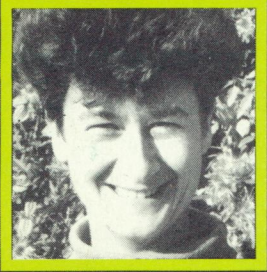


GOLDEN DRUM

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This man thinks he is going
to change the world,
but what do other people
who are involved with the fwbo
think they are doing?

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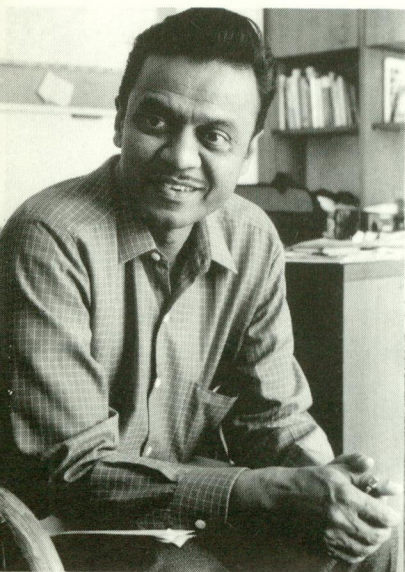
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AROUND THE WORLD
Activities and events around the FWBO

It is eighteen-and-a-half years since I started to edit *Golden Drum's* predecessor, the *FWBO Newsletter*. In my first editorial I warned the reader that, with our six centres (worldwide) beginning to throw out subsidiary branches, the magazine would probably have to become less of a vehicle for news about centre events, and 'more of a voice of the movement, communicating through the medium of book reviews, feature articles, and so on, our own distinctive and vital approach to the Dharma.'

In the summer of 1975, the FWBO was really a very small and intimate movement. It was still not long since Sangharakshita had led all the activities of its sole UK centre. Most 'active' Order members knew each other personally and well. The brightest nuggets of erudition and insight to emerge on Sangharakshita's three study seminars reported in that issue of the *Newsletter* would have circulated throughout the Movement quickly and in detail—simply by word of mouth. But was all this about to change? My editorial went on to discuss a couple of crucial issues. How were we going to establish and underwrite unity in our growing and increasingly culturally diverse movement? And how were we to avert self-deception and ideological dilution as, through the medium of fund-raising appeals, residential communities, and Right Livelihood ventures, we hauled our Dharma practice out of the shrine-room and into the confusing territory of everyday life.

Eighteen-and-a-half years later the FWBO is much bigger and far more culturally diverse than I think anyone would have predicted. Outside the Movement, at the London Buddhist Society's Summer School that Subhuti and I attended just after that *Newsletter* came off the press, the FWBO was treated as little more than an upstart with an uncertain, and probably short, future. Inside the Movement, who of us, even three years before it happened, foresaw the emergence and rapid evolution of an Indian wing? Throughout all that growth and development the issues I touched on in my editorial have remained with us as crucial issues. I suspect they always will. But to the extent that the *Newsletter* and *Golden Drum* have played a part in keeping the Movement's members and institutions in harmonious contact with each other and alive to the Dharmic ideals and considerations that must inspire and feed our activities, then the job has been worth

doing.

To produce a single magazine with the brief of informing and stimulating a streetwise Order member in London's East End, a complete newcomer in Wellington, New Zealand, a mitra in San Francisco, and the bhikkhu on the Bangkok omnibus, has never felt easy—or even achievable. It is an uncomfortable burden that has led to more wrangles between writers, graphic designers, and interested onlookers than the magazine's sedate and predictable demeanour has perhaps betrayed. Has the time come to split it into two or three separate organs with varying briefs? Should it simply be bigger and better? Should it be 'harder hitting'? Those who see the same old, recognizable *Golden Drum* faithfully appearing every three months may be surprised to know that I have some strong opinions of my own on the subject—which is one reason why I am now handing over the magazine's editorship to a team of four executive editors and an editorial board. Between us ('us' since I'll be on the board for the time being) we will see what we can do to make *Golden Drum* a more fitting medium for a burgeoning movement.

Those four editors, Vishvapani, Dhammadassin, Karen Stout (soon to be ordained), and Tejananda, are, along with myself, the creators of the present issue of *Golden Drum*. By channelling the thoughts and words of a beginner, a mitra on the verge of ordination, a new Order member, a senior Order member, and a 'representative' of our Indian wing, our intention has been to present a sort of snapshot of the human dimension of the FWBO as it is today. Given the actual cultural diversity of the Movement, I am not really sure that our snapshot is at all profoundly representative. But I hope it will interest at least the majority of present readers.

In that I may find myself editing the occasional issue in the future, I am not sure how valedictory I dare be. But it would be impossible for me to conclude this—for now—last Editorial without thanking all the contributors, photographers, typists, proof-readers, graphic designers, typesetters, printers, space-sellers, collators, staplers, mailing-list updaters, and despatchers who have shared with me—often for no financial reward—their time, talent, enthusiasm, and energy to make the whole thing happen. □

Nagabodhi

Willing to learn more

When Nagabodhi explained his idea for this issue of *Golden Drum* and asked us who we would like to choose, I immediately thought 'A beginner. Much the most interesting.' In my experience of meditation classes over the last ten years, people coming along to the FWBO for the first time are as varied as—well—as people are in general. You never know what has brought someone along, why the trajectory of their lives has brought them to one of our centres. Everyone has their own reasons, they have their own responses, and it is these personal factors which determine whether they pursue that interest any further.

For the next few weeks, as I met people at classes at the North London Buddhist Centre, I was quietly wondering whether they would be good subjects to interview. Nagabodhi was insistent that mine had to be a real newcomer who had been attending the Centre for 'no more than four or five weeks, at the most'. Okay, but they also needed to be someone who could articulate their motivation in coming to the Centre and their response to what they had found there. As I looked around, it dawned on me that this was asking a lot. It also occurred to me that, if the unfortunate interviewee were to stay involved in the FWBO, they would have to live with the text of their early unstudied and, presumably, uninformed responses.

One week I thought I had found the perfect person—only to discover that she had attended the London Buddhist Centre for two months before coming to our Centre. The next week I met someone who I thought would be excellent—but he hasn't been

back to the Centre since. Then I met Bill Aitchison at the lunchtime class I teach. He is quietly-spoken, but thoughtful and articulate. He is twenty-two, has just finished a degree in Drama, French, and Philosophy, and has recently moved to our part of London. What struck me was that he had obviously reflected a good deal on his experiences in coming to the Centre over the previous four weeks, and this seemed to be based on a good deal of reflection on his life in general.

I asked Bill if he would like to be featured in *Golden Drum*, and he was only too happy to oblige. Next week he was off fruit-picking in Suffolk, but we made a date, and when he

returned we spent a couple of very enjoyable hours chatting in the FWBO Liaison Office where I work.

So, the first question: 'What do you do?' Recently I have started to avoid asking this of people at classes because so many of them are unemployed. They can look as if they have just been asked to justify their existence and can't. Not so with Bill, who is happily unemployed, and is a performance artist. Later he qualified this: 'I don't like to make a distinction between my life and my art, so I call myself a person who makes performance art, rather than a performance artist.' This is a fine distinction and I realized we would be in for an interesting conversation.

'My work is in an area which is the culmination of a whole series of arts.... It is more of an integrative approach to creativity than performance art. It involves a good deal of conceptual thought.'

At this point I wondered if Bill might not quite be a 'typical beginner' after all. On the other hand it could be confirmation that such a being does not really exist. Certainly Bill was quite clear that there were elements in this background that had led him to meditation:

'The approach I am taking is dependent upon a unified world-view. I have been influenced by a series of people who are themselves influenced by Eastern approaches—people like Cage, Artaud, Duchamp—so it seemed to make sense to take up actual meditation practices rather than just reading about them. But my reasons weren't simply artistic. I was attracted to meditation first of all because, although I didn't know very much about it, what I had read about the world-view contained in its practices—so different from the predominant Western world-view—seemed to make a lot of sense to me.'

Following through the implications of his thoughts, Bill went to a yoga and meditation class (not, incidentally, run by the FWBO) at Wolverhampton University. How did he find the actual experience of meditation? 'A disappointment. I am simply not used to sitting in one place for twenty minutes and focusing my mind on one thing. It was very peculiar, something I had never been trained to do. But I realized it was a definite skill.'

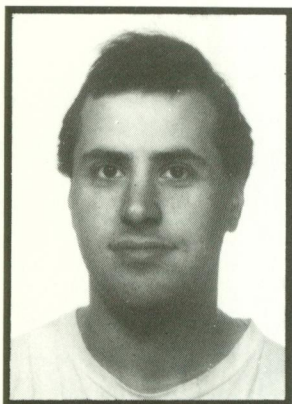
Having finished university Bill moved to London and saw a leaflet for the meditation classes at the North London Buddhist Centre. He was attracted by its accessibility—the Centre was offering an introductory class and the class was free—so he came to one of the introductory lunchtime classes. I wondered what had been his first impressions.

'When I got to the Centre it was smaller than had I expected and I was pleased by the informality, though there was a little anxiety among the people at the class.' The meditation practice taught at the class was the mindfulness of breathing. How had Bill got on with it?

'The introduction was quite thorough, which was helpful. I came out feeling first of all disappointed, but also intrigued. You have these illusions that somehow you will see something that you never saw before. But at first all I saw was how all my thoughts were rushing around out of control—though that was quite interesting in itself. I did feel in a different kind of state when I got up and left—and that was interesting as well.'

I was quite taken by Bill's open-mindedness and his responsiveness to meditation. He seemed keen to persist. 'I have been trying to meditate reasonably regularly since then—maybe two to three times a week, nearly always doing the mindfulness of breathing. I have only done the metta bhavana once and I'm not sure if I really understand it yet. Two or three times I have felt quite significantly different afterwards. It is difficult to put into words....'

Bill lives in a shared house not far from the Centre and so far he has not had to deal with any adverse



Vishvapani

reactions to his new interest. 'I don't think the people I live with know—I just sit there quietly in my room. But I have no embarrassment about it. That said, I do find it hard to meditate at home because of noise—in many ways it seems easier to meditate at the Centre. You have to put time aside specially, whereas at home it might be between things; the situation can be more distracting.'

As well as being a good place to meditate, what were Bill's impressions of the Centre more generally? 'I like the fact that it is reasonably unpretentious—a small place in Holloway. That is quite encouraging. There is a slight tendency to middle-classness and I am wondering why this is. That intrigues me.'

Did he mean me? Anyway, I decided not to pursue this line of enquiry and asked him whether he was interested in Buddhism as well as meditation, and if so what attracted him to it. 'I have read a little: Krishnamurti and a little on Zen Buddhism. The more I've read the more I have come to an appreciation that Buddhism seems to make sense as a whole system of thought. In some ways it seems impenetrable, and I am starting to have more respect for its difficulty. But the way it stresses direct experience attracts me; logical thought is not elevated to the distinction it has in our culture; intuitive thought has some kind of place.'

I wanted to look a little further into where this interest had come from, so I asked Bill if his background was in any way religious.

'I had quite a strict Roman Catholic upbringing. When I was fourteen or fifteen I wanted to be a priest. But I found the whole church atmosphere quite infuriating. I was more into the essence of the belief. But then there was a growing disappointment with the circularity: "You should believe it because it is true and you know it is true because your faith tells you it is." I left the church when I was about sixteen or seventeen.'

The primary sticking point seemed to be the Christian emphasis in 'a God who is separate from you'. 'Eventually I drifted off into, I guess, existentialism and nihilism for a while. There was a kind of sceptical part of me. I became sceptical of everything—even scepticism—and it became quite a negative thing. I am only starting to realize this now. It stops me from really taking on board the world, from really interacting with it. That's another reason why I have decided to come to a Buddhist Centre.'

Finally, I asked Bill if he thought he would continue with meditation and look further into Buddhism. 'I hope to. I think my interest is sufficient to devote that little bit of time each day to meditation. And I do want to learn more about Buddhism. I know there are people who are interested in meditation simply as a means of relaxation, but it is the spiritual nature of it that really attracts me. I want to explore the issue of creativity and, I guess, how it helps me to exist in the world in a way I can feel positive about.'

Our conversation touched on the difference between art as expression and art as communication, on Dadaism, Zen,

life in Islington, the new London Buddhist Arts Centre, and so on, and so on. All this didn't seem directly relevant to the article I had been asked to write on 'a beginner', though on second thoughts, maybe it was. Anyway, I certainly hope Bill sticks around and that we can get to know each other better. If he does, I hope this article doesn't give him too much to live up to or, alternatively, to live down. Time and Bill will tell. □

Bill Aitchison



Reverencing the Buddhas

When she met the FWBO, Jo Skelton felt she had come home: she had found what she had been looking for since she was seven years old and had taken herself off to a Methodist Sunday School because, it seemed, you could meet God there. In her teens she joined the Derby Cathedral Choir, searching in the simplicity and ornateness of the Church and of the song, for meaning. She took confirmation classes, tried to be receptive, did 'good works'—with underprivileged children, helping slow learners at school—and piled all her hopes and expectations on the moment when the Bishop would put his hand on her head and confirm her. Something would happen. Except it didn't, and, disillusioned, she gave up on God.

The starting point for her involvement with the FWBO was meditation. 'My initial experience of meditation was of realizing that I went around in two parts—a body and an observer. For most of the time they didn't overlap; I needed to tune them in to one another and stop living life in the third person.' Jo learned to meditate after a period of depression, of soul-searching, of realizing that she could go through life superficially, 'a successful shell', and dreading that prospect. Meditation seemed to offer a way of bringing the various aspects of herself together into an authentic whole. 'Reading Sangharakshita, I thought "This makes absolute sense." He was saying things I'd thought for myself, or that I hadn't so much thought as glimpsed, which he had clarified and put into words. I wouldn't have said this at the time, but

what he presented me with was the possibility of change, and a vision of how that change could take place.'

The demise of Christianity as an ordering influence in her life had left the spheres of social action and political thought. Although she wasn't an 'activist', characteristically, she got involved: the black polo-necks and being-in-the-moment of sixth form existentialism, university feminism, voluntary work at a rape crisis centre, the Revolutionary Communist Party with its plethora of ideas about how the world ticks and

how to change it, all reflected a search for a framework out of which to act. 'Looking back, it was all just too narrow. I was aware of the bigger picture—the world, the human race—and that this picture needed to change. I was also aware that I could have a little sphere of influence; but the gap between my little sphere and the greater picture was so huge that it left me feeling impotent and depressed.' Becoming involved in the FWBO has meant 'slowly starting to look both inwards and at my place in the broader picture, learning to tune them in to one another.'

In this light, Jo began to set her desire to be 'useful' in a Dharmic context. She moved to London to

develop her links with the FWBO, found a community to live in, and became a mitra. She left her job as a tutor for autistic adults—and her plans to become a drama therapist—to help set up a Christmas gift shop to raise funds for Aid For India (now the Karuna Trust). After a solitary retreat, she asked for ordination and joined Jambala (now Evolution), the gift shop in Bethnal Green managed by Ratnavandana. 'I responded whole-heartedly to her big vision of what work could be, and the possibility of developing friendship.'

The conditions Jo had established in her teens to find meaning had not borne fruit; those she was establishing in Bethnal Green, with the aim of becoming more aware of herself, were. 'It seemed to involve learning that, although the work at Jambala could be boring at times, it became meaningful through the attitude I brought to it.' In the often fraught, hectic, and cramped conditions of a successful gift shop housed in too small a space, Ratnavandana's vision of 'dusting those shelves as though they were a shrine' brought meaning to objects and activities which in themselves seemed to lack it. Something else that had meaning was the team—a group of women practising awareness even when it was difficult, strongly highlighting one another's unhelpful habits and positive qualities. 'I learned I was a "good girl", that I could work hard but get very out of balance, forgetting the importance of human relating. Usefulness on its own isn't everything!'

After years of habitual service to others, Jo found 'I could end up doubting my motives. What was real altruism, and what was just a desire to please? Dharma study forced me to think more clearly, and to stretch my idea of what is possible. This was very different from my sense of my own smallness in the big picture of social action: I was gaining a healthier sense of my own smallness in the big picture of the Dharma. This was comforting, not overwhelming. My immediate sphere of influence was small, but it was beginning to develop breadth. Instead of a grandiose vision and an inferiority complex, I began to develop a vision of what's possible, based on a growing sense of the value of working on my own consciousness—taking responsibility for myself and my actions.'

This has clearly led to a different kind of confidence, '—not what I expected when I was twenty-one!' On an Easter retreat this year Jo went for a walk before the morning meditation. 'I listened to the lark weaving garlands of sound above me and realized that my purpose in life is to reverence the Buddhas. When I was twenty-one I would have asked "What will that achieve? How is that useful?" Now I recognize that attitude of reverence as a still, central place within me, as an attitude of "being" from which "doing" can come, and be not less but more effective. My sense of service to others is still there, but I want to serve the Buddhas too, and find access to them through communication, meditation, devotional practice—find access to another, archetypal, dimension of



Dhammadassin



Jo Skelton

being, to a universal set of ideals which I can already see growing to differing degrees in the people I know.'

Jo's vision grows out of this desire, like a tree putting forth branches, twigs, flowers, fruit, dropping seeds which grow into new trees, new branches.... 'In Britain we need more social action from Buddhists. I see a particular route through the Arts, to which more and more people are turning for channels to contact and express themselves and their vision.' She is actively involved in setting up the London Buddhist Arts Centre in Bethnal Green, a new cutting edge of the Movement, and one which means pioneering very close to home. 'At the moment the radiators still need a top coat of paint, and I don't fully realize what I've got myself involved in. But I know it's significant. Here we are in an East End community, where the Buddhist Centre, its shops, its restaurant, and its health centre are all having a positive effect on the area; I meet non-Buddhist people again and again who say they're glad we're here. I see the Arts Centre as another point of contact between the people of London (and beyond) and the Dharma and the Sangha.' A programme of Buddhist and Community arts projects is being devised, and a Right Livelihood team is being planned, a team which, Jo hopes, will practise working in an atmosphere of co-operation and communication, making its ideals tangible to the

people who come in off the street.

'It is very important to all of us engaged in creating the Arts Centre that we beautify the space, that we turn those two floors of a grim monolithic building into a place of beauty. That will have an effect. The *practice* of beauty is what goes on here—in the environment we are creating, in people making music, making pots, learning to dance.... This is what we're bringing to Bethnal Green. I want to spread it around, invite people in, go out to schools in the area, offer the practice of beauty to people and say "Have a go at this! Do you like it? Come and meet us, and let us meet you." This is also the flavour of the lunchtime meditation class that Jo teaches at the London Buddhist Centre, an attitude of outward-reaching friendliness, of the Dharma as a 'personal invitation'.

'Ratnasambhava, the "Jewel-Born One", the Buddha of beauty, is very important in this. He overcomes pride through generosity, teaching beauty as a practice of looking for harmony in day-to-day living, and sharing it by aspiring to give in an empty-handed way. Ratnasambhava's hand doesn't hold anything; his giving is not bound by any ideas of giver, receiver, or gift, but by a threefold circle of purity in which, as Sangharakshita says, "giving is the natural, unforced interchange of one's energy with

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that of others. In this sense real giving is receiving." I want to help create the conditions for that being the way in which the human race lives. The glimpses I have of it make me happy; I want that for myself and for everybody else. Within all this, my living situation, my community, is essential and central. I live with other Buddhist women who also aim to practise together and be sangha to one another, and to keep on refining and purifying what that means.'

Jo has found fertile ground for the interests and skills she developed before she got involved with the FWBO. She was working in a Sheffield arts centre when she learned to meditate. Her involvement in that sphere now rests in the context of a personal myth, 'a constant apprenticeship to teaching the Dharma and meditation. I want to keep passing the Dharma on. Administering the Arts Centre and running arts workshops and retreats are ways of continuing and deepening that apprenticeship.' The desire to know and affect the world, to help people, to find meaning, has brought Jo to the point of ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. Her glimpse of 'reverencing the Buddhas' has broadened her vision far beyond what she thought she might achieve, and the FWBO has given her the practical context in which that vision can take root. Listening to her speak was like watching a flower open, a tree bud. □

A star in the making?

I was standing on a crowded Underground train on my way to work one day in 1980 when I suddenly saw a torn and scrappy poster about meditation. I don't know why, but just as the doors were closing I scribbled down the phone number. The poster looked so old I thought the place would probably have closed years before; but I telephoned and was very surprised to get an answer from the London Buddhist Centre. So began my conscious connection with the Dharma in this life.

What struck me first at the introductory Dharma course I went to was hearing that Buddhists were expected to live by certain moral precepts. I realized that I'd already been living by those precepts—not in detail, but my upbringing, while not at all 'religious', had instilled in me a sense of ethics, giving me a respect for the truth by which I tried to live, even though in doing so I felt completely at odds with the world. I had always been able to see that human beings had wonderful potential—I was fascinated by stories of great endeavours and heroism—but their seemingly limitless capacity to perform acts of heartless cruelty left me a pessimistic cynic. I was therefore very excited to discover that there were other people who, like me, believed in living by ethical standards. That was my first experience: that it might be possible for me to go along with the human race rather than against it.

After a few months of attending classes at the LBC, however, I stopped going. Although I felt I would come back to the Dharma one day, I had met a man to whom I wanted to commit myself. We started to live together, and I forgot all about Buddhism and the FWBO. When we moved to Norwich four years later I had no idea that there was an FWBO centre there. By that time I was working full-time for the Post Office and absolutely hating it. I was the archetypal surly post office counter clerk. To do my job to perfection, by the book, to the letter, was the only thing which gave me any sense of achievement. Somehow, though, I knew there *was* meaning to life and this wasn't it. Discovering the

Norwich Buddhist Centre gave me my second chance at the Dharma, and this time I knew I would stay. (Incidentally, the 'man in my life' was ordained last year, becoming Pramudita—'Joyful', and he now lives at Padmaloka, but that's another story!)

I very quickly experienced for myself the fact that *all* the tools we have been given—meditation, puja, Dharma study, retreats, communication—do work; we just have to pick them up and use them. For me the two most crucial and constant working grounds have been the development of emotional positivity and psychical integration. At least twice during the years of my involvement with the FWBO I've come within a

hair's breadth of leaving. What kept me going was carrying on using the tools I had been given, especially keeping on meditating. I would say that meditation has to be an important element in the life of anybody involved in the FWBO. If you're not meditating, you've got one hand tied behind your back, and in my experience the spiritual life is difficult enough with both hands.

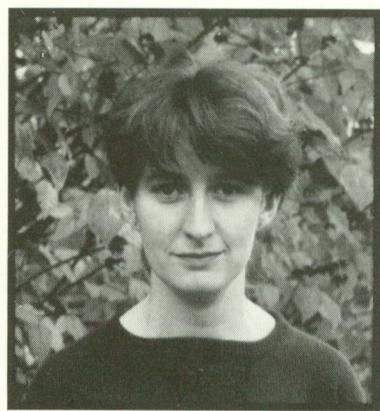
It was the metta bhavana that made the most immediate difference to my life. It took me a few weeks to realize that the reason people in the street were smiling at me—and why I felt like smiling at them—was that I was meditating, but from then on I was sold on meditation. Having believed so firmly that my negativity was just my nature—fixed, unalterable, to realize that I could change was like being given a million pounds. As an Order member I now have a sadhana practice, and I feel privileged to have such access to the higher realm of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but the metta bhavana is still the foundation of my meditation practice.

My first experience of puja was on a beginners' weekend retreat in a big rambling house in the country. It was a freezing cold November, nobody had had the forethought to put the central heating on, and I was shocked to discover that we were expected to sleep on bare mattresses on the floor. The pujas seemed to go on and on forever. My legs ached! In those days, beginners were brought up on double-length meditation sessions—it wasn't thought that they needed any gradual introduction.

At first I found puja difficult. I thought everybody was doing it just to be seen to be doing it, and I dug my heels in at that. But as I sat through pujas week after week at the Centre, I felt myself thawing out. One evening I felt for the first time that I *wanted* to make an offering, and I didn't care whether anybody was watching me or not. As I went quivering to the shrine and made my offering, which was very meaningful to me, I realized that everyone else was making offerings out of their own heartfelt response too. After that, I really took to pujas.

One thing that disappoints me about the FWBO is a sense of the puja getting dull and automatic. It saddens me because I think it's a powerful, beautiful practice. One of my fears is of things starting to ossify, starting to be done in a certain way because that's the way they've always been done. I notice that when I'm doing the Sevenfold Puja daily at home, all sorts of subtle nuances emerge and I'm more in touch with it in my heart. It's very different from just doing a puja once a week at the Centre—same old format, you've done your meditation, now's the time to do the puja. So-and-so does the reading in such-and-such a place....

The pull of the conditioned, the pull of the mundane, exerts itself on the FWBO as much as it does on any other organization and every other thing in the world. We've got a lot that's working very well, but we can't afford to be complacent. Everything's got to be



Karen Stout



Vijayanandi (left) at her public ordination with Vijayamala, Shrimala and Vijayashri

kept alive and questioned—not changed for the sake of it, but explored, refreshed, constantly re-inspired, like a fountain bubbling up from the depths of a pool. That means we've got to have an intensity of practice. The danger is that our heads can go ahead of our hearts. We need to keep coming back to basics.

We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Sangharakshita for the facilities that are now available to us in the FWBO and the WBO, all of which evolved out of his depth of experience and understanding of the essentials of Buddhism. It's that basic depth of practice which has to be the core of whatever we do. Our future depends on the degree to which we're meditating and doing pujas, the degree to which we're studying the Dharma, the degree to which we're really trying to communicate with one another—in short, the degree to which we're using the whole of our Dharmic tool-kit in our everyday lives. I must say that attending my first Order Convention (in August this year) and seeing the whole spectrum of experience from new Order members such as myself right up to Sangharakshita, gave me a great deal of confidence in the Order's developing maturity, imagination, sense of adventure, balance, and harmony.

I do have great ambitions. I want to be a spiritual powerhouse and take the Order a long way forward, take the FWBO a long way forward, not to say the universe! In the past I've tended to resist the Bodhisattva Ideal, but I now see that in actual fact it underpins everything I do. I want the world to change, and I want to be effective in bringing the Dharma to the world. However, during the Convention another Order member brought up the importance of being supportive, and I began to reflect that yes, there are some 'stars' in the Order, some obviously exceptional people who have

emerged one by one. I hope that more and more will emerge, but not everybody can be a star. Maybe the lesson I have to learn is the value of support; perhaps I will have a supportive role rather than a starring one. That's given me a lot of food for thought.

My name, Vijayanandi, means 'she who delights in victory'. What I most delight in is being able to convey something of the Dharma to others, and seeing them respond. In January next year I will be moving to live and work at Taraloka, the FWBO's retreat centre for women. I look forward to the challenge of learning to co-operate and live with others, as well as the opportunity of helping to create the conditions in which people can transform themselves through practising the Dharma.

When I was

ordained in October 1992, I felt at my peak, really confident and strong, but now when I look at the photographs of my ordination ceremony, I see myself as a mere child compared to how I experience myself a year later. I delight in the fact that I'm becoming more and more myself, more and more confident in the Dharma, and confident in the Order and the FWBO, for all their limitations. I feel confident that true individuals are emerging from amongst us so that collectively we have enough experience to keep us on track, to make the adjustments that are constantly necessary, and to move continually forward towards Enlightenment. □



Weaving Indra's net

Devamitra, an Order member for twenty years and Overall Mitra Convenor since 1982, must be one of the most widely travelled and well known of Order members throughout the FWBO. Interviewing him at his community in Bethnal Green, London, in August, I asked him about his involvement with the Movement and his impressions of the FWBO 'then' and 'now':

'I'd been going along to the FWBO for a week or two before the 1972 summer retreat started—it was at Keffolds and was one of only two retreats a year that were held at that time. That retreat completely turned my life around. I more or less decided there and then that I wanted to lead a Buddhist life—but I didn't know how. You couldn't really speak of there being "a movement" in those days, it was just the Archway Centre, with Sangharakshita doing most of the teaching. I certainly didn't have any idea of a movement; I just wanted to meditate, learn about Buddhism, and be with my teacher. That seemed to be the way you went about it.

'Around the time of that retreat several communities started up near the Archway Centre. Jeremy Goody, who later became Lokamitra, put up a notice asking anybody who wanted to live with other meditators to sign up. The five of us who put our names down just happened to be men. Sangharakshita immediately picked up on the atmosphere in the community we formed and seemed very pleased with the fact that we were all men living together. That was a very important development. We take the FWBO's single-sex communities for granted nowadays, but that was the first one.

'I must say I was very unimpressed by the Order members around the place in those days. To me they didn't really seem to know what they were doing. This was no doubt partly due to my own youthful arrogance, because I'm sure they did a lot for the Movement. But I certainly had no real inkling or feeling for spiritual community in the way that we have come to know it subsequently. So when I asked for ordination I really had

no idea what it was I was asking for. I didn't hear anything from the Order members about my ordination request. In the end I was ordained about eighteen months after I had first come along. Our present sense, or understanding, of sangha only slowly emerged. What I was more aware of at the time were my growing friendships with a few people.

'It was a tiny Order and a tiny movement, but already Sangharakshita was trying to broaden and expand our horizons, and trying to get us to take the expansion of the Movement seriously—though we weren't really grasping that in the early days. With the ordination of Subhuti, Manjuvajra, Mangala,

Chintamani, Dhammadinna, and Hridaya, and then—a few weeks later—Lokamitra, Nagabodhi, Aryamitra, and myself, I think things really began to change. There were only about three classes a week at the Archway Centre at the time of my ordination, but subsequently Subhuti and I at least doubled them.

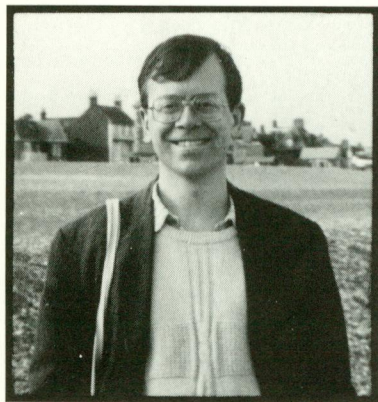
'Sangharakshita had been talking at that time about the importance of Right Livelihood, but we didn't really take it on board. At the time there was a more pressing need: the Archway Centre was a short-life property and Sangharakshita was urging us to find a new London centre. That became a major concern. A year after I'd been ordained I moved to a village in Norfolk and, after a year spent transcribing Sangharakshita's seminars, I moved to Norwich to set up an FWBO centre. Very soon after that a friend associated with the Centre set up the Rainbow Restaurant, but I don't think Right Livelihood really began to take off until Nagabodhi got things stirred up at Croydon. That seemed to be the first really successful Right Livelihood venture.

'I think that Lokamitra going to India in 1979 was quite a turning point in the expansion of the Movement. The fact that things developed so quickly in India had a ripple effect around the rest of the Movement and made those of us involved look outwards that much more.

'Towards the end of my four years in Norwich, Sangharakshita asked me if I would move to the London Buddhist Centre, and in January 1982 he asked me to become Overall Mitra Convenor—he wanted me to give the mitra system a boost. The mitra system had been initiated within a few weeks of my ordination. Originally it was the "kalyana mitra system", but there were very quickly far more people wanting kalyana mitras than there were people available to fulfil that need. We therefore introduced the "mitra system" in a more general sense so that anybody who wanted to become a mitra could do so.

'When I took over there hadn't been an Overall Mitra Convenor for a couple of years and the mitra system was in a bit of a state. Some Order members were losing confidence in it. The main thing I had to do was to re-state the value of the mitra system, re-inspire confidence in it amongst Order members, and do something about the Dharma study needs of mitras, because it became pretty obvious to me after the first couple of years that mitras were not getting the Dharma study they needed. Hence the introduction of the mitra study course.

'Over the eleven years since then the nature of my work, and of the mitra system, has changed. Over that period—this is only a rough guess, but it's a fairly informed one—I would say that the number of mitras has probably doubled. There are now about 1,200 mitras worldwide. I used to try to keep up some kind of personal connection with all the mitras, but I can't do that any more. There are far more FWBO centres and there are over fifty local men's and women's Mitra Convenors. I see my main task now as working more



Tejananda



directly with the Mitra Convenors. I try to meet up with them all very regularly.

'The developments in the men's ordination process have also changed my work. Of course, the ordination process has been very richly developed by the ordination team. It is still within the mitra system, but I no longer have any direct part to play in it, or in the initiatives that the women are in the process of developing in their own ordination process.

'Sangharakshita has now almost entirely passed on his responsibilities towards the mitra system. If there's something I cannot resolve myself then as a last resort I will refer it to him, but he'd rather that the mitra system functioned without any input from him—and by and large it does. Obviously as time passes and as the Movement gets bigger things will have to be done in a different way. In ten years' time I imagine the Overall Mitra Convenor will be working more with a team of regional Mitra Convenors.

'It is in the interests of the unity of the Movement to have an Overall Mitra Convenor, overseeing the system as a whole. The mitra system is a very strong force for unity within the Movement. I know people sometimes complain that it's bureaucratic and so on, and maybe sometimes it does get a bit wooden. But you've got to weigh that against its benefits as a source of unity.

'It is very noticeable to me that those of us who have been involved in the Movement for many years have broadened our understanding, our sympathies, our capacity for empathy. Hopefully, in tandem with that, though this is much more difficult to perceive, there will have been an equivalent deepening. I would expect that to be the case. The breadth is more to do with compassion and the depth is more to do with wisdom, although that distinction can't be too black and white.

Devamitra (right) with Nagamitra, 1990

'I don't know why, but I'm surprised at how bright and enthusiastic people I meet in the Movement seem 11 to be these days—more so than they have ever been.

I was particularly struck by this when I was in San Francisco in January. There weren't even any Order members living there at that time. It was very impressive: so much energy and enthusiasm for the Dharma as we teach it in the FWBO. The Movement seems to be more alive than it ever has been. I suppose

this is indicative of a greater maturity.

'The people who are getting ordained now seem as impressive as Order members have always been. But it feels as though with each person who's newly ordained there's an augmentation which is seemingly



Devamitra (left) immediately after his public ordination ceremony in 1974

disproportionate to the fact that you have just one new Order member. It's like the image of Indra's net, each jewel reflects all the other jewels: if you put one more jewel in, you get that jewel plus all its reflections. In other words, you get that person plus his or her influence on everybody else in the sangha. I suppose it has to do with the connections we share as Order members—we're all somehow or other having a positive effect on each other. Well, perhaps that isn't always the case, but I certainly think it is increasingly so.' □

This movement can change

Almost fifty years old, married with five children, Gaganabodhi lives in Poona where, until recently, he was Chairman of Bahujan Hitay, the social welfare wing of our movement in India. He now oversees the procurement and development of land and buildings for Bahujan Hitay and Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gane (TBMSG).

He became a Buddhist—along with 10,000 other people—at a 'village programme' in February 1957. This was just five months after the first mass-conversion rally, in Nagpur, and very soon after Dr Ambedkar's death. He knew about Dr Ambedkar—one of his teachers in the local village school would sometimes talk about him (while another, a brahmin, would refuse even to hand books to Untouchable pupils), and he had an uncle in Bombay who was inspired by the Ambedkarite newspapers he read. But at the age of thirteen, living in a village where the Mahar caste was numerically strong and confident, and belonging to a family that enjoyed an uncommon degree of wealth—a house and a few acres of irrigated land—the significance of the conversion ceremony didn't really register.

While he was at college, studying for a BSc, a bitter quarrel broke out among his relatives which left his immediate family financially ruined. He moved to Bombay and got a job interpreting Hindi, Gujarati, and Marathi vernacular into English at the Sessions Court.

He spent a lot of his free time with three new friends, discussing politics and the atrocities that were still being committed against ex-untouchables. They began to arrange activities for local youths: 'Sports, arts, a bit of agitation. Really it was just for fun; there was no concrete basis.

'Actually, 1966–70 were horrible years. I was just a vagabond, very much engrossed in sensual enjoyment: sex, clubs, and gambling.

'My father and uncle were utterly shamed by some of the things I did, and urged me to get married, in 1970, to a woman whose father was later to become Dharmachari Silendrabodhi. My marriage brought me back down to earth, and I started thinking again of working for the good of society.'

He founded another group of about 110 people. They called themselves 'Panthers' (and were later affiliated to the official 'Dalit Panthers') and agitated for the rights of ex-untouchables. A successful fight over land rights with a local tribal community set Gaganabodhi's group on a new course. 'We became notorious as a "mafia" gang, spreading terror throughout the district. We set out to protect our community from the kind of people who would beat us up or blind us. I also founded the Ti Ratna Cultural Centre which had a library and organized arts and sports events. I was very keen to get young people working together in teams. If they could only learn to work together, they would be able to take

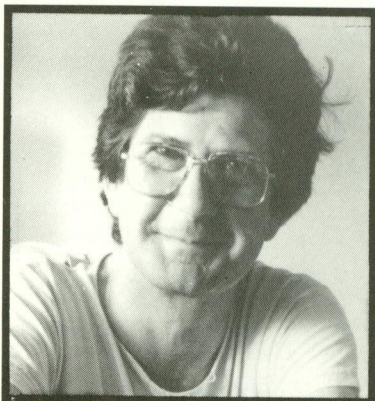
on anything and anybody. But throughout this time I was also drinking a lot. With all these followers I was a king! I thought I could get away with anything.' Some of the group's revenge activities became seriously violent. A few of its members went on to become ordinary criminals.

'Looking at myself in the light of my subsequent development, I can see that I was actually a very frightened man. That is why I did all those things, and passed myself off as a daredevil. I was not really a revolutionary. And it was certainly not me that started to think differently. It was my friends—and they had to work very hard on me!

'I had an intellectual interest in Buddhism, but there was nobody there to teach us anything. The activities at our vihara looked like idol worship, and I was sure Dr Ambedkar hadn't intended that. To me, Buddhism was about fighting social evils, about social change. In 1984 my friend Chandrashila suggested I went on a retreat. He's a shrewd fellow, he was very soft: 'Look, you have got so much energy, doing all this work. Why don't you just come and see what we are doing?' So I went on a three day retreat in Ambernath, and those three days were enough. The mindfulness, the meditation, the beautiful chanting.... The people were so disciplined, so happy, and communicated so freely. I wondered how they could live in such an enjoyable state. And I got some glimpses—I saw colours I had never seen before! I felt so content, so powerful. Chandrashila told me that I should not get too caught up in that sort of thing—there was further to go. But it made me want to try more meditation, and to go on more retreats.

On my second retreat we studied Sangharakshita's booklet *Going for Refuge*. I suddenly saw that practice begins with the individual, and then goes out to society. I had to work on myself, I realized. I was just a beginner, I had not really understood Ambedkar's philosophy at all. I immediately severed my relations with the old activities, and Lokamitra even suggested that I move: 'If you want to develop yourself, you should change your surroundings. In future you may be able to change all that, but at present it is you who need to change.' I didn't know much about TBMSG or Bahujan Hitay, or how they were run, in those days. I only knew that I had to meditate and study—the 'spiritual administration'. That was enough for me.

Gaganabodhi was ordained in 1987, and in 1988 became chairman of the Centre in his home town of Ulhasnagar. 'I was a successful chairman of quite a busy centre. A part of my work involved organizing a small self-sufficiency project, which meant preparing proposals for Bahujan Hitay and the Karuna Trust in the UK. In this way people realized I was capable of management. I was also good at giving speeches. There was tremendous scope for me in any area of activity. In 1990 Lokamitra asked me to leave my job and work full-time in the Movement. This was a chance to develop myself more, he said. When there is a necessity, it is good to make use of the opportunity. But I had to think about this. With five children, I had



Nagabodhi

tangled past, and his vast ambitions for the future

everything!

a lot of responsibilities.

'Eventually I became Secretary of Bahujan Hitay. It was a very suitable job: there was a real gap waiting to be filled, and it was the kind of work I had been doing as Superintendent of the Court's Accounts Department and as a Clerk of Court.

'I have never regretted that decision. But things were difficult to begin with. I really wanted to work with the organization, but there was so much work to do, in such a small office. It was very difficult. There was no system, no rules, no nothing—it was all up to us. The atmosphere was not always so friendly either. Some people were wary of me because I had come from such a good job. That can be a weakness in the Indian movement. It's a very normal, ego-based thing: we think that people working in posts that carry a lot of responsibilities—chairpersons, secretaries, whatever—simply enjoy those posts as a sort of "position".

'Everyone has their weaknesses, but we were not taking ours into account. We were so concerned with our work for the Movement that our communication could be superficial and merely job-related. Some friends suggested that we should go away together for a few days to sort things out. During this period we became more aware of our weaknesses, and committed ourselves to changing. We knew that our business interactions had to run smoothly, and for that to happen we had to become good friends. Our lives as Order members provided the basis for that to happen and, these days, our friendships are very strong.'

Until recently Gaganabodhi was leading two mitra classes a week as well as a few general classes. What does he see as more important—his work for Bahujan Hitay or his Dharma teaching activities? 'At this juncture, I am not really able to see TBMSG and Bahujan Hitay as being different. My work in Bahujan Hitay is Right Livelihood. Social work is the outward expression of our attainment—whatever compassion, friendliness, or wisdom we have developed—in action. We are helping society, but our main aim is to spread the Dharma, to bring more people to the Buddha's teaching. The kindergartens and so on are obviously useful in themselves, but they are also a way in which we can introduce ourselves to society as Buddhists.

The fact is that whatever we can give to society through Bahujan Hitay won't be enough. Only the Dharma will make society happier. Western thinkers are concerned only with the poverty of India. They assume that where there is poverty no one thinks of education or spiritual things. Of course people need

food, but after someone has got his body nourished, he needs education, mental development—otherwise he's not a proper human being. I see people in the slums and hutments who are happy because—I won't say because of Buddhism—but because they practise morality. They don't steal or quarrel with their neighbours, they live happily with just a few things, because their habits reflect the standards of Buddhism. If people practise Buddhism they will give up, as I have given up, drinking and other bad habits. My life is turning out very nicely. My family is developing, my neighbours are happy with me.

Unless we understand what we got from Dr Ambedkar, we won't be able to carry it forward. We got the Dharma from Dr Ambedkar, not a caste struggle, or a preoccupation with atrocities committed against us. We have to carry forward the karma that he left at his death—and that was the Dharma.'

Gaganabodhi happily admits that he has an ambitious imagination: 'TBMSG is the only organization in India that will one day lead more than 50% of the population. In

India, 55% of the population are from the "downtrodden" classes. Most of these people are still worshipping gods, they still haven't understood Ambedkar. When they realize that the old religion has nothing to offer they will have no alternative but to come over to Buddhism. If we are doing well, working together happily, these people will come to us. Then 55% of India's population will be Buddhist, and they will rule India! 13

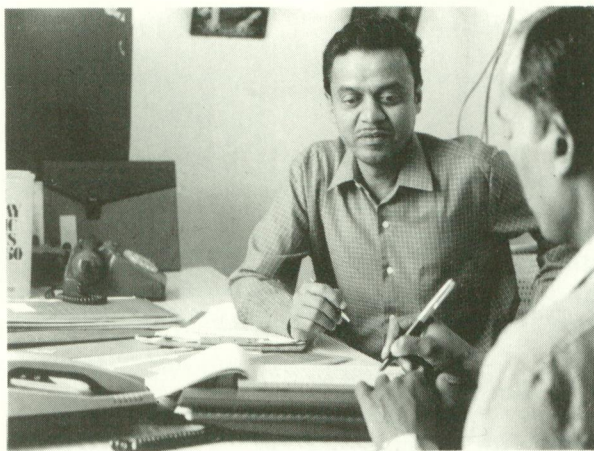
This Movement can change everything—not just material life, or even spiritual life, but *everything*: the whole of human existence. The

future generation—in fifty or a hundred years time—will be very developed if we work in this way. Darwin said that an entire species can change over time. No God is needed for this. The human race will change because of our Movement's practice.

Running India and changing the human race is quite a responsibility. Is the Movement up to it?

'Yes! At present everything is on a trial basis. But people *are* changing, we *will* be strong. Of course we are still ego-based, sometimes we think only of ourselves, there are conflicts.... But these things will improve as we realize that the work is so much bigger than ourselves. I have come to realize that my work for the Movement is not just for my own sake. I must therefore develop myself. I must keep up my meditation practice, improve my communication. These things are essential. Unless we can communicate clearly and frankly, there is little hope of improving our organization and administration. If I find something wrong with you I should tell you, have a frank exchange of views. That's what will make for the confidence that we will go ahead, keep moving.

Those who have been around me over the past ten years have seen a different Gaganabodhi emerge. They can't believe that this is the same man whom they saw drinking and fighting and abusing people. When they see how much I've changed, then they start changing. My biggest contribution is my example. □



Gaganabodhi at work in Poona

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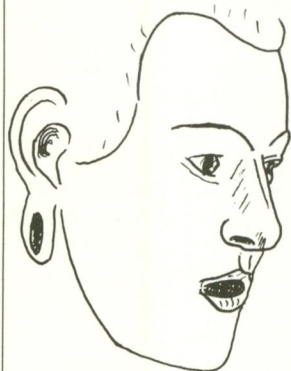
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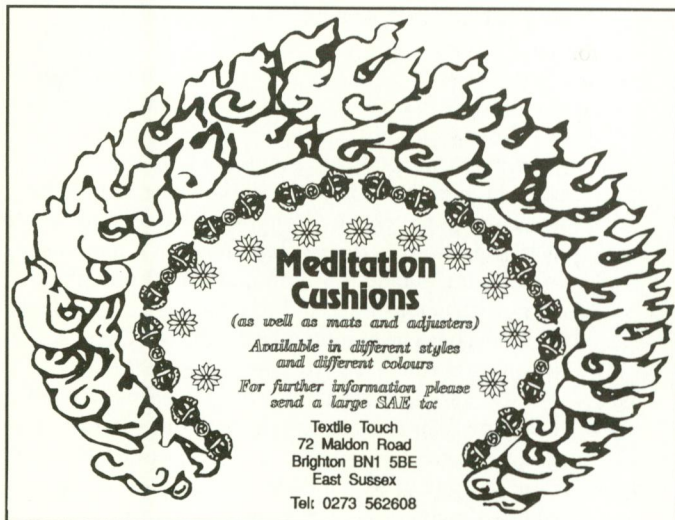
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GOODBYE TO GOD?

God in Us: A Case for Christian Humanism

by Anthony Freeman
Published by SCM Press
pp.87, paperback, £5.95

Nietzsche proclaimed God's 'death' over a hundred years ago, but it was not until the 1960s that radical theologians such as Thomas Altizer, building on foundations laid by earlier radicals such as Barth and Bonhoeffer, promulgated a fully-developed 'death of God' theology. The idea of a godless Christianity was more popularly disseminated, with a good deal of attendant controversy, by John Robinson, then Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, and more recently Don Cupitt's fine balancing act of obscure theological disquisition and media populism has kept the fray running on and on.

Given such antecedents, it curious that this book, outlining 'A Case for Christian Humanism', has recently whipped up a small storm of controversy and discussion in the British media and, it would seem, within sections of the Anglican church itself. The media 'controversy' seems mainly to centre on the fact that an Anglican parish priest can publicly declare unconventional views about God and still keep his job. Whether this indicates a 'conservative backlash' in general perceptions of moral and religious matters readers can judge for themselves.

The book itself explores issues arising for the author from a 'conversion experience'. This conversion was 'from a Christianity which had become oppressive to one which brought a glorious sense of freedom and joy. This freedom came when I accepted that I did not believe in God as traditionally understood.' The traditional Christian idea of God as an omnipotent, everlasting creator who, though

transcendent, constantly intervenes in the world, is redundant. Even though Christians still use such terminology, the author's view is that they no longer understand it literally. Each generation re-interprets Christianity: 'No form of Christianity in the 1990s can be the same as the Christianity of 1662 or of 1066, or of any past time, because to say the same thing in new circumstances is to say something different. There is no such thing—for us at least—as a timeless truth.'

Consequently, the future of Christianity lies neither in a reactionary clinging to past forms, nor in theologically 'liberal' attempts to square traditional doctrine with the modern scientific world view, but in what the author terms a 'radical' or 'open' theology, based upon the premise 'that religion is a purely human creation'. In his view, a 'supernatural' God is untenable. Nevertheless, attachment to this particular three-lettered word seems to go deep. Rather than dispense with God altogether, the author prefers to '...change my use of the term God. Instead of referring it to a supernatural being, I shall apply it to the sum of all my values and ideals in life.'

A humanistic re-interpretation of Christianity along these lines is the main thrust of the book: sin, salvation, worship, Christ and the Holy Spirit are all—convincingly enough within the author's own terms—given non-supernatural, humanistic meaning. To a large extent, I could imagine the approach which he offers providing a tenable mythic-cum-spiritual 'life context' for what may be called 'post-supernaturalist' Christians. Nevertheless, looked at from a Buddhist perspective, some of this material leaves one with a feeling of his having thrown the baby out with the



bathwater.

This is evident, for example, in his point that all values are purely *human* values: 'There never was any absolute way of telling good from bad.... It is human beings making human judgements who have given Hitler the thumbs down and Mother Teresa the thumbs up.' From a Buddhist perspective, though, there is (as may be expected) a 'middle way' between this extreme and the opposite one of seeing values as entirely 'God given'. This is that actions tend to be 'skilful' or 'unskilful' according to whether the underlying motivations are fundamentally 'ego-centric' (rooted in craving, aversion, delusion) or 'self-transcending' (springing from generosity, compassion, wisdom). As we act, so we become. This avoids both the danger of relativism and the need for a transcendent 'giver of values'. It simply reflects 'the way things are'.

The author's model seems to discount things being any particular way at all. In the context of a very constructive discussion of Christianity and other religions, he describes the way religions form their world-views as being like 'people looking at clouds changing shape in the sky and saying how the different shapes [appear] to them.... There is no absolute truth by which the different offerings

can be judged.' This kind of relativism seems to underlie a lot of his thinking. The problem—at least from my own perspective—is that in the absence of an insight into 'the way things really are' (or that there *is* a way things really are), we are left without any ultimate sense of direction in the 'religious quest'.

Nevertheless, I applaud the author for his obvious integrity in following through the consequences of his own thoughts and feelings. It is a book that thinking Christians—and even thinking Buddhists—could well benefit from reading. □

Tejananda

ALSO RECEIVED

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by Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki,
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Published by Condor

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A World Waiting to be Born
M. Scott Peck
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Self and Liberation
The Jung/Buddhism Dialogue
ed D.J. Meckel and R.L. Moor
Published by Paulist Press

Dreams of Power
Peter Bishop
Published by Athlone

SEMINAL WORK

Forty-Three Years Ago: Reflections on my Bhikkhu Ordination

by Sangharakshita
Published by Windhorse
pp.59, paperback, £3.50

The Western Buddhist Order appears to be the object of a certain degree of incomprehension amongst other Buddhists and students of Buddhism. I have lost count of the number of times I have come across confusions or conflations of the WBO and the FWBO, along the lines of 'this is Dharmachari X who is a member of the FWBO'. True, acronyms and 'in-house' jargon aren't very helpful (though most Buddhist groups have this tendency: how many people in the FWBO know the difference between a *ngakpa* and a *ngawang*?)

16 However, this kind of confusion can pale into insignificance when it comes to trying to communicate the basic principles of the WBO and of ordination into the WBO, and especially how and why the WBO, as an Order, is 'neither monastic nor lay'. This is not because the basis of the Order is overly abstruse or

Buddhist life-style are already the object of quite a large amount of debate in Western Buddhist circles. Sangharakshita's new paper, *Forty-Three Years Ago*, though relatively short, not only clarifies yet further the elegant simplicity of his conception of the Order, but drops something of a literary depth-charge into this debate, and even into the 'traditional' Buddhist world as a whole.

The nature of this 'depth-charge' emerges from a 'rude shock' that Sangharakshita received some six years after his bhikkhu ordination in 1950. This was the discovery that he wasn't a bhikkhu! His ordination had been technically invalid, one of the bhikkhus who participated in the ceremony having been in serious breach of the *sikkhapadas* or monastic rules of training. Sangharakshita's thoughts of seeking re-ordination were ultimately stemmed by the radical and far-reaching conclusion to which he came: 'Technically valid [bhikkhu] ordination is virtually impossible of attainment and ... if one did, miraculously, obtain it, one

of the Buddha himself. Indeed it would seem from Sangharakshita's observations that the complete technical *parisuddha* of any ordaining chapter is most unlikely. Thus, not only was Sangharakshita's bhikkhu ordination technically invalid: to all practical intents, *all* bhikkhu ordinations are.

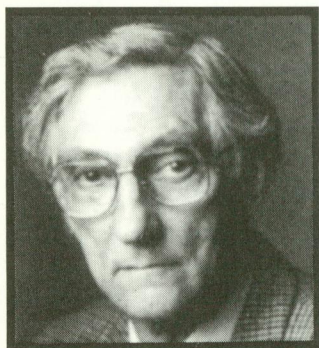
However, though this may seem deeply undermining of the bhikkhu sangha—and indeed Sangharakshita shows clearly the degree to which it *does* undermine many present day Theravadin assumptions and practices—the discovery opened up some very productive directions for Sangharakshita himself. This started with his observation that though certain bhikkhus were 'bad monks', in the sense that they lived in flagrant contravention of the *sikkhapadas*, they were nevertheless often very 'good Buddhists'. He also noted that the undoubted sense of 'peace, satisfaction, fulfilment, acceptance, and belonging' which had accompanied his bhikkhu ordination did not seem to be affected by the discovery that it was technically invalid. 'Only much later', he writes, 'after I had realized that the Going for Refuge was the central and definitive Act of the Buddhist life, and that commitment to the Three Jewels was primary and life-style, whether lay or monastic, secondary, did it become possible for me, taking the feeling I experienced during my ordination ceremony as a clue, to understand what really happened and to acknowledge to myself that I had been ordained not as a bhikkhu by bhikkhus but, in reality, as a Buddhist by Buddhists, and welcomed not into the Monastic Order but into the Buddhist Spiritual Community in the widest sense.'

This realization, in effect, laid the basis for the WBO, Sangharakshita coming to realize that the proper understanding of *samvara* or ordination in Buddhism is in the Act of 'Going for Refuge ... recognized and formally acknowledged by the Sangha or Spiritual Community of those who themselves go for

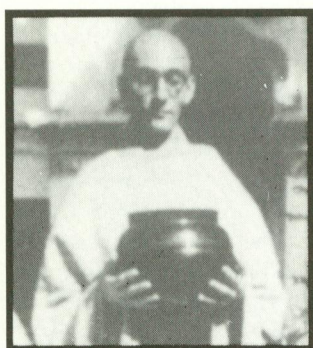
Refuge'. Thus 'ordination in the WBO is based on ... knowledge of one's own effective Going for Refuge and its recognition by others. It is not based on the technical validity of one's ordination.' Sangharakshita highlights the stark contrast between this and the 'quasi-magical' status that has become attached to bhikkhu ordination. The elaborate respect and considerable *dana* given to bhikkhus by Buddhist laypeople has little, if anything, to do with respect for their *spiritual* striving, but rather with the belief that giving to bhikkhus represents the best 'investment' in terms of 'merit' gained. A monk who has received what is understood to be 'valid' bhikkhu ordination is therefore greatly to be preferred as an object of *dana* to a devout—or even enlightened!—'nun', who is technically a layperson.

Moving on from these points, Sangharakshita reflects on a number of important related issues, such as the question of 'recognition' of the WBO ordination by other Buddhists, and the attempts by Western Theravadin women practitioners to revive the Theravadin bhikkhuni ordination ('a desire, at least to an extent, for socio-religious status... [which] has its origins not in the idea of "going forth" ... but rather in egalitarian notions which have nothing to do with Buddhism'). Above all, in the final part of the paper Sangharakshita emphasizes that his reflections do not imply a rejection of monasticism *per se*. 'What I reject is the identification of the spiritual life with the monastic life and the monastic life itself with pseudo-monastic formalism.' He then expounds, with his characteristic lucidity, the *real* nature of Buddhist monasticism and the ways in which, in the life-style of anagarikas, this finds expression in the WBO. This is undoubtedly one of Sangharakshita's seminal works. I hope it will be read, and carefully reflected upon, by both Western and Eastern Buddhists. □

Tejananda



Sangharakshita today,
and (right) at the time of his
higher ordination into the
Theravada tradition



could not know that one had done so.'

This is primarily because of the impossibility of ascertaining the *parisuddha*, or complete moral purity with regard to the observance of the monastic code, not only of the bhikkhus participating in any particular ordination, but of the bhikkhus participating in *their* ordination, and so on back, presumably, to the time

complex—in fact quite the reverse is the case. It has more to do with preconceptions that many Buddhists have about the notions 'monastic' and 'lay' in the Buddhist context, and the relationship between them. These 'poles' of

TRANSCENDING USEFULNESS

Wisdom beyond Words: Sense and Non-Sense in the Buddhist Prajnaparamita Tradition

by Sangharakshita

Published by Windhorse

pp.295, paperback, £9.99

Over the years, Sangharakshita's oral output, in the form of lectures and seminars, has far exceeded his written. Most of this has only been available in the form of unedited transcripts. However, a new FWBO enterprise—the Spoken Word Project—is now turning these unedited works into book form. *Wisdom Beyond Words* is the project's second production and, apart from its Dharmic content, it is an impressive piece of editing.

The editor, Jinananda, has taken material from Sangharakshita's lectures on the *Heart* and *Diamond Sutras* and from the seminars on the *Ratnaguna-samcayagatha*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. From these he has produced a seamless discourse on these three Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajnaparamita*) texts (Conze's translations are included). The seminar material, in particular, has been so skilfully edited that one would never guess that it once formed part of a dialogue—usually a one-sided dialogue—between Sangharakshita and those attending the seminar. Nor can one detect where chunks taken from the seminar on Suzuki's work have been incorporated into the text.

Rather ironically, given that an academic article has classed the FWBO as a form of 'Protestant Buddhism', one theme of this book is 'The Greater Mandala of Aesthetic Appreciation' (also known, more provocatively, as 'The Greater Mandala of Uselessness'), involving an assault on the infamous 'Protestant Work Ethic'. According to Sangharakshita, the only real values are aesthetic values, never

utilitarian ones; real spiritual work is about being able to sit back and simply enjoy the universe. Of course, this can be misunderstood; it is not an excuse for the lazy to sink into the soup of greater laziness, but a reminder for those who may still be in the grip of this Protestant Work Ethic and who feel their existence can only be justified through incessant work, that the Buddhist spiritual life is a balanced one.

Our work, however spiritually important it may be, needs to be balanced by what, from a 'Protestant' perspective, seems like useless and 'unspiritual' activity. If the balance is lost, then the truly spiritual dimension—the 'Greater Mandala'—is also lost. It is not that Bodhisattvas spend most of their time tripping round art galleries. What to us seems hard work is to them simply *lila* or 'play'. Whatever a Bodhisattva does is within the 'The Greater Mandala of Uselessness'. So, imbalanced, limp aesthetes, or those who like sitting around with idling minds, will find no consolation here. They just need to get off their backsides and *do* something, preferably for others.

Yet more important, this 'Greater Mandala' theme reminds us that all the things we now regard as relevant to us—even leading a balanced spiritual life—are, from a higher perspective, completely *irrelevant*. The message of the Perfection of Wisdom, difficult to disentangle from its medium of medieval, Indian over-intellectuality, is that the most essential ingredient in our spiritual life is the 'flavour of irrelevance'. As ordinary Buddhist practitioners, we quite naturally think in terms determined by what our present limited self sees as its 'spiritual needs'. Yet, however important these may be in the short term, when it finally comes to transcending our unenlightened state with its

limited Dharmic perspective, the last thing we will need is what seems useful—even spiritually useful. Viewed from our present perspective, what we actually need to make that final leap will appear as something totally irrelevant and useless. Yet this is the grain that finally tips the scales.

In this way, sutras like the *Diamond Sutra* are like elaborate koans, whose true significance cannot but appear as insignificant to our present self. Yet 'knowing' this doesn't help, as without the effort to overcome this dilemma, it will not be a koan but just an intellectual teaser. Here we have, in a Mahayana form, the dilemma all Buddhists face: if the Dharma is a 'raft' and we mistakenly take it as an end in itself and turn it into some absolute, we will miss the point of the Buddha's message. We will, in the words of the *Alagaddupama Sutta*, 'grasp the snake by the wrong end'. Yet, at the same time, whilst 'knowing' this, we have to throw ourselves wholeheartedly on to the raft as if it *were* an absolute, as that is what our unenlightened hearts demand.

For the practising Buddhist, there is no way out. It is simply a matter of living with the tension between the way things really are and how we imagine them to be. In the words of the *Ratnaguna*, we simply have to call up as much faith as we can muster and take the plunge. If one practises wholeheartedly, the dilemma will be a creative one.

In such a short review, one cannot do justice to the riches found in this book, and I have only touched upon one. Sometimes Sangharakshita is very provocative, for example in suggesting that simply passing on the Dharma to others is a more meritorious act than spending ten thousand lives as a social worker in ten thousand



different worlds, or that building a stupa dedicated to world peace suggests that one is not convinced of the overwhelming importance of truly spiritual ideals over such mundane ones as world peace, freedom, and equal rights. At other times his expositions of the traditional Dharma are quite illuminating, and present the thoughtful Buddhist practitioner with perspectives that will challenge him or her into thinking more deeply about the Dharma.

What we have here is, in my own opinion, probably the most important Dharma commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom ever to appear in the West. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it may be one of the most important books on the Dharma to appear in the West: the topics and themes traverse the Dharma *per se*. Others will, no doubt, disagree. □

Sagaramati

Further Thoughts on 'The Open Letter'

In the last issue of *Golden Drum* we published an Open Letter which had been drafted by members of the Network of Western Buddhist Teachers following their meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. Kulananda, one of the letter's signatories, shares some further thoughts:

For many of us, our meeting in Dharamsala marked an epoch. For the first time ever, perhaps, representatives of the Theravada, Rinzai and Soto Zen, Gelugpa, Kagyupa, and Nyingmapa, and some of the emerging Western traditions, gathered to discuss the transmission of the Dharma to the West. We were all Buddhist teachers and we were all Westerners—born and brought up in Europe or North America.

18 We met against the background of what some regard as a time of crisis in Western Buddhism. In the United States, especially, several Dharma groups have suffered acute crises of confidence in teachers variously accused of the abuse of sex, power, alcohol, and money. We discussed many matters, received valuable clarification from the Dalai Lama, and, having come to what we thought of as some important conclusions, felt the need to share our thoughts and conclusions with the rest of the Western Buddhist world. For some, the belief that some Western Buddhist students were continuing to be abused by a few Eastern or Western Buddhist teachers urgently reinforced this wish to share. Thus we drafted the Open Letter and, pressed for time, broadly agreed its contents at the end of our meeting.

Back in Britain, six months after the event, I find myself continuing to contemplate those issues. The Open Letter, necessarily brief, can be read in many different ways. It is

not a final or definitive document, but the initiation of what I hope will be an extended discussion in Western Buddhist circles. As one of the original signatories, I would like to share some further reflections.

The first paragraph of the letter suggests that our first responsibility as Buddhists is to work for a better world, and that the promotion of Buddhism is a secondary concern. The Dalai Lama was very concerned that we opened our Letter with such a paragraph. But what, I wonder, might he have meant? Can we really work towards creating a better world without promoting the Dharma? As committed Buddhists, do we really think it possible to alleviate the sufferings of the world without bringing the wisdom of the Dharma to bear, without practising 'skilful means'? Clearly not. I therefore read this section as

Can we really work towards creating a better world without promoting the Dharma?

an attempt to re-emphasize the primary purpose of Buddhism itself—the alleviation of the suffering of all beings—and as a call for us all to bear this in mind as we go about creating our various Buddhist institutions.

The same section calls for us to be guided by the principles

of kindness and compassion, the furtherance of peace and harmony, and tolerance and respect for other religions. From our discussions in Dharamsala, I know that the call for tolerance and respect was seen as being mediated by the call for kindness, compassion, peace, and harmony. Perhaps we need to reach more deeply into this matter. What, for example, do we mean by tolerance? I know we did not mean that we should tolerate the practice of untouchability by some Hindus, or allow the *fatwah* against Salman Rushdie to go unchallenged. In future discussions we might consider more explicitly where we stand with regard to those actions and beliefs which run counter to the spirit of kindness, compassion, peace, and harmony. Are there not some things that we do *not* tolerate? Do we not need, sometimes, to assert that there are some beliefs, held by orthodox practitioners of some religions, which run counter to the principles of Buddhism? If we cannot make such assertions we may be in danger of having our belief systems determined for us by others.

In the West today there are those who believe that religious tolerance consists in the identification of all religions as just so many variants on a single, unitary truth. Far from being genuinely tolerant, this view only serves to negate the possibility of real differences in belief and attitude. As such it may well be simply a disguised form of intolerance—a way of denying the validity of others' beliefs. As committed Buddhists, however, we can tolerate the beliefs of others

whilst at the same time asserting that we don't hold those beliefs to be true.

Do we not need, sometimes, to assert that there are some beliefs, held by orthodox practitioners of some religions, which run counter to the principles of Buddhism?

Our Open Letter also noted the danger of sectarianism creeping into the relations between Buddhists in the West, where so many traditions now exist side by side. Indeed, as the Dharma comes to be established in the West we have a great opportunity to create institutions, such as the nascent Association of British Buddhist Centres, which can bring Buddhists of different traditional allegiances together in a spirit of co-operation and friendliness. But within diversity, what are the grounds for unity? What do we really have in common? As Buddhists, our primary and overriding commitment is to the Three Jewels. Seeing this, we may come to identify ourselves as Buddhists first and as followers of a particular tradition second. In other words, as we put it in the FWBO, we will recognize that Going for Refuge to the Three

buddhism in a sea of faith

The Sea Of Faith is an annual conference of Christians, many of them Anglican clergymen, who can no longer subscribe to many aspects of orthodox Christianity. They meet under the inspiration of Don Cupitt (a theologian who sometimes describes himself as a 'Christian-Buddhist') to explore where this leaves them in

relation to the Church, their congregations, and spiritual life in general. This year Kulananda was invited to teach meditation and give a talk introducing Buddhism. His visit was a marked success and many of those attending expressed an interest in taking up meditation, visiting an FWBO centre, and exploring Buddhism. □

Jewels is primary and the way in which we live out that Going for Refuge is secondary.

The Open Letter calls for an openness to the beneficial influences from secular and other religious traditions, and acknowledges the need to develop psychologically oriented practices from within existing Buddhist traditions. Here again we might have been more explicit.

Since Freud, many Westerners have adopted an often unconscious view that all forms of mental discomfort can be overcome at their own level, without any need for self-transcendence. Along with that belief has come an increasing tendency towards narcissism and excessive self-preoccupation.

In a world where instant results are often expected, and where all known problems generate their own specialized therapies, Buddhism offers Westerners a radical critique of their attitude to psycho-physical unease. In suggesting that discomfort is endemic to self-preoccupation, Buddhism offers a path to genuine mental health by way of self-transcendence. Thus, although we might have recourse to psycho-therapeutic techniques in cases of acute dysfunction, we must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that the ultimate aim of Buddhism is self-transcendence.

Moreover, as we find ourselves employing psychological techniques that derive from traditions outside Buddhism, we must take care to subject them to a thorough Buddhist critique. The metaphysical frameworks that underpin such techniques must be considered in the light of Buddhist thinking, for otherwise we might find ourselves unwittingly bringing non-Dharmic elements into our Dharma teaching. Great

care is needed to assimilate psychological techniques to the Dharma and not to reduce the Dharma to the level of psychological technique.

In the Open Letter, we suggest that 'one's position as a teacher arises in dependence on the request of one's students, not simply on one's being appointed as such by a higher authority.' This statement derives, in part, from the tradition that one can only teach upon request. In the Tibetan and Zen contexts in particular, perhaps, with their strong emphasis on the authority of a teacher and the authority of his or her lineage, it is very important to acknowledge that the student bears at least part of the responsibility for the quality of their relationship with their teacher. But although we have begun to look into the issue, we are a long way from exhausting our enquiries. Although there is no explicit mention of it in the Letter, much of our time in Dharamsala was taken up in discussions of the nature of authority and lineage in the transmission of Buddhism to the West. This is a discussion which will run and run. In time, I hope we will come to consider examples such as the FWBO's re-characterization of the teacher-student relationship in terms of spiritual friendship. In the context of spiritual friendship there is no question of anyone's being appointed by someone else, rather it is a relationship of mutual openness and mutual commitment. The signatories to this letter are all too aware that, as Buddhism comes to the West, we must beware of blindly importing with it a set of relations more appropriate to a previous, feudal, context.

Coming on to the question of unethical conduct amongst teachers, it must be

emphasized that the emerging Network of Western Buddhist Teachers is not setting itself up as a kind of Star Chamber or Inquisition. To do so would be entirely un-Buddhist—and would run entirely against the spirit of openness and enquiry that characterized much of our meeting.

Indeed, although we can rejoice in having arrived at the common view that the Five Precepts are a basic, common foundation for Buddhist ethics, there was no clear consensus amongst us as to how these were to be interpreted and applied. Do we take the fifth precept, for example, as implying complete abstention from alcohol? Obviously not, as some of those present enjoyed an occasional social drink. Nor was there a clear consensus as to what is meant, in the third precept, by 'sexual misconduct'. Clearly we were not advocating complete chastity: several of the teachers present were married or otherwise involved in sexual relationships. But where are the boundaries? Some of those present had current sexual relationships with people who were once their students.

All of us were concerned that students should not suffer abuse at the hands of their teachers and yet, in an age where people seem to be increasingly encouraged to think of themselves as victims—as passively non-responsible for many of the circumstances of their lives, and where the very notion of 'abuse' has itself become highly problematized—were we really wise to advocate without further qualification the publicizing of 'any unethical behaviour of which there is irrefutable evidence'? This difficult area calls, perhaps, for calmer and deeper reflection than we were able to bring to bear during the course of our meeting.

Nonetheless we made an important start, particularly in our assertion that nobody can stand above the norms of ethical conduct and in our call for all Buddhist teachers to live at least by the Five Precepts, even if these may be variously understood.

The Letter affirms the need

for equality between the sexes in all aspects of Buddhist theory and practice. Is such a statement perhaps too bald, suggesting as it does that men and women have identical qualities and identical needs? Our experience in the FWBO, for example, has shown that men and women, left to their own devices, have different emphases in their approach to spiritual life. Thus in the Western Buddhist Order we have one Order and one ordination, but it is an Order with two wings: a men's wing and a women's wing, leaving the men and the women free to evolve the particularities of approach which are most suitable to their needs and conditions. An assertion of equality, misunderstood, might easily be read as denial of particularity.

Finally we must consider the part played by the Dalai Lama in our meeting. His willingness to participate made the process possible. Without his presence it is unlikely that so many busy teachers would have given up so much time to come together as we did. And there is no doubt that for many of the participants His Holiness's presence lent a kind of empowerment to the proceedings. In a sense he 'authorized' people to speak their minds and think their own thoughts. And yet much

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■

of our meeting was given over to questioning the very nature and validity of such authorization. We think of ourselves as Western Buddhist teachers. I hope the time will come when we will feel free and willing to meet simply as such. □

an association of british buddhist centres

At a meeting at the North London Buddhist Centre in September, representatives of a number of the British Buddhist Centres and organizations agreed to form an association. The initial purpose of the association is to invite the Dalai Lama to the UK in 1994 and to organize the visit. Beyond this it is hoped that it will provide a forum for Buddhists from different traditions to meet and develop trust and co-operation. □

reflecting on the usa

Sangharakshita talks to Nagabodhi about his brief but bracing encounter with Buddhism in the Bay Area

Did you have any general impressions of the American Buddhist scene prior to your recent visit?

Over the years I've had a certain amount of correspondence with a few American Buddhists, and I've been receiving American Buddhist magazines. So I have been able to form a few very general impressions. I have noticed, for instance, that Tibetan Buddhism has become an increasingly strong and vigorous influence. When I stayed at Yale in 1970, the dominant influence was that of Japanese Zen; there was hardly any trace of Tibetan Buddhism. Then there is the phenomenon of the Buddhist scholars—scholars in Buddhism who are themselves practising Buddhists. That can only be a positive development. I have also noticed, especially latterly, that the older generations of Asian teachers are in some cases being succeeded by native-born American teachers—and sometimes even by the American disciples of those American teachers. This certainly represents a development—one could perhaps even speak of an

'Americanization' of Buddhism.

There is a positive aspect to this. It means that, in the case of some groups, Buddhism is shedding a few of its Eastern cultural trappings and becoming more approachable and accessible. But there is a negative aspect as well, inasmuch as Buddhism seems to be becoming, to some extent, rather assimilated into the American way of life—which is not of course necessarily very Buddhist at all.

I was particularly struck, for example, by the promotion of 'vipassana' meditation as a technique quite dissociated from its foundations in Buddhism, and associated instead with a very worldly, almost secular sort of Western outlook. There seems also to be some talk of a 'family based' Buddhism. Here it would seem that the American idealization of the family has infiltrated some Buddhist circles. In the East, even where the Buddhism is very ethnic, no one ever talks in such terms. One can also see, judging especially from advertisements in the Buddhist press, that there is a good deal of commercialization involved. There are all sorts of fringe products associated with the Buddhist movement: 'lucky Buddhas', expensive, luxurious meditation cushions, all kinds of religious paraphernalia,

I think it's just that hordes of teachers have come across. To take a slightly realistic view, they are refugees, they've got to make a living, so they do it mainly through teaching the Dharma and handing out tantric initiations, with more or less of altruistic inspiration.

That's a pretty strong statement!

Well, they never came out of Tibet before. They never even thought of it. So inasmuch as they professedly upheld the Bodhisattva Ideal, one rather wonders why they didn't bother.

Did you find that you or the FWBO are at all well known in America?

It certainly transpired that I was well known through my writings. Quite a lot of people were familiar with *A Survey of Buddhism* and *The Three Jewels*. People were very welcoming and appreciative indeed. I was somewhat surprised to find myself being hailed wherever I went, quite explicitly and spontaneously, as an 'elder of the Western Buddhist movement'. The FWBO is probably rather less known. But with the establishment of an FWBO centre in San Francisco, and now that I have met personally several of the more important leaders in the States, I think there will be a greater awareness of the FWBO and what it stands for than hitherto.

What aspects of the FWBO seem to be attracting those who are

our emphasis on the importance of sangha and spiritual friendship, and appreciated the friendly atmosphere of the FWBO—though I must say that wherever I went, among other Buddhist groups, I found the atmosphere generally friendly.

Are people being drawn by our experiments with residential communities and Right Livelihood?

Most of the local Buddhist centres have retreat centres with associated communities, and even residential communities in cities. But they are all somewhat caught up with the family. You always seem to find married couples with children living at the retreat centres and city centres. There is no conception of the 'single-sex' situation or community. Even the Theravadin movement there is predominantly a lay movement. I would say that they have still to address the question of what we would regard as real spiritual communities, based on the single-sex principle.

There are certainly people engaged in Right Livelihood, though I don't think the ideal of Right Livelihood has been addressed in the same 'total' way as we've addressed it here. The main exception I encountered was Dharma Publishing. The people working there were completely committed to Dharma Publishing and its ancillary bodies. I am sure they also meditate and study, but they seemed to regard working for, with, and in Dharma Publishing as constituting a whole way of life, a whole spiritual commitment in itself—in a way that corresponded quite closely to our own attitude to Right Livelihood. I was very impressed by them.

Were any of your meetings with leading Buddhists particularly stimulating? Did you encounter any particular preoccupations among the people working there? I found *all* my meetings quite

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Left (from above) Sangharakshita at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, with members of Dharma Publishing and Dharma Enterprises, and at the San Francisco Buddhist Center

even insurance, legal services, and real estate. Some people are clearly making a lot of money out of all this.—One might even mention tantric initiations.

That takes us back to an earlier point. Why do you think there is so much enthusiasm for Tibetan Buddhism?

getting involved?

Although the majority of those who have joined the FWBO, at whatever level, have had substantial experience of other Buddhist groups, I kept hearing how much they appreciated the clarity of our teaching—of the Dharma in general and of meditation in particular. They also valued



stimulating and very agreeable. People were sincerely interested and willing to listen—but very ready to express their own ideas as well.

Although there was too little time to go into many things in sufficient depth, I think the preoccupation I encountered most often was one with issues of authority, with power and the abuse of power. In certain cases the abuse of power has led to disaster. This has been particularly the case when authority has been associated with institutional centralization—even over-centralization—with all authority, power, and financial resources being concentrated at the top of a pyramid, as it were, and in the hands, sometimes, of just one person. A lot of the Buddhists I met were concerned to find an alternative model. They were therefore interested in the FWBO's principle of decentralization, of having a large number of FWBO institutions that are legally and financially autonomous, instead of having just one big FWBO with branches that are controlled from the centre.

An allied theme to which we returned again and again was the importance of 'horizontal' spiritual friendship in addition to the 'vertical'. The man at the top of the organizational and spiritual structure was, in most cases, the guru. So they

were interested that in the FWBO we balance the vertical spiritual friendship with the horizontal.

Were people able to talk about their problems very freely?

The people at San Francisco Zen Center and at Green Gulch Farm were particularly open about their difficulties. They have already been reviewing their structures for some years, and I certainly got the impression that if they found anything that would be useful to them in our FWBO experience they would not hesitate to adopt it. Others spoke in a more general way.

There seems to be a fairly 'ecumenical' mood among West Coast Buddhists, quite a lot of mutual awareness and friendly contact.

Well, you use the word ecumenical, a term of Christian origin which means 'tending to promote unity'. Within the Christian context, this means unity among the churches. In a Buddhist context it would mean unity among different Buddhist groups. But what constitutes the basis for unity among Buddhists? So far as I see it, promoting the unity of different Buddhist groups could only come about through promoting an understanding of the centrality of the act of Going for Refuge. I don't think

there is an ecumenical movement in American Buddhism in that sense.

Abbot Tenshin Anderson recently wrote a very interesting article for *Tricycle* in which he made the point very strongly that American Zen Buddhists have concentrated on other aspects to such an extent as to lose sight of the Going for Refuge, but to what extent American Buddhists have made the Going for Refuge central, and if they do try to make it central, to what extent that will result in the modification—even the complete overhaul—of the tradition to which they belong, remains to be seen. One mustn't confuse being ecumenical with just being friendly. The Buddhist groups in the Bay area are certainly friendly. They were friendly towards me and I think they are friendly among themselves. But whether they could be said to be ecumenical is another question.

That friendliness gives rise to quite a lot of mutual contact and 'networking'. Does this seem to have a diluting effect?

As regards some people, the networking could lead to superficiality, but not in all cases. It was quite clear that each centre had a nucleus of quite devoted practitioners who, while having a friendly

attitude to members of other groups, were quite clearly getting on with their personal practice in the context of their own tradition. Dilution may be the case with some people, particularly perhaps those who are into the arts and who just draw on a little bit of Zen or Tibetan Buddhism for inspiration. But this by no means affects everybody.

In some of your talks on the 'Rain of the Dharma' you referred to 'cotton candy Buddhism' and the 'acid rain of the Dharma'. Can you say a little about this?

I coined the term 'candy floss—or cotton candy—Buddhism' after listening to some of the talks at the European Buddhist Union Congress in Berlin last year. Really, I was continuing a line of thought that began to develop there, but I thought a word of warning might be appropriate in the States.

Cotton candy is, first of all, pink—pink being the colour of pseudo-liberalism. It's sticky, it's sweet, and there appears to be a lot of it without there being any real substance. As taught by some people Buddhism seems to be rather like that. As for the 'acid rain': when talking about the 'Rain of the Dharma' I emphasized that it must be pure rain, pure Dharma. The 'acid rain' of the Dharma is a rain of the Dharma in which the purity of the rain is polluted by foreign elements, by -isms and ideologies that have nothing to do with the Dharma; they are in fact quite opposed to it, and deprive it of its specific identity. I referred for instance to Catholicism; I know that Philip Kapleau has complained about the integrity of the Zen tradition being threatened by teachers sanctioning Catholic priests and nuns as well as rabbis and ministers to teach Zen. Then of course there are those who mix up Buddhism with Feminism (with a capital F) and with all sorts of confused political ideas about egalitarianism. One could say that 'cotton candy Buddhism' represents Buddhism in a very weak and dilute form, whereas the 'acid rain of the Dharma' represents Buddhism as mixed not just with extraneous, but even with hostile, elements. □

sangharakshita diary

Sangharakshita returned from America at the end of June and spent three weeks at his London flat. On 17 July, he went to Padmaloka where he attended to the work of the Order Office, and was interviewed by Sinhadevi for *Dakini* magazine. The biennial convention of the Western Buddhist Order began on 26 July with the ten-day women's convention. In the course of this Sangharakshita travelled to Wymondham College several times and gave personal interviews, held an informal meeting with the women preceptors, and led a sevenfold puja, during which he conducted Samatha's anagarika ceremony.

On 1 August Sangharakshita travelled with Paramartha to Cambridge. *En route* they visited Ely Cathedral and then had lunch with Vajraketu and Kuladitya before seeing Cambridge's Evolution shop, the new Centre, and the new Windhorse Trading warehouse. Supper was in the company of the Cambridge men's chapters.

On 5 August the combined convention started and Sangharakshita travelled to Wymondham College where he stayed for the duration of the combined convention and the men's convention which followed. In the course of the combined convention he met Dharmacharinis, attended the talks, and chaired talks by Nagabodhi and Subhuti (at the

conclusion of Nagabodhi's he launched his latest publication, *Forty-Three Years Ago: Reflections on my Bhikkhu Ordination*).

Sangharakshita followed a regular routine throughout the men's convention. At lunch and supper each day one of the Order chapters was invited to join him. In the afternoons he saw people individually. Most evenings he attended the lecture.

After the convention he went to Padmaloka and then returned to Sukhavati where Nagabodhi interviewed him for *Golden Drum* about his trip to the US (see p.18). On 26 August he celebrated his 68th birthday and was pleased to receive over 100 cards from around the world: an exceptionally large number. In the course of the day he paid a visit to the new Oriental Gallery at the British Museum and had supper with Sukhavati community.

On 3 September Sangharakshita saw a production of Shelley's *The Cenci* at the Lyric Studio theatre and on the 9th he attended the opening of the new London Buddhist Arts Centre in Bethnal Green. Before the opening he had a meal in the Cherry Orchard Restaurant with the committee running the Arts Centre and the evening's speakers. In the course of the evening he formed part of a 'double act' with Padmavajra who gave a talk on themes in Sangharakshita's poetry which was illustrated by readings by the poet himself.

Also in this period, Sangharakshita was

invited to advise the team currently editing the forthcoming feature film, *The Little Buddha*. One of the editors used to attend FWBO classes at the old Archway Centre, and asked Sangharakshita to come to a studio in central London to advise on some of the special effects, in particular the nature of the Buddha's halo at the time of his Enlightenment. Sangharakshita had the impression that Bertolucci wants his film to be as authentic as possible.

Sangharakshita spent a great deal of time seeing people, many of them from overseas, and clearing up some of the backlog in his correspondence. He is now looking forward to getting on with some more writing. □



Sangharakshita being presented with a picture of Padmasambhava at Dharma Publishing

22

VAJRALOKA



22 Oct – 5 Nov **Meditation and Insight Retreat**

13 Nov – 27 Nov **Mindfulness Retreat**

29 Nov – 10 Dec **Teachers' Retreat**

for men Order members

11 Dec – 18 Dec **Open Practice Retreat**

18 Dec – 2 Jan **Mitra Winter Retreat**

for men who have asked for Ordination

29 Jan – 26 Feb **Rainy Season Retreat**

for men Order members

1 Mar – 12 Mar **Just Sitting Retreat**

18 Mar – 1 Apr **Brahmaviharas Retreat**

1 April – 8 Apr **Spring Retreat**

15 Apr – 29 Apr **'Mandala of Enlightenment'**

7 May – 21 May **Meditation and Insight Retreat**

21 May – 2 Jun **Mindfulness Retreat**

93/94

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trading up

Windhorse Trading, the FWBO's Right Livelihood gift business, moved to a much larger warehouse during July. The new warehouse, situated on an industrial estate near the centre of Cambridge, is about 15,000 square feet, approximately the size of a football pitch. The new premises will provide extra storage space for the rapidly expanding business. Turnover in 1992 was £2.8 million and for the second year running it appeared in the *Independent* list of the hundred fastest-growing private UK companies. Windhorse Trading now employs sixty-three people and plans to be running twelve shops over the Christmas period, seven of which are permanent undertakings. In addition, the new accommodation includes enough office space to house the men's sales and administration team as well as the women's accounts team which hitherto had separate premises. □

(Below) The Windhorse warehouse and (right) parents' and children's retreat



biennial order conventions

Every two years members of the Western Buddhist Order from around the world meet for a convention. This year the venue was Wymondham College in Norfolk. Women Order members met first for ten days, after which they were joined by their male fellows for the five-day combined convention. After that the men stayed on for a ten-day men's convention. Over 300 Order members attended some part of the convention, with a maximum of 227 on the combined event.

The event was marked by two principal themes. The first of these was the practice of revised versions of the five mula yogas (or 'fundamental spiritual practices'). These practices derive from the Tibetan tradition, but have now been reformulated and made available to Order members in more universal forms. Secondly, several of the talks gave consideration to the future of the Order and the FWBO in the light of Sangharakshita's increasing withdrawal from direct involvement in their affairs. □

ordinations at guhyaloka

This June twenty-six men were ordained at Guhyaloka Retreat Centre in Spain at the culmination of the annual men's four-month ordination retreat.

Their public ordinations were conducted by Suvajra, who from now on will be spending much of his time in India, working with the Indian ordination process. Meanwhile, Sangharakshita has agreed that Ashvajit, Padmavajra, Prakasha, and Surata (all members of the Padmaloka ordination team) can act as preceptors in the future. □

indian order members visit uk

Gaganabodhi, Adityabodhi, and Manjuvira, three senior Order members from India, came to the UK for two months in the summer. The principal focuses of their visit were the international Chairmen's meeting at Padmaloka and the Order convention that followed it. There they 'represented' the 152 Indian Order members—over one quarter of the Order. In the course of their visit they saw many of the FWBO's centres in the UK, gave a number of talks, and spent an evening knocking on doors with a team of Karuna Trust fund-raisers. □

new zealand retreat centre land

The Auckland Buddhist Centre has recently purchased 214 acres of land in Tararu Valley, on the Coromandel Peninsula, not far from Auckland.

The land will be used for a retreat centre and hopefully for an Australasian Going for Refuge retreat centre where people from both Australia and New Zealand will be able to prepare for ordination. The land is part scrub and part deciduous forest, and lies between two river valleys and includes valleys of its own. In addition, it borders on large areas of uninhabited country making it altogether very secluded.

The retreat facilities will have to be purpose-built and by 1995 work should be underway to plan and finance the building work. □

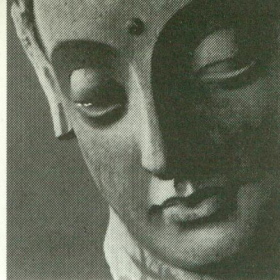
parents' and children's retreats

This August, for the third consecutive year, parents and children from around the London Buddhist Centre held a Families Retreat at Water Hall. For the parents, many of whom could not otherwise get away, these retreats offer a chance to have a break and to share experiences of practising within a family context.

Devapriya, who led the retreat, also led study on the *Sigalovada Sutta*, which gave rise to much discussion on how to form and develop supportive friendships.

For the children the retreats are an eagerly-awaited chance to get together with their friends and to learn something about Buddhism. They joined in with the pujas and spent a day with Saddhujivin, a teacher, under whose guidance they acted a play recounting the story of 'the blind men and the elephant'. A film crew from the *Sunday Morning* programme on ITV also joined the retreat for a day and an item appeared on the programme a few weeks later. The group also hold meetings in London and are keen to develop their activities further and contact other people in the FWBO who are in similar situations.

In early July, another group of twenty parents and children spent a week on retreat together at Dhanakosha, the FWBO's Scottish retreat centre. Focused around the creation of a Five Buddha Mandala, this retreat differed from the one at Water Hall in that, throughout the retreat, children and parents participated in almost all the activities together. □



what is a retreat?

A retreat is an ideal situation in which to take a fresh look at yourself and your life. On retreat you can relax and enjoy yourself. You can learn to meditate, or take your meditation further with the help of experienced teachers. This can help you develop clarity, confidence, energy, positive emotion – even a deep insight into yourself. A retreat is an ideal situation in which you can grow.

the programme

Every day will begin with a period of meditation practice, followed by a short work-period after breakfast. Further sessions of meditation will follow. There will be discussion groups every day, giving you the opportunity to talk about the retreat and to get to know some of the other people better.

In the afternoon, there will be an optional yoga period led by a qualified instructor. The programme will include 'communication exercises', which are simple techniques for encouraging our awareness and appreciation of others.

There will also be time to enjoy the countryside. In the evenings, there will be a series of talks by members of the team, and an optional puja. A puja is a devotional practice, intended to help us to strengthen our emotional connection with our ideals and aspirations.

the team

The retreat will be led by members of the Western Buddhist Order, who have been living and practising the Buddhist life for a number of years and have experience in various aspects of the Buddhist tradition, especially in meditation.

information

The retreat will be held at Sibford, a school in the Oxfordshire countryside near Banbury.

The dates of the retreat are Dec 23- Jan 1 inclusive; Thursday afternoon to Saturday morning. Some places are available for those unable to attend the whole retreat. However, priority will be given to ten day bookings.

Accommodation will be provided, normally in men's or women's shared rooms. The food will all be vegetarian, and we can accommodate special diets such as vegans.

The cost for the whole period £270 waged
£198 low waged
£144 NUS UB40s OAPs.
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If you want to come on the retreat, but are unable to simply because of the cost, please contact us and we will try to make it possible.

details and booking

London Buddhist Centre
51 Roman Rd.
London E2 0HU
081 981 1225

december

23

january

|

london buddhist centre winter

retreat

meditation at glastonbury

There is a large UK 'alternative' sub-culture which finds its fullest expression in summer festivals: latter-day hippies, 'grunge-heads', the much-reviled 'travellers', and a lot of young people looking for a meaningful alternative to conventional society. So, for the second year running, a team of twenty-five people from various FWBO centres (but based around the Croydon Buddhist Centre) set up a meditation tent at the Glastonbury Festival. In a large marquee situated in the festival's 'healing area' the team taught meditation and gave talks on Buddhism to around 700 people over three days. Shortly afterwards they visited the Phoenix Festival at Stratford-upon-Avon where around 200 people attended their activities. Next year they hope also to organize a retreat near the Glastonbury site. □

mexico

Upekshamati is a Mexican Order member currently living in the UK. Last spring he returned to Mexico City for three months. Whilst there he established contacts with local Buddhists and held nearly thirty classes of his own. The classes, which covered both meditation and Buddhism, were well attended and Upekshamati found that people were very interested in understanding Buddhism as a system of spiritual discipline. Both he and Shuddhavajra (another Mexican) hope to visit Mexico in the coming year to hold classes and retreats. In the longer term Upekshamati hopes to return to Mexico in the next few years to start the Mexico City Buddhist Centre. □



Clockwise (from top): The meditation tent at Glastonbury, Sanghapala in Dublin, Upekshamati takes a meditation class in Mexico, and inside the Glastonbury tent



activities start in newcastle

In July Subhadassi, Nandavajra, Narapriya, and Dharmaghosha moved to North Shields on the outskirts of Newcastle with the intention of starting FWBO activities in the city. Until now there have been no FWBO activities in the north-east of England. Their Dharma work got going with a six-week course held in the centre of the city, and they are hopeful that before long they will have their own centre. □

sukhavati builders reunion

Between 1975 and 1978 over seventy-five men worked together to turn the Old Fire Station in Bethnal Green into 'Sukhavati' and the London Buddhist Centre. The burned-out shell was gradually transformed, through freezing winters and impecunious summers, into a well-fitted, fifty-roomed, six-storeyed building.

On 1 August, around twenty of the builders assembled in the LBC on the fifteenth anniversary of the opening of Sukhavati. Among them Subhuti and Atula (two home-grown pillars of the project), and Robert Gerke and Jori Squibb (two Americans who lent their inimitable flavour to the proceedings). A video patchwork of material filmed during the construction work provided a few laughs, everyone present said something about those days, and the general feeling was one of good humour, warmth, and camaraderie. Ashvajit writes 'Although for most of us it had been a difficult, perhaps crucial time of our lives, the work provided us with a common project and a set of ideals. It was a joyous reunion and a most worthwhile project—as the present Sukhavati continues to testify.' □



fwbo ireland

Sanghapala moved to Dublin in January 1991 and started his Dharma work that March with a talk on 'Buddhism, Guilt, and Morality' at a vegetarian-Marxist co-operative in the bohemian quarter. A year on Sanghapala was running a weekly programme of classes from his flat. Today there is a public centre—the Dublin Meditation Centre—in a Georgian building in the centre of town running four classes or meetings a day. A thriving local sangha has emerged—including six mitras—which has recently been joined by Ratnabandhu.

Along the way Sanghapala has had to cope with hostile landlords, disruptions to meetings, and investigation by the 'Dangerous Cults Department'. Attempts to bridge the cultural divide include the composition of a Celtic puja and the translation of the *Heart Sutra* into Gaelic. This is the first time that there have been FWBO activities in Ireland, but Sanghapala is already thinking of extending the work to Cork and Galway. □

sangharakshita on film

In October a film on Sangharakshita was premiered on Finnish television. The film-maker, Ole Mallender (*left, with Sangharakshita*), is a long-time admirer of Sangharakshita and has a particular interest in his views on art. The programme is based around interviews with Sangharakshita and is illustrated with shots of Buddhist art. It is an excellent portrait of a particular side of Sangharakshita: he speaks about his childhood, his dreams, his visionary experiences—and those of some of his Tibetan teachers—and his responses to colour and to Western Art. The fifty-five minute film is entitled 'In the Realm of the Lotus' and is entirely in English. The production company has received interest from thirty television companies around the world and hopes that it will soon be seen in many countries including the UK. Mallender hopes to come soon to England to launch the film at the London Buddhist Arts Centre. □



the london buddhist arts centre

On 9 September nearly 200 people attended the inaugural event at the London Buddhist Arts Centre in Bethnal Green. The highlight of the evening was a talk by Padmavajra—illustrated by Sangharakshita reading his own poems. The inauguration followed an intensive period of renovation and decoration work on the main hall, during which over forty people helped out. The Arts Centre is in Eastbourne House, a large Victorian

building not far from the London Buddhist Centre. The space (*in the top floor of the building, right*) will allow for artists' studios, while the main hall is available for use as a rehearsal space or as a venue for workshops, classes, and performances. A series of events will be held in the autumn, and in the new year the Centre hopes to launch its first full programme. □



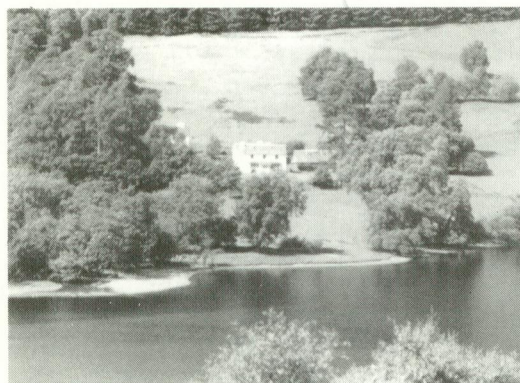
evolution arts and natural health centre

In September Brighton's 'Evolution Arts and Natural Health Centre' was officially opened by the Mayor of Brighton while two people associated with the Centre abseiled down the building dressed as a pink cat and a gorilla! The recent Summer School, which featured

courses in sculpture, massage, photography and art, was very successful. Other aspects of the Centre's work are well

underway. The Natural Health Centre is staffed by seven people, four of them Buddhists; studio space has been rented out and the autumn programme offers courses and workshops in a large number of arts. □

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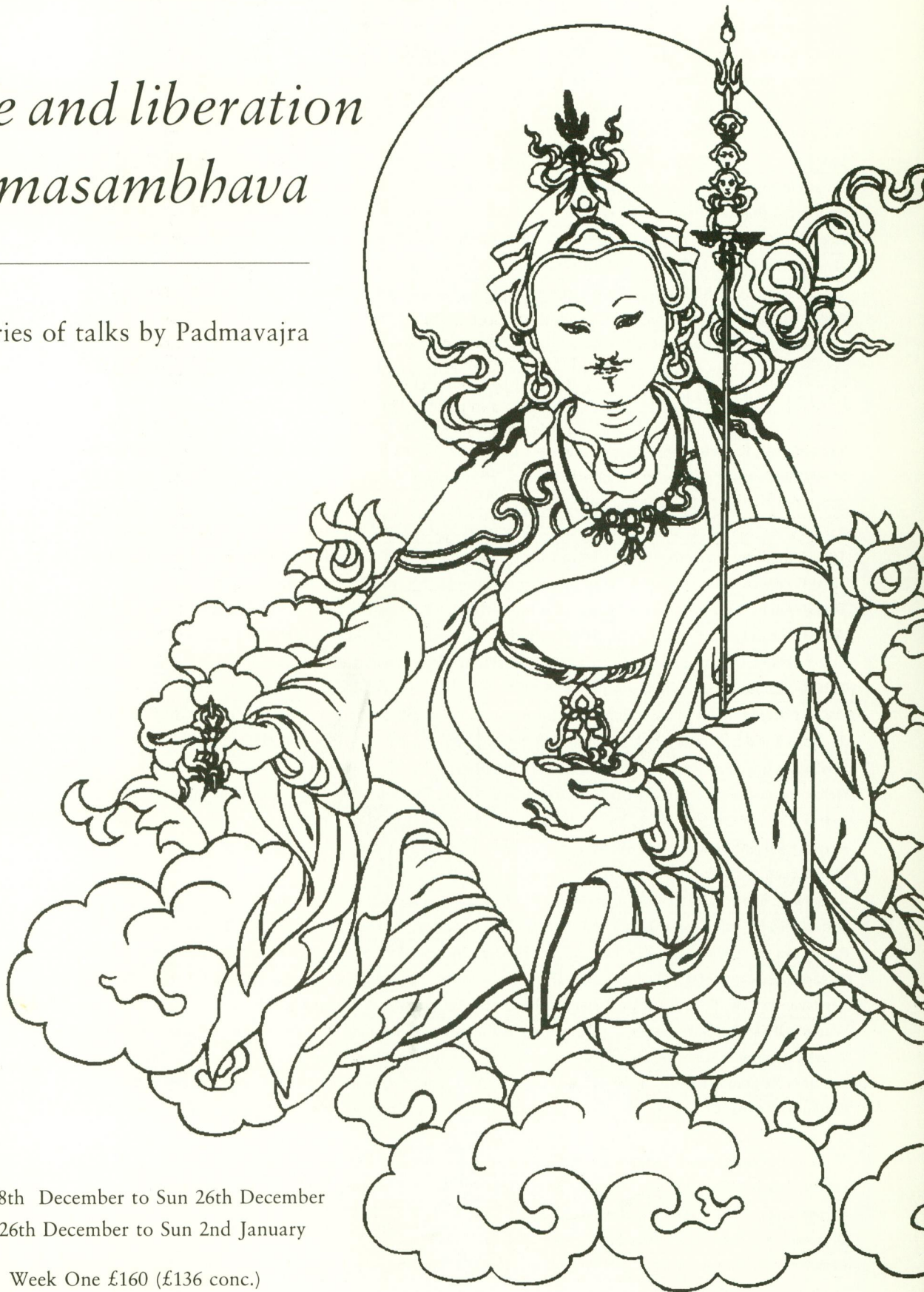
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West London Buddhist Centre , 112 Westbourne Park Road, London W2 5PL. Tel: 071-727 9382
Dublin Meditation Centre , 23 South Frederick Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. Tel: (1) 671 3187
Centro Budista de Valencia , Calle Ciscar 5, pta 3, 46005 Valencia. Tel: 06-374 0564
FWBO Germany , Buddhistisches Zentrum Essen, Herkulesstr. 13, 45127 Essen, Germany. Tel: 0201-230155
Helsingin Buddhalainen Keskus , PL 288, SF-00121, Helsinki 12, Finland
FWBO Netherlands , P.O. Box 1559, 3500 BN Utrecht, Netherlands
Västerländska Buddhistordens Vänner , Södermannagatan 58, S-116 65 Stockholm, Sweden. Tel: 08-418849
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Guhyaloka Retreat Centre (Spain) , c/o Lesingham House, Surlingham, Norwich, NR14 7AL. Tel: 0508-538112
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