, and the collective practice that you and the others are engaged in.

Of course, eventually, your retreat will come to an end and you will return to your normal living situation. But be warned. What seemed 'normal' before may not seem normal afterwards! You may find yourself wanting to make changes in your life. What experience will you carry away—a more supple approach to your Yoga practice? A greater clarity about the relevance of Buddhism to your life? A realization that, in the absence of men, different aspects of yourself blossom? You may take away any or all of these and other benefits: the list is as extensive as the number of women who visit Taraloka. Such are the obvious effects of being on retreat. However there are other underlying effects, underlying but not hidden if you are prepared to look. To explore these let's first reflect on the significance of the name—Taraloka.

Taraloka means the Realm of Tara, and Tara is the embodiment of Compassion in action, Compassion engaged in the world. By calling our women's retreat centre Taraloka we have placed ourselves under the influence of that Compassion, which means identifying ourselves with Tara and thus beginning to embody that essence of Compassion within ourselves.

You may think that this is a fairly predictable model for a women's centre, perhaps even a rather uninviting model? Why not a figure of great heroism, energy, or wisdom instead of a figure who seems to represent the woman's traditional role of nurturing and caring? But do not underestimate the essence of Compassion. It is not blind: it is born out of Wisdom and needs great heroism to

Green Tara

attain—or even to see the need for its attainment.

Traditional pictures of Tara, which are painted to help meditators reflect on her qualities and to identify with them, show her right hand held out in a gesture of giving to the world and her left hand held in a gesture of fearlessness. As if to emphasize this gesture of giving, her right leg is stretched down ready to bring Compassionate action to wherever it is needed.

Just as the figure of Tara implies action in the service of an Enlightened mind, so the existence of Taraloka serves to help us open our minds to the influence of the Buddha's teaching. Just as Tara is prepared to go anywhere she is needed, so can we develop the fearlessness it takes to allow the Buddha's teaching to permeate all the compartments of our life. The real purpose of Taraloka is to help mature our commitment to putting into effect in our lives the Buddha's path to Enlightenment. We need to develop our talents, deepen our confidence, and eradicate our own particular demons which attempt to prevent us from taking up a spiritual life seriously. Some of us, for example, need to strive against the view, imbibed from our cultural and religious background, that in order to follow a spiritual life it is necessary to be a man. We need to go beyond our present mental limitations however comfortable they may be, recognize them for what they are, and cast them aside. Maybe that will be a difficult process, but it is not impossible, and it is a process which leads to wider and more satisfying horizons.

Tara's activity permeates all aspects of existence—all beings, all life-styles, all circumstances. There is nowhere she will not go and no skilful means she will not employ in her efforts. Similarly, at Taraloka, you are not asked to observe a set of monastic rules which, though valuable in some circumstances, are not of primary importance for an exploration of the spiritual life—and which may seem of no help at all to a woman who is concerned to work out the practical details of her spiritual path in the context of a family or job. Details of life-style are important, but our commitment to the Dharma and our ethical responsibilities can be worked out in many environments other than a monastic one. Tara's beautiful form is her interface with the world. Taraloka has an interface too. It is dynamic and flexible because, after fundamental ethical principles have been considered, it does not do to maintain fixed views about what is and what is not of benefit in leading a spiritual life.

At Taraloka there is a wide array of retreats, with the reciprocal effect that different influences feed back into the spiritual practice of the community and of the Order Members who lead the retreats. A body of experience is building up at Taraloka which has already created an atmosphere of on-going practice and purposefulness, and which is reaching out to more women every year. If a network is created, of friendship, of practice, and of clarity of purpose—all under the influence of the Dharma—and if we extend that network, letting it diffuse into and become the heartbeat of our own lives, then indeed shall we be dwelling in the wider realm of Tara.

EXPRESSING YOUR VISION

Dharmacharini Vidyashri believes that Buddhist women must make more effort to communicate their spiritual experience

Moonlight and Flowers
(Katsukewa Shunsho)

How come there have been so few women writers/poets/artists, over the last 2000 years?' is a question that has often been asked. There have been some such women, no doubt, in most ages and most cultures, though perhaps little known to the majority of people. And there have always been those few who have stood out and have been known: women who have expressed their vision strongly, and clearly, and sometimes beautifully enough to reach out to the hearts and minds of men and women down through the ages.

A few immediately spring to mind: Sappho, back in Greece in the sixth century BCE, spoke out with beauty in her poems, which still sing from the pages of books today. Ono No Komachi and Izumi Shikibu excelled as poetesses in the ninth and tenth centuries respectively, in Japan. The abbess, Hildegarde of Bingen, put her remarkable lyrical poems to music, and wrote plays. St Julian of Norwich recorded the depths and heights of her religious experiences and visions. The Brontë sisters, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, and others lived, and dreamt, and thought, and wrote, in the nineteenth century. In the first half of this century, Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poetess, comes to mind as having written some of the finest modern poetry.

However, it is probably true to say that there are relatively few women in the past who have expressed themselves in this way, and the same is true of female Buddhist practitioners. The reasons for this are complex—I do not propose to discuss them here! (Virginia Woolf has some thoughts on the matter in her book, *Three Guineas*.)

But there are records of the lives and teachings of a few Enlightened women. In the Vajrayana tradition, teachers

often had some women disciples whom we learn of. Perhaps most well known are the lives of Yeshe Tsogyal and Mandarava, two of Padmasambhava's chief disciples. From the time of the Buddha, we have the beautiful 'Therigatha'—the Songs/ Psalms of the Sisters'. This is a collection of 'gathas' uttered by (supposedly) seventy-three different Elder Women, giving expression to their Enlightenment experience, and accompanied by explanations of episode and speaker by Dhammapala of Kancipura, in the fifth/sixth century CE.

Some of these little biographies and gathas are rather stereotyped and repetitive, giving the impression that they have fossilized over the centuries and lost touch with the inspiration of the particular human being who originally gave birth to the utterance. Others are very much alive and individual, giving expression, one feels, to the particular woman's vision in terms of her life experience and personality. Even so, there are relatively few (71 of the *Therigathas*, as compared with 264 of the *Theragathas*, the Brethren's songs), and although there is mention elsewhere in the Pali Canon of female disciples of the Buddha, far less is known about them and the lives of the bhikkhunis than is known about the male disciples and the lives of the bhikkhus. For it is, as far as we know, the bhikkhu sangha who transmitted the Dharma, not the bhikkhuni sangha.

On a women's ordination retreat in 1987 during a question and answer session with Sangharakshita, we touched on the question of the Buddha's contact with the bhikkhuni sangha, and why it should be that the bhikkhunis themselves did not transmit a corpus of teaching. It seems very possible that the Buddha had more contact with them, in the latter part of his life, than is recorded in the Pali Canon; many of them were obviously articulate and did travel around teaching much of their lives, as did the bhikkhus. Sangharakshita responded by making the point that, learning from this situation, we should ensure that such is not the case today. Committed women Buddhists today should make every effort to communicate and share their understandings of, and practice of, the Dharma—their vision. Otherwise history will repeat itself, and once again there will be very little Dharma transmitted by twentieth-century female Buddhists, and no doubt as little known about them.

Sangharakshita's comments made me think. Is there a particular value in women expressing their vision? Very clearly, there is. Although the truths of Buddhism are universal, and therefore common to all human beings regardless of sex or race, each individual will express them in his or her own particular way, relating them to their particular life experiences and communicating them through their unique personality. So with the expression of women's vision, we get a fuller perspective of the breadth and richness of human experience, which is of value to both men and women. But obviously women in particular can relate to, learn from, and be inspired by another woman's vision, since her life experience is likely to be closer to their own. Women need heroines—need role-models—to guide and inspire them, to give them confidence, just as men do.

In the FWBO, a wealth of experience of spiritual practice is developing among women in the movement and is finding expression in various ways.

For over fifteen years Order members have led retreats and study groups, given Dharma talks, and taught meditation. We have a team of women running Taraloka, our women's retreat centre. There are women mitras and Order members, working in and running team-based Right Livelihood projects; women inspired by the ideal of Right Livelihood, and dedicated, often over many years, to establishing and maintaining creatively run work situations for other women. Communities have been established. Women are training and working in the field of health-care—as doctors, acupuncturists, homoeopaths, osteopaths, Alexander Technique teachers, Yoga teachers. Recently six women artists had a joint exhibition of their work in a London gallery. Poetry events have been held where women have read their poetry. And a book is on its way which will explore the influence of Christianity on the lives on some women Order members.

But still, this is only a beginning. The door is wide open for women to express themselves more fully, successfully, and creatively in almost every area of life, and especially in the area of verbal expression. As yet, very few women in the FWBO give expression to their vision through the medium of the written word, or through public talks. This is such an immensely valuable area, since through the written word in particular it is possible to reach out beyond the small personal sphere of influence that each of us lives and works in—to reach out, not only in space, but also in time.

Of course, many women in the world today are expressing themselves through the written word. Some of this material is of genuine value to mankind, enriching and stimulating our minds and hearts. Some of it is not. It is crucial that women who are contact with, and who are practising, the Dharma—the precious Dharma, which 'refreshes all creatures'—give expression to their vision, imbued as it will be, to some extent, by the Dharma.

It is of value to others if we express our vision, but it is also of value to ourselves. Through attempting to give expression to our thoughts, feelings, ideas, and dreams, we are forced to clarify and often deepen them. Indeed it is often through the expression itself that we make them fully known and conscious to ourselves. It has certainly been a very important aspect of my development, learning to communicate myself—despite a certain shyness and lack of confidence. It has been immensely fulfilling to be able, at times, to share and communicate what is of deepest value to me. It is, as far as I can see, part of the very process of growth itself, that we give expression to, in one way or another, our own personal vision, ever attempting to communicate it more fully and truely, ever attempting to communicate it in ways that can be more fully understood by others.

It requires effort to attempt to give expression to yourself, to your vision. And it takes courage—to take the initiative, and dare to affect the world you live in. Some are not prepared to make this effort. Perhaps, if this applies to you, you could ask yourself—why not?

THE BREATH OF LIBERTY

Does Buddhism treat women as 'second-class citizens'? Dr B R Ambedkar, founder of the Indian Mass-conversion Movement, thought not. Dharmacharini Padmashuri explains

India is a patriarchal society. Even amongst the wider ex-untouchable Buddhist community the women are often discriminated against, even in their own homes. However, Indian women involved in TBMSG are not discriminated against within the Movement. If they choose, they can study and practise Buddhism at the same intensity as their male counterparts. Not restricted by gender-based divisions they can meditate, attend retreats, practise the same five or ten precepts, earn their livelihood, become mitras and Dharmacharinis in likewise manner to the men. They are neither seen as inferior nor subservient to the male mitras and Dharmacharis. Such a radical change and breakthrough is one that was strongly encouraged by Dr Ambedkar.

In 1950, six years before the mass conversions to Buddhism of the ex-Untouchables under the leadership of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, an article appeared in 'Eve's Weekly', an Indian women's popular magazine, entitled 'Our New Republic', in which the Hindu author made the following two statements: 1. It was alas the Buddhist theory that seems to have thrust women into the background. 2. The Buddha was ever exhorting men to beware of women.

In an article in the *Maha Bodhi Journal*, Lama Govinda challenged and refuted both statements. Dr Ambedkar went further. Feeling so strongly about these charges levelled against the Buddha, he examined the question and wrote an article entitled: 'The Rise and Fall of

Hindu Woman. Who was Responsible for it?' In this article he maintained that the decline and fall of Indian women should be attributed to Manu, the law giver of the Hindus, and not to the Buddha. Ambedkar felt the above charges could be supported on two grounds only. Firstly he refers to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* of the Sutta Pitaka, Chapter 5, which reads:

'How are we to conduct ourselves (asks Ananda) with regard to womankind?' 'As not seeing them Ananda,' (replies the Buddha.) 'But if we should see them, what are we to do?' 'Not talking Ananda.' 'But if they should speak to us Lord, what are we to do?' 'Keep wide awake Ananda.'

Dr Ambedkar examined this passage to determine whether or not it was original and genuine, or a later interpolation of the bhikkhus. The Sutta Pitaka as we find it now is, according to Dr Ambedkar: 'Wrapped about by mythical drapery, disfigured by additions of purely Brahmanic ideas entirely foreign to the original Buddhist thought, and distorted by twists and turns given to it by monastic ideas intended to enforce monastic ideals.'

The Sutta Pitaka was not written until four hundred years after the Buddha's Parinirvana. Ambedkar suggests that since the editors were monks, they compiled and wrote for the monk. In this way the Buddha's statement was seen as being valuable for the monk in order to preserve his rule of celibacy. Ambedkar also supported his suggestion by noting that many passages occurring in this sutta also occur in other suttas, whereas this particular passage does not. There is moreover also a Chinese version of the sutta which does not contain this passage.

The Buddha's—and Ananda's—attitude to women as reported generally in the Pitakas seems contrary to the Buddha's answer to Ananda's question in this instance. For example, in the very same sutta, the Buddha describes the wonderful qualities of Ananda, including the following:

'If, Brethren, a number of the sisters of the Order . . . or devout women should behold him, and if Ananda should preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company is ill at ease, Brethren, when Ananda is silent.'

Both the Buddha and Ananda met and discoursed with women. It therefore seems unlikely, according to Ambedkar, that such a question would have been asked. Personally, I think it may have been asked, but as a general question, and perhaps it *was* good advice to most monks!

Ambedkar thought the second support for the charges against the Buddha was the so called subordination of the bhikkhuni sangha to the bhikkhu sangha. Certainly there seems plenty of proof in the Pali suttas that the Buddha did not regard women as inferior to men either in point of intellect, character, or spiritual attainments—as when Ananda asked the Buddha:

'Lord, are women capable, after Going Forth from the house life into homelessness in the Law and Discipline declared by the Perfect One, of realizing the fruit of Stream Entry or Once-Return or Non-Return or Arahantship?' 'They are Ananda!'

Presumably, had he feared that their presence in the order might lower the prestige of the sangha, he would never have admitted them. He chose, according to Ambedkar, to have two separate sanghas for fear that co-fraternity of men and women who had left home and become monks and nuns would soon weaken and probably break the rule of celibacy. The Buddha promoted the view that it is the sex instinct which drives a man into woman's bondage, and a woman into man's. The bhikkhus were the ones already instructed in the Buddha's doctrine, whereas the women had not yet been instructed. The women would therefore have to be under the instruction of the men. Ambedkar felt this to be a simple practical matter, and not one of the 'subordination' of the women to the 'authority' of the men.

Under Hindu Brahmanic theory—and contrary to Buddhism—women are denied the right to acquire knowledge, or even the right to study the Vedic scriptures. It is stated in the *Manu Smriti*, the sacred law book of the Hindus which even today still gives scriptural authority for the inhuman treatment of the (officially ex-)Untouchables, that:

'Women have no right to study the Vedas, that is why their rites are performed without Vedic mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of Vedic mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Vedic mantras they are as Untruth is.'

The freedom enjoyed by Buddhist women being allowed and able to realize their spiritual potential was so great that bhikkhuni Mettika, a Brahmin woman by birth, sang out aloud: 'So sit I here upon this rock, and o'er my spirit sweeps the breath of Liberty.'

To gain this freedom the bhikkhunis had given up social position and domestic success. Even in India today this is still highly prized for women, yet it cramps, stultifies, and binds them to the home, making the possibility of their stepping out as individuals virtually impossible. There was a time, before Manu, when women could rise high in learning and education, and when women were highly respected. It was Manu, according to Ambedkar, the law giver of the Hindus, feeling threatened by Buddhism, who was responsible for

Dharmacharini Jnanashuri and mitra Mrs Sonowane

woman's downfall. Knowing that the home was the place to be protected against Buddhism, it was the women in particular whom he put under restraint.

The mere fact the Ambedkar chose to write this article on women, using relevant quotations from the Buddhist scriptures, indicates that he recognized the spiritual potential, even spiritual realization, of women Buddhists. His writings and speeches on Buddhism were addressed to both men and women. When speaking on Buddhism as 'A Perfect Religion' he talks about equality: 'Equality not just between man and man only, but between man and woman.' Like the Buddha, Ambedkar spoke not only to half the human race, but to men and women.

Uninspired by the bhikkhu sangha in India, which seemed to place far more emphasis on monastic status than sincere practice, Ambedkar felt, at the time of the mass conversions, that a new Buddhist movement was needed, a sangha which did not depend on the bhikkhus, a sangha in which there would be no discrimination of caste, class, colour, or gender.

TBMSG is fulfilling his wish in the sense of being a sangha consisting of men and women primarily committed to Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, without discrimination. It is for this reason that TBMSG has been so successful in being the life-force behind the Dharma Revolution in India. The women of TBMSG play a large part in this revival of Buddhism, and I have witnessed quite dramatic changes in many of their lives.

One such woman is Dharmacharini Vimalashuri. She was born an Untouchable. Through the encouragement of Dr Ambedkar she gained an education. This enabled her to see through her caste and gender discrimination. Eventually after much searching she discovered TBMSG. Now she is able to practise and teach the Dharma freely.

She is someone who, under the influence of Dr Ambedkar's views and now TBMSG, has changed enormously. She along with others is a great inspiration to other women Buddhists.

Once again a Breath of Liberty sweeps over India.

Drawing Inspiration From The Theris

Dharmacharini Dayanandi suggests a powerful way of maintaining one's inspiration to practise the Dharma

Most people reading this article will have been born and brought up in the West where the material, rational world-view greatly predominates over any spiritual one. Perhaps, until recently, you had never come across anyone who was leading a spiritual life. If that is the case, you would not be at all unusual! Many of us who share that rationalist Western background find the idea that we can change ourselves and develop spiritually very strange.

Yet when we encounter Buddhism and find ourselves inspired by its ideals, we begin to hope that we can gradually put this kind of thinking, this limiting conditioning, behind us. We hope that we can become free enough in ourselves not only to develop spiritually, but also to gain Insight into the true nature of existence. This becomes our aspiration. However, we often find that things don't seem so clear and simple in our ordinary, day-to-day life. Society's conditioning seems so much more powerful than that golden thread of inspiration which leads us onto the spiritual path. Our doubts return: we begin to doubt again whether we can change at all, let alone experience Insight!

How different the situation would have been living in northern India at the time of the Buddha. Insight and Enlightenment would be an everyday reality: we would come into contact with the Enlightened disciples of the Buddha—we might even meet the Buddha himself. In fact we would have many opportunities to meet men and women with a far greater degree of Insight than our own: men and women who might be quite radiant, quite beautiful, as a result of the experience of Insight. In the Pali Canon we find the example of Shariputra:

Now it being morning, the Venerable Assaji dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe he went into Rajagaha for alms. His manner as he went inspired confidence, whether in moving forwards or backwards, looking ahead or aside, bending or stretching, his eyes were downcast and he moved with grace. The wanderer Shariputra saw him thus as he was begging for alms in Rajagaha, and he thought: 'There are Arahants in this world, those who possess the Arahant path, and this Bhikkhu is one of them.' (Bhikkhu Nanamoli, *The Life of The Buddha* p.70)

We can't of course literally go back in time. But we can acquaint ourselves with these stories from the time of the Buddha, imaginatively identifying ourselves with some of the characters we meet. We soon find the Buddha's world opening out before us. For instance, we follow intimate discussions between the Buddha and his disciples as he asks after their welfare or their spiritual practice; we read of debates with teachers from different traditions as the Buddha tries to communicate to them the truth of the Dharma—and much more.

As a woman, I find one section of the Pali Canon particularly striking: the *Therigatha,* where we are introduced to women of all ages and life-styles—from queens to beggar-women, from teenagers to the elderly. Some find the Buddha's teaching in the midst of very sad or painful incidents in their lives, others through disillusionment with wealth or beauty; for some it is dissatisfaction with the never-ending chores of the home that brings about their going forth into the spiritual life.

There is the story of Patacara. The Buddha catches sight of her as she is wandering about crazed with grief, following the tragic deaths of her husband and children. The Buddha sees through her mad and deranged state and realizes that, fundamentally, her mind is capable of grasping his teaching:

. . . Just as now thou art shedding tears because of the death of children and the rest, so hast thou, in the unending round of life, been shedding tears . . . O Patacara, to one passing to another world no child nor kin is able to be a shelter or a hiding place or a refuge. . . . Therefore, let whoso is wise purify (her) conduct, and accomplish the path leading even to Nibbana. (Psalms of the Early Buddhists 1—The Sisters, trans. Mrs Rhys Davids p.71)

From the depths of her grief, Patacara sees the truth of what the Buddha is saying. She is established in a clear Insight, and is ordained as a bhikkhuni. She practises consistently for many years and, the text tells us, she gains full Insight whilst she is washing her feet one day. As she pours water over her feet, watching how the water flows and then sinks away into the dusty earth, she reflects on the impermanence of life. Struck deeply by this, she goes to her hut and meditates further, soon after which her Insight is firmly established.

Patacara went on to become one of the greatest teachers amongst the bhikkhunis. She is said to have inspired many disciples of her own, and helped them to attain Insight through the depth of her own understanding.

Another very touching story is that of a bhikkhuni of unknown name, whose nickname was 'Little Sturdy'. Little Sturdy was happily married to a young noble of Vesali when the Buddha came to preach there. After hearing the Buddha she became a lay disciple, but on hearing Patacara discourse on the Dharma, she decided she would like to leave home and enter the spiritual life full time as a bhikkhuni. Little Sturdy's husband, however, would not consent to her leaving home. Perhaps he feared for her safety if she undertook the homeless life of a wandering nun. So she continued with her household duties—but all the time reflecting on the sweetness of the Buddha's teaching, and on the transience and impermanence that she saw in everyday things.

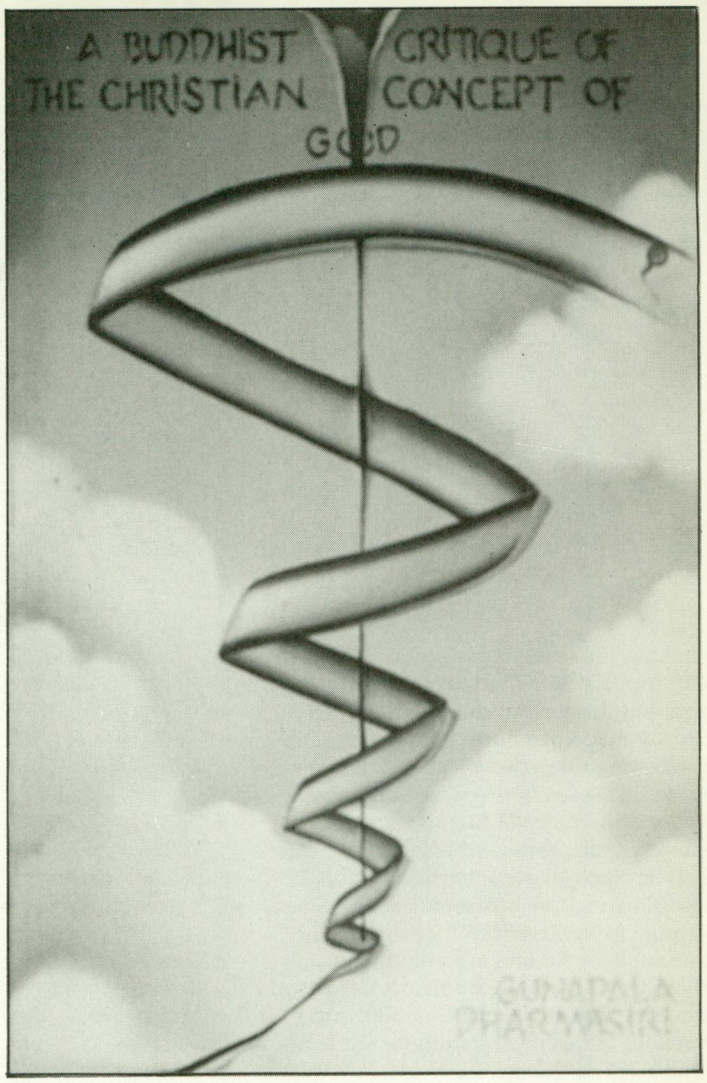
It seems that one day, as she was

cooking the curry, a great flame shot up and burnt all the food. Instead of hurrying to prepare more food, Little Sturdy made this episode a basis for meditating on the impermanence of all things. This led her to a realization well beyond the point of Stream Entry, where she broke the fetters of craving and hatred. She put aside her jewels and adornments. Her husband, seeing the change in her, realized that she was incapable of leading a domestic life, and took her to the bhikkhunis who ordained her. The Buddha spoke the following verse to her, referring to the episode which led to the arising of Insight: *Sleep softly, Little Sturdy,take thy rest/At ease, wrapt in the robe thyself has made./Stilled are the passions that would rage within,/Withered as potherbs in the oven dried. (ibid* p.9)

You may be thinking, perhaps, that life in ancient India made it easy for women to lead a spiritual life. In fact, though—despite what I said about the difficulties of our Western conditioning—those Indian women certainly didn't have it easy either. Traditionally their lives were not their own to make decisions about. Betrothed and married early in life, they were under the authority of their parents before marriage, and under that of their husbands and parents-in-law afterwards. If a woman left home to 'go forth into the homeless life' of a bhikkhuni life was still hard: she had no fixed abode, no source of food other than what could be obtained through begging. It was not safe for women to go about alone—at a time when the Buddha encouraged solitary meditation in the depths of forests for the attainment of greater depths of concentration and Insight. For a woman to have taken on this way of life must have required either fervent inspiration, a deep rejection of her mundane life, or a plain heroic spirit. The women we learn about in the Therigatha are truly impressive!

We can draw much encouragement and inspiration from stories such as these, and this can help us become more confident that we too can change. We can loosen the grip that our materialistic Western conditioning has had on us. We can gain Insight into the nature of existence.

GOD REFUTED?



A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God
A Critique of the Concept of God in Contemporary Christian Theology and Philosophy of Religion from the Point of View of Early Buddhism
by Gunapala Dharmasiri
Published by The Buddhist Research Society
pp.324, paperback
price not known

The Buddha did not accept the existence of God. He also rejected the idea of a soul though he advocated the possibility of salvation. The present work is an attempt to elucidate the reasons that led the Buddha to such conclusions.

With these words Dr Dharmasiri introduces his book presenting a Buddhist critique of Christian theism, which now appears in a second edition with a new Foreword and Postscript. Such a project clearly invites comparison with Glasenapp's pioneering work in this field, *Buddhism: a non-theistic religion*, published as long ago as 1954. Dharmasiri's book is narrower in compass in that he restricts himself to a Buddhist critique of monotheistic belief, a subject to which Glasenapp only devotes a single chapter. As a result Dharmasiri explores the issues in much greater depth but, unlike Glasenapp, at the expense of not describing the full range of theistic belief in the Buddha's day. This means that anyone reading Buddhist texts after this book, and thinking that the Buddha rejected the idea of the existence of deities as such, might be a little confused at the appearance therein of numerous *devas* or deities who speak with and are taught by Him.

Such questions aside, Dharmasiri takes up, as it were, where Glasenapp left off, and examines each of the traditional arguments of the Natural Theologians (and their modern successors), evaluating them upon their own terms and then introducing to the discussion relevant arguments drawn from *Theravadin* Buddhist sources. Thus he works his way through the traditional ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of god, as also those from design, and from the experience of god. He tackles the problems of theodicy, as well as those involved in the idea of revelation, and ideas of god's omnipotence and omniscience, and moreover goes in some detail into expositions of the nature of Buddhist ethics and of Nirvana.

In this way he satisfies the Buddhist reader that, despite constant misinformation to the contrary, the Buddha was not agnostic either upon the fact, or upon the ethical effect, of belief in the existence of an omniscient, ruling, creator god. Another virtue of Dharmasiri's book is that it draws from some of the Buddha's statements a significance which is not always apparent. Good examples of this occur in his discussion of the 'unanswered questions' concerning such things as the existence of a soul, etc. He points out that, apart from the irrelevance of such questions to the pursuit of the spiritual path, to answer them on their own terms is implicitly to accept that their premises, e.g. the concept of a soul, are meaningful anyway. (p.20)

Criticism could be made of the text for its dense style, clearly that of a doctoral dissertation; overall Dharmasiri approaches his subject as though it were primarily philosophical in nature. But, did the Buddha criticize ideas of a divine ruler and creator merely as a result of reasoned argument, or was his position taken on other grounds? Dharmasiri only touches upon this, when he criticizes the Christian theologian by pointing out that 'a purely abstract logical relationship cannot explain or give an intellectually satisfying account of an existing factual world' (p.42 and p.80). The same realization is reflected in his account of Buddhist ethics, where he rightly concludes that the Buddha 'proves the intrinsic value of other persons, in the only way it is possible to do it, namely, through empathy or sympathetic feelings' (p.80).

In contrast, the Natural Theologians believe that one would inevitably discover the 'reality' of God's existence through the natural functioning of the faculty of reason. Yet one doubts whether anyone believes in God only because they know an argument that purports to 'prove' his existence. Such argument often seems to substantiate the fact of a person's prior belief or disbelief. This is certainly the case with the Buddha, for some texts make it absolutely clear that he held his position as a result of direct experience, as we can read in the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 49).

The whole text is liberally illustrated from Pali sources, in the author's own translations, and as such is a fascinating mine of textual sources concerning the Buddhist teaching upon God and related issues. Generally speaking, such a treatment as this is long overdue, and one only regrets that the author limited his researches to the *Theravadin* literature, unlike Glasenapp, ignoring the metaphysically richer thought of the *Mahayana*.

In this connection, one notes a change of views between the chapters from the first edition, and his additions to the second. In the former he offers a presentation of Nirvana as total annihilation—a significant misunderstanding of the tradition, aided by his exclusive reliance upon *Theravadin* sources. In his Postscript he revises this view, by equating Nirvana with *'the ultimate noumenal experience'* (p.304)—revealing a more positive conception of its nature.

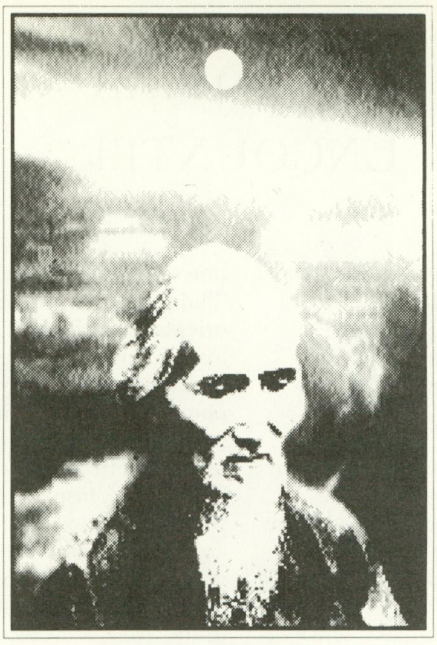
Another change appears in his own perspective upon the discussion, in that he now draws the reader's attention to 'a different set of problems concerning the concept of God that are actually more existentially important and significant than the more theoretical problems that I was discussing before'! These are 'the practical implications of the concept of God' (p.300), foremost among them being the negative psychological and ethical effects of submission to an external authority.

Much more could be said about this rich and fascinating study, a boon to students of religion and thinking Buddhists alike. One looks forward to a lively critical response to its republication.

Sthiramati

A Modern Odyssey

Empty Cloud: The Autobiography of the Chinese Zen Master Xu Yun
Translated by Charles Luk
Revised and Edited by Richard Hunn
Published by Element Books
pp.244, paperback
price £7.95



There cannot be many biographies where, as here, the subject's first forty-two years can be titled 'Early Life'. Xu Yun was born in 1840 and lived for 120 years through some of the most turbulent events in China's history. The fascination of his life-story lies in its blend of the contemporary with the timeless, a collage which includes solitary wanderings within China and across the Far East; lone sojourns on misty pine-clad mountains; encounters with eminent masters and teachers (including a possible emanation of Manjushri); the survival of more than one brush with death; prolonged stays in various monasteries, studying, meditating, and teaching; and his own revitalization, physical and spiritual, of several temples.

I first encountered this book some years ago in a limited edition published by disciples of Roshi Philip Kapleau in the USA. At the time I was led to it by my interest in the sixteenth/seventeenth century Ch'an (Zen) Master Han Shan, whose autobiography *Journey Through Dreamland* is to be found in the quaintly-named 'Practical Buddhism', also translated by the late Charles Luk. Luk was a disciple of Xu Yun and, like many Chinese Buddhists, saw him as a modern Han Shan. Their careers have many parallels. Both were pre-eminent wandering teachers, renewers of the Dharma in China, as well as great meditators and lovers of solitude.

The style of *Empty Cloud* is also reminiscent of Xu Yun's predecessor; presumably such biography is a genre of Chinese literature. The happenings of each year are recounted, usually succinctly, although it is clear that the space devoted to each year does not always reflect its importance. There are many brief entries such as: 'My 42nd Year (1881/82): That year, I went to the Gao-min Monastery at Yangzhou and paid obeisance to Abbot Yue-lang. I passed the winter there and made good progress in my Ch'an practice.' The fruits of such quietistic years are to be inferred from the lengthier accounts of others. For example, there is the Master's pilgrimage to Wu-tai Mountain, which seems to have been a major turning-point for him, or his undertaking, at the age of ninety-five, of the rebuilding of the monastery of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch.

In several places the terse narrative is expanded by some interesting editorial interpolation. For instance, we are told that in 1942 Japanese bombers intent on destroying Nan-hua mysteriously missed their target and collided in mid-air as Xu Yun meditated alone in the main temple. Historical background and Dharmic explanation are also provided by Richard Hunn's *Introduction* and his usually excellent footnotes to each year. These sometimes help lend significance to what might otherwise seem a mere catalogue of alien names of teachers and places and odd incidents. Perhaps a map or two would have also helped in this respect.

The general atmosphere of the book is serious and intense, but there is still a place for anecdote. Alone in a small hut on a snow-covered mountain one winter, Xu Yun sits down to meditate while waiting for his meal to cook. Some time later, friends call by and rouse him from samadhi. Thinking his food should be ready by now, he lifts the lid of his cauldron to discover it is covered with an inch of mould. 'Fu-cheng was startled and said, "You must have been in samadhi for half a month." ' After melting ice, cooking fresh food, and eating together, 'they joked with me and left'.

A full appreciation of the richness and depth of Xu Yun's life is also aided by Richard Hunn's inclusion here of some actual teaching discourses. At their simplest and most direct, these stress avoidance of disparagement of and dispute with other schools, wholehearted practice of one's own, and the vital importance of *sila*. (Parts of this material can also be found in Luk's *Ch'an and Zen Teaching, First Series*, where it formed some of the final reading of C G Jung, who was apparently much impressed with Xu Yun's words.)

Certainly, without these examples of his teaching, the beginner in Buddhism might find this merely a colourful and exotic but culturally remote story. But those Western Buddhists prepared to let the full flavour of this life sink in will find it impressive and inspiring, in a number of ways.

Firstly, there is the manner in which a dedication to the contemplative life is carried over into effectiveness in the world in the service of the good. Xu Yun at various times organizes famine relief, intervenes with authority to alleviate persecution, and seems effortlessly to attract the necessary energy and support to renovate temples and renew the spiritual impetus that started them.

Secondly, there are the persistence and doggedness that sustain him in what he does. Although Xu Yun's was a full life, his one-pointed belief in the value of what he did also leaves an impression of a spacious, uncluttered life. However, there are also clear allusions to some personal doubts and misgivings over his early decision to leave home and dedicate himself to the monastic life and these difficulties are not ignored.

And, thirdly, there is the courage with which he faces likely death, not only due to serious illness on more than one occasion but also to his torture at the age of 112 by Communist cadres after his conscious decision to stay in mainland China after 1949 to do what he could for Buddhism under Communist rule.

It may seem to us today that we live in 'interesting times'. The example of Xu Yun's personal qualities in a situation which was possibly less certain and more insecure than our own may perhaps help to sustain us.

Finally, while Element Books are to be praised for filling in this gap in the published works of Charles Luk, it must be said that too many distracting proof-reading errors mar what is, otherwise, a well-designed and illustrated book.

Prajnananda

VICTORIAN ENCOUNTER

The British Discovery of Buddhism
by Philip C. Almond
Published by Cambridge University Press
pp.186, hardback
price £22.50

Philip Almond sets out to investigate the discovery of Buddhism by the nineteenth century West. By showing how Victorian thinkers endeavoured to make sense of the East and come to terms with an alien tradition both complementary and opposite to their own, he casts light on a period which was seminal for the development of contemporary religious pluralism.

The book is clearly the result of long and thorough scholarly research. Almond allows the Victorian thinkers largely to speak for themselves, quoting copiously and in detail. His intention is to evoke for the reader the complex interrelationships between texts which comprise the Victorian apprehension of Buddhism, as well as a sense of the characteristically 'Victorian' aspects of that discourse.

In this he admirably succeeds. It is fascinating to see before our own eyes the roots taking shape of views which continue to be in the West, even today, established misapprehensions about the nature of Buddhism.

The main body of material quoted in the book dates from around the 1830s, when various religious phenomena that the Victorians were coming upon in their wanderings about Asia began to be classified as 'Buddhism' or 'the religion of the Buddha'. A central thesis of Almond's book is that the Victorians did not *discover* Buddhism, but *created* it, and this creation took place in two more or less distinct phases.

In the earlier phase, up to the the middle of the nineteenth century, 'Buddhism', as a collection of phenomena subject to organization and classification, and made imaginatively manageable by Westerners in the East, existed only in the Orient. By about 1860, however, the locus of 'Buddhism' had come to be the oriental libraries and institutions of the West. It had become an essentially *textual* object, defined, classified, and interpreted in terms of its own textuality. In this latter phase 'Buddhism', instead of being perceived as located 'out there', in the oriental present, was now an object expressed by Western orientalists, living in the West, who thought that they alone knew what Buddhism was, is, and ought to be, owing to the Western ownership and control of Buddhism's own textual past.

Almond develops this thesis in great detail. Beginning with the eighteenth century, when European knowledge of oriental religious practice was still vague and unclassified, he outlines how the first distinctions came to be drawn between 'Buddhism' and 'Hinduism', necessitating the untangling of the Hindu claim that the Buddha was an avatar of Vishnu, as well as the recognition that the Buddhist and Hindu views of the Buddha were actually distinct.

He also shows us the early orientalists grappling with the distinctions between the historical Buddha and his mythic predecessors. We read of the elaboration and eventual abandonment of theories that Buddhism originated in Africa, or other non-Indian locations, and we follow the first orientalists as they discover and begin to analyse the textual riches of the various Buddhist traditions.

In the mid-nineteenth century we see Buddhism emerge onto the Victorian popular scene, aided by the explosion of journalism and the Victorian penchant for religious literature. However, despite the wide interest it aroused (Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* becoming one of the most popular long Victorian poems and running into over a hundred editions), for the Victorians Buddhism remained essentially 'other'. The nineteenth century West was unable to treat the East on equal terms and the unchallenged assumption of the superiority of Western value systems underlay any discussion of the truth or value of Eastern philosophy and culture.

The Victorians appear to have been unable to remove or even acknowledge the existence of their own cultural spectacles. Where they were able to accept the Buddha it was only to the extent that his life and teachings could be represented as reflecting Victorian, and in particular Protestant, mores. Thus he was often depicted as a spiritual hero, second only to Christ, whose teachings had come to be distorted and debased by the 'inferior' civilizations through which they were perforce transmitted. Almond's book abounds with confident Victorian assertions such as: 'Buddhism, *as He taught it*, is not the religion of the five hundred millions who are said to reverence His shrines,' and 'Nothing would have astonished or disgusted the founder more than to find himself adored as a God and his simple teaching converted into an ecclesiastical ritual of the most superstitious character.'

The value of Mr Almond's excellent book is twofold. In the first place it allows us to see quite clearly the Victorian roots of certain currently persisting misapprehensions about Buddhism: that it is nihilistic, pessimistic, or essentially selfish and indolent, for example, or that the Mahayana represents a degeneration of the pristine and 'original' Pali teachings.

Secondly there is his exposure of the tendency to view Buddhism exclusively within the terms of the cultural framework of the beholder. So long as 'Buddhism' remains exclusively a textual and conceptual object such perceptions are inevitable. Only through the actual practice and application of that which the texts expound can their trans-cultural meaning be found. Buddhism may have been discovered by the Victorians, but it can only really be understood by Buddhists.

Kulananda

ALSO RECEIVED:

Sakyadhita—Daughters of the Buddha
ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Snow Lion

Beckett and Zen
Paul Foster
Wisdom

The Song of the Profound View
Geshe Rabten
Wisdom

How to Meditate
Lawrence LeShan
Crucible

The Dymamic Way of Meditation
Dhiravamsa
Crucible

The Diamond Healing; Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry
Terry Clifford
Crucible

What We May Be; The Visions and Techniques of Psychosynthesis
Piero Ferrucci
Crucible

The Intuitive Edge; Understanding and Developing Intuition
Philip Goldberg
Crucible

Self-Therapy; A Guide to Becoming Your Own Therapist
Janette Rainwater
Crucible

Edgar Cayce on ESP
Doris Agee
Aquarian

Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation
Noel Langley
Aquarian

The Return From Silence; A Study of Near-Death Experiences
D. Scott Rogo
Aquarian

The Book of the Dead
E.A. Wallis Budge
Arkana

Open Secrets
Walter Truett Anderson
Tarcher

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THE SANGHA AND THE STATE

SAKYADHITA

An unusual news story appeared in the pages of the *Times* newspaper this August. It reported that 'eighty dissident monks of an orthodox Buddhist sect' (sic) were taken to a detention centre after refusing to stop wearing their saffron robes. Thai police said that over a hundred members of the 'sect' had been arrested on charges of violating 'ecclesiastical law'. Twenty-six were later released after being found to be 'genuine' under 'the Sangha Supreme Council's regulations'. Phra Bodirak, the 'leader of the sect' who had ordained most of these monks, was arrested in June but released on bail pending trial on similar charges. The article did not explain why the 'dissident monks' were not considered to be 'genuine'.

Even if it should turn out that these monks had no legitimate spiritual claims to the bhikkhu robes, this news item raises important questions for Buddhists. What is Buddhist 'orthodoxy', and can secular power be legitimately involved in spiritual matters? Given that in the time of the Buddha there was no imposition of secular power in the affairs of the spiritual community, and that in any case such involvement would contradict the fundamental Buddhist principle of non-violence, one must question whether a 'sangha supreme council' whose decisions are backed up by force is in any position to pronounce about matters of orthodoxy.

Monks under arrest in Bangkok

Over the centuries the early Buddhist community has developed into many different communities, each following its own particular version of precepts and, where there are monks, monastic rules. The only spiritually valid response to a fundamental difference over matters of 'orthodoxy' is for those involved to go their separate ways. There can be no question of punishment of one party by another.

In Thailand today the Buddhist monastic sangha is regulated by the state, and is an institution which is often used to promote the interests of Thai nationalism. One must question whether in such a situation authentic Buddhism, i.e. Buddhism in which people genuinely commit themselves to the path of spiritual development, can actually be practised. How much are any spiritually sincere bhikkhus and 'laypeople' in Thailand (and elsewhere) undermined by such interference? Can genuine Buddhism survive when the sangha is regulated by secular authorities imposing political orthodoxy by force? And what spiritual relevance does a monastic robe have if wearing it is regulated by secular authorities—when originally it signified the renunciation or 'going forth' from all secular entanglements?

September saw the first meeting in Britain of Sakyadhita, the 'International Association of Buddhist Women', which brought together a number of women from various Buddhist traditions.

The programme comprised a talk by Bhikkhuni Ayya Khema on 'Women in Buddhism', a slide show of Tibetan Buddhist nunneries in India, some meditation, and a discussion about the aims and function of Sakyadhita—how it can become a forum for Buddhist women and stimulate developments in the Buddhist way of life for women, including encouraging the training of women as teachers of the Dharma. It was a friendly day, and those members of the Western Buddhist Order who attended felt happy and inspired to be with women whose unifying factor is their practice of the Dharma.

A forum in which women (and men) from different Buddhist traditions can meet and discuss practical issues such as meditation and ethics—two topics that Sakyadhita is pursuing—would indeed be a valuable one. Another issue that concerns Sakyadhita is the perhaps more controversial one of the ordination of women as 'nuns' (bhikkhunis) in the Theravada tradition, this particular ordination lineage having died out.

Important as this topic may be, it will be interesting to see whether Sakyadhita's discussions extend to the question of whether bhikkhuni and bhikkhu ordinations are actually relevant or helpful to spiritual development in a modern society.

No doubt our own Dharmacharinis, whose going for Refuge has no less value, meaning, or 'status' than that of their brothers within the WBO, will have an important contribution to make.

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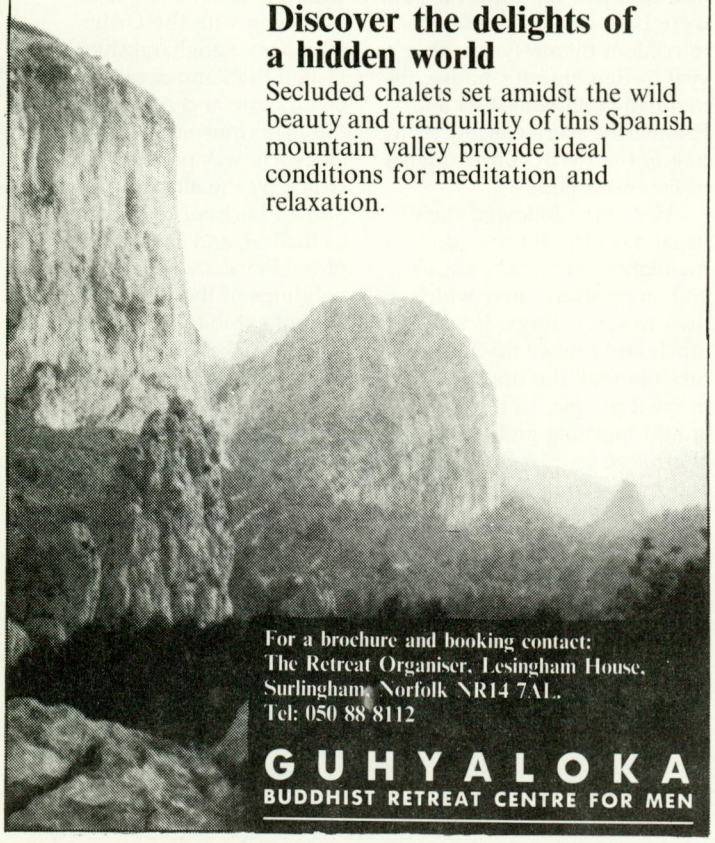

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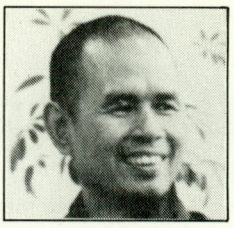
TRANSFORMATION OF SUFFERING

A FIVE-DAY RETREAT WITH
THICH NHAT HANH



FRIDAY, APRIL 20th - 6.00 PM — WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25th - 2.00 PM
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Thich Nhat Hanh was born in central Vietnam in 1926. At the age of 16, he joined the monkhood. When war came to his country, he and his fellow monastics were faced with the question whether to remain meditating in their monasteries or to help the villagers suffering under the bombing and devastation. They chose to do both, to meditate while helping those in need, thus founding the movement known as "engaged Buddhism." Following the war, he served as the chairman of the Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks.

Nhat Hanh was invited in 1966 by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to tour the U.S. "to describe to the American people the aspirations and agony of the masses of the Vietnamese people." Threatened with arrest at home, he has lived in exile since then gardening, meditating, teaching and writing in a community of westerners and refugees in France. He was nominated by Martin Luther King, Jr., for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967.

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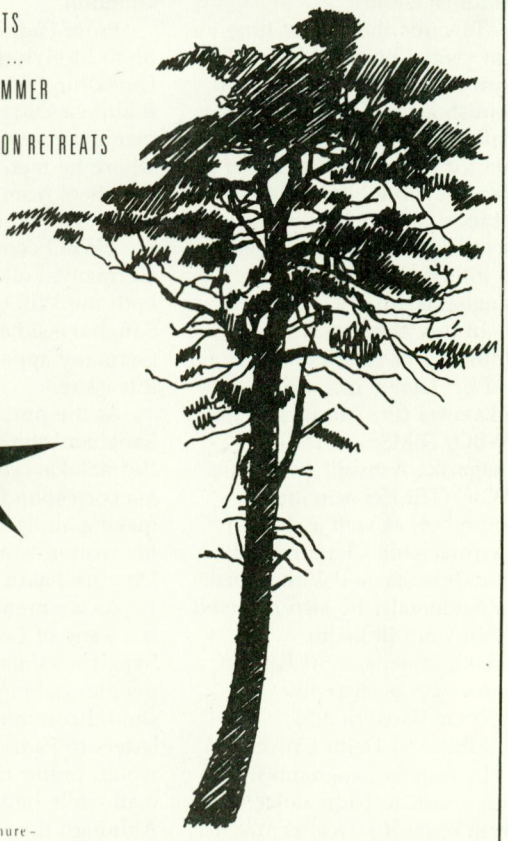

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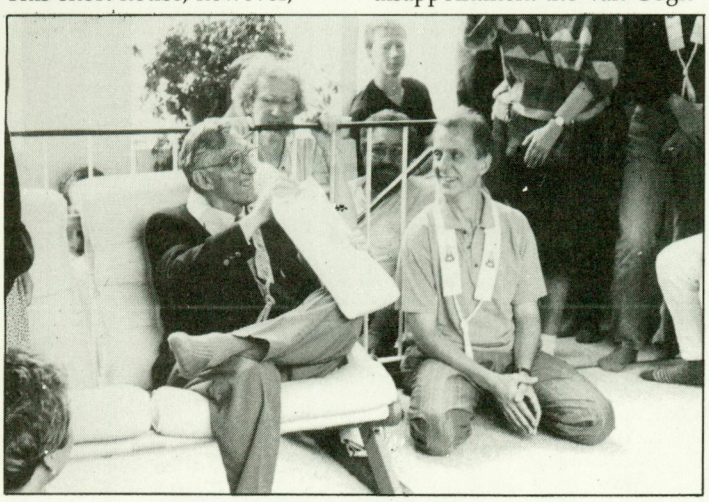
SANGHARAKSHITA VISITS GERMANY

In early August, during the Chairmen's AGM at Padmaloka, Sangharakshita told Dharmapriya that he would like to take up FWBO Germany's invitation to come for a visit, and that he would like to come in September! This short notice, however, caused not so much consternation as delight.

Shantipada collected Sangharakshita and his travelling companion, Paramartha, at Amsterdam airport early on a Monday morning. To their disappointment the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum were both closed, so they had to content themselves with a visit to Rembrandt's house. By nightfall Sangharakshita and Paramartha were ensconced in one of the FWBO appartments in Essen-Borbeck.



Sangharakshita with Dhammaloka and Friends in Germany

Here they followed their usual morning routine: double meditation, breakfast, a walk, and some study, after which they would emerge. It was at lunch and dinner that Sangharakshita took the opportunity to meet people, so most days, at mid-morning and mid-afternoon, four or five Friends and mitras from Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Holland, Belgium, and even further afield, would arrive and descend upon the kitchen to create a meal—which they then consumed with Sangharakshita and Paramartha.

The highpoint on each occasion was the conversation, which often stretched well into the afternoon or evening. Among other things, Sangharakshita spoke about the FWBO triad of centre, community, and co-op, about his childhood, about the whole question of having children, about the all-too-common tendency to want to teach the Dharma before one had really learned the Dharma, and about the teaching profession as a form of Right Livelihood. In this latter context, Sangharakshita admitted that he was not particularly keen to see the emergence of 'Buddhist schools' in the more strictly denominational sense, but was more interested in the possibility of ordinary, non-denominational schools being staffed by people who happened to be Buddhists and who would be able to communicate, informally, something of a Buddhist's spirit and outlook to the children under their care.

Along with the Order members, Sangharakshita visited the famous cathedrals of Cologne and Aachen and the main museums of those cities. He was particularly struck by the altar piece by Stepan Lochner in Cologne Cathedral, and by the wealth of medieval and late medieval paintings of the Cologne School exhibited in the Wallraf-Richarz Museum next door. With all the resident Order members, and a mitra who has asked for ordination, Sangharakshita visited a performance of Handel's *Julius Caesar* at the Düsseldorf Opera

The highpoint of Sangharakshita's visit for most Friends was a reception and puja, led by Sangharakshita, at the Centre in Essen. Forty-nine people attended this event, making it the biggest puja ever celebrated at the Centre. Quite a few people were able to talk to Sangharakshita, and everyone appreciated the warm and mindful way he led the puja. On his side, Sangharakshita was very impressed by the size and physical appearance of the Centre, and by the youthfulness and quality of the people who used it.

The nine days came all too soon to a close, and on the last day Dharmapriya drove Sangharakshita and Paramartha to Amsterdam airport for their return flight to Norwich. Underway they did, however, have time to visit the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, both of which were now open.

Perhaps it will not be too long before Sangharakshita pays another visit to Germany. He certainly enjoyed this visit and admitted to feeling very much at home there.

SANGHARAKSHITA DIARY

Sangharakshita has passed most of the summer in quiet reading and reflection at his flat adjacent to the London Buddhist Centre.

Towards the end of June he was visited by an old friend from Helsinki, the prominent Finnish art critic Olle Mallander. The two had not met for ten years, and spent a pleasant three hours discussing subjects of mutual interest, including Olle's plans to video an interview with Sangharakshita.

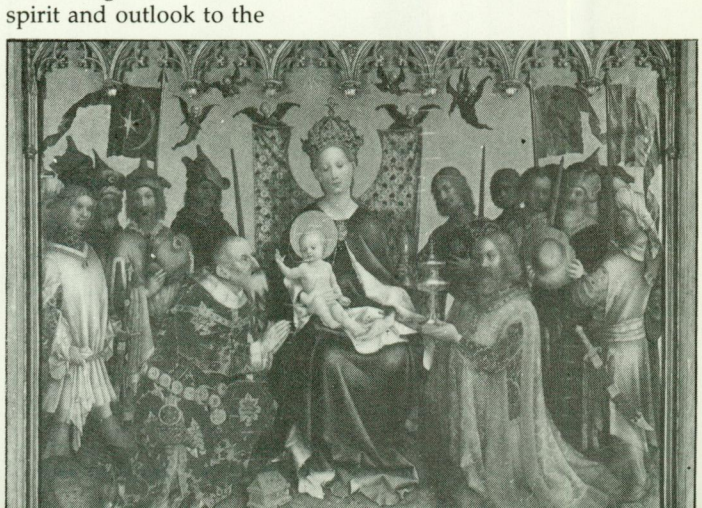
In July Sangharakshita saw a number of visitors from India and Sri Lanka, including Lokamitra (the founder of the FWBO/TBMSG in India), Anagarika Ashvajit (who runs FWBO/TBMSS activities in Colombo), as well as Indian Dharmacharis Chandrabodhi, Chandrashila, and Vimalakirti. Coincidentally he also received a visit from Bhikkhu Dhammaratana, a Sri Lankan monk who is currently studying Sanskrit and Buddhism at Delhi University.

In August Sangharakshita paid a visit to Padmaloka, the FWBO men's retreat centre in Norfolk, UK, where he sometimes resides. While there he attended a session of the international meeting of chairmen of FWBO centres, and dealt with the backlog of correspondence waiting for his attention.

From Padmaloka he went on to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, where the Western Buddhist Order was holding its biennial convention, and where he met with Order members from all over the world. He then paid a visit to the FWBO centre in Essen, Germany. Fuller accounts of both the WBO convention and Sangharakshita's trip to Germany appear elsewhere in this issue.

At the time of writing Sangharakshita is again at Padmaloka, catching up with his correspondence and making audio tapes of parts of his written work for Dharmachakra Tapes.

As we mentioned in the last issue of *Golden Drum*, Sangharakshita has asked that people wishing to write to him should continue to send their letters to Padmaloka, as he would prefer not to receive mail while he is in London. Although this creates some delay, he does read all his mail personally in due course.



Stepan Lochner's altar piece in Cologne Cathedral

WITH THE EBU IN BUDAPEST

Addressing the Union

The scene is a simple but comfortably furnished office on an upper floor of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education. Outside, the Danube cuts its languorous course through Budapest, a city that has been for the past two weeks at the centre of the world's attention. Only a couple of days ago, the border with Austria was opened allowing thousands of East Germans to escape to a 'new life' (as the British press repeatedly described it) in the West. Here in Budapest, however, the West seems almost to be coming to us. The wide streets and boulevards are crowded with cars and people, the shops, if a little drab, are nevertheless full of food, clothes, and other consumer items, private taxis hurl themselves around the streets at terrifying speed, and the gypsy bands play—for a considerable fee—in the cafés and the sometimes palatial restaurants.

The Deputy Minister, a shrewdly avuncular figure, rests his arms on the wooden table, cradling a small cup of bitter black coffee in his hands. He speaks quietly, almost confidentially, addressing his beverage as much as us, allowing his crisply suited interpreter to add such elements of drama as may be necessary.

'In a week or so, there will be new legislation, allowing far greater freedom of religious expression in our country. There will be a new department at our ministry (and here, a slight inclination of the head in the direction of the department's boss-designate) which will work in conjunction with a representative body drawn from all the religious organizations. Any such organization, no matter how small, will be invited to send its delegate.

'Naturally there will be delegates from the Buddhist schools, since there seems to be considerable interest, particularly among our young people, in Buddhism. Perhaps this is because they are attracted by Buddhism's blend of philosophy and practical teachings—I don't really know. It could be that we Hungarians need to look again for our cultural roots, and have to recognize that those roots lie as much in the East as in the West.'

It was a really a little bit of history, shared by just four Buddhist emissaries from Britain, Italy, the USSR, and Hungary. We had been invited to the Ministry on this bright September morning from across the river in Buda where we were participating in an annual meeting of the European Buddhist Union.

Since the Union's earliest days, it has been recognized that one of its prime tasks should be to make itself more truly representative of the European Buddhist scene. Who would have thought, though, that we would be welcoming delegates from Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and the USSR, before seeing even the hem of a robe from some of the larger and more prominent movements in the 'free' world? (And who would have predicted that the first all-vegetarian dining plan would have been created by the congenitally functional, state-run, Hotel Szot?!)

As usual, the Union's formal business meetings left most things to be desired: above all, perhaps, a point. But a new President, a brace of Vice-Presidents, and a Treasurer (our own Kulananda) were elected; applications for membership were considered—often in the unaccountable absence of any representatives from the applying bodies themselves—some knotty points relating to the Union's still unapproved new constitution (see *Outlook*, issue 9) were raised, chaotically discussed, and shelved—to the resonantly liturgical accompaniment: 'Next year in Pomaia'. There was also a coach outing to a perfectly crafted stupa in the grounds of the Hungarian Buddhist Mission's HQ, where two Polish Korean-Zen monks enterprisingly performed a puja, and the rest of us took pictures of each other.

So why go at all? Surely Kulananda and I were not the only delegates to ask ourselves this question during the three days that the conference persisted. But, as usual, the answer seemed to be that the gathering did at least afford a valuable, and unique, opportunity to meet and befriend Buddhists from other schools and other countries, and that these informal meetings, rather than the formal business of the conference, made the trip worthwhile. It is also useful to get an impression of the state of the European Buddhist scene from time to time.

Certainly it was helpful to find out something about the state of Buddhism behind the—increasingly threadbare (fatigued?)—iron curtain. The two-hundred or so people from Hungary who attended an open afternoon of talks and pujas—many, including the conference's organizer, Dr Ernest Hetényi, dressed in the maroon robes of Lama Govinda's Arya Maitreya Mandala—graphically confirmed their minister's comments on the strength of interest in Buddhism there.

Polish delegates (Korean-Zen and Jodo Shinshu) spoke excitedly about the number of Buddhist movements in their native land. Like other Eastern-bloc delegates, they were not a little intoxicated by recent developments: it is not often you get to see a grey-robed monk conclude his speech by raising a hand, two fingers rampant, while shouting *Solidarnösc! Solidarnösc!* But in more cautious moments they admitted their apprehension over the mounting strength of the Roman Catholic Church. 'At the moment it seems that if you are not a Catholic, then you are not a good Pole.'

The two Yugoslav representatives (of the 'British Shingon School'!) were relatively new to Buddhism and the Buddhist scene and were therefore unable to reveal much about the state of things back home, but Tom Rabdanov, whose quiet warmth belied his Siberian origins, and who works with the Moscow Buddhist Mission and the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, spoke enthusiastically about temple restoration projects underway in the USSR, about State-owned Buddhist art treasures on the brink of being returned to the Buddhist people, about translation and publishing projects, about possible film projects. . . . Was it all too good to be true? Would it last? No one could really say.

About thirty-five of us attended this conference. As well as those countries already mentioned, we came from Holland, West Germany, Spain, and France. If it serves no other purpose than to bring *Buddhists* from such diverse backgrounds together, simply to meet, exchange news and experience, and to develop friendships, then the Union is doing a worthwhile job. Indeed, despite all the high-blown speeches about the things that the Union *could* be doing, it is still hard to think of a job for which it would be better suited.

Nagabodhi

FIRST STEPS IN THE USSR

Sarvamitra introduces an open-air puja

Sarvamitra reports a new and historic departure for our centre in Helsinki, a programme of monthly visits to the USSR to lead weekend retreats for a burgeoning community of Buddhists in the Baltic republic of Estonia.

Finland lies just across the Gulf of Finland from Estonia, and as the FWBO is the most prominent Buddhist movement in Finland, it was to Sarvamitra and Ratnapriya at our Helsinki Centre that Anti Kidron and Aime Hansen decided to turn in the hope of initiating activities in their own country. Anti and Aime live in Tallinn, and it was at Anti's summer cottage by the sea that the first retreat took place in July.

The weekend was warm and sunny which meant that all the activities could take place out in the open air. According to Sarvamitra this was just as well since the thirty people who attended the event would never have fitted indoors! The programme included all the practices and activities normally encountered on an introductory retreat: mindfulness of breathing and *metta bhavana* meditation, communication exercises, puja, and talks. 'Everyone was so responsive, so moved, so grateful for having found an opportunity to practise the Dharma that I often found myself—along with them—on the edge of tears,' said Sarvamitra. 'They seemed especially to enjoy the devotional practices—as if at those moments they were at last really *doing* the real thing!'

Apparently some forty or so people are currently in contact with the Tallinn group, having developed an interest in Buddhism from their reading or from an involvement with Hatha Yoga, T'ai Chi, and karate. But this is not the first time that Buddhism has gained a following in Estonia. Although the stories are somewhat vague, Sarvamitra knows of stupas that have been built there in recent times, and has even heard of a sort of 'underground' Buddhist Order that existed there during the past two decades.

But it is only now, with *perestroika* and *glasnost* well under way, that Estonia's Buddhists—actual and potential—are feeling truly free to explore their chosen path without any fear of interference or reprisal. In September their Buddhist Association won official recognition and a bank account has been opened. Now it should be relatively easy for them to receive foreign guest teachers, and even to travel abroad themselves to attend retreats and conventions.

Before and after each retreat Sarvamitra and Ratnapriya are trying to spend a few days in Tallinn, getting to know as many people as possible in the hope of finding those who really will help to establish the Dharma there. Ideally Tallinn will turn out to be just a beginning, for in time they intend to travel beyond Estonia, to other Baltic states and on to Leningrad (where there is already a recently restored Buddhist temple).

Obviously, for the Estonians, all this is new and exciting, and part of a general movement towards a growing sense and experience of freedom. For this reason, Sarvamitra admits, it is hard to tell at this stage how deep and how far this interest in Buddhism will go. Even so, he and Ratnapriya intend to waste no time in making the most of the opportunity.

DHARMACHARINIS VISIT USA

In the nine years that the FWBO has existed in the USA only four women Order members have visited that huge country. This dearth of Dharmacharinis has undoubtedly slowed the development of the Movement in America, making it difficult for the all-male Order presence to convey the full breadth of the FWBO's approach to the Dharma and the spiritual life. For this reason the visits of two women Order members this summer and autumn was very warmly welcomed by the American branch of the Sangha.

In the summer Vidyavati travelled to the USA for a six-week period, specifically to spend time with women mitras and Friends, and to discuss issues of particular interest to them. Her presence at retreats, classes, and study groups was very encouraging—not just for the women but for everyone associated with the Movement—and her understanding and personal practice of the Dharma was an inspiration for many people.

But this influence was not one-sided: Vidyavati was so impressed by the people she met in America that she has abandoned her plans to set up a women's meditation centre in the UK, and has decided to work for the Dharma in the USA—visas permitting. She plans to live at or near Aryaloka, where she will be particularly involved with the women's activities. She will also have some more general responsibilities, and will spend time at other centres, particularly those on the West Coast.

No less important was Dhammadinna's month-long visit to the USA this autumn. This began with a ten-day stay in California, in which she took part in a programme of meetings, talks, and a retreat.

She was invited to speak at the San Francisco Zen Center's city centre, and at their country centre at Green Gulch Farm—where about three hundred people attended for a Sunday morning session, of whom about sixty stayed for a lengthy discussion which ran on well into the afternoon.

She also attended a three-day retreat held at the Vajrapani Institute, beneath the massive redwoods of the Santa Cruz Mountains, which focused on the Bodhisattva Tara—and introduced the participants to an aspect of the FWBO they had probably not encountered before.

At the time of writing Dhammadinna was heading south from northern California towards Santa Barbara, where she will stay for a few days before returning to the East Coast for a programme of retreats, talks, and study groups.

ARYALOKA CONVERSION PROJECT

Major changes are being made to the Aryaloka Retreat and Study Center in New Hampshire, USA, to upgrade the facilities and accommodate more visitors.

New accommodation for the resident community will be built on the top two floors of a large modern barn. This will free up the two geodesic domes so that retreats and classes can be held more frequently and easily. The domes will provide enough space to accommodate twenty-five retreatants very comfortably, and the environment for participants in the Centre's visitors' programme will be improved.

Work has already started on rebuilding the public areas used for regular courses. A new entrance to the shrine-room has been built, and the space available for bodywork has been increased. These improvements have been funded by expanding the programme of courses, which now includes Yoga, T'ai Chi, and massage, as well as the usual meditation and study. The remaining construction work will be financed by a loan—the first stage in securing this has already been completed—which will be paid for by increased use of the facilities at Aryaloka.

MUSICIAN'S PLAYTIME

Surrounded by the huge forms of dragons and birds left over from Bristol's West Indian Carnival, a dozen musicians met in a community hall there this summer for a 'playtime' which lasted a whole weekend. Many of the participants did indeed have a strong sense of having been let out of school—in introducing themselves before the event a number spoke of how years of rigorous practice had dulled the sheer enjoyment and liberation of expressing themselves through music.

The weekend was led by Bodhivajra and Louise Holtberndt who, with Lois Paul, have been working to develop their vision of the active part that music could play in the FWBO.

Louise led movement and voice workshops—and many were surprised by the powerful results they could obtain by really using their voices. Bodhivajra led workshops on rhythm, in which the effects of twelve people each playing a full-sized drum were perhaps less subtle, but certainly no less powerful.

The workshops included some scheduled improvisations, and more unscheduled ones. People were reluctant to stop playing—even for food—and some surprising and beautiful combinations of instruments were discovered.

Reporting on the weekend, Karen Stout writes that throughout the event there was a strong sense of Dharma practice, and that many participants found it exciting to discover that their spiritual commitment could be deepened and expressed through the love of music.

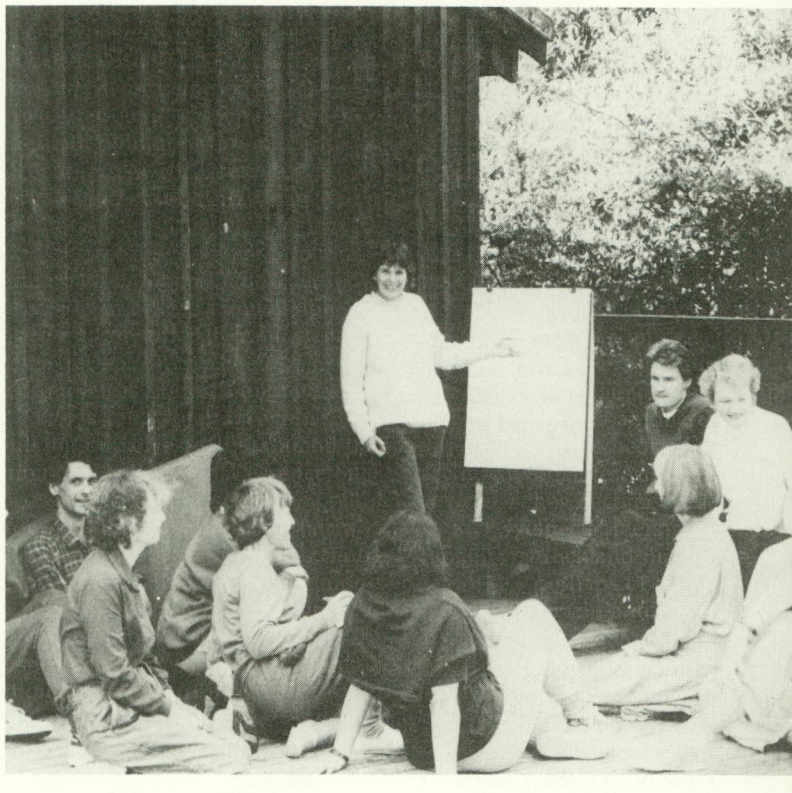
The closing discussions held much promise for the future, including ideas for bringing music into ritual and devotional practices, and much enthusiasm for more and longer retreats.

MEDITATION COURSE IN NEW ZEALAND

This year the Auckland Centre held its first ever Meditation Workshop, modelled on similar workshops held at Vajraloka, the FWBO's meditation centre in North Wales. Twenty-seven Friends, mitras, and Order members gathered for the event at Kiwanis Camp, nestled among the bush-covered cones of Huia, just outside Auckland. The camp has become imbued with a special feeling for many Auckland Buddhists—a result perhaps of the lush volcanic terrain and the deep emotions many people associate with the retreats which have been held there in the past.

In this charged atmosphere Dharmanandi, Priyananda, and Guhyasiddhi led the retreatants through ten days of meditation theory and practice. According to our correspondent, Monique Chasteau, the three teachers did a marvellous job of communicating an enormous amount of material to people with widely different levels of experience.

Other news from Auckland is that the hunt for a new Centre building goes on—this search is being given top priority, as it is several years since the city's FWBO Buddhists had a place to call their own—and that a busy season of summer retreats is planned, with three retreats running consecutively during January.



THE STONYHURST CONVENTIONS

Puja on the Order Convention

The stately rooms and echoing, labyrinthine corridors of Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, England, provided the setting for the ninth convention of the Western Buddhist Order this August. For those Order members able to remember conventions held in hired village halls, in the main barn at Padmaloka, and once, even, in the front parlour of Aryatara Community, their first sight of the Jesuit college's 16th and 18th century west frontage and the half-mile, lake-bordered driveway leading up to it, must have come as something of a shock. But with 180 people—half of the Order—attending the event, nothing else could be found that offered the required space at the right price. And although the heady mix of schoolroom paraphernalia and Roman Catholic artefacts, and the fact that Stonyhurst provided the model for Mervyn Peak's *Gormenghast*, provoked a scattering of jokes, the ample facilities (single rooms, spacious shrine-room and lecture theatre, swimming pool, squash courts, beautiful grounds . . .) and the unexpectedly excellent vegetarian catering left everyone hoping that this might be the first of several conventions to be held there.

The convention was divided into two rather unequal parts: a ten-day convention for Dharmacharis, and a four day 'mixed' event when women Order members joined the men before proceeding to their own convention at Taraloka. The Order members—some of whom had been organizing and saving for months in order to attend—came from all over the world. They came, naturally enough, in the hope of seeing old friends and having a chance to receive fresh inspiration and nourishment from a large gathering of committed Buddhists. But they also came because members of the WBO have always taken very seriously the Buddha's advice to his followers to assemble regularly and in large numbers, so that the prosperity of the sangha might be expected, rather than its decay.

The daily programme for both events was very similar: a session of meditation before breakfast and then a morning of study and discussion in small groups. The afternoons were largely unstructured, allowing people to meet up for walks and talks, or to watch video and slide presentations of FWBO activities around the world. Another session of meditation preceded the evening meal which was followed by a full-length talk. The day came to an end with a puja. For some the convention was a relatively leisurely affair spent largely in the company of just a few close friends; others seemed to jump and spin from 'appointment' to 'appointment', seeing and catching up with as many people as the number of hours in the day allowed.

To the delight of all, Sangharakshita attended the convention, and spent a great deal of time seeing Order members, sometimes discussing their responsibilities in the FWBO, sometimes giving advice on more personal, spiritual matters, and sometimes simply enjoying a friendly chat. Although he attended the evening talks he refrained from giving one himself. However, the highlight of the first night of the mixed convention was a reading from his latest (forthcoming) volume of memoirs. The section he chose was one in which he describes his brief—and frankly hilarious—encounter (as a script adviser) with the Bombay film industry.

On other evenings the talks ranged from the scholarly (The Nyingmas, and the Scandinavian Sagas), through the spiritual (Meditation, the Three Fetters, Spiritual Friendship) and the experiential (working for the Dharma in Sri Lanka and in India) to the speculative. During the mixed convention, Lokamitra offered an occasionally controversial 'outsider's' view of the more western end of our Movement, and Nagabodhi outlined a series of issues in need of fresh awareness and debate as the Order and the FWBO enter their third decade.

To sit in meditation, or to perform a puja, with 150 and more serious practitioners is an experience well worth crossing a few oceans to enjoy, and for most participants the shrine-room activities, led with considerable warmth and creativity by Suvajra, were a delight. In this dimension the highpoints were the celebration of Padmasambhava Day—with a spine-tingling, life-sized effigy of Padmasambhava himself seated before the shrine—and the highly ornamented puja on the last night. From the very rear of the hall to the shrine seemed a long, long way, and as we each in turn progressed along the central aisle, past harmoniously chanting ranks of brothers and sisters, to make our own personal offerings to the shrine, the Sangha Jewel—indeed all Three Jewels—seemed to shine and sparkle as never before.

WOMEN'S ORDER CONVENTION

The Women's Order Convention this August had a decidedly international flavour, as forty-six Order members—from New Zealand, Australia, Holland, Finland, Scotland, and England—converged on Taraloka Retreat Centre for the biennial gathering.

The women's wing of the Order used the Convention to explore 'The Sangha Refuge', and to examine a number of important questions related to this theme: What are the benefits of placing oneself within the circle of those who bear the Buddha's teaching? Is an Order really necessary? What is an Order? Are we a *Western* Order? Is our Order maturing in its practice of the Dharma?

This theme was introduced and placed in a wider perspective in a talk by Dhammadinna called *Daughters of Noble Family*, an account of the history of the Western Buddhist Order, and particularly of its women's wing. According to our correspondent, Kulaprabha, this was a moving account which gave a strong sense of lineage: of the lineage of Sangharakshita's own teachers; of this weight of practice being passed on to members of the Order with the added benefit of reflection and experience; and now of that combined experience beginning to mature into another generation of people capable of handing on the Dharma in their turn.

The first part of the Convention was devoted to small group discussions on the Sangha Refuge. This was followed by a series of meetings of Order members with the same visualization practice, to discuss and share experience. Visualization was also the subject of a talk by Vidyashri, which fed much useful information into the discussions.

But of course discussion is only one way to explore the Sangha Refuge. In such a gathering the best approach was simply to *be* the Sangha, helped by a regular programme of meditation and puja, which as the Convention progressed built up a very potent atmosphere.

One highlight of the Convention was the brief visit of Vimalakirti, Chandrabodhi, and Chandrashila—three male Order members from India. Their few words to their Western Dharma sisters made clearer than ever the importance of the Order as a vehicle which can carry the Dharma to whoever cares to listen, in whatever situation and part of the world they may be.

NEW DHARMACHARINIS

Kalyanaprabha's ordination

The forty-four women who attended the Mitra Retreat this summer at Taraloka Retreat Centre witnessed a memorable event in the history of the Western Buddhist Order: the first ordination of a woman in the West by someone other than the Order's founder, Sangharakshita. The fact that senior women Order members have taken on this initiatory role represents an important new stage in the development of the women's wing of the Order, and matches a similar move in the men's wing reported in the last two issues of *Golden Drum*.

At the time of writing seven women in the West have been ordained by senior women members of the Order. The first of these ordinations took place in the course of a colourful summer retreat at Taraloka, on the theme of the Cosmic Refuge Tree, when Sanghadevi and Anagarika Ratnashuri performed the private and public ordinations, respectively, of Chittaprabha—previously Rosemary Sharples—who had travelled from Sydney, Australia, for the occasion.

Less than a month later six more women were ordained, this time by Ratnashuri, Sanghadevi, and Shrimala, in a ceremony which marked the culmination of the 1989 Pre-Ordination Course for women at Taraloka.

At the moment Sangharakshita still makes the final decision on whether women are ready for ordination. It will probably be some years before he hands over this responsibility to members of the Order, but these recent ordinations mark an important step in this direction.

INTERNATIONAL CHAIRMEN'S MEETING

Early in July, Padmaloka Retreat Centre set aside its programme of 'Going for Refuge' retreats in order to play host to a two-week meeting of the chairmen of the FWBO's centres worldwide.

Thirty-three men and women attended this event, coming from Britain, Holland, Germany, India, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, and made it the largest gathering of its kind in the Movement's history.

While the FWBO has continued to grow and become increasingly diverse, these 'chairmen's meetings' have been taking place regularly for thirteen years, and now play an essential part in guaranteeing the Movement's underlying unity. In some ways there is a world of difference between, say, a talk—strongly imbued with the influences of Dr Ambedkar—given in the clogged back-streets of Bombay, and a tranquil evening of meditation at the London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green, yet these are equally manifestations of the FWBO (or TBMSG as it is known in India). Whether 'central' or 'peripheral' all these activities are linked by a common intent, and share a common flavour. All our centres, communities, and Right Livelihood ventures are legally independent and autonomous: there is no central HQ, no structured, formal heirarchy; yet all serve the same purpose: to help individuals, no matter where, to make contact with the Three Jewels and to live in accordance with the ideals that they embody. And all aim to provide a bridge between the particular part of the world in which they are placed—with all its attendant features and specific qualities—and the Western Buddhist Order, which is one, unified spiritual community.

As ever, the ultimate guarantee of unity is the bond of friendship and active communication linking those who have taken it upon themselves to initiate and organize FWBO activities. Hence the importance of these meetings—which also serve a secondary purpose of offering a kind of 'peer group' support for those who live with the day-to-day responsibilities of giving a lead within the Movement.

The international events take place only every two years, but chairmen in Britain and also in India meet far more regularly—three times a year for a few days, and once a year for a longer AGM.

The programme for this event included meditation, puja, study, some slide shows, and plenty of time for making and rekindling friendships on long walks along the uncommonly sun-drenched Norfolk lanes. But the event really focused around a series of morning group sessions in which each chairman reported briefly on progress at his or her centre, as well as on his or her personal experience of being a chairman, before receiving advice and feedback from the others. An important side benefit of this was that each chairman received a challenging overview of the entire Movement.

An outstanding and enjoyable feature of this particular meeting was the presence of Chandrabodhi, Chandrashila, and Vimalakirti, three Indian Order members. (Vimalakirti is Chairman of TBMSG Wardha, Chandrabodhi is Chairman of TBMSG Poona, and Chandrashila is the Convener of Mitras for India.) Although Lokamitra has 'represented' India before at international meetings, this was the first time that any Indian-born Order members have attended. Indeed, it was the first time that any Indian Dharmacharis had visited the West at all. The three guests arrived at Padmaloka just a couple of days after their arrival in England. They had already attended a reception held in their honour at the London Buddhist Centre, and done a little sightseeing in London and Cambridge, but seemed to be quite happily taking the jet-lag and culture shock in their stride.

As well as participating very fully in the general discussions and feedback sessions, each of the three was given an evening to talk in often moving detail about his life and work.

After the Chairmen's event, the three attended the men's and the 'mixed' conventions at Stonyhurst College, and visited several more FWBO centres and communities, before flying back to India in early September.

The Indian Dharmacharis' visit was funded by 'Golden Rainbow', an account specifically set up in England a couple of years ago by Bodhimitra to pay for such ventures. By the end of the Order Convention appeals were being made for money to fund the next wave of visitors from India. The initial response was extremely good: a prosaic but nevertheless reliable testament to the success of this first encounter.

(l-r) Chandrabodhi, Chandrashila, and Vimalakirti

PADMASAMBHAVA DAY

The shamanic figure of Padmasambhava—the semi-mythic founder of Buddhism in Tibet, who embodies the deep powers of magic, energy, and transformation—may seem an unlikely image to be associated with a movement which is trying to evolve a specifically *Western* form of Buddhism. But *Western* need not mean one-sidedly cerebral—we ignore the forces that Padmasambhava represents very much at our peril—and the decidedly un-Western figure of Padmasambhava occupies an important place in the imagination of many Buddhists in the FWBO.

This connection with Padmasambhava has its roots in the spiritual lineage of the FWBO's founder. Padmasambhava is the archetypal guru of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism, to which most of Sangharakshita's distinguished Tibetan teachers either belonged or had close connections. For many people in the FWBO Padmasambhava has come to symbolize the magician-like strength and energy needed to establish the Dharma in the hostile environment of the materialist West.

On Sunday, 10 September—this being the tenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar—the London Buddhist Centre celebrated a suitably colourful and mythic Padmasambhava Day in honour of this colourful figure.

It began at 7.30 a.m with the Prostration and Going for Refuge Practice (for those mitras and Order members who have been given this practice) and ended after 9.30 at night with a ceremonial bonfire in the yard. In between there was a packed programme of meditation, puja, music, and reading; a talk called 'Brushing the Lips of the Transcendental' by Sumitra; and—the most novel feature of the day—two sessions of masked ritual dance.

These dances—while they were inspired by Tibetan ritual dance—sought to capture the spirit rather than the letter of this tradition, and to evoke a spiritual attitude which transformed the performance into a form of active meditation.

Masked ritual dance was first introduced into the London Buddhist Centre's Padmasambhava Day celebrations last year, when a dance was performed showing Padmasambhava subduing the gods and demons of Tibet, who were resisting the spread of the Dharma. This year this dance was expanded to include a mime of the gods and demons obstructing the building of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, which added a welcome comic element.

A second, more formal dance was also added to this year's programme. This took the form of an invocation of four of the eight forms of Padmasambhava, during which the 'audience' chanted the Padmasambhava mantra to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.

Throughout the celebrations—which were led by Kuladeva and organized by Paramajyoti—there was a special emphasis on a spirit of open-handed generosity. All of the large amount of work involved in the day was given freely (as is usual), no charge was made for entry, and food and refreshments were provided for all visitors free of charge—although many people also brought their own contributions to add to the communal feast.

BODY POSITIVE

When Peter Randall first sought out Harshaprabha—a member of the Western Buddhist Order who lives in a men's community above the London Buddhist Centre—it was because Harshaprabha was a Buddhist, and certainly not because he was an architect.

Peter—one of the founder members of the HIV and AIDS support charity Body Positive—was himself suffering from AIDS, and had been favourably impressed by what he had heard and read of the Buddhist views on death and dying. He was put in touch with Harshaprabha as someone he could talk to about his illness and his own impending death.

Peter died on 18 August 1988. We can hope that his contact with the Dharma helped him deal with this challenge. But although Peter himself is no longer here, the legacy of his meetings with Harshaprabha is still very much in evidence—in the form of a building which is of real, practical assistance to other people affected by the HIV virus.

As a result of his contact with Peter Randall, Harshaprabha was asked to design Body Positive's first drop-in centre, a place where those affected by the virus can relax, talk, eat, listen to lectures and attend for counselling, therapy, or social events. The centre—housed in the converted church hall of St Cuthbert's Parish Church in Philbeach Gardens, south-west London—is now open and functioning. It is greatly appreciated by all who use it, not least because of the welcoming, non-institutional atmosphere created by Harshaprabha's design.

Harshaprabha first set up his architectural business, Octagon Design and Building Services, in 1981. Since then he has worked on a number of projects, including the London Buddhist Centre, and the FWBO's meditation and study centres in North Wales.

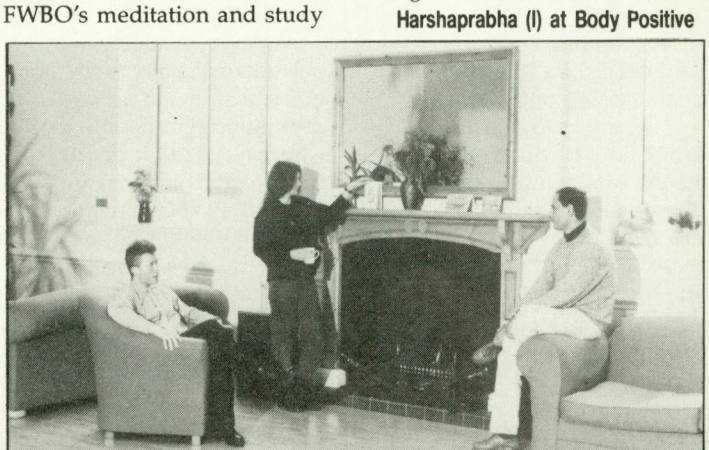
So far the Body Positive centre is Octagon's most important project, In this case, Harshaprabha's status as a member of the WBO clearly played a role in Octagon's success. But in a more general sense, how does the Dharma help his practice of architecture? Harshaprabha feels that his life as a Buddhist helps him avoid two of the main failings of many modern architects: a lack of responsiveness to the real wants and needs of the client, and a tendency to adopt an overly conceptual approach to the design of buildings.

Buddhism places great emphasis on warm-heartedness, on open communication, and on expanding one's frame of reference to include other people's points of view. The result is a greater ability to empathize with others, and—in the case of an architect—to give other people the buildings and environments they really want and need.

One of the most important results of regular meditation practice is the gradual integration of the head and the heart, so that thinking and feeling increasingly become united into a single faculty, more powerful than either on its own. This integration is especially relevant to the practice of architecture, which at its best is a fusion of art and engineering—or of heart and head.

All too often architects work with the head only, and produce buildings which may be conceptually brilliant, but which the eventual users find cold and unwelcoming. Harshaprabha is convinced that his meditation practice helps him create environments which not only work at the technical level, but which also capture the imagination, and take account of the aesthetic experience of the human beings who make use of them.

Harshaprabha (l) at Body Positive



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