



**golden drum**



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# Studying the **Dharma**

His life is not poor,  
He has riches beyond measure,  
Pointing to the moon...



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# editorial

Study of the Dharma is an integral and indispensable part of the Buddhist path. Perhaps the word 'study' has slightly intimidating overtones for many people, evoking less-than-fond memories of school or college, or of cramming for exams. But Dharma study is not essentially an intellectual — let alone an academic — exercise. It has been observed that the very simplicity of the Buddha's teachings is often what makes them difficult for our busy and complex minds to understand. Undoubtedly, we do have to use our intelligence to penetrate and gain an initial understanding of the Dharma teachings, but this is only one aspect. Studying the spoken or written Dharma equally involves our capacity to feel and to employ our creative imagination in order to penetrate into the images, symbols, similes, and parables with which the Dharma teachings abound. In essence, Dharma study is a process of assimilation which leads us to sympathize or 'vibrate with' the Dharma in its ultimate purity and simplicity. In this way, we enable the Dharma to enter, simplify, and progressively transform our lives.

But this still leaves many questions about Dharma study unanswered: how has Dharma study been understood and approached by Buddhists in the past? What, exactly, are we aiming to achieve in our study of the Dharma? Which are the best ways to go about it? Are some approaches unhelpful? How might study in the more usual sense of the term — particularly the academic field of 'Buddhist studies' — relate to the needs and purposes of Dharma study? I hope that the articles in this issue of *Golden Drum* will shed light on these and a number of related questions.

Dharma study has been an integral element of FWBO practice since its inception. In fact, Sangharakshita's particular emphasis on leading study seminars and giving series of lectures on the Dharma during the first ten or so years of the FWBO's existence represented not just a pragmatic means of communicating the Dharma to a new group of disciples, but also a thoroughly traditional approach. For the Dharma to be passed on from one generation of practitioners to the next it has to be communicated *personally*, and this has been the case from the time of the Buddha right up to the present. Personal communication is integral to Dharma study. But why is this?

We could say that, at all levels, Dharma study is essentially about the overall objective of Buddhism itself: seeing things as they really are. Studying the Dharma is not, however, just a matter of familiarizing oneself with various items of abstract, factual information about 'how things are'. As already intimated, it's much more a matter of coming to understand how, exactly, this information applies to oneself and then transforming oneself in the light of this understanding. It's at this point that Dharma study begins to bite! It may not, for instance, be so very difficult to gain some understanding of the Buddhist teaching that all

things are 'empty' of real, permanent existence; it's far less easy to take on board one of the implications that is drawn from this: that we should give up certain attachments; ultimately all of them.

The Dharma needs to be communicated personally because each of us is unique and will respond to challenges such as this in a unique way. Hence, perhaps the single most important element of Dharma study is gaining a perspective on the appropriate *practical* implications of the teachings for oneself. An appropriate application of the same teaching could, for instance, be very different indeed for a twenty-year-old single woman and a fifty-year-old man with a family. Such individual and practical understanding cannot be achieved just from reading about Buddhism in books. Unfortunately, most of us rarely have sufficient objectivity either to face squarely the sheer challenge of the Dharma teachings or to achieve a clear perspective on what the immediate, personal implications of what we are reading might be. We need the help of others.

This is why, in the FWBO, group Dharma study is the primary means by which the Dharma is 'transmitted'. This is not to say that personal Dharma study is unnecessary or unimportant; only that it is secondary to study in the context of personal communication. Group Dharma study need not be, and in the FWBO is not, restricted to a single form. It can, in fact, take any number of guises, from formal 'seminars' led by a senior and experienced Order member to unled discussion groups in which people with a similar level of experience take up a Dharma topic. The vital factor is that one is studying the Dharma with others who have a perspective on the Dharma and a perspective on *oneself*.

In an FWBO Dharma study group, one is likely to be studying some topic of the Dharma itself, either from a traditional Dharma text or from an exposition of some aspect of the Dharma by Sangharakshita or another member of the Western Buddhist Order. But even before taking up a particular topic, the prerequisite for anyone wishing to study the Dharma, as Sangharakshita makes clear at the beginning of his *magnum opus*, *A Survey of Buddhism*, is the development of Right Motive. Right Motive has to be founded on an understanding of what it is that one is trying to achieve through engaging in Dharma study in the first place. While this issue of *Golden Drum* cannot possibly deal with the vast area of Dharma study exhaustively, I hope that the articles which follow, by helping to clarify the nature and functions of Dharma study *per se*, will not only prove intrinsically interesting but also make some contribution towards helping readers develop and deepen this all-important quality of Right Motive.

**Tejananda**

# a tradition

**Saramati** surveys the approaches to Dharma study taken by our Buddhist predecessors

Near the end of the 12th century — when Oxford was but a fledgling association of independent scholars — Nalanda Mahavihara, greatest of all the Buddhist monastic universities, faced yet another wave of the Muslim marauders who were soon to complete its total destruction. Dating from the prime of the glorious Gupta Age (300 – 550 CE), Nalanda had already been the pre-eminent educational institution in India for well over three-quarters of a millennium, attracting students, both monastic and lay, from virtually every corner of Asia — from Sri Lanka, Khotan, Kashmir, and Nepal on India's borders; from Tibet and Mongolia further afield; and even from Java, Sumatra, China, and Korea. For eight hundred years this great institution epitomized a venerable tradition of Buddhist study and enquiry. But how did this come about? The Buddha is well known for having urged his early followers to eschew metaphysical speculation in favour of verifying the Dharma directly within their own personal experience. How then, one may well wonder, did Buddhism come to produce its great universities? How, indeed, did systematic study become such a central part of Buddhist practice? To resolve this apparent paradox, we must understand more broadly the place that study occupied as Buddhism evolved over the centuries. We must consider the nature of Nalanda's greatness, but we must seek also to understand that greatness as the culmination of a much older tradition of study, one that does in fact stem from the time of the Buddha himself.

Why did Nalanda become so famous as a centre for higher education? Unlike the tradition of Vedic study carefully guarded by the Brahmins as their exclusive and hereditary prerogative, Buddhist learning was from the outset open to all. Moreover, because it was based in publicly supported monasteries, rather than in the private residences of individual Brahmin pandits, Buddhist education fostered a livelier and more interactive exchange of ideas from all sources. This approach in turn stimulated, indeed demanded, careful attention to the study of logic and rhetoric, epistemology, and critical metaphysics.

# of study



I-ching, a learned Chinese monk who studied in India at the end of the 7th century, describes a thriving community of three thousand monastic and lay scholars housed in the various monastic colleges at Nalanda. The individual colleges specialized in different fields of study, and each day was carefully divided into periods of instruction, regulated by a centralized system of water clocks and bells. Students could choose from as many as a hundred lectures a day, following a curriculum classically divided into five branches: grammar and philology, medicine, logic, the fine arts, and metaphysics. By the Pala Period (9th – 12th centuries), moreover, Nalanda had accumulated a substantial library housed in its own special complex of three buildings, and it is to our good fortune that visiting scholars were regularly allowed to transport copies of these texts back to their homelands throughout Asia, for the Muslim invaders were to prove themselves to be even more efficient at torching libraries than at butchering monks. Before that tragic end, however, the Buddhist universities of India were so highly respected that even the sons of prominent Brahmins were often sent by their fathers to study with the learned monks, in order to attain the broadest possible education.

Such was the glory of Nalanda's renown. But we must recognize that this attainment was but the flowering of a tradition of formal study which had much deeper roots, a heritage that was already a thousand years in the making before Nalanda first opened its doors. How then did this rich tradition of study and reflection grow up among the early followers of the Buddha? And to what ends was it directed? Consider first the Buddha's expectation that his followers not only master his Dharma, but that they make the path of liberation widely available 'for the welfare of the many (*bahujana hitaya*)'. In the *Mahavagga* (I,ii,i) we find the oft-cited exhortation: 'Go forth, O bhikkhus, on your wanderings, for the good of the many — for the happiness of the many, in compassion for the world — for the good, for the welfare, for the happiness of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. O bhikkhus, proclaim that Dhamma which is gracious at the beginning, at the middle and at the end.' The Dharma is thus to be doubly mastered: one is to realize it in one's own experience, and one is also to give expression to that realization for the benefit of all. Herein lies the basic impetus for study in Buddhism. Without careful analysis and investigation the path will remain obscure, never to be fully mastered. And without careful clarification and explication whatever experience one manages to gain of the Dharma will remain uncommunicated.

This twofold effort of clarification and communication lies at the very heart of Buddhism, and the emphasis on study for the sake of others was clearly established from the outset, well before the Mahayana effort to underscore the compassionate dimension of wisdom. Already in the *Mahaparinibbana Suttanta* (III,vii) we find the Buddha telling Mara that he will not leave this world until his followers, 'having themselves learnt the doctrine, shall be able to tell others of it, preach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear — until they, when others start vain doctrine, shall be able by their truth to vanquish and refute it, and so to spread the wonder-working truth abroad.' Not only were the disciples to be adept at presenting the Buddha-dharma, they were also to be skilled at refuting the prevailing false views of the day. But how was this complex charge to be undertaken?

Two specific and distinctive institutions of the early sangha evolved to fulfil this dual expectation of the Buddha: the practice of 'reliance' (*nissaya*) on a pair of preceptors, and the formal discussion of doctrinal topics (*abhidhamma-katha*). The first ensured that one properly mastered the path, while the second provided practical training in the exposition of the Dharma and the critique of any 'wrong views' that might undermine its dissemination. Under the personal guidance of one's preceptors and through systematic training in basic Dharma, one's approach was to be both analytical and intuitive. Discerning

analysis of the various constituents of existence and experience (*dhamma-vicaya*) was often cited as a crucial skill. Yet the role of imagination and insight was clearly stressed as well.

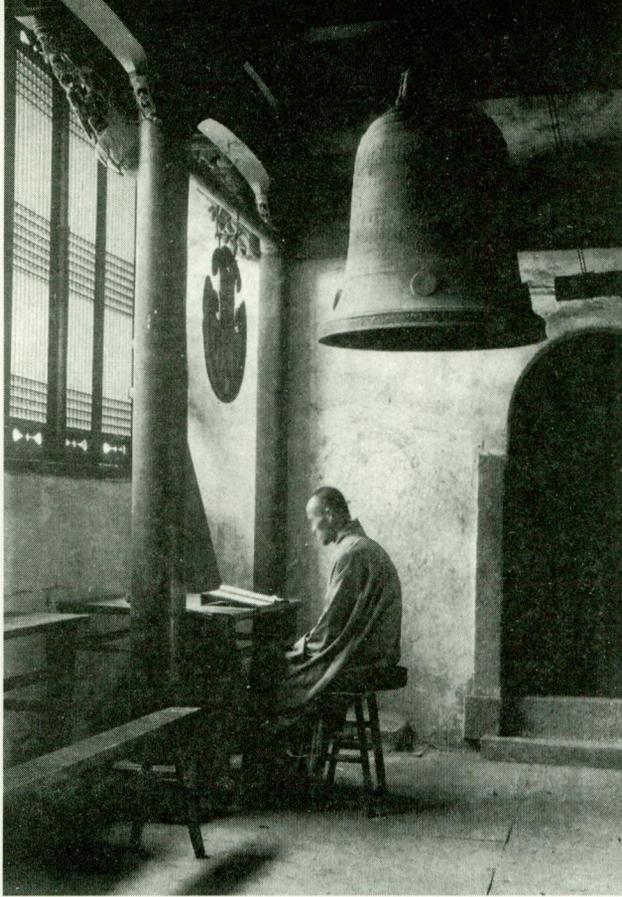
This synergistic combination of discrimination and vision turns up in even the earliest canonical literature. In the *Patisambhidamagga*, for example, we find an intriguing inquiry into the nature of spiritual understanding. Kondanna, one of the five ascetics with whom Siddhartha had practised austerities, became the Buddha's first disciple and the first arhat, we are told, as the result of a fourfold 'comprehension' (*patisambhida*). He comprehended the *principles* of the Buddha's first sermon; he comprehended the teaching's true meaning or *import*; and he comprehended the *language* by which it was expressed. Yet his liberation was complete only when he finally comprehended also the *inspiration* from which it arose. The first three aspects of Kondanna's comprehension thus culminated in this final direct insight into the Buddha's inspiration — into his *patibhana* or 'brilliant exuberance', a term referring in Sanskrit aesthetics to the artistic genius of a poet skilled at improvising verse. The Dharma radiates out of the Buddha's creative imagination, in other words, and it can be fully comprehended only through a comparable and corresponding act of inspired vision. Study within the Buddhist tradition thus necessarily includes critical analysis, but always in the service of this ultimately creative imagining.



**Discussion group, Covent Garden Meditation Centre**

On hearing the Buddha's exposition of the Middle Path and the Four Noble Truths, Kondanna partook of the inspiration underlying the teaching to realize directly for himself that 'everything subject to arising is subject to cessation', the insight that triggered his liberation. What other doctrinal topics were the subject of the early disciples' critical analysis and inspired comprehension? To answer this question, we must consider yet another important development of early Buddhism, the idea of *matrikas* or 'matrices'. One of the first efforts of the early oral tradition was to compile formulaic lists or matrices of the principal teachings of the Buddha. The Pali *Abhidhamma*, which grew out of this exercise, recognizes a total of 122 of these matrices or meta-lists, with similar compilations to be found in the canons of other schools. It was the content of these matrices that was the focus of early Buddhist study: They were mastered individually, and then they were subjected to a meticulous process of correlation and cross-referencing. Seeking to understand better just what was involved in this type of study, we can turn to one of the earliest of these dharmic matrices, a core list of essential doctrinal topics said to have been formulated by the Buddha himself.

In the *Mahaparinibbana Suttanta* we find what many scholars consider the oldest and most basic of these matrices for Buddhist study. At Vaishali, not long before the Buddha's demise, Ananda had beseeched the master to provide some guidelines for the sangha soon to be left leaderless. The Buddha



**Chinese monk studying, 1930s**

replied that rather than concerning themselves with his physical body (*rupa-kaya*), the monks should rely on the 'body of his Dharma', his *dharma-kaya*. Asked of what this dharma-body consists, the Buddha enumerated a matrix of seven key doctrinal formulae which, when fully expanded, came to be known as the 'Thirty-seven Aids to Enlightenment', a core summary of the tradition, both 'Hinayana' and Mahayana. The seven parts of this 'Vaishali Summary' thus provide us with a good idea not only of what the Buddha considered central to his teaching, but also of the topics most frequently studied by his early followers.

First in this 'Vaishali Summary' come the 'Four Bases of Mindfulness' as taught in the *Satipatthana Suttanta*, where one is enjoined to cultivate mindfulness of the body, of the feelings, of thoughts, and of the various objects of thought. Next come the 'Four Right Efforts', another theme frequently encountered in the early discourses. In this case, one strives to eliminate unskillful actions that have already occurred, prevent those that have not yet occurred, cultivate skillful actions not yet present, and perpetuate those that are present. Third come the 'Four Roads to Supernormal Abilities', namely the cultivation of strong intention, assiduous effort, mental application, and examination. Fourth comes the well-known list of the 'Five Spiritual Faculties': faith or confidence (*shraddha*), enthusiastic effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Fifth come the 'five powers', which represent the maturation of the preceding faculties into firm dispositions. Sixth is the list of the 'Seven Factors of Enlightenment': mindfulness, dharma analysis, enthusiastic effort, rapture, serenity, concentration, and equanimity. And finally there is the 'Eightfold Path': right (or perfect) vision, emotion, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

Considered as a whole, and especially when taken as the Buddha's own summation of his teaching, the most striking feature of this matrix or 'list of lists' is its eminently practical nature. Listed here are not abstract theories, but rather qualities of mind and character — spiritual qualities, not simply to be reflected upon intellectually but to be cultivated as the very expression of one's manner of being in the world. While the programme of study was eventually, as we have seen, to extend well beyond this core matrix, it is here that we can best see the essential nature of Buddhist study. It is here that we find the

roots that were to nourish the rich and variegated tree of learning that eventually flowered in the great Buddhist universities of Nalanda and Valabhi, of Vikramashila, Odantapura, Vajrasana, and Somapura, and in those of China and Tibet as well. This is the same tradition that struggles even now to take root in the West, and it is in this latter context that we should consider one further question.

What is the greatest danger we face in our efforts to assimilate this great heritage of Buddhist study and reflection? Is there some course we might take, however inadvertently, that would lead not to an infusion of Buddhist wisdom into the West, but to a merely superficial appropriation of Buddhist 'data' into the already overloaded coffers of Western knowledge? Perhaps we can take a cue from the tradition itself. Was not much of Vajrayana, of Zen, and even of Pure Land Buddhism, a reaction against certain spiritually stunting tendencies within the tradition, a rejection of the dry and arid scholasticism that eventually made its way into Buddhist scholarship? Is it possible to reach a point of too much study? Or does the danger lie rather in losing track of the original impetus of study as outlined above? The Vajrayana *siddhas* and Zen masters were right to re-focus their attention on the experience that is directly and immediately at hand. But study — at least in the truly Buddhist sense of the term — need not sever us from our experience; and especially not if it maintains a healthy balance between the analytical and the inspirational dimensions of comprehension laid down by the early tradition.

To be sure, the spiritually debilitating acquisition of information for its own sake or for the sake of worldly gain will remain a danger for modern Buddhists. This type of learning is a characteristic feature of contemporary education, and it has arisen historically within the Buddhist tradition as well. Already, by the 1st century CE, the *Mahavamsa* notes that there were monks in Sri Lanka who were recognized as 'book-specialists' (*ganthadhura*). Such specialization was, no doubt, a quite natural development, but later commentaries note a subsequent, more ominous, development, a division between the *ganthadhuras* and those monks who specialized in the meditative cultivation of insight, the *vipassanadhuras*. This suggests that study and meditation came to be seen, in some circles at least, as mutually exclusive vocations, and it was a development that no doubt contributed to the 'scholasticization' of Buddhist study that Nagarjuna sought to resist with his trenchant critique of certain rationalistic tendencies among the Abhidharmikas. This division very likely contributed as well to a secularization evident at Nalanda itself. In his praise of the great university, I-ching notes that many of the students at Nalanda pursued their studies in order to secure prestigious positions in the service of court, an aspiration more likely to garner wealth and power than spiritual insight. It was, no doubt, such worldly-minded monks and lay students who ridiculed Shantideva for his lack of ambition when he first arrived at Nalanda — the same monks he was later to chide for their arrogance and aloofness in his famous *Bodhicharyavatara*.

Buddhism has nurtured the spiritual and didactic value of systematic study from its earliest days. And it made a major contribution to South Asian culture with the Nalanda ideal of a liberal higher education, rigorously pursued and open to all. Yet we have also seen that Buddhism has not always been successful in preventing the appropriation of its scholarship to serve quite mundane goals and values, a tendency that was only encouraged whenever study was estranged from its roots in spiritual practice. Perhaps it is thus of no small significance that within the *rwbo* the pre-eminent centres for meditation and for study — Vajraloka and Vajrakuta — are located but a short stroll apart. Surely it is only through carefully maintaining the vital connection between meditation and study that Western Buddhists will succeed in transplanting and revitalizing the true strength of the ancient Buddhist tradition of study and critical enquiry.

One of the fundamental purposes of Dharma study is to uncover and rectify our wrong views about the nature of reality — 'how things really are'. Ultimately, we will have to deal with very subtle views, such as the belief that there is a really existing permanent 'selfhood' in things. But initially we need to examine our experience in the light of the Dharma in order to uncover and deal with much cruder levels of wrong view, and it is with some of these, and particularly how they arise in the context of our modern Western society, that I want to deal in this article.

Though we Westerners generally like to think of ourselves as liberated, independent, and free-thinking, we are likely to find, if we examine them, that many of our own views are little more than regurgitations of the views and opinions that surround us. Our views are deeply influenced by prevalent ideologies, both 'straight' and 'alternative', by educational, social, and political institutions, and, maybe above all these days, by the relentless impact of the media. These received views determine our perceptions of the world and of human nature, and form our attitudes to life, to ourselves, and to each other. Just how many truly independent thoughts — let alone original ones — are the majority of us are likely to have between the cradle and the grave?

Socrates is supposed to have said that our heads are round in shape so that our thoughts can change direction. Be this as it may, the most important thing for us to clarify in the first place is what it is that steers our thoughts, or views, in a particular direction. The Buddhist perspective is that the influence which has decisive steering power is the constant succession of likes and dislikes which arise from the basic defilements of our unenlightened mind: craving, hatred, and delusion.

Following from this, a factor which has a great deal of influence on the form our thoughts and views take is the desire for acceptance. The majority of people, if removed from their usual surroundings and placed in an unfamiliar society with none of their usual supports, are soon likely to change their views on important issues. Human beings in general have a very strong tendency to adopt views in order to gain

approval or affirmation from members of the groups in which they find themselves.

As Buddhists, one of our main tasks is to clarify our thinking and free ourselves from the grip of wrong views. In doing so we always need to be mindful of the power of the 'gravitational pull' towards craving, hatred, and delusion. Until we reach Stream Entry, the point at which our spiritual momentum reaches such intensity that we start to move permanently beyond the pull of craving, hatred, and delusion, our views — and therefore our loyalties — can change

direction. Until then we are susceptible not only to wrong views themselves but also to the emotional packaging they come wrapped in, especially the cynicism, narcissism, and consumerism of the modern West and its materialistic explanations and interpretations of human nature and human needs. To begin to go beyond these pressures and our own narrow selfhood, we need a point of reference outside them: a transcendental critique of our views.

It's no coincidence, then, that the



# From **Wrong View** to **Perfect Vision**

**Right View is fundamental to the Buddhist Path. Sinhadevi explains how study helps us develop it**

Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path begins with *samyag drishti*, which can be understood both as Right View and Perfect Vision. The translation 'Perfect Vision' suggests that we are most truly moved — moved to change — not by thoughts, reflections, and explanations, important as these are. Our essential being will only be persuaded by *vision* which is touched by the magical inconceivability of Enlightenment itself. Vision such as this can change not just the direction of our thoughts, but the direction of our very being. With it, we find ourselves looking outwards and upwards, from the

## Human beings have a very strong tendency to adopt views in order to gain approval

shores of this toiling world, towards the wondrous, starry vastness of Reality.

But such vision, if it is to transform our lives fully, must percolate through to all our faculties. Before we can dwell fully in the magic of Perfect Vision, we must go back to basics and, through studying, understanding, and acting on the critique that the Dharma provides, establish Right View in our lives.

Right View will always stand up to the fire of reason, and the development of reason is an important approach to establishing Right Views. Firstly, though, it is important to distinguish reason from its 'near and far enemies'. 'Near enemies' of reason include dogmatism and rationalization. Dogmatism can be defined as the obstinate assertion of an apparently established law as authoritative, even when there is evidence which refutes its validity. Rationalization, in the sense in which I am using it here, is a process of 'reasoning' which proceeds from false assumptions, often based on negative emotions. The 'far enemy' or diametric opposite of reason is irrationality. Irrationality is a denial of the value of objectivity or logic, a stubborn discounting of any evidence which challenges dearly-held views.

Reason, on the other hand, means openness to the consideration of all

available evidence, guided by consistency and logic and underpinned by positive emotion. Through studying the Dharma we begin to train ourselves in the practical use of reason, exposing our erroneous thinking as we establish ourselves in Right View, the first step towards Perfect Wisdom.

For us Westerners, as I have already suggested, this process has to begin with our becoming aware of some of the prevailing views in our culture which contravene both reason and Right View. Let's see what a few of these views are.

A wrong view which has its roots in current Western preconceptions concerns the Buddhist approach to views themselves. It runs something like: 'Buddhism teaches that we must go beyond views, therefore, all views are equally to be eschewed'. It's true that Buddhism teaches that the pursuit of Perfect Wisdom will eventually lead us to 'no-views', that is, the realization that all views are empty (*shunya*) of ultimate validity. The confusion which arises here is that between 'ultimate truth' — that which pertains to Enlightenment itself — and 'relative truth' — that which pertains to ourselves, now, as unenlightened beings. Unless we can firstly identify what is relatively true, in terms of understanding views which distinguish how things are from how they are not, we will have no basis for the ultimate realization that all views are empty. After all, if all views are to be eschewed, it would be just as valid to say 'nothing ever changes' as to say 'all things are impermanent'. Yet the first statement (taken at face value) is obviously untrue, whilst the second is an important indicator of 'how things really are'.

The tendency to deny all views, or to say that all views are equally valid, is itself a reflection of a very prominent view in our own late 20th century Western society: relativism. Relativism proceeds from the notion that there is no such thing as 'objective truth'; rather, there are only differing 'value-systems', each of which has equal validity and value. The Buddhist critique of relativism is that it is at root a wrong view because, as we have just seen, at the level of relative truth some views (and hence values) really do point to 'how things really are', whereas others point in quite the opposite direction.

Relativism has insinuated itself into every aspect of current thinking, undermining notions of objective truth with the view that what one holds to be 'true', or the values one upholds, are merely a matter of 'preference'. Accepting this and not questioning anyone else's views or values is usually, mistakenly, referred to as being 'open', or 'non-judgemental'. So insistent is this notion of 'openness' at times that, as Allan Bloom puts it in *The Closing of the American Mind*, anyone who has any degree of conviction at all is accused of being an absolutist.

Objective truth, by way of contrast, is independent of subjective likes and dislikes, demonstrable through the use of reason, and consistent with all the available evidence. The pursuit of objective truth and what is objectively good (in Buddhist terms *kushala*, or skilful) means that of necessity we must make judgements and be discriminating if we are to establish that which is true, good, and skilful in our lives.

What are the consequences if objective truth is not acknowledged? First of all, there is a strong tendency, given the power that craving, hatred, and delusion have over us, to fall back on narrowly self-referential yardsticks in any situation where one's 'interests' are in question. Then, communication is undermined (especially in matters of dispute) because each party holds their own views and position to be, in the absence of any objective referent, indisputably valid. In such conditions, the views of those in power, or of a charismatic leader who becomes a figure of false authority, are the ones that tend to prevail.

Such are at least some of the possible outcomes of putting one's faith in erroneous thinking and wrong views. As Ryokan puts it: 'If you point your cart north when you want to go south, how can you arrive?' If, on the other hand, we study, understand, and place our faith in the Dharma we can, using the raft of Right View, steer ourselves away from the mud of social approbation, out from the shallow waters of our own subjective preferences, through the currents of dogmatism and the choppy waters of irrationality, beyond, eventually, the narrow straits of the conditioned altogether, until we find ourselves floating free under the full moon of Perfect Wisdom.

**Kamalashila** points towards the ultimate conclusion of  
Dharma Study

## **Beyond** Dharma Study



The Buddhist tradition ascribes the highest value to insight. It doesn't want us to be 'saved' by God or his representatives or even, ideally, to go to heaven. Buddhism does, of course, 'want' people to be happy. But, unlike theistic faiths, it sees the highest spiritual goal as the breaking through of our illusions. We do this by developing transcendental wisdom, or *prajna*, and attaining 'knowledge and vision of things as they really are': seeing *shunyata*, the open, 'empty' nature of conditioned existence.

From this it should be obvious that the Buddhism understanding of the word 'insight' is different from its everyday meaning. Usually the word suggests a breakthrough on to a new level of comprehension. This may be about something relatively mundane — how exactly to cook a good curry, or how to formulate a neat sentence. Or we may be encouraged to 'gain insight into our own strengths and weaknesses'. On a somewhat higher level, we may speak of a 'lightning-flash of insight' which suddenly causes us to realize, say, the truth of a notion we had dismissed as irrelevant.

But for Buddhism, all of these are what we might call insights with a small *i*. The sense in which Buddhism uses the term is of a totally different order. We could call it Insight with a *capital I*. It is a special kind of 'experience' — if that is the right word — which transcends mundane existence and effects a permanently positive change in our whole being. As such, it is considered the most significant factor in the whole field of human development. (Though it's by no means the only one: Buddhism also values compassion, which it sees as a *dimension* of insight.) This is not to say that our mundane, 'lower-case' insights involve no spiritual element at all. There may at least be a realization, at some level, that there is more to be understood. If we can recognize this we have a basis for the cultivation of deeper levels of understanding. According to tradition there are three successive levels of *prajna*, or wisdom, called 'listening', 'reflecting', and 'meditating'.

The first and most basic is *shrutamayi prajna*, the wisdom of learning or 'listening'. This is the stage which we normally think of as 'Dharma study', in which we listen to (or read) the Dharma, taking the ideas in and adding them to our stock of knowledge. For example, newcomers might learn about Buddhism by reading all the literature they can, attending lectures, and sitting in on discussions. But of course, study at this level of 'listening' is not limited to newcomers. The knowledgeable don't stop adding to their knowledge, it is simply that the road to wisdom begins



Kerouac

there. In fact, even for the knowledgeable — perhaps especially for them — it is rarely easy simply to listen. We are too ready to interpose preconceived ideas and assumptions between ourselves and our 'listening' material, whether it is about the Dharma or simply a point that someone is trying hard to get across. If we really want to understand what the Dharma is trying to 'tell' us, we must inhibit our instant, automatic reactions.

In the course of our Dharma study at this level we shouldn't expect to dispense with assumptions altogether: the very structure of our thinking is built on working assumptions based on past experience. However, if we cling to them rigidly our assumptions will certainly spoil our understanding. For example, to some degree popular Western assumptions about Buddhist teaching have been influenced by writers such as Jack Kerouac and Robert Pirsig. These have collectively helped give Buddhism the image of being a highly rational, yet morally liberal tradition. While this is by no means totally wrong, assumptions about Buddhism based on such sources can often be vague and subtly misleading. Assumptions based on prevalent modern views such as empirical materialism can also get in the way if they lead us to insist, for example, that the Buddha couldn't really have taught on empirically unverifiable matters such as rebirth. But if we could at least acknowledge that he *may* in fact have done so, we can start thinking more deeply about why. We can, for example, ask ourselves with what exactly we disagree, if we do. Our understanding will then turn toward a deeper level, toward the mode of reflection, *chintamayi prajna* in Sanskrit, at which we integrate new ideas into our existing mental processes and gauge their effect on what is already in our mind.

The initial stage of taking in new ideas is comparable to eating something. *Chintamayi prajna*, which is still generally within the realm of Dharma study, is in a way comparable to digestion — it's partly an unconscious process. It certainly

takes time for the implications of new ideas to sink in, and until this has taken place they may seem somewhat abstract. But reflection also needs to be conscious and deliberate, for, as with food, we find certain ideas more palatable, and digestible, than others. We will certainly find ourselves resisting the Dharma at times. For example, we may object, 'all that stuff about *pratitya samutpada* and *shunyata* — it's so abstract I can't get interested in it.' Or we may resent the considerable attention given in Buddhism to seemingly 'morbid' themes like death and impermanence. But the most likely reasons we may experience Dharmic themes as abstract or depressing are, firstly, because we have reflected upon them insufficiently or unimaginatively, and, secondly, have not acknowledged their importance in our lives. The principle of *shunyata* seems an irrelevant abstraction to us only because we have not made it concrete: we need to reflect on its real significance. The inevitability of change — even of death itself — can, if seen within a context of spiritual development, become a source of great joy.

It is in the third stage that wisdom passes altogether beyond the realm of 'Dharma study' as such and becomes complete. This is known as *bhavanamayi prajna*. The word *bhavana* often refers to meditation (as it does in *metta bhavana*, the meditation on loving kindness), and this level of development of wisdom is often called *vipashyana*. *Vipashyana* means 'seeing': such practices involve first developing a clear and emotionally refined state of concentration known as *dhyana* and then, within that state, reflecting on a particular doctrine concerned with ultimate reality — for example *pratitya samutpada*, the interdependent nature of things. For this reason, this stage of wisdom is usually called 'meditating'. However, the main point is that here we begin to *embody*, rather than merely understand, the insight concerned.

In principle, *bhavanamayi prajna* is not to be identified with any formal meditation exercise. *Vipashyana* meditation, in the formal sense, is equally important as a means of developing the previous stage of Wisdom, reflection, where our understanding is penetrating into deeper levels of our being. The characteristic of *bhavanamayi prajna* is that we break through into Insight with a capital I — Insight which is irreversible. Having seen reality as it is, we will — happily — never be quite the same again! Such permanent transformation is, of course, the ultimate objective of Buddhist practice.

A common wrong view of the position of study in Buddhism is that it creates a hindrance to understanding.

This is the view that you don't need to know much about the Dharma in order to put it into practice, and that in this respect a simple-minded person is in a better position than an intellectual. But this is misleading because it is so superficial. Of course, the quantity of knowledge we imbibe is unimportant. The question is whether we can use what we know to clarify our doubts and deepen our understanding through reflection. If we don't know much, the need to clarify doubts may require that we find out more. If we already know a lot, we may need to weed our subjective assumptions out from what is objectively the Buddha's teaching. Either way, quantity is not an issue.

Of course, intellectual learning can involve pitfalls. But so can meditation, communication, ethical behaviour — and indeed every kind of spiritual practice that is done blindly, uncritically, and unreflectingly. If our intellectual learning of the Dharma is done for its own sake, and not aimed at the increase of *prajna*, then we will not try with our whole hearts and minds to clarify our uncertainties and gain the confidence to start practising it. Only on the basis of practical experience can we reflect effectively on Buddhist teachings and break through into wisdom, because we only *really* know, with confidence, when we know from experience.

# THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF BUDDHISM

What does academic study offer to the Buddhist world? An insider's view from **Sthiramati**

**W**hen I was talking with a friend in the Order recently, he used the expression 'academic Dharma study'. My view is that this is a contradiction in terms.

Dharma study surely involves reflection upon the doctrines and history of the Buddhist tradition as a means for achieving transformation of life and consciousness. Universities or colleges, the home of 'academia', offer courses in various fields or disciplines which touch upon some aspect or another of the Buddhist world, but, quite rightly, they never offer to train students as Buddhists. That is properly the domain of the Buddhist 'seminary'.

Even so, having spent the last eight years within the academic world, I am confident that Buddhists have much to learn and to gain from attending university, but only if they keep each world in its proper place. Then the insights of the academic world can contribute to the Dharma life of the practising Buddhist. However, we must never forget that the correct application of this learning to Dharma practice is the business of the individual person and their Buddhist teacher.

Some of the scepticism regarding academia that I have met with amongst Buddhists seems to have arisen from mistaken expectations — for example, that it should serve the interests and needs of the Sangha. I have heard people express shock at the fact that (non-Buddhist) college teachers do not observe the precepts 'even though they are teaching about Buddhism'; or irritation at the way dictionaries of Pali or Sanskrit 'don't follow the order of the alphabet'(!), or that dictionary entries for the term *mitra* don't expound the virtues of spiritual friendship!

These are no more than examples of naïvety. We must accept that academic institutions are independent (at least from Buddhism, in the West) and are engaged in a coherent and valuable intellectual and educational enterprise. They are peopled by those who are drawn to study some aspect of the Buddhist tradition, often without being Buddhists themselves. This they are rightly free to do. Needless to say, some Buddhists are uncomfortable (in varying degrees and for various reasons) with the prospect of the Buddhist tradition being studied by non-Buddhists. There are several responses to this discomfort.

The bottom line is that there is little we can do about the situation. I certainly do not believe that it would be to the advantage of the Dharma if we were able to impose some sort of embargo upon the study of Buddhism, restricting it to *bona fide* Buddhists alone. Of course, there are academics who misunderstand Buddhist doctrine and practice, and propagate

those misunderstandings. This is irritating, even potentially tragic, and their views should be corrected if at all possible.

But we should not forget that each such misrepresentation also represents a challenge and an opportunity — a challenge to communicate a better understanding of the matter, and an opportunity to deepen our own understanding. Sometimes what we as Buddhists perceive as misunderstandings arise from elements of Buddhism which we ourselves have not assimilated to our own view of the tradition. Over the centuries there is no doubt at all that the Buddhist tradition has benefited enormously from having to clarify and communicate what it is, in itself, to a critical audience.

The most positive action that Buddhists can take, if they are dissatisfied with the prospect of non-Buddhists studying and teaching Buddhism, is to encourage more Buddhists to enter the academic world, and to try to ensure that what they see as a faithful account of the Dharma is communicated there.

It remains an undeniable fact that much of the English-speaking Buddhist world is profoundly indebted to academic work. Without it we would surely not have the easy access that we do to the Buddhist canon. As an example, the bulk of the Pali canon has been edited and translated into English by non-Buddhist scholars of Pali. Their efforts were in turn encouraged by the Pali Text Society, set up 'to foster and promote the study of Pali texts' — but not Buddhism as such.

If, as Buddhists, we locate the most authentic expression of the Buddha's teaching in the canonical scriptures, then, without direct access to these scriptures, we are cut adrift from that locus, dependent upon often non-Buddhist translators. While the Western Buddhist world as a whole is increasingly well served by translators who are also Buddhists, there exist only the beginnings of any established expertise in the canonical languages within the Western Buddhist Order itself. One may complain at the quality of the translation of a study text, but if there is no one to do better we are at an impasse. The fostering of a generation of Buddhist translators is one of the most exciting advantages of academic study for the Western Buddhist world in general, and for the WBO in particular. In the meantime, even if we are dissatisfied with the results, we cannot but admit that non-Buddhist translators have greatly contributed to the accessibility, and hence the spread, of the Dharma in the West.



Nagarjuna, from a 15th century Tibetan text

Again, the Buddhist world is almost entirely indebted to the academic world for the recovery of Buddhist history. Of course, local Buddhist traditions have always transmitted their own version of events, but it has taken the efforts of several generations of academics to begin to unravel the threads and to weave a single connected cloth. As an example, even the name of Asoka would have remained the subject of garbled legend, and his edicts untranslatable were it not for the efforts of a small but dedicated succession of scholars, beginning with James Prinsep.

Sangharakshita makes very clear the necessity of practice and commitment, and ultimately spiritual realization, to a full and balanced understanding of much, if not the whole, of the Buddhist tradition. This he contrasts with the academic study of canonical languages or doctrines, as representing a more two-dimensional and hence distorted view of the tradition that utilized them. The anthropologist, studying Buddhist traditions 'on the ground' does not escape criticism either, for though willing to understand Buddhism as a religion practised by people in their daily lives, a methodological commitment to non-judgemental reportage forbids the anthropologist from making essential evaluative choices as to what Buddhism *is*. For the anthropologist, Buddhism is whatever is to be found under that name. Whereas, by contrast, Sangharakshita's emphasis upon the centrality of Going for Refuge means that much of 'traditional' Buddhism has to be put to one side as mere cultural tradition, devoid of the living breath of the Dharma as a radical transforming agent.

Though I agree with this stance, I think the uncritical application of this principle needs to be restrained. An essentially relativist position, in that it maintains that understanding of specific issues is determined by the experience and expectations characteristic of a defined group of individuals, it has its weaknesses too. It can, for example, be carried to an absurd logical conclusion, in which one has to admit that all religions can only be authentically discussed by their individual adherents. No Buddhist could meaningfully speak about any aspect of Christianity or Islam, for example. The alternative, an alternative that is, I believe, compatible with Buddhism, is to admit that there is some possibility of an objective truth, accessible to anyone who is capable of finding it. The onus is therefore on testing the validity of the

ideas, not upon the external status of the individual who propounds them.

To my mind, the essence of the academic project is the attempt to make statements about a given subject that are true. These will not be statements of mere personal or group conviction, but will be substantiated by evidence which can be independently checked by others. (Of course some matters can only be understood through spiritual experience, which must stand as a timely warning to academic and Buddhist alike.) This is not incompatible with the possibility that the author also writes about a field in which he or she holds personal beliefs, but it will be necessary that any statements made will be verifiable by non-believers.

This is a rough and incomplete description of what the scholarly community tries to do. At its best, it is an exercise in truth and communication, and in that light is completely compatible with the Buddhist approach which seeks to understand and communicate 'things as they really are'. From a Buddhist perspective, there is the possibility that good scholarship can be seen in the light of *shruta-* and *chintamayi prajna*. I do not see why the 'truths' concerning Buddhist history, doctrine, and so forth established by the academic world need in any way be in conflict with the truths sought by the spiritual aspirant. Furthermore, I have no doubt that the Buddhist world can benefit from participating in this exercise, in terms of communicating its own insights within and through the academic community, and also by discovering more about its own attitudes and perspectives upon the Buddhist tradition, when they are subject to independent critical examination.

A further area of advantage would be for the Buddhist world to claim some credit for speaking about itself objectively. In the West it is common for those seeking some objective understanding of a subject to call upon the services of the academic world, which, it is supposed, will be able to speak free from prejudice, giving a fair assessment of the subject. Surely it is better that there are Buddhist academics, whose view of the tradition is sympathetic and informed by practical experience? It is possible for Buddhists to be able to discuss their own tradition objectively, and there is no reason why this cannot be done in an academic context, thereby offering a richer account of the Dharma than might otherwise be available.

## A Magnificent Life

### Buddhism In Russia

The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar

by John Snelling

Element Books

pp.290, paperback, £14.99

Agvan Dorzhiev was born in 1854 in Buryatia in southern Siberia. Buryatia was a devoted part of the Tibetan Buddhist world, and it was also a province of the Russian Empire. Thus it was a staging post between European civilization and feudal, Buddhist Tibet. In the long run, European influence—in the shape of Communist materialism—was to smash the closed world of 'Lamaism', and even a century ago this threat was apparent. At that time the danger was possible absorption into the competing empires of either Russia or Britain. Dorzhiev attempted to circumvent this danger by cultivating the diplomatic support of Russia, and in doing so he became a pioneer in the meeting of the two worlds.

Dorzhiev received a monastic education in Lhasa, rose quickly to become personal tutor to the 'Great Thirteenth' Dalai Lama, and remained for many years his closest political adviser. He became Tibet's diplomat-at-large and eventually Lhasa's man in St Petersburg. Thus he was a political figure, but the politics were overlain with spiritual implications. How would a lama cope in the world of international politics? Would he be corrupted or would spiritual practice give access to arcane, esoteric means of influence? How would Tibet play her diplomatic hand when she was economically insignificant and militarily non-existent? And, lastly, would the Europeans respond to the Dharma by which he lived?

Politics and spirituality make a heady mixture, and has made Dorzhiev the object of some fascination. Popular mythology has variously identified him as a Russian agent in Tibet, or a Buddhist Machiavelli plotting world domination, and he has even been identified as the *alter ego* of Gurdjieff, the Russian spiritual teacher. Snelling dispels most of these myths,

but he is not immune to the attraction which gives rise to them. His prose is often breathless with the excitement of a scholar who, stepping outside his cloister, finds himself in an unfamiliar world of danger and intrigue.

Dorzhiev led several diplomatic missions to St Petersburg in the early years of this century and extended his contacts with visits to Paris, London, and other capitals. After 1908, the diplomatic situation calmed down and Dorzhiev settled in St Petersburg. He was able to gain influence in the Russian court and he hatched a vision of pan-Mongolian unity and of a great Lamaist zone of central Asia. It would be a true embodiment of Shambhala, the Pure Land, and exemplify Buddhist teachings in practice; it would unite the world's Buddhists and effect the spread of the Dharma across the globe.

It is hard to know how to take such utopian imaginings; Snelling is surprisingly generous in assessing how realistic they were. What is not in doubt is that Dorzhiev worked intensively and with some success at the start to see them fulfilled. He was responsible for the construction of the Tibetan Buddhist temple in St Petersburg, and he presided over a revival of Mongolian Buddhism and the growth of considerable interest among European Russians.

But the Revolution changed everything. Through the 1920s Dorzhiev fought an increasingly desperate rearguard action to purge Buryat Buddhism of its many impurities: corruption, exploitation, and inadequate spiritual practice. The attempt was defeated by the intransigence of the lamas who absolutely refused to give up personal possessions. Perhaps even a pristine sangha would not have escaped the holocaust which Stalin unleashed on them in the thirties. But Snelling suggests that the lamas' failings contributed to their eventual fate.

By the time of his death in 1938, Dorzhiev's work was in ruins. Snelling has worked hard to make this book a valedictory tribute, and was working on the text up to his own death in 1992. The result is neither fully

successful as an account of Buddhism in Russia nor as a biography of Dorzhiev. Perhaps it is not quite finished. His command of the historical background is sometimes shaky and the prose lapses into cliché in the racier parts of the story—in 1914, for example, he writes that 'war-clouds were gathering and soon the dogs of war would be loose all over Europe.' But Snelling has the advantage of a fascinating protagonist who lived an extraordinary life.

We have here the lineaments of a life which was both magnificent and tragic; which was lived for the Dharma but within history. As Snelling depicts him, Dorzhiev was a man who combined 'spiritual and scholarly qualities' with 'great personal charm and political acumen'. But he finally seems neither a Machiavelli nor a visionary so much as a sophisticated and sincere man grappling to bridge the gulf between two worlds—which was coincidentally the gulf between his spiritual ideals and human reality that surrounded him. Dorzhiev's own words are the best testimony the book contains:

'As for my own angle on what the future will bring, because of the mental confusion of my consciousness, I do not know what good or bad will ensue. I would only offer the following homily: don't be a monkey, think things out for yourself.' **Vishvapani**

## Tibet and the Western Psyche

### Dreams of Power

Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination

by Peter Bishop

Athlone Press

pp.162, hardback, £40.00

Peter Bishop explores the encounter between Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination from the perspective of post-Jungian depth psychology and from personal experience of the current Western Tibetan Buddhist scene. Besides reporting on the encounter, which he does in an admirably thorough manner—drawing on sources as diverse as Arthur

Conan Doyle, Antonin Artaud, and the film director David Lynch—he also makes an informed critique on the encounter in its current phase.

The over-arching paradigm of the book is most succinctly expressed in two sentences from C.G. Jung: 'The psyche creates reality everyday. The only expression I can use for this activity is fantasy....'

Tibetan Buddhism has touched innumerable surfaces of the Western imagination but, time and again, that imaginative encounter has led to a literalization of the fantastic—a demythologization which peels the Tibetan image from its native context and, safely filleted of its complex, messy, shadow aspects, treats the mythic as literal. Bishop sets out to restore imaginative reflection to its proper place in the spiritual scheme of things: '... to return reality to fantasy.'

Despite the apparent diversity of their encounters with Tibetan Buddhism—Francis Younghusband's 'expedition' to Lhasa, Sherlock Holmes 'rebirth' in Tibet after escaping from Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, contemporary Western Dharma students relating as students to modern incarnate lamas—Peter Bishop suggests that there is a surprising consistency about the way in which Westerners have imagined Tibetan Buddhism. This consistency, he argues, tells us much about the nature of Western fantasy-making, about its dreams of power and its longings for authenticity.

Tibet has come to represent the farthest boundaries of the Western psyche, an exemplary standard of all that is enigmatic, imaginatively bold, beneficent, and psychologically sophisticated. In all of this Bishop notices a neglected underside—both of the Tibetan Buddhist religious system itself and of the fantasies which have reconstructed it in the West.

Throughout his study Bishop shows that Tibetan Buddhism is deeply involved in Western problems with the symbolic Father. Time and again the Western imagination seems paralysed, paradox is by-passed, and tensions and contradictions are avoided, in the face of a benign and omniscient Father image.



**The Third Dalai Lama**

Beginning with a brief introduction to the highly romanticized first encounters between Tibetan Buddhism and Western imaginings—'a land so close to the sky that the natural inclination of her people is to pray', a high place of crystalline purity, sacred mystery, worldly innocence and spiritual mastery, a utopian Shangri-la beyond the lost horizon—Bishop brings us sharply into the present day by reporting conversations typical of the many he has heard at teachings by Tibetan lamas:

Newcomer: 'He [the lama] didn't really say anything.'  
Regular: 'No, it's us that have to listen in another way.'

Newcomer: 'But he just repeated the same thing.'

Regular: 'That's because we have so many blocks he is trying to get through.'

Or another:

Regular: 'Did you enjoy the teaching?' Newcomer: 'Not particularly.'  
Regular: 'You came with expectations. When these don't work out as you expect you get angry or disappointed.'

Paradoxically, such a belief-system is espoused side by side with the injunction not to believe anything one is told but to test it out; to base one's knowledge on experience and not on faith. Western practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism assert over and again that Buddhism is true because it is based on empirical evidence, and indeed this is one of the foundations of the Buddha-dharma. Nevertheless, according to Bishop, this is an ideal and not a commonplace practice, as, within the communities of Western practitioners, the whole structure proclaims a particular truth prior to any investigation.

The claim of omniscience, inherent by definition in any reincarnated lama, plus the densely codified iconographic and ritualistic displays, create a myth of infallibility and omnipotence. At best they produce a form of benign paternalism.

Tibetan Buddhism and its hierarchical systems, its elite lineages, its emphasis on spiritual order, authentication, and control, its extensive bureaucracies and its determination to ensure its own continuity, all point to the centrality of the Father archetype—the senex—personified by the Dalai Lama who sits at the very apex of the system: the last representative of the God-kings of ancient mythology.

In Tibet the Divine Father was always present. He encompassed the country, ordered and guided the destiny of the whole nation. But for the West, he easily comes to represent the Divine Father whom one wishes were one's own. Many Westerners feel orphaned, without a spiritual Father. The senex of their culture either stands discredited (due to ecological disregard, the arms race, global poverty, spiritual bankruptcy), or is absent ('God is dead'—or impotent, sick, or insane). Small wonder, then, that the encounter between these two 'fantasies' often takes place in the context of extreme naïvety and over-literalism.

As the recent conference in Dharamsala between Western Dharma teachers and the Dalai Lama showed, this naïvety is currently being strained to the limits and the cracks are beginning to show. Too many Tibetan lamas in the West are proving to be all too human. It is clearly time for the encounter between Tibetan Buddhism and the Western imagination to move on to a new and, one hopes, more spiritually mature, phase. For the receptive reader, Peter Bishop's informed and respectful study sheds very timely light into an area of shadow and confusion. I hope that, despite its inordinately high price, it will be read with thoughtful care by many of those currently engaged in that encounter. **Kulananda**

## Uncommon Courage

### **Seeds of Peace**

by Sulak Sivaraksan

Parallax Press

pp.131, paperback, £10.00

Thailand is an economic success but a spiritual and political disaster. It has the fastest-growing economy in the world but 'development' has been at the expense of the country's rich traditional culture. Mechanized and export-oriented agriculture has led to the collapse of the peasant economy and massive migration to the cities, particularly Bangkok. But on arriving in the cities, the migrants find huge slums, Dickensian factories partly reliant on child labour, and a vast prostitution industry.

These developments have been presided over by a series of military governments which have periodically given way to elected civilians. The last such attempt at democracy was overthrown in 1991 by the military regime that currently holds power.

This pattern of exploitation and oppression is common enough throughout the developing world, but Thailand is a Buddhist country and these developments have taken place in direct competition with the Buddhist values to which it nominally adheres. With some notable exceptions, the Theravadin monastic sangha has remained mute and unable to suggest an alternative direction. This has been partly due to fear of political reprisals and partly through lack of imagination. Does Buddhism really have nothing creative to offer?

Sulak Sivaraksan is a Thai intellectual and social activist who is lacking in neither courage nor imagination. He is a prolific writer, teacher, and organizer and the founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. In all his work he has tried to base his actions on Buddhist principles.

This volume of essays is a brief but eloquent introduction to Sivaraksan's ideas. His critique of modern society is based on the belief that 'Buddhism is a prescription for both restructuring human

consciousness and for restructuring society'.

He is strongest in his critique of modern ills—'the religion of consumerism', the inadequacy of prevailing models of development, and the pernicious influence of the West on traditional societies. At the same time, he stresses the need for inner change to accompany outer activity and, much in the manner of Thich Nhat Hanh, advocates the practice of mindfulness and retreats.

In between these concerns is a swathe of questions about lifestyle and what engaged Buddhism looks like in practice. Here—at least in this book—Sivaraksan is disappointingly brief or frustratingly vague. His is a defensive attempt to combat a tide of social trends which are inundating his country. Its principles are presented here in a very simple form, but they are clear, sound, and defiantly Buddhist.

Sivaraksan is currently standing trial for *lèse majesté*, in reality for his criticism of Thailand's military rulers. The principles of this book deserve the sympathy of all Buddhists who consider that the Dharma contains answers to the world's problems. The man deserves our outspoken support.

### **Vishvapani**

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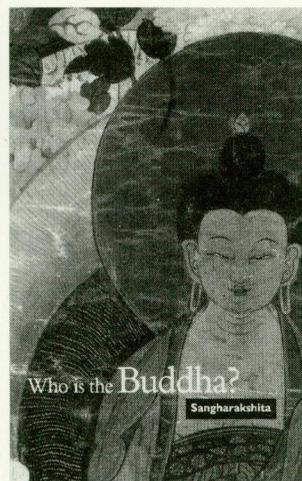
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## Buddhist Radio

Throughout most of 1993 Vishvapani presented and produced a weekly programme on Sunrise Radio, which broadcasts to the Asian community. It was called *The Buddhist Programme* and went out at 9.05 am on Sunday mornings for fifteen minutes. Over the months it evolved into a fully-fledged radio programme including talks, readings, stories, and even a serialized life of the Buddha.

A large number of Order members appeared as speakers. In all, thirty-two programmes were produced, and they seem to have developed a loyal and enthusiastic audience.

Sunrise broadcasts in West London, West Yorkshire, and the West Midlands, and it has a large international audience who receive the programmes by cable and satellite. As of the start of the year, it started broadcasting over the whole of London.

Following the success of the programme a number of other local radio stations around the country have expressed interest in broadcasting it. It is possible that some of the series will be repeated on Sunrise later in '94.

## Sangharakshita Diary

Sangharakshita's autumn began with a tour to launch his new book, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, accompanied by Paramartha. This took him to the FWBO centres in Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, and Norwich, and at each he gave a talk entitled 'Prajna and Vijnana'. He was also able to have contact with members of the communities in which he stayed, to meet with the local Order chapters, and to give numerous personal interviews.

While staying in Manchester, Sangharakshita paid a visit to Liverpool to see the Walker Art Gallery and the 20th century Anglican Cathedral (which he found 'very impressive'). He spent time in Leeds where he saw people individually, and while in Birmingham he had tea with the women mitras and visited the Birmingham Art Gallery.

Sangharakshita also had contact with several teachers connected with other Buddhist groups. While in Birmingham he called on the Ven. Rewatadhamma at his vihara, where he met a number of old friends. Sangharakshita had met Rewatadhamma a year before at the European Buddhist Union Congress in Berlin, and on 29 September he called on another of the speakers at the Congress, the Ven. Ayya Khemma, who was paying a visit to London and staying at the London Zen Centre. The Ven. Myokyo-Ni also joined them for a while. On 7 October Dr Shenpen Hookham and Lama Denis visited Sangharakshita in Bethnal Green. Their conversation was mainly concerned with Buddhist studies.

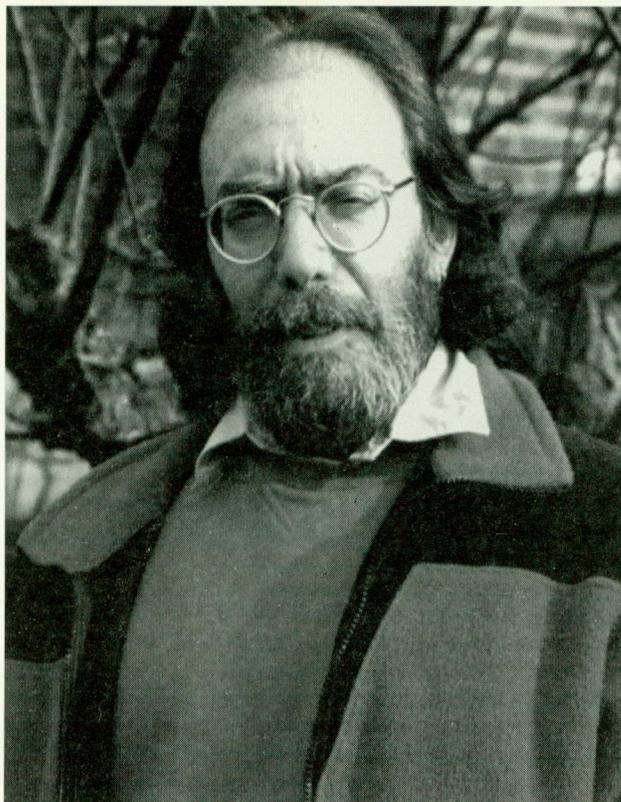
In late November Sangharakshita launched Windhorse Publications' new anthology of his essays, *The Priceless Jewel*, at the four main FWBO centres in London: the London Buddhist Centre and the centres in North London, West London, and Croydon. On each occasion he read extracts from the volume of memoirs on which he is currently working, and some recent poems.

Other engagements in this period included a trip to the Royal Opera House to see Mozart's *Magic Flute* and having tea with men who were working on a fundraising appeal for the Karuna Trust. Sangharakshita spent three days at Padmaloka from 30 November to engage in office and other work. He spent a great deal of time seeing people, catching up on his correspondence, and continuing work on his memoirs.



Papageno in the *Magic Flute*

## Dharmachari Sthiraka



Dharmachari Sthiraka died in Norwich on 11 November 1993. He was fifty-seven years old and for several months had been suffering from cancer.

Sthiraka was born Simon Del Monte into a very poor East End Jewish family. His father died when he was eight and Simon left home when he was fourteen. His environment was steeped in violence and criminality, but he refused to be drawn into that world. When he was eighteen he did National Service, and in 1957 he married Nina. In 1969 they emigrated to Australia where they lived for twenty-two years and grew to love the life and the people. They were happy and prosperous and in 1988 they came across the Sydney Buddhist Centre. Taught to meditate by Amoghavira, with whom they were later to develop a warm friendship, Simon felt that in Sangharakshita's teachings he had found something he could believe in and trust.

In 1991 Simon and Nina took the remarkably courageous step of uprooting themselves and making the journey back to England, to live in Norwich with the specific purpose of deepening their Going for Refuge and seeking ordination.

Simon quickly began to develop warm friendships within the Norwich sangha and beyond. Within a short time he was working for the Norwich Evolution shop and doing electrical work on Padmaloka's

new shrine-room. Within a year he had been invited to Guhyaloka for the annual men's ordination course and on 15 June 1992 he was ordained and given the name Sthiraka, which means 'the steadfast and faithful one'. His friends on the course tell of Sthiraka's enormous pleasure at his new name. Returning to Norwich, he soon became an effective meditation teacher with a distinctive style: friendly, accessible, and down-to-earth.

Well before his ordination, Sthiraka's health had begun to cause him problems. He developed quite serious asthma and discovered that his lungs had become irreparably damaged over the years. During this past summer his health deteriorated further and he was frequently in great pain. In September cancer was diagnosed.

Sthiraka's response was to meet the situation with great positivity. He maintained his friendships and activities as fully as possible, and in doing so earned the deep admiration and affection of all who knew him. Sthiraka was deeply touched by the overwhelmingly warm and supportive response of the FWBO sangha world-wide. In early December he was admitted to hospital in Norwich, his condition now painfully deteriorating. Many people came to visit him and, despite his discomfort, he received them with a warm welcome.

A few days before he died,

Sthiraka had a vision of the Buddha. Those who were with him at the time saw Sthiraka's enraptured response and were in no doubt that something greatly profound had happened, an experience which gave him the strength to meet his imminent death.

Sthiraka was 'his own man' in everything he did, and this enabled him to develop a warm and easy interaction with almost everyone he met, even with people of quite different ages and backgrounds. His readiness to speak his mind won him respect; his generosity won him affection; the heroic commitment to his Going for Refuge, seen for instance in his journey to England to seek ordination, won him admiration. Sthiraka's wide interests and his humour made his company a pleasure to share. He was very proud to be a member of the Western Buddhist Order.

Well named was Sthiraka, the faithful and steadfast one.  
**Viprassana**

*Sthiraka's wife Nina wrote the following in her journal three days after his death. We are very grateful to her for allowing us to reprint it as a tribute to him.*

*Tuesday 14 December 1993*  
Sthiraka died on Saturday. His body thrashed about gasping, trying to breathe, choking as his lungs clogged up. And yet there was this entirely separate essence that was calm and

peaceful. His face, his brow, were smooth and pain-free. When I read to him from *Travel Letters* he listened to me and responded. Dharmika spoke in his ear. He told Sthiraka what his name meant, he sang softly, he recited the root verses and again Sthiraka listened. All the while Sthiraka's body was thrashing about. He gasped for air, he tried to sit up, we supported him so he could cough. We wiped his body, face, and neck with moist cloths to try to cool it. All the while his brow remained calm and wrinkle-free. Arms flailed, but at no time did the essence that was Sthiraka become distressed. These were two separate phenomena. The thrashing body, the peaceful consciousness. He was finally given extra medication and gradually the body grew calmer. And then I could actually see the moment in which Sthiraka left his body. The face changed colour and went blank and the body was left to leave on its own, gradually subsiding into lesser effort until no effort was made.

I don't want to grieve. I don't want to feel bereaved. Sthiraka's death was a joyful day, a day for happiness, a day of release and a day of freedom. What more could we want? Love does not cease to be just because there is separation. In fact it becomes fuller and richer: unconditioned. So now there are thirty-six years of love and friendship and caring to draw on. Of warmth and friendliness. Of laughter and joy. Why should I despair? Our love was not a transient thing, shadows or figments of imagination. It was real and tangible. Acts of kindness, acts of caring. Intimacies shared. Gestures, overtures. There were hardships, there was fun. There were tears, there was ecstasy. How can I feel impoverished?

Dear Sthiraka, love will not cease now you are no longer here, any more than it would cease if I left. So let's rejoice in what we had and what is now. Dear, dear Sthiraka.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!  
**Nina Del Monte**

## The FWBO photographic archive

Clear Vision Video is collecting images of the FWBO in all its aspects around the world in order to create a photo archive which will be stored safely and made available for use by journalists, programme-makers, and researchers. A fire-proof filing cabinet has been purchased for negatives and transparencies. A customized database is being prepared which will hold a page of information for every image we hold.

Mokshapriya and Aparajita are keen to hear from anyone with collections of photos of FWBO activities.

## Edinburgh Buddhist Centre

In September Tejmitra, Agrachitta, and Alan Bould set up a community together. Their new accommodation is large enough to house the hitherto peripatetic Edinburgh Buddhist Group. So, for the time being at least, there is an Edinburgh Buddhist Centre.

The shrine-room has been regularly used for a programme of classes and retreats. Twenty-five people attended Sangha Day in November which set the seal on the new centre with readings, mediation, and puja.

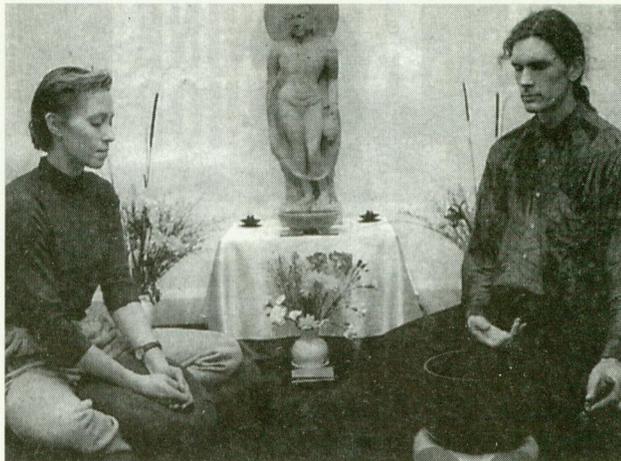
## Publications in Birmingham

The distribution and accounts wing of Windhorse Publications has moved from Glasgow to Birmingham. A competent team, including Virachitta, the chairman of the Birmingham Buddhist Centre, has been formed, and is taking over all of Windhorse Publications' business administration.

## Liverpool Meditation Centre

Mangala arrived in Liverpool two years ago and has been teaching classes and courses since then. Now activities have found a permanent home in the Liverpool Meditation Centre. This is housed in four rooms on the second floor of a Georgian terraced house in the university district of Liverpool.

When the Centre moved in November it was able to start activities right away. It was inaugurated with a dedication ceremony on Sangha Day. The day was also an opportunity to welcome Vimalaprabha, who has recently moved to Liverpool to join Mangala.



## Outreach in London

There are six full or part-time FWBO centres in London, all of which run substantial programmes of activities. This is a fair number, but it is still just a drop in the ocean of the life of the city.

In an attempt to find new ways of contacting people, Lokabandhu has recently become the London Buddhist Centre's first 'outreach worker'. He has started to gather a team of people interested in starting or supporting activities in new areas, the intention being that they will provide training, encouragement, and support for each other in their new ventures.

This initiative has already borne fruit in a number of ways. In the spring session, meditation groups will be started in Romford, Rochester, and Edmonton and a team has been formed which is interested in schools and education.

## Courses for probation officers

Lokapala recently led a meditation course for probation officers at Covent Garden Meditation Centre and is following that up with further courses. He is a highly experienced and respected probation officer himself and so far there has been a very positive response within the profession.

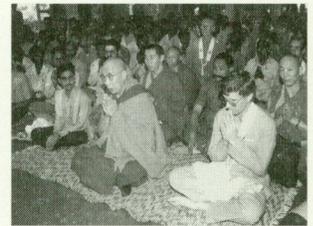
## Meditation for shoppers

The Covent Garden Meditation Centre is right in the middle of the great sea of London shopping. So in the run-up to Christmas it decided to turn itself into an island of tranquillity, a haven for stressed-out shoppers. During the whole of December the Centre ran meditation classes throughout the day—at 11 am, 1 pm, 3 pm, and 5 pm as well as its usual evening programme of classes and courses. The month proved an irresistible story for the media and it received coverage in several national papers as well as Carlton TV and the BBC World Service. 'Chill Out and Keep Your Cool', ran the headline in the Sunday Express, 'Meditation is the way to cope with Christmas'.

In a similar vein, in the spring the FWBO centres in London will be organizing London Meditation Week. The week, which is being timed to coincide with the release of Bertolucci's film *The Little Buddha*, will be a 'festival of meditation', with many events taking place across London.

## Visit of the Dalai Lama to Mahavihara

On 4 December TBMSG was delighted to receive a visit to the Mahavihara at Dapodi, from His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. Before a large crowd of Order members, mitras, and Friends in the shrine-room of the Mahavihara, Lokamitra gave a brief explanation to His Holiness of the Dharma work of TBMSG and the social work of Bahujan Hitay. He also explained the very important place that Sangharakshita's Tibetan teachers had played in his understanding of the Dharma and therefore in the development of the FWBO/TBMSG, especially in relation to the centrality of Going for Refuge. In response, His Holiness remembered Sangharakshita as an old friend, although he had not seen him for many years, and then gave an inspiring Dharma talk, speaking of the



Dharma as a protection of the mind, emphasizing mental purification and examination of one's mental states. He emphasized that although we may meet with many difficulties in our Dharma practice, we should never give up but should continue with steady effort, and that if we did so progress towards Enlightenment was assured. Before leaving, His Holiness announced a donation of Rs 10,000 towards the work of TBMSG.

## Dharmachari Munindra

Just as we were going to press we heard the sad news of the death of Dharmachari Munindra. Munindra, who was ordained in 1979, lived in Pune, where he was actively involved in the work of TBMSG. We will include an appreciation of him in our next issue.

# Bordharan Retreat Centre

Bordharan is in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, near to Nagpur. This is the heartland of the Buddhist movement in India and TBMSG activities there have been outstandingly successful since they started a few years ago. On 25 September the completed Hsuen Tsang Retreat Centre at Bordharan was opened at a ceremony attended by 25,000 people.

The first phase of the Centre, with accommodation for thirty retreatants, was opened by Sangharakshita in January 1992. The completed centre has as its focus a stupa-shaped shrine-room which can accommodate 350 retreatants.

The funds for the Centre were raised in Taiwan and many guests from Taiwan attended the opening, including the Ven. Shin Dao and nuns from the Loung Fon Temple, and My Yeh Tong Hui, Secretary General of the Lay Buddhist Association of Taiwan.

Also present was Dr Yo, who came with a number of disciples. He has been responsible for encouraging Lokamitra to visit Taiwan and for encouraging many people in Taiwan to support the work. Although he has been fundraising for the project since 1988 this was the first opportunity he had had to see the product of his labours.

The Centre is named after Hsuen Tsang, who made the arduous journey from China to India in 629 CE and returned

sixteen years later laden with sutras. Now, thanks to the generosity of modern-day Chinese friends, the first Buddhist retreat centre in central India for more than a thousand years has been opened. The Chinese guests brought with them a four-foot high statue of Hsuen Tsang, which was installed beneath a canopy facing the main entrance and the shrine-room.

The other main event was the unveiling and dedication of four golden Buddha images facing in the four directions of the circular shrine. Above the shrine is the tall stupa-shaped canopy of the roof. Lokamitra explained that the stupa represents both the path of spiritual development and the goal of Enlightenment. On top of the roof have been placed seven steps, representing the stages of Enlightenment. Atop the steps is a lotus and the Three Jewels, which can be illuminated at night.

Lokamitra praised the generosity of the Chinese donors, pointing out that the Long Fong Temple is not especially rich. In fact it is one of the poorest in Taiwan and has put aside its own building programme to fund the Bordharan Centre. He also spoke highly of Dr Yo's dedication in organizing Lokamitra's fundraising tours of Taiwanese monasteries and lay Buddhist associations. Although he has a demanding job, he organized Lokamitra's itinerary,

translated his talks, and made heartfelt appeals of his own.

Lokamitra commented that at the time of the conversions to Buddhism, Dr Ambedkar had emphasized that help would be needed from the international Buddhist community, but in his experience the only significant contributions had been made by Sangharakshita's Western disciples and by these very friends from Taiwan.

In his speech Dr Yo made two announcements. Firstly he said that the Loung Fong Temple and the lay Buddhist Association of Taiwan had each decided just that day to donate \$10,000 towards the rehabilitation of victims of the earthquake which had struck the Lathur district of Maharashtra just three weeks earlier. They asked TBMSG if it could organize a rehabilitation programme. Secondly he announced that he and other friends in Taiwan had decided to raise funds for TBMSG's Dharma Training and Study Centre which is to be built in Nagpur and to be known as the Nagarjuna Institute. Both these announcements were greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, appreciation, and applause by the assembled crowd.

The attendance at the opening was quite remarkable considering that the Retreat Centre is situated well away from large towns. The Hsuen Tsang Retreat Centre was well and truly established; indeed, it is already a landmark.

## Diwali retreats

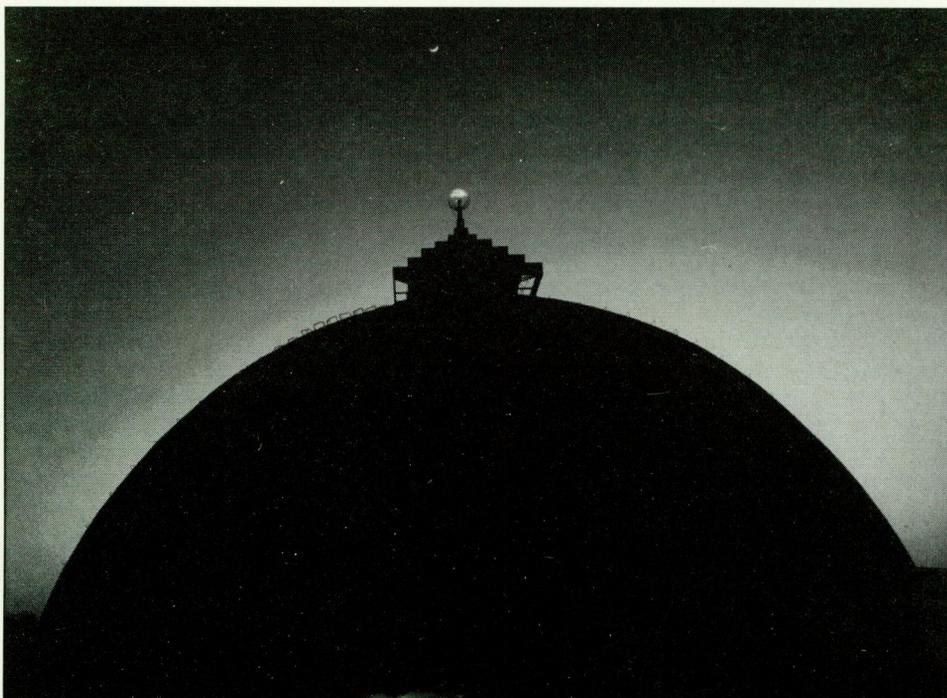
The Diwali festival in mid-October, being a Hindu festival during which schools are closed, is the traditional time of year for TBMSG to hold large general retreats to which all family members are welcome. This year 14 separate retreats were held, which 1,870 retreatants attended. The largest retreat, at the new Hsuen Tsang Retreat Centre at Bordharan, was attended by 420 people in the first week, followed immediately by a further 250 for the second. At Amaravati, also in central India, 250 people were on retreat for four days, demonstrating the great enthusiasm for TBMSG's activities in that region, even though Order members only moved there on a full-time basis in the middle of 1993. As well as the retreats in Maharashtra, 50 people attended the Diwali retreat in Goa, and 40 the retreat in Agra.

## Earthquake in Maharashtra

On 30 September an earthquake struck the Lathur District of Maharashtra which soon caught the attention of the entire world as a natural calamity on a vast scale, claiming the lives of more than 20,000 and leaving many more injured and homeless. Several Order members from Aurangabad and Poona with families in the affected area went quickly to the scene. Two Order members lost family members; in the case of Nagasena no less than nine relatives died. Bahujan Hitay Trust immediately looked for ways to contribute to the rehabilitation of the district, with especial concern for the welfare of children. Some funds have already been donated for this purpose, and further donations may be sent either to the Karuna Trust or direct to TBMSG in Poona (addresses on back page), both of whom will also provide information about the rehabilitation programme.

**Outlook will be returning in the next issue of Golden Drum.**

The shrine-room stupa at night, Bordharan



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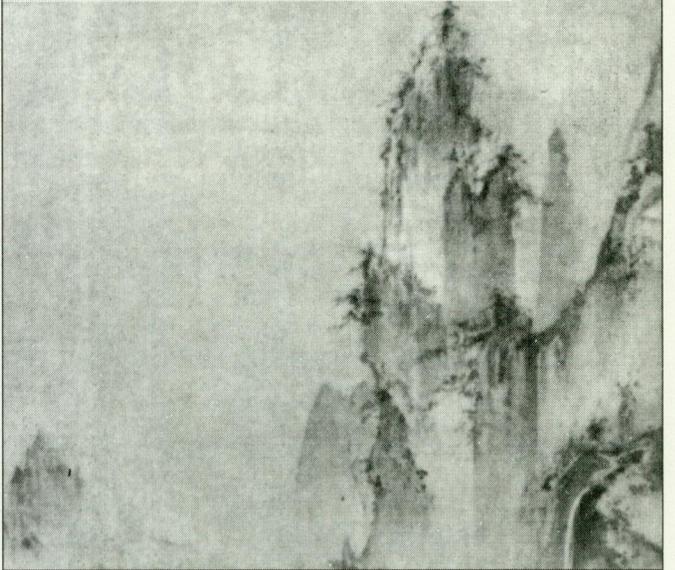
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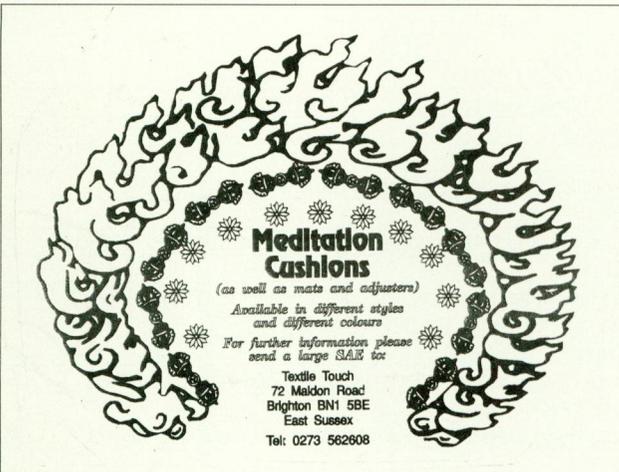
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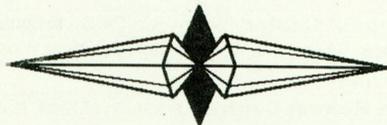
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**Sydney Buddhist Centre**, c/o 5/248 Miller Street, North Sydney 2060, Australia (postal address only). Tel: (02) 958 4705

**USA**

- Aryaloka Retreat Center**, Heartwood Circle, Newmarket, New Hampshire 03857, USA Tel: 603-659 5456  
**FWBO Seattle**, 2410 E. Interlaken Blvd, Seattle, WA 98112, USA

**Retreat Centres**

- Dhanakosha Retreat Centre**, Ledcreich House, Balquhiddy, Perthshire, FK19 8PQ. Tel: 041-333 0524  
**Padmaloka Men's Retreat Centre**, Lesingham House, Surlingham, Norwich, NR14 7AL. Tel: 0508-538112  
**Rivendell Retreat Centre**, Chillies Lane, High Hurstwood, Nr Uckfield, Sussex, TN22 4AA. Tel: 081-688 8624  
**Taraloka Women's Retreat Centre**, Cornhill Farm, Bettisfield, Nr Whitchurch, Shropshire, SY13 2LD. Tel: 094875-646  
**Water Hall Retreat Centre**, c/o London Buddhist Centre, 51 Roman Road, London, E2 0HU. Tel: 081-981 1225  
**Vajrakuta Buddhist Study Centre for Men**, Blaenddol, Treddol, Nr Corwen, Clwyd, LL21 0EN. Tel: 049081-406  
**Vajraloka Meditation Centre**, Tyn-y-Ddol, Treddol, Nr Corwen, Clwyd, LL21 0EN. Tel: 049081-406  
**Guhyaloka Retreat Centre, Spain**, c/o Lesingham House, Surlingham, Norwich, NR14 7AL. Tel: 0508-538112

**The Office of the Western Buddhist Order**, Padmaloka, Lesingham House, Surlingham, Norwich, NR14 7AL. Tel: 0508-538310

**FWBO Liaison Office**, St Mark's Studio, Chillingworth Road, London, N7 8QJ. Tel: 071-700 3077

**Karuna Trust**, 186 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1UE. Tel: 0865-728794

**Dharmachakra Tapes**, P.O. Box 50, Cambridge, CB1 3BG

**Clear Vision** (videos and prints), 538 Wilbraham Road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester M21 1LD. Tel: 061-881 0438

**Windhorse Publications** (editorial), 354 Crookesmoor Road, Sheffield, S10 1BH. Tel: 0742-684775

**Windhorse Publications** (distribution and accounts), Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb St, Birmingham, B9 4AA. Tel: 021-604 1640

*Activities are also conducted in many other towns. Please contact your nearest centre for details.*