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golden drum

BUT IS IT
Buddhism?
Telling the truth through the arts

contents

Golden Drum 33

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Head of an Apostle, detail,
Raphael,
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Art for Enlightenment's Sake

I'm writing this on the third day of the South African elections. Today, for once, the news bulletins are positive, recording the joy so many people feel at the ending of apartheid. South African artists have played their part in this turn of events, drawing the world's attention to the plight of their country: I think of Alan Paton's classic *Cry, the Beloved Country*, written in 1948; the writings of Steve Biko, whose story was told in the film *Cry Freedom*; the musical *Sarafina!*; the music of Hugh Masekela and many others; and the plays of Athol Fugard.

Fugard's play *The Island* is about two prisoners, one of whom, John, learns that he will soon be free, while the other, Winston, must stay on the island for life. The two of them are rehearsing a scene from Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, in which Antigone is sentenced to be walled up alive on an island for the 'crime' of burying her brother's body against the king's orders. At the end of the performance Winston steps out of the character of Antigone to address the audience as himself: 'I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs.'

It is the strength of art that it can cut through to the truth. This play brings us into contact not only with a specific situation, but with a universal one. We feel the bare truth of imprisonment - not of that man or this woman, not in South Africa or ancient Greece, but of all people everywhere who suffer the loss of liberty. It is such expressions of reality that move us to change.

Of course, little of what we might call 'art' has this transforming power. Works of art can tell the truth only to the extent that their creators have realized it. Some Buddhists would say, in fact, that followers of the Buddha, 'farers in the truth', should steer clear of all art because it is distracting and 'worldly', and they would quote traditional texts to support that view. Here, as in all other areas of life, discrimination is needed. Experiences which dull and coarsen the mind are harmful, while those that refine and expand consciousness, that awaken us to ourselves and the world around us, are clearly helpful to our spiritual development. If the Buddha were around in the modern West, he might be counselling his followers to avoid TV soaps, airport novels, and violent films, but he would surely be encouraging them to experience the uplifting and expansive effect of beauty - including, perhaps, the catharsis, the 'purification of the emotions by vicarious experience', of tragedy.

The teaching of the Buddha gives us the discriminating wisdom to see and appreciate the truth wherever we find it. Take the truth of impermanence: nothing is eternally fixed; everything changes. If we cannot accept this truth, we suffer, but if we live in accordance with it, we experience great happiness. In other words:

*He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy,
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.*

That's not from the Pali Canon, although it easily might have been; it's by the English poet William Blake. The best works of Western artists reflect at least a glimmer of the truth which the Buddha experienced in full at the time of his Enlightenment. When I watch a Shakespeare play, read a novel by George Eliot or a poem by Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson, look at a portrait by Rembrandt - or a Raphael drawing, listen to a Mahler symphony, or come to that, a song by Paul Simon, my perception grows clearer, my emotions more positive. To be controversial, I would suggest that we might even come closer to the truth through the finest art of our own culture than we can through the 'Buddhist art' of other cultures, beautiful and deeply moving though it often is.

Buddhist art, after all, is simply the reflection of the truth in the language of a particular culture. The Buddha used to insist that his teachings should not be preserved in some sacred language, but taught in local dialects, in language that people could readily understand. Throughout its history Buddhism has never clung to a particular culture, but has integrated itself with and refined the culture of whatever country it has reached. In other words, there is nothing intrinsically Eastern about Buddhism. It is, of course, relatively new to the West; we cannot yet know what Western Buddhist art will be.

This Golden Drum offers a taste of the work in progress of some artists practising Buddhism within the FWBO. We also explore some recent initiatives such as arts centres and arts retreats which aim to help 'non-artists' to benefit from the practice and appreciation of the arts. Buddhist artists face a tough challenge because they seek to embody the truth not only in their art but in every aspect of their lives. The lives of many great Western artists show that while their works express an extraordinary vision of reality, they were unable to integrate these ecstatic experiences into the way they lived their lives. In following the path of vision and transformation, however, all Buddhists, including all Buddhist artists, are committed to attempt such integration. Many of our articles reflect the struggle to find authenticity both in art and in life.

As I write, as well as the news of the South African elections, the papers are carrying the first reviews of Bertolucci's *Little Buddha*. (For our review see p. 15) Several reviewers feel that the film is a naive fairytale, albeit a beautiful one, and one laments its didactic tone - 'like being in Sunday school'. Of course, one should not go on what reviewers say - as the *Kalama Sutta* might put it - and I for one will want to see the film for myself, but it could be that because the film sees Buddhism through the eyes of an 'exotic' Eastern culture, it doesn't make it believable as a path that Westerners might follow. It's good, though, to see a mainstream film addressing a Buddhist theme, and it appears at an appropriate time, at Wesak, the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Our search for truth through the integration of Buddhism with the Western artistic tradition (and through our new 'comment' column - first contributor Sangharakshita) is also, I hope, a fitting celebration.

Vidyadevi

Lines

*I questioned, in my greener age,
Whether it were best for me
To blossom Poet or burgeon Sage;
But now in riper days I see,
And with what gladness know it:
The Poet is the truest Sage,
The Sage the sweetest Poet—
The piper his own best tune;
And laugh that I could ever
Have striven thus to sever
The moonlight from the moon.*
Sangharakshita 1954

Religion versus

Sangharakshita forsees a
resolution to the conflict

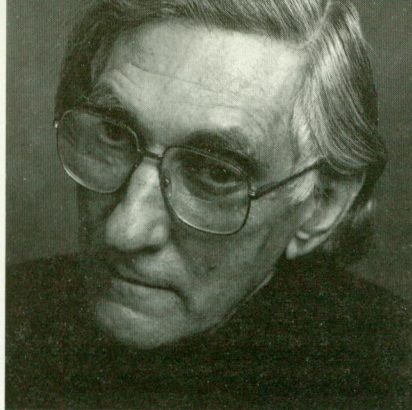
art

Fairly early in my Buddhist life, when I was a young bhikkhu studying with my teacher in Benares, I began to notice a conflict between two quite different aspects of myself. Some years later I described the conflict between these two aspects (which I called 'Sangharakshita I' and 'Sangharakshita II') in the volume of my memoirs called *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*: 'Sangharakshita I wanted to enjoy the beauty of nature, to read and write poetry, to listen to music, to look at paintings and sculpture, to experience emotion, to lie in bed and dream, to see places, to meet people. Sangharakshita II wanted to realize the truth, to read and write philosophy, to observe the precepts, to get up early and meditate, to mortify the flesh, to fast and pray. Sometimes Sangharakshita I was victorious, sometimes Sangharakshita II, while occasionally there was an uneasy duumvirate. What they ought to have done, of course, was to marry and give birth to Sangharakshita III, who would have united beauty and truth, poetry and philosophy, spontaneity and discipline; but this seemed to be a dream impossible of fulfilment.'

I was reminded of this recently when someone asked me whether there had been a reconciliation between Sangharakshita I and Sangharakshita II, or whether they were still in conflict. My reply was that it isn't possible for either of them to get rid of the other. They have to co-exist. There has to be, it seems, a sort of fruitful tension, even a fruitful conflict, between the two as they interact with each other.

What I am describing is not the 'artistic conflict' popularly said to act as a 'creative spur'. If one thinks of creativity in purely aesthetic terms, it belongs to Sangharakshita I, not to Sangharakshita II. The tension is not between two types of creativity, but between creativity in the aesthetic sense and something quite different.

Shortly after he was condemned to death by Ayatollah Khomeini, Salman Rushdie gave a lecture in which he made the point that there are two absolutes: a religious absolute and an artistic absolute. The religious absolute takes religious values as being absolute. For Islam, for example, Islamic values are absolute. As some Muslims see it, if Salman Rushdie blasphemes against the Prophet, there can be no compromise: he must be killed. But Rushdie's attitude is different. He represents the aesthetic point of view, according to which the artist must have complete freedom to express whatever he wishes to express, regardless of any



Sangharakshita, then (L) and now

religious or ethical considerations. That is the aesthetic absolute. So here there are two absolutes in conflict, neither prepared to give way to the other. In medieval times it was the religious absolute which had the power, but in modern times, at least in the West, the aesthetic absolute has the upper hand.

In my own case there is this same kind of conflict – Sangharakshita I representing the religious absolute and Sangharakshita II representing the aesthetic absolute – and it seems that there has to be conflict between them. At least in my case, however, the conflict can be considered to be creative, or at least productive, though not in a narrowly aesthetic sense.

When I was in Spain a few years ago, I was invited to speak to a Tibetan Buddhist group. In discussion with them I found that they were experiencing great difficulty, because according to the Tibetan tradition they were supposed to accept whatever their lama said, without question; in other words, they were up against the religious absolute. Since they were Westerners they found this very difficult, even though they wanted to follow the lama's teaching.

I tend to think that we need a synthesis – for want of a better word – between the two positions. The days of the religious absolute are finished. We don't any longer really need teachers – whether they are Christian or Muslim or Buddhist – who stand for a religious absolute. Nor do we need artists, painters, and writers who stand for the aesthetic absolute and refuse to consider moral and spiritual considerations. It's not that the artist cannot break rules, from the spiritual point of view, but there is no value in breaking rules for the sake of it. Many artists and writers seem to set out with the idea that they can extend the scope of artistic expression just by breaking rules. One has, as it were, dogmatic religion in conflict with dogmatic art, religion saying 'The rules must be obeyed,' and the artist saying 'The rules must be broken.'

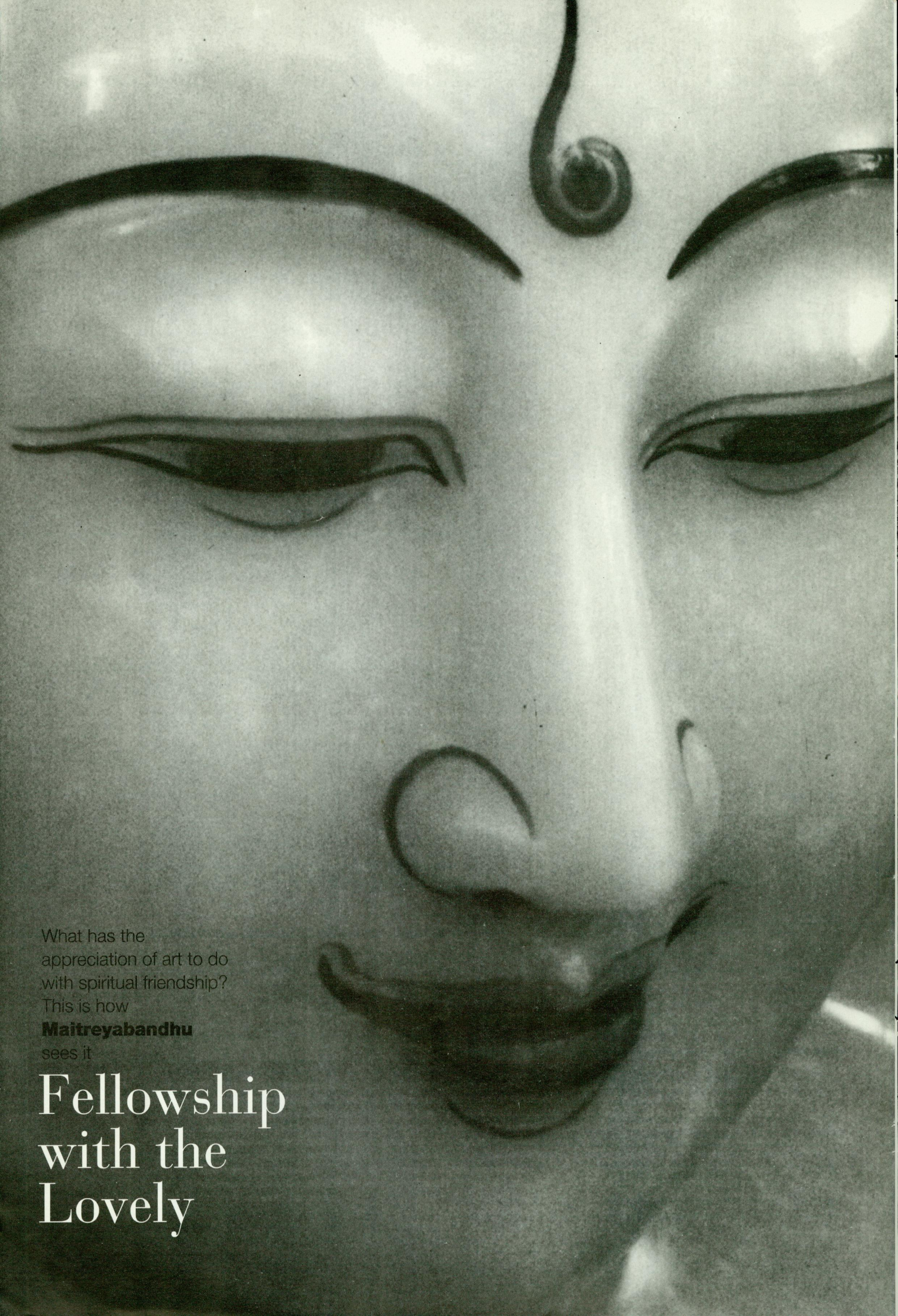
So we need a new sort of person, a person who represents neither just the religious absolute, nor just the artistic absolute. I think Lama Govinda was a bit

like that. He was an artist, and at the same time a sort of mystic. There was nothing 'absolute' about him; he seemed to synthesize the two extremes very well, without any conflict. He was able to be an artist and a writer and a poet, as well as being a Buddhist devoted to meditation, Buddhist thought, and Buddhist philosophy.

This is not to say, of course, that the artist needs to become 'religious' in a conventional sense; we must not take the idea of developing 'religious art' too literally. In *The Religion of Art* I distinguish between conventionally religious art and art which is genuinely religious. If a painter, for example, takes a so-called sacred subject like the Madonna and Child (to take an example from Christian art), but paints it without any real feeling, the painting created is religious only by tradition or association, not by virtue of its inner spirit or the artist's insight. On the other hand, someone with real insight can take the same subject and create a work which is not only formally but genuinely religious. Then again, you can have a painting that is genuinely religious in that it is the product of real spiritual insight, but not associated with any formally religious imagery – it could be a landscape, or a painting of a flower.

In modern times, maybe since the Renaissance, artistic inspiration has tended to flow less and less in conventionally religious channels. The English critic Middleton Murry said 'When Roman Catholicism died in Britain, then English literature was born.' The spiritual energies which formerly flowed through the church are now free to flow outside it and find expression in secular art and literature. Nowadays, if one is looking for inspiration – let's say in literary terms, leaving aside the visual arts – unless one is definitely a Christian, one doesn't read the Bible, or other formally religious literature. One looks to the great novelists, the great poets: James Joyce, Proust, Thomas Mann, Goethe, and Rilke. One will get one's spiritual nourishment from those sources, not from ostensibly religious ones. We always have to distinguish between art which is not genuinely religious in feeling, whether it is formally religious or not, and art which is genuinely religious in feeling, even when it is expressed in secular terms.

Extract from an interview between Sangharakshita and the Finnish art critic J.O. Mallander. A film based on the interview, The Realm of the Lotus, is to be shown by various television stations throughout the world; and Windhorse Publications are planning to bring out an edited version of the full interview.



What has the
appreciation of art to do
with spiritual friendship?

This is how

Maitreyabandhu

sees it

Fellowship with the Lovely

A work of art is an expression of consciousness. When we look at a painting, read a poem, or listen to a symphony, we are gaining a meeting with the mind of the artist, we are gaining a meeting with the artist's sensibility, with all that has shaped him or her, with the full weight of his or her experience. All art is communication: each mark of a painting, each word of a novel, each movement in dance, speaks. Not just the particular words either, or the particular sounds or shapes, but all the interrelations, the tensions, the harmonies between them speak, 'the complete consort dancing together' speaks. If we choose to pay attention we can enter into a communication with the sensibility of an artist, a communication that can 'startle us into an enhanced awareness of life', that can change our life, that can pierce the thick wall of selfhood and transport us into the far beyond of egolessness.

The mind is not a thing. Consciousness is not a *thing* that we have. It is a *santanna*, as the Pali word would have it – a process or flux. Buddhism tells us that everything we say, everything we think, everything we do, creates us, that we are the sum total of all our actions of body, speech, and mind. This is what a sensibility is, the sum total of those actions, skilful or unskilful, refined or crude, aware or unaware, that have made us who we are. And a work of art is the expression of that sensibility. A work of art is, as I've said, a communication.

The strength and depth of vision of that communication depends on who the artist has been and how they have acted. We cannot help but communicate who we are. Our every word, our every action, expresses us, shows us to be more or less integrated, more or less aware, more or less emotionally positive. No one is the same or stays the same. What we are is the sum total of who we have been. Who we will be depends on how we act, on the choices we make. Dependent on our actions we will be more mature or less mature, more emotionally positive and healthy or less so, and so on.

It follows that some works of art are better than others. They are the products of a more harmonious and integrated mind, the communications of a more refined sensibility. If we are receptive to that communication we will be changed, we will be drawn up into new modes of being, our lives will be enriched and refined by the experience of a consciousness more discerning, expansive, and vividly alive than our own. In short, our minds will be stretched beyond the narrow confines of egocentricity. We will experience the consciousness of the artist, in George Steiner's words, 'breaking into the small house of our cautionary being'. And the house is left 'no longer habitable in quite the same way as it was before. A mastering intrusion has shifted the light.'¹

If we read the Pali Canon we get a sense of this communication of a more refined sensibility with a less refined one in its most paradigmatic form. We see Gautama the Buddha wandering around northern India, and communicating in many different ways to many different people. We also see the momentous effect he had on people. We see people completely and irreversibly transformed by contact with him. We even see them gaining Enlightenment after exchanging just a few words! Now obviously the effect the Buddha had on people is not simply to do with the words he used; we

read them and are so often curiously unmoved. It is more that it was the Buddha himself who spoke them. The effect the Buddha had on those with whom he came into contact was more to do with *who* the Buddha was than *what* he said. It was a result of the direct contact between the Enlightened and the unenlightened mind.

But it is worth remembering that not everyone who met the Buddha underwent such a positive and complete transformation. Some, it seems, were antagonistic towards him, others were indifferent. Only those who were open and receptive to who the Buddha really was were affected by him. I would suggest that if we are to allow art to change us, we must be no less genuinely receptive, no less willing to learn, willing to change and in changing to die spiritually. 'For death and art are terrible for the same reason,' Sangharakshita flatly informs us in *The Religion of Art*, 'Both represent change.'

Recently I went to see an exhibition of 19th and 20th century paintings belonging to the American collector Dr Albert C. Barnes. I had gone primarily to see the Cézannes. The exhibition was hung in very large rooms which, as the show had proved very popular, were packed with an ever-moving throng of people. 'Ever-moving' being the operative word. Hardly anyone, it seemed, actually stopped to look at anything for more than just a few seconds. I remember one woman standing right in front of a very large Matisse, listening to her audio guided tour of the show on headphones and looking anywhere but at the painting itself.

Yet if we are to communicate with works of art, if we are to enter into relationship with them, become receptive to them, we need to give them time to reveal themselves to us, time at least to strike up more than a mere nodding acquaintance. We need to approach works of art, particularly great works of art (and I insist that such things exist), as we would a friend, a friend who is more developed, even greatly more developed, than ourself, a friend whose sensibility outreaches our own. We need, as it were, to get to know them, spend time with them, contemplate them, be willing to learn from them. As I've said, the paradigm for this would be our relationship with the Buddha, with Enlightened consciousness. This is the paradigm for the friendly relations between teacher and disciple, and also between artist (the true artist, that is) and audience.

When we talk about the appreciation of great art, what we are really talking about is the experience of *kalyana-mitrata*, the experience of 'fellowship with the lovely', as it is sometimes translated. Usually we think of Kalyana Mitrata primarily as a friendship based on a mutual desire to 'go for refuge' to the ideals of Buddhism, a friendship in which one person is more deeply committed to those ideals than the other, or, to put it more simply, a friendship between someone who is more spiritually developed and someone who is less so.

However, we can also think of *kalyana-mitrata* in terms of aesthetic appreciation, in terms of our relationship with works of art. If all art is communication, and if what is being communicated is the unified sensibility of the artist, and if that sensibility is more greatly developed than our own, then we will be entering into a relationship of *kalyana-mitrata*. Our minds will be stretched beyond the narrow confines of egocentricity to the much wider circumference of the artist's mind. We will expand into the higher vision and the deeper understanding of the artist, we will form a fellowship with the lovely as it lives and breathes and speaks in the words and sounds and colours of great art.

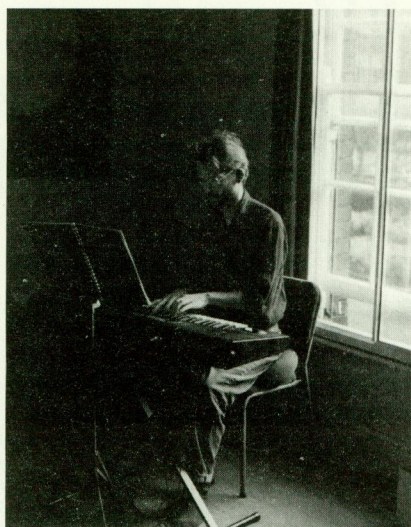
As Shelley says in the last verse of 'Adonais', his elegy on the death of Keats:

*The breath whose might I have evoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling
throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of
heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.*

If we are to gain a meeting with the minds of artists, if we are to enter into a meaningful relationship with them, we must change. As George Steiner aptly puts the matter, 'The archaic torso in Rilke's famous poem says to us: "Change your life." So do any poem, novel, play, painting, musical composition worth meeting.'² This change, this move toward what is highest and best in humankind, is not only the true value and significance of art but the very meaning and orientation of Buddhist practice.

1: George Steiner, *Real Presences*, Faber and Faber, London 1989, p.143.
2: *Ibid.*, p.142.

Bodhivajra lives in Norwich, where he teaches piano and jazz improvisation courses, as well as spending as much time as possible writing music



Gates of the Sun

How, in practice, will the integration of Buddhism and Western culture come about?

Bodhivajra describes his own experience

In the summer of 1986, on a solitary retreat in a cottage on the Yorkshire moors in northern England, I read Carl Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, an extraordinary, powerful book which I found so exciting I could hardly put it down. This book, this journey into the unconscious, suddenly presented me with a verse about someone called Telesphoros.

'This is Telesphoros, who roams through the dark regions of this cosmos and glows like a star out of the depths. He points the way to the gates of the sun and to the land of dreams.'

I had never heard this name before, as far as I knew, but it made a very strong impression on me. Immediately I had a desire to create some music based on those words. It didn't seem enough just to receive what Jung had said; I wanted to create Telesphoros in a musical form. Because the image of Telesphoros had appeared within me, I wanted to pay honour to it.

I wasn't satisfied with the music I wrote then, and it wasn't until 1990 that I found another opportunity to bring Telesphoros into a musical work. I began to write 'Carpe Diem', a choral piece which started life as an exploration of the

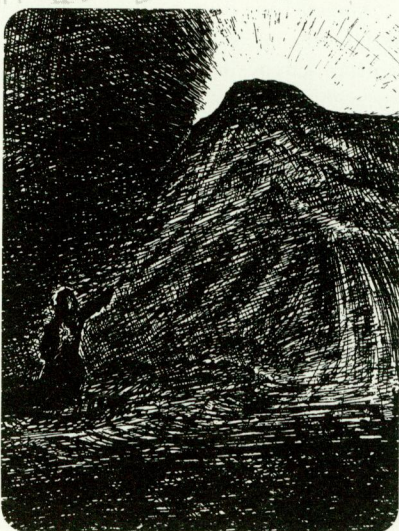
theme of impermanence, with words from the Odes of Horace as a starting point. But then Telesphoros reappeared in my imagination, and although I couldn't yet see how it would tie in with the existing Carpe Diem music, I was determined to find a much more satisfying music than my earlier attempt.

Although I was using as text just two sentences, this expanded into three musical sections. The first is an improvised invocation to Telesphoros using wordless sounds from the choir which gradually turn into the syllables of Telesphoros's name. During this section Telesphoros appears, brought into being by the repetition of his name. The second section shows Telesphoros 'roaming through the darkness' and 'shining like a star'. In the third section, a jazz-based instrumental piece leads into the 'Gates of the Sun' and the 'Land of Dreams'.

These three musical sections effect a movement from the depths to the heights. The heights cannot be experienced without having established roots which reach right down into the depths. Telesphoros symbolizes this movement because he is both darkness and light, both death and life. He appears from the depths in a dark, hooded cloak, his face hidden from view because it is a face of death, while at the same time his light dispels fear and he points upwards to the sun-drenched heights. He is equally at home in the depths and the heights, and is thus a symbol of integration, a 'marriage' of heaven and hell.

This, of course, is my own vision or experience of Telesphoros; unsurprisingly, the picture I have of him in my mind's eye doesn't completely tie up with traditional Greek images.

Telesphoros Illustration: Pete Womack



Traditionally he is depicted as a child, wearing a hooded cloak and carrying a light. One account describes his connection with Asklepios, the god of healing: Asklepios dies at winter time and is reborn as the child Telesphoros in the spring.

Telesphoros and his new music became for me the most important part of 'Carpe Diem', to the extent that I considered renaming the whole work (which was performed on FWBO Day 1992). The rhythmic energy, vitality, and freedom expressed in 'Carpe Diem' – in the later sections through the words of Walt Whitman – come directly from the power of Telesphoros the Healer, whose season is the spring.

'Telesphoros' can mean 'the one who brings to an end' or 'the one who brings to fulfilment'. As a god of healing, he brings sickness to an end; by restoring health he brings about a fulfilment, making whole someone who has been ill. In his lecture 'The Archetype of the Divine Healer', Sangharakshita makes the point that the Greek cult of Asklepios was both a system of medicine and a religion. A doctor was also a priest, a patient also a worshipper.

Telesphoros has also been described as 'the personification of the hidden sustaining vital force upon which depends the recovery of the sick'. So Telesphoros (or any other archetypal 'divine healer') does not cure us miraculously, but alerts us to the 'hidden sustaining vital force' within us which will make us whole or bring us to fulfilment. This 'vital force' is our life-blood, our faith, our creative energy, our desire for truth and fulfilment. When we are in contact with it, we feel healthy, happy, and vital.

For me Telesphoros 'works' just as archetypal Buddha and Bodhisattva figures 'work'. Just as Shakyamuni, Vajrasattva, and Padmasambhava uplift and inspire me, so too Telesphoros awakens me, gives me a taste of freedom, encourages my highest aspirations. Telesphoros is a figure from the Western cultural tradition who has made a dramatic appearance in my imagination and affected me deeply. My experience convinces me that if, as Sangharakshita suggests in his essay 'Buddhism and William Blake', 'Buddhism will not really spread in the West until it speaks the language of Western culture', it is important to allow Western archetypes into our minds and hearts, and into our practice, without being afraid that they are 'non-Buddhist'.

Faltering steps

Where does art fit in

Some years ago I was reading a book on the English carver Eric Gill. In it he said, to the best of my recollection, that if an 'artist' found himself attempting to work during a period when society had no overall 'religious' ideology, then in his opinion it was pointless working (i.e. being a productive artist). One should rather devote one's energies to changing that society until such time that 'spiritual' or higher human values were established, and the artist had a context and ideology within which to work and be of service. 'At last!' I thought. Here was a plan of action suitable for the dilemma I had been in – with varying degrees of awareness – for most of my life. Forget about the 'art' (in my case visual arts) and get on with helping to transform society until there was once more a context for one's work to serve – even illustrate – perhaps one day illuminate –

If only life was that tidy and straightforward. If only a new idea was enough to tug all the strands of one's being in one direction. Gill had predominantly (or liked to think he had) the attitude of the artisan, in the mould of the medieval stone masons working on the great cathedrals – every chip for the glorification of God. It is of course extremely questionable whether a medieval stone mason would recognize this view of his life – we are hardly likely ever to know! It's not that Gill himself stopped working. He did, however, continue to write and speak on artistic, religious, and social issues in the hope of changing prevailing attitudes.

But I did *not* have a view of myself as some worthy artisan, however desirable that might have been. I had grown up in a very different world. I found some of Gill's work interesting and stimulating, but the reason I was so preoccupied with him for a number of years was primarily that he provided a kind of symbol (regardless of what he was actually like) of an English artist with, for want of a better term, 'spiritual ideals', attempting to work in an increasingly (in his life) if not entirely (in my life) secular society, the values of which, if one could call them that, seemed to be moving rapidly in the opposite direction. Gill provided at



Detail from Gill's *League of Nations Creation Relief*

least a glimmer of hope that such a thing was possible, and for this I am extremely grateful. Since then I have discovered within this rather loose category of mine other slightly shell-shocked heroes – David Jones, Cecil Collins, Stanley Spencer – making their way through no-man's-land in the shadow (usually) of William Blake, and all of them have provided both example and encouragement.

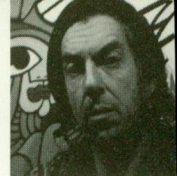
Attracted and even excited by Gill's idea, I made many attempts to abandon 'artistic' activity, devoting myself, once I was within the framework of the FWBO, to what might appear to be more 'mainstream' activities: communities, centres, and team based Right Livelihood. Of course, the only real 'mainstream' activity (if one is going to use that language) within the orbit of the Western Buddhist Order is Going for Refuge. To think of activities *in themselves* as being mainstream, or not, is rather missing the point. They are only meaningful to the extent that they are external expressions of the continual deepening and working out of one's Going for Refuge.

Eventually I began to realize that

although Gill's statement did put the issues in a certain helpful perspective, I could not implement his tidy solution. My involvement in the language of images is one of the strongest conditioning factors of my life. Almost all I ever did at school was draw. I left ordinary education at thirteen to enter art school at the beginning of the 1960s, and I spent most of that decade in various art schools and colleges. A very formative period in anyone's life! It was at art school that life began to take on some kind of meaning, confused and chaotic admittedly, but at least a vague inkling that direction was possible. After I left I supported myself with part-time art teaching, while devoting most of my time to continuing my investigations within the realm of the visual arts.

I was well prepared by my education, having caught the end of the old-style art training. The emphasis was on hard work and learning techniques and skills. Issues of 'art' or even 'creativity' were not on the agenda, at least as far as one's own abilities were concerned. One of my tutors advised us not to bother about such things unless we were still working ten

Having spent some time at Padmaloka working with the men's ordination team, Aloka now lives at Street Farm in Norfolk, where he spends much of his time painting and creating book illustrations



with changing the world? Some personal reflections from **Aloka**



years after leaving art school. In the meantime one was to *learn* – not only skills but *how* to motivate and discipline oneself.

Learning how to work is vital in any area of life. Learning how to organize one's time and activities, learning how to create a meaningful pattern out of all the elements of one's life, is an issue for anyone, not just the so-called 'artists' of this world. My artistic training helped me to come to terms with this to some extent. It was the search for a more all-encompassing vision of the meaning of human existence that brought me to the Dharma. Trying to integrate the momentum of my previous interests and passions into this greatly expanded context, whilst coming to terms with just *how* expanded that context is, has, at root, been the 'stuff' of my life over the past twenty years.

This integration is not just a question of fitting everything in somewhere, but more a process of purification. One's motives are always mixed, so my involvement with the visual arts includes many factors – some of use, some not, and some definite obstacles to the practice

of the Dharma. This mixture is purified through contact with the Dharma. It's no good my avoiding Dharma study on the grounds that I'm more a 'visual' or 'devotional' type. I have needed – need – to *know* what the Dharma *is*. Without an understanding of its concepts and ideas, any 'purification' is likely to be rather tepid.

Study and meditation have been of tremendous benefit to me, even in terms of my 'work'. Once I met the Dharma, my artistic activities took a back seat for about six years. When I took up figure drawing again, much to my surprise my drawing had improved! Well, it's not so much that my *drawing* had improved as that my awareness and general emotional state had improved. If I was drawing someone I was more capable of really seeing that person rather than just a product of my own assumptions and prejudices, or even likes and dislikes.

I rather hoped, having encountered the Dharma, that I could drop the struggle of my artistic activities. I have not been able to, and as I see it now I am glad I could not. But in what sense am I a 'Buddhist artist'? I have to admit to not ever thinking of myself as a 'religious' person. Nor have I found much of what passes as 'Buddhist' art particularly exciting, often finding myself being sidetracked by its immersion within Eastern cultures. In terms of Sangharakshita's four categories of 'art' as enumerated in *The Religion of Art*, I see my fascination centring on art that is 'religious' in content but not in form, rather than 'religious' in both content *and* form.

At the same time I recognize that although I am attempting to practise the Dharma in a Western context, its principles are embedded in an Eastern setting, whether in 'literature' or in visual images. One needs to be able to see through the form to the content. In the West, like it or not, we have inherited with 'Buddhism' an iconography foreign to us in style and history. However, it is not untranslatable if one can understand the 'language' and sort out essentials from cultural and historical conventions.

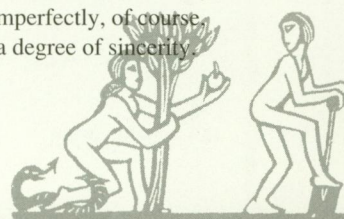
With our perspective on history, we cannot be confined to the Buddhism, or

the artistic traditions, of any one culture. And we cannot necessarily 'read' images in the way that they were intended to be read at the time and place of their creation. This goes for any area in the history of art, not just so called 'religious' art. We do not see a Vermeer in the way his contemporaries saw it. It is not that *nothing* is communicated, but we must be aware of unthinking assumptions. Just think of the innumerable marble 'ice goddesses' produced by the Victorians, blinded by a romantic notion of the pristine purity of classical Greek sculpture from which time had removed the pagan paintwork long before the Victorians (or indeed even Michelangelo) ever clapped eyes on it!

I work as an artist because at the moment it is the only way for me to deal with certain areas of my life. That is the more subjective end, if you like. Objectively, it is important that people have images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that to some extent reflect a Western sensibility, rather than just being copies of oriental antiquities, and because I have certain skills I am able to attempt this. I am more than happy to do so, although, as I said, I like to think that a non-religious 'form' is also possible. But I have to make my work a meaningful undertaking for myself. I am not a fourteenth century Tibetan or an eleventh century Kashmiri. I am a late twentieth century Westerner. I can admire the products of other cultures, I can learn from them to the extent that I can 'see' them, I can even be inspired by them, but I think it would be unintelligent merely to copy the form (except as an exercise in investigation).

For me, taking faltering steps at the beginning of a great adventure, walking into a room of paintings by Joan Miro causes my heart to leap towards the magic of unexplored possibilities far more than walking into an exhibition such as the recent show of Tibetan art held at the Royal Academy in London. This is not to disparage the Tibetan Exhibition; it simply reflects the actual state of affairs in the life of a 45-year-old Western artist attempting to practise the Dharma in a realistic fashion – imperfectly, of course, but hopefully with a degree of sincerity.

Gill, Adam and Eve



True Stories

Ashvaghosha is a team committed to communicating the Dharma in India. How do they do it? **Jayamati** tells their story

In 1975, after six years as a young and idealistic theatre director, I was appointed artistic director of the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool. One evening, as I was walking to the theatre for the opening night of one of my productions, I suddenly felt that I could quite easily turn right or left and simply not go to the opening performance.

I felt shocked, and although I did carry on down the street to see the play, I knew that something had changed in my attitude to theatre. Until that moment the theatre had been my 'religion'. It had replaced Roman Catholicism for me when I was eighteen, and since then it had been the central and most passionate interest in my life. I believed completely that a meaningful form of theatre was not only possible but also desperately necessary in the modern, mad, cruel world in which I found myself. That night in Liverpool, that belief started to fragment. I no longer believed that theatre was trying to bring a meaningful and necessary experience to people, and I realized that I had nothing to say myself.

For the next sixteen years, I kept a distance between myself and the theatre. The only way I could work in it again would be to approach it with completely different values, values that upheld truthful communication and sought to address the audience in a meaningful and substantial manner. To achieve this, I had to go away and find those different values. This is why I sought the Dharma, how I found it, and why I have been practising it for the past sixteen years.

When I was asked to get involved in the Ashvaghosha Performing Arts Group in India, I was faced with a dilemma. Ashvaghosha is a group of committed Buddhists which goes to villages and urban slum localities and, through the performing arts, seeks to communicate the values of the Dharma. Truthful communication is of the essence. I had seen at close quarters the damage that 'staging plays' can do to people. Unless there is a strong and conscious desire to communicate a truth that is more important than the 'event' of the performance, people very quickly lose their way and get intoxicated by the excitement of the stage and an audience. What could I do that would help get the Ashvaghosha team up and running, and at the same time offer the possibility of a meaningful experience for both performers and audience?

One night in the small hours it came to me. The evening before I had been talking to someone who outlined for me a series of stories that he wanted, with my help, to

make into 'dramas'. The stories were all to do with the issues facing the ex-Untouchable Buddhists: the problem of alcoholism, the assumptions behind dowry weddings, the benefits of adult literacy, and so on. Now, as I lay awake, I knew that this was the answer. We would go to the villages and tell stories.

In every culture, drama has evolved out of story-telling. As the stories became more elaborate, the techniques for communicating them became more complex, with dialogues, sets, characters, and scenes combining to illustrate the story. By going back to the simple act of telling a story, we could create a theatre that was truthful and honest, deploying theatrical techniques only as a means to further communication, not as ends in themselves. We would not have to get caught up in putting on costumes, designing sets, balancing one scene against another, and all the myriad demands of theatrical convention. We would simply communicate our stories. I felt as if I had found a golden key that unlocked the door to a way of working with drama. But although I had found the key, I had still to open the door.

We started our rehearsal periods with games that produced collective stories. Someone would start a story and then pass it on for somebody else to add the next instalment, and so on. Next we did work designed to 'draw the story out'. We found that if people listened attentively and encouragingly, individual imaginations were much more able to create and invent. And then we moved on to rehearsals designed to help in the actual telling of the story. The technique required was to tell the story with the whole of one's being – body, speech, and mind – which meant being fully committed to communicating the story. This opened up a fascinating area which amounted to the study and practice of truthful communication. If we wanted to tell a story, we first had to believe it was worth telling, then, once convinced, put ourselves into a full and effective communication of it.

At this level of rehearsal, the considerations were much more to do with effective Dharma practice than effective performance techniques. I was delighted with this development. I kept reassuring the performers that if they could put themselves in front of an audience and communicate truthfully, everything else would follow: the audience would be receptive to them, and their stories would be heard and appreciated. Some of them found this difficult to believe, and looked for ways

**Ashvagoshha:
an evening performance**

of making their story, their performance, and themselves more interesting and more theatrically viable. But I was convinced that if they just told the story truthfully, everything would be fine.

Our first performance was in Shuni, a village about one hour's drive from Poona. Although we were assured that arrangements had been made and that we were expected, when we arrived, no one knew anything about us. Undeterred, we started setting up a few chairs and mats. A friendly chap was putting up a floodlight for a political meeting to be held the next day, and we asked him if he would mind shining his light in our direction so that we could perform our stories. This he did, and with lorries and buses trundling past on the main road about forty yards away, and an intrigued but bemused audience sitting before us on the dusty earth, we began our story telling.

Chandrakant told his story about the tragedy that befalls a drinking man. He gave an impeccable performance. He was completely behind what he was doing, and able to invest the story with all the heartfelt concern he obviously felt for his subject. The audience were visibly stunned by his story, and showed their appreciation in no uncertain terms.

Next it was Rekha's turn. She unfolded a drama about a woman who slowly gets won over by the teacher of an adult literacy class, and learns to read and write. She did this with the help of others in the group; the format was more like a play than a story. Again she was committed to getting her story across, and did so with a lovely light, comic touch that had the audience entranced.

Then it was Deepak. He told of a man fallen on hard times who was helped out of his predicament by the generosity of a friend. Deepak was one of the most experienced actors in the group, and although he held the audience's attention, I could see that he was relying on old techniques to get him through his performance. He was wearing a 'mask', and although theatrically impressive, his story did not move the audience as Chandrakant's and Rekha's had done.

At the end of the evening the audience were delighted and thrilled by our visit. They had been addressed on issues that concerned them deeply, and they had had the great benefit of coming together as a



community to see these issues restated. In this way they had taken part in a simple but highly effective ritual. It is as a ritual collectively addressing the vital issues of living (and dying) that theatre becomes meaningful. In a simple way this happened in Shuni on that evening. It was the most satisfying experience I had ever had in all my years in theatre.

As we drove back to Poona that evening the performers were elated. They could hardly believe that their simple stories had been so warmly appreciated and had had such a strong effect on people. There was much singing and high spirits in the jeep as we picked our way through the traffic back into the city. I felt extraordinarily still and calm. I knew we had found the beginnings of something that was very obvious, very simple, but also very elusive. We had stumbled across the fundamental dynamic of the theatre experience, and if we could only stay with that and begin to build on it, we might well be able to recreate a meaningful and valuable theatre – something I had longed for but had really thought was impossible.

As the Ashvagoshha project gains momentum, I begin to realize that I may have to give it many more years than I originally thought. There is so much potential to be realized. This concerns me because I would love to be able to contribute to the influence of the Dharma on Western culture. The situation in the West is of course more complex than that in India. In India the oral tradition is still alive; wandering storytellers and drama troupes can just turn up in a village or urban locality and present their work in a direct and uncomplicated manner. The West, by contrast, is rapidly forgetting its traditions, and is deeply confused about

its values. Our culture has lost sight of what it wants to say, and has instead become fascinated by ways of saying 'it'. More and more we see the truth of Marshall McLuhan's appalling and apocryphal realization that 'the medium has become the message'. Style has replaced content, and all hell has broken loose as the media vie to catch and keep our attention.

How, as Buddhists, do we begin to have an effect on Western culture? The first step is to slow down the frantic invention and place the emphasis on content. This, of course, requires self-awareness, and awareness is painfully won. The next step, as I discovered in India, is to get 'underneath' the art form, strip it of its expectations, its sophistication, its burden of artistic conventions, and simply identify what one wants to say. There is no point in exploring the means of communication if we are not simultaneously developing our understanding and powers of perception. The modern world desperately needs artists and communicators with insight into the real nature of the human condition. And as Buddhists, our need to communicate our understanding of the Dharma is as vital to our own Dharma life as it is of value to those who hear it.

The lines of communication are not so simple in the West as they are in India. To find points of contact in a highly materialistic society is almost impossible. But not quite. Human beings love the truth. We all love to encounter anything that truly resonates with the deepest seat of our being. If artists prepare their truthful statements, sooner or later, even in the materialistic, secular West, people will want to hear them.



Chintamani

Visual artist, writer

All too often people feel a gulf between the 'ideal' meditative life they experience on retreat and the grosser, more sensuous state they find themselves sinking into back 'in the world'; and it may seem that to progress spiritually one has to sacrifice the latter to the former in a spirit of teeth-gritted 'renunciation'. But although retreats are vitally important to the spiritual life, I believe that to develop spiritual robustness one also needs to integrate the emotions stimulated by everyday life with its kaleidoscope of sensuous impressions. And I think that art helps to bring about that integration. Art can draw in all one's emotions, all one's sensuousness, introduce them to one's ideal, and, in the context of the Dharma, lead one towards Insight in a whole and full-blooded way.

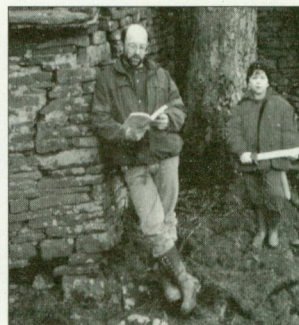


Suchitta

Music therapist, conductor

Over the last eighteen years (since I first met the FWBO) a radical shift has taken place within the mandala of my life. Music remains very close to the centre of that mandala, but it is not *the* centre – that place is given to my commitment to the Three Jewels. I have needed to learn to communicate with people in other ways than through my 'musical self'; to my surprise this has had the effect of enriching my experience and understanding of all that is most precious to me in the art itself.

Music and the spiritual life found their true point of integration for me on FWBO Day in 1992, when I conducted Bodhivajra's choral piece 'Carpe Diem'. It was an extraordinary occasion which came out of a shared effort, a shared striving.



Achalabodhi

Woodcarver

I do not see myself as an artist, any more than I see myself as having a 'spiritual life' or creating 'works of art'. I am just myself, trying to see clearly, with a purer heart and lighter mind. There are no end products, just processes.

And for us, as Dharmafarers, karmic processes are quintessentially important. What we are is based on our mental states, the result of karmic activity. It is the quality of the mental states behind our outward actions that really matters – and only we ourselves can know our own hearts. Creative, artistic, meditative actions are not ends in themselves, nor to be competitively compared, but karmic activities, affecting what we are, and what we might become.

Srivandana

Art therapist

I find that I am reluctant to call myself a 'painter'. I regard myself as someone who uses paint and other media to channel and process my emotional response and relationship to internal and external landscapes and worlds.

On retreat I take a sketchbook, and after each meditation I sit down and paint my response to that experience. I am frequently amazed at what is shown to me, and grateful that I have a diary of those retreats, the images reconnecting me with particular meditations so strongly and immediately. For me the fusion between art and the spiritual life began with those sketchbooks.



Prue Burch

Visual artist

Taraloka admin worker

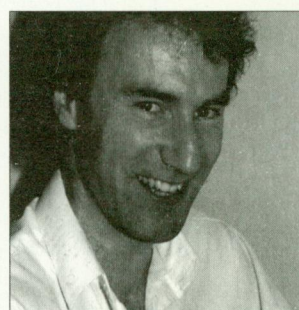
I dropped direct involvement with the arts to live at Taraloka and deepen my understanding of Buddhism and create a strong foundation within myself based on the Three Jewels. Living at Taraloka has certainly given me the conditions to do this.

However, the process of going deeper into myself has also made it clear that artistic expression is not just an 'interest' of mine. If I am to feel deeply engaged with my life and my practice, it's crucial. Consequently I have decided to move to London and join the Arts Centre team.

Varabhadri

Writer, Mitra Convenor

The arts certainly stimulate, challenge, develop, and refine our emotions. They guide us up the golden ladder from the *kamaloka* to the *rupaloka*. But they can't be an end in themselves.



Satyadaka

Writer, actor,

Hockneys restaurant worker

There was a period of some years after I became a Buddhist when I tried to give up my artistic aspirations, seeing them as a kind of egotism. Silly really, a bit like not meditating because you always experience the hindrances! The arts are very important to my spiritual life, both as a practice and for enjoyment. One day I'd like to write a novel, or several.

The Golden Ladder

How do Buddhism and the arts connect?
FWBO artists share their reflections

Meditation, reflection, and solitude disclose the part the arts have to play in anyone's life. We must be able to recognize, not intellectually but emotionally and spiritually, works of great and unusual genius, and also value and develop our own creative faculties. Active participation puts us in touch with our inner fire and with angelic company. I would not want to confine art to too narrow a definition. Inspiration is a free spirit which is nurtured by ethics – our practice of the precepts. And the realm of inspiration is infinite space, where anything can happen.



Rupachitta

Visual artist, Evolution shop worker
In a way I'm an anti-'art object' artist. Currently I work in an Evolution shop and one of my jobs there is to make window displays. I don't want to make beautiful objects for people's living-rooms. I want to make spaces that catch people's eye as they go about their ordinary lives, that make them think 'This moment is extraordinary.' This is where Buddhism and art merge for me. They offer a doorway into new realms of experience – higher, more beautiful, more positive, more meaningful realms. The artist doesn't have to be a solitary sufferer, although we all have to struggle to gain depths. When we were designing and setting up our shop, we worked like an orchestra. Everybody in the team was an essential part of the visual spatial music we created. A high point of my life, artistically and spiritually. 'If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure.' (Ryokan)

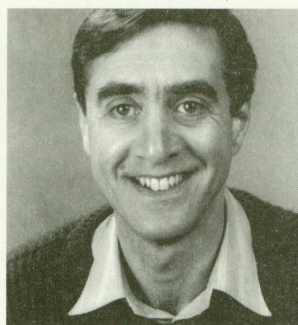


Karunachitta

Painter, meditation teacher
Every time I start a new painting I have to be willing to go beyond my present self and accept new experience. I have to shed the constrictions that bind me to the wheel and be able to let go into the unknown. This challenge goes hand in hand with meditation practice. Both call for wholeheartedness, for the passion to change, and both move one towards egolessness. Colour, light, and radiance as from the archetypal realm are what I most often attempt to paint. These joyful, expansive elements are what I most wish to experience and communicate.

Amaraketu

Painter
I lack inner completion, and, however hard I have tried, it seems I can't work on myself in a purely internal way through meditation. I seem to need the outside elements – be it people or landscape, colour or form – to activate my imagination and my search for meaning, as well as to develop mindfulness and metta. For me, art arises out of a necessity to connect, to relate to life with as big a 'yes' as I can. My 'yes' is blocked by authority projections, lack of permission, lack of individuality. As I work and play, experiment, and explore, these blocks gradually dissolve and I expand into a bigger space.



David Earl

Concert pianist, composer
'... all of a sudden, in those caverns far below, ageless heroes will start up once more at the sound of distant trumpets, and reach for their unfailing weapons, and goddesses will weave afresh the old spells which protect the daring.' These lines, from Vessantara's short essay 'The Bodhisattva Ideal', embody exactly the reaction I experience when either confronted with art or in the process of creating it. It is as if something much older, wiser, and multi-dimensional has raised its head and levelled its eyes at mine. In this sense I find an exact parallel to the act of Going for Refuge: the ancient perfections, as personified by the Buddha, his Dharma, and the great community of his followers, ageless, ever-renewing, wait patiently for my attention, and having acquired it, move me to greater clarity and stillness. This is what art is: a physical reflection of aspects of the unconditioned, of the transcendental, which the living out of those perfections leads to.

Ananda

Poet and novelist
I cannot imagine my spiritual life without writing in some form. It brings spiritual values from the abstract to the concrete, and makes them perceivable in the physical world. For example, one of my most recent poems, 'The Piano', embodies the idea that one can break free of one's personal psychological past and act in a new way, thus using daily experiences to grow, rather than being imprisoned by them. Writing is the mirror that makes me aware of the deeper forces at work in my life, and shows ways of using them to generate the qualities we call spiritual.

The Piano

I'm tramping in bog and claggy mist stalked by that image: the mute woman dragged down

by the gift that was her voice, then at the last second, cutting free.

It got to me, stirred old familiar ghosts, shapes too close for peace: my dad humped over a saw, having no speech

for what was nearest, no silence from what wheeled always beyond reach.

And me, unable to get close because closeness meant being seen, picking up the tab,

cutting free. Safer to be dumb, invisible, bloated with blame.

Up here there's space. Lots. It's an element to be human in.

I'm stunned by what earth endures: sheep locked in sheep, stones in stone, bats in bat.

I'm grateful for this borrowed inch of choice that makes me me;

being able, just once, to say: 'is this where I'm at?' OK. I'll use it.'
Ananda

Creating Ourselves



Over the last few years 'arts retreats' have become a source of inspiration and awakening for 'artists' and 'non-artists' alike. These retreats take many forms, but most explore a theme such as the Wheel of Life, the elements, or the religion of art through many media – writing, painting, music, movement, sculpture – in a context of meditation, puja, and study. These excerpts from a talk given by **Ratnadevi** at Taraloka give a taste of what being on an arts retreat is like.

Do you know this experience? Perhaps you've just been meditating. You step out into the evening sun, and suddenly you are touched by the beauty of Nature in a way you didn't think was possible.

It's an exquisite moment of inspiration. It stirs something in your heart, something that goes beyond your comprehension. And you feel you need to give some kind of form to it, to communicate it somehow.

How deeply do we allow our experience to touch us? If you really allow your heart to open, if you allow yourself to love, then everything you see will come to life.

THE ARTIST'S EVENING HYMN

*O for an inner creative power to thunder through my mind.
O for a growth full flowing with sap to spring from my fingers.
I only shudder, I only stutter, and yet I cannot stop.
I feel you, I know you, Nature, and so I must grasp you.
When I think then how my mind these many years has been opening up,
And now tastes a stream of delight where a barren waste used to be,
O then I long for you, Nature, and long to feel you with faith and love.
You will be for me a leaping fountain of delight,
Playing from a thousand outlets.
You will enhance and refine all the powers of my mind,
And expand this my narrow life to eternity.*
Goethe

It's best not to expect some great performance at the end of this retreat, or expect to go home with some great work of art. But sometimes when we improvise with each other, say in music or in movement, there can be quite exquisite moments of beauty. They last maybe just seconds, and then they are past, just gone. This is the remarkable thing about improvisation. We don't have to be Goethe or Beethoven to experience some element of self-transcendence. Improvisation only really works when we are truly ourselves, with our inspiration, our awkwardness, and our fears. From there we can reach out to others, and then the magic can happen. It's like the power of collective ritual: you have access to states of mind much bigger than your own. Improvisations find material out of which ritual evolves, because they use the basic ingredients of ritual: music, movement, costumes...

So what is it that we will be creating on this retreat? What is the object of our creative talents? Well, in the first place it is ourselves. We are the work of art – and by this I don't mean 'body sculpting'. The raw material of this work of art – which is a lifetime's work – well, probably several lifetimes' work – is ourselves, our conditioning, our tendencies, our likes and dislikes, our typical states of mind. This is where we start from.

And the main tool we'll be using to work on ourselves is mindfulness. With mindfulness we can detect the nature of the raw material we'll be working with – how we can change it, what its possibilities are.



Why so many media? What's the advantage of the multi-media approach? Well, I think using many media somehow cuts through our conceptual mind, giving us access to the relaxed approach of a child that explores the world with all senses and dances and sings spontaneously in response.

Being an artist is very difficult. We experience so many tensions. The tension between our vision, what we aspire to, and our ordinary life experience can be very painful. We experience tension between structure and freedom, between solitude and company. Also, any artist who goes beyond banalities has to come to terms with suffering – and yet we all so desperately want to be happy. There is a huge tension between our striving towards happiness and the necessity to experience and accept suffering.

I find that this lies at the heart of the creative process. When I practise the cello, there is often a moment when I feel I can't go on. The sense of suffering welling up is just too much to bear. I really have to expand enormously to make room for that. Simply avoiding playing is not the answer. When I sit on my cushion to meditate, the same thing happens

Dreams of the Buddha

Little Buddha

Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci

CiBy 2000/Seprocor Ansalt

2hr 20min

Over fifty years ago Antonin Artaud addressed an appeal to the Dalai Lama for help in the spiritual crisis of the West:

'O Grand Lama ... grace us with your illuminations in a language our contaminated minds can understand ... transform our Mind ... Teach us ... how we may no longer be earthbound.'

Such yearnings, such projections, have coloured Western views of Buddhism ever since, and find eloquent expression in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha*. His earliest idea, to film the life of the Buddha, remains as a significant strand – a series of statuesque, emblematic scenes following Siddhartha from birth to Enlightenment. There is a good deal of supernatural detail (when the baby Siddhartha walks, we really do see lotus flowers bloom in his footsteps), and Keanu Reeves, playing Siddhartha, has only to look the part of a beautiful prince and, when he sits, to look as if he is meditating – while all around the special effects men work their miracles.

There are glories here, scenes which have long inhabited my imagination, animated – with the immediacy of which only film is capable – more vividly than the most expressive of thangkas or the most eloquent of poems. But it is easy to see why Bertolucci decided that the Buddha's biography would not make a film in itself. The mythical quality of these scenes captures something of the Buddha's universality, but they also seem distant, removed, and it would have been a great mistake to have enlivened them with psychological motivation. Myth has long ceased to be a language in which we can experience ourselves directly. Instead we see myths as archetypes, as metaphors for 'real life'. So *Little Buddha* has a parallel plot to bridge the gulf. And here Bertolucci has hit upon a very large question indeed: the

relationship between Buddhism and the modern West.

The location is Seattle, depicted as a spiritually inert place of greys and blues enlivened principally by the spontaneity and freshness of eleven-year-old Jessie

adventure which will enhance their lives, without threatening the values by which they are lived. The conflict is given a fascinating psychological twist. Siddhartha's father wants to shield him from reality, only to be thwarted when

the Tibetans are refugees inhabiting a complex social reality in which tulkus have a pivotal role as feudal overlords and spiritual autocrats. Furthermore, their idealized world is entirely discrete from American realities.



Konrad. One day his parents (Bridget Fonda and Chris Isaak) are visited by a group of Tibetan lamas, 'like the three kings from the East', who announce that Jessie may be a *tulku*, the reincarnation of their teacher. This naturally throws the parents into a spin. They eventually decide they will allow Jessie to be taken to Bhutan for 'tests'. In part they are charmed by the lamas, but more important is the parallel between the spiritual poverty of their lives and the richness of the alternative. But what is that alternative? Siddhartha's life is intercut with these events to suggest the archetypal implications of their decision. The four sights mirror the unsatisfactoriness of Seattle life, where Dean's business is failing; an old friend commits suicide. There must be more to life than this. Siddhartha decides to go forth from palace life, and Dean has a final conversation with Lama Norbu. Norbu tells him that Jessie is being offered a position of power and spiritual leadership. The decision is made. They will go, father and son.

But the analogy is patently false. Siddhartha's going forth meant the abandonment of worldly ties and aspirations, and a renunciation of the family. Dean and Jessie undertake a spiritual

adventure which will enhance their lives, without threatening the values by which they are lived. The conflict is given a fascinating psychological twist. Siddhartha's father wants to shield him from reality, only to be thwarted when

his son sees old age, disease, and death; meanwhile, Dean cannot tell Jessie about his friend's suicide. We see a culture of denial expressed in an inauthentic relationship between father and son. In his recent book *Dreams of Power*, Peter Bishop asks what 'root metaphors' underlie Western imaginings of Tibet. 'It is the face of the Father – the Holy or Wise Old Man, the elder and the autocrat, that consistently appears in the Western imagination.' Bound up in this are 'longings for superior knowledge, for assurance, for what is ordered, old, and established, for a continuity with hierarchical disciplines'. The promise of all these things is whispered to Dean by Lama Norbu, the ideal father who brings security, certainty, and an answer to the endless question 'Who am I?' in the good news of Jessie's true identity as a tulku. Jessie is thereby linked to the timeless realm of authentic meanings symbolized by Siddhartha and embodied in the Tibetans.

Little Buddha speaks to the Western fantasy of Buddhism as the mirror image of its own shortcomings. It presents an idealized view of Tibetan Buddhism, with little sense that

One scene shows a Dharma centre in Seattle which is entirely populated by Tibetans, without a single Western practitioner in sight. And Dean does not become a Buddhist himself. Only Jessie, the golden child, magically endowed through the grace of reincarnation and the wisdom of innocence, can enter the rarefied reality of the Tibetans.

So much for the baloney – and there is a good deal of it in *Little Buddha*. But the film's innocence is also part of its charm, and in its naivety it invokes moments of powerful engagement with the imaginal world of Buddhism. Siddhartha's palace is full of the dances, music, and smells of classical India, which challenged my hazy view of it as an enchanted fairy castle. The Enlightenment, which one might have thought unfilmable, is triumphantly realized. And towards the end Sakamoto's soundtrack features a shimmering soprano singing the *Heart Sutra* in Sanskrit over cascading strings as Lama Norbu's ashes are borne away downstream on waves eddying into silence.

Vishvapani

This review is based on a longer print of the film than the version released in the UK.

Buddhist Classics?

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Liberation Through Understanding in the Between

Translated by Robert A.F. Thurman

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Openness, Clarity, Sensitivity

Michael Hookham

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Entering the Stream

An Introduction to the Buddha and His Teachings

Edited by Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn

Rider

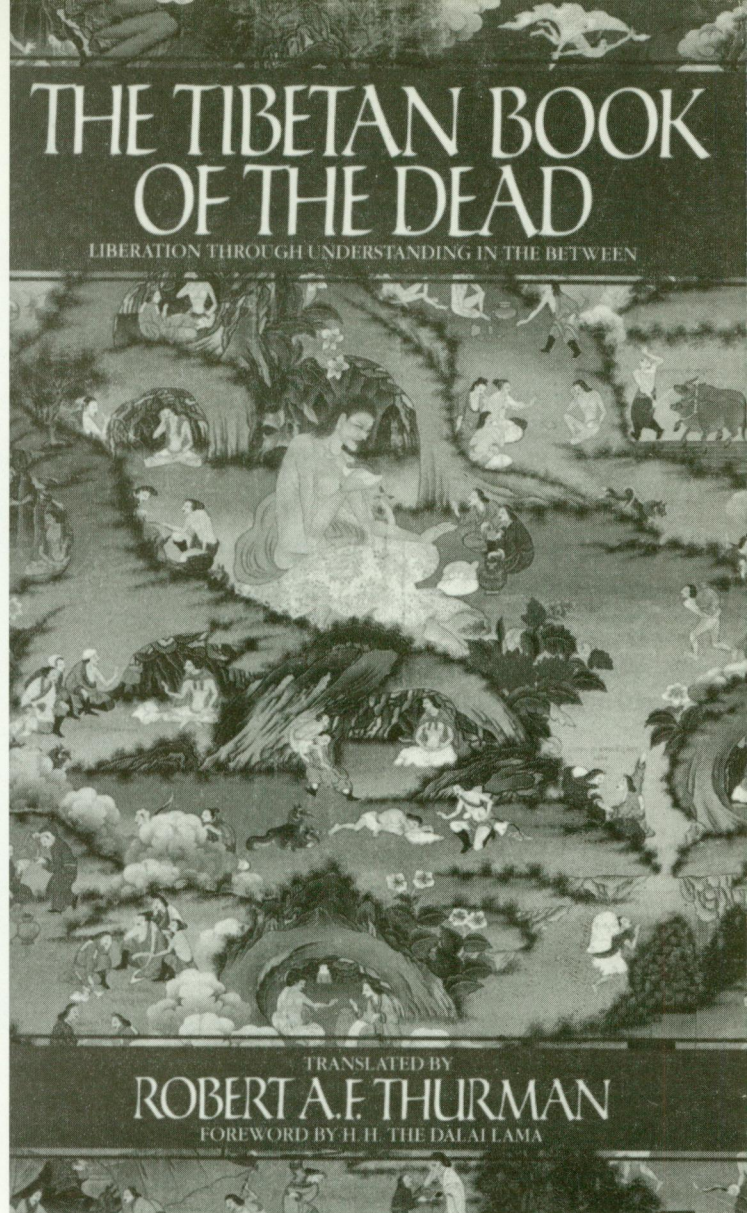
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Over the years, a small number of Buddhist texts have acquired 'classic' status in Western publishing circles. 'Classic' in this context means that a fair number of translations are printed and, in the case of those perceived to be the *most* classic, large general publishing houses keep a version in print. Examples which come to mind include the *Dhammapada*, the *Heart* and *Diamond Sutras*, Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, the *Sutra of Hui Neng*, and, the text currently under question, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (in Tibetan *Bardo Thodol*), composed by Padmasambhava.

Undoubtedly these are all important Buddhist texts, though it is unclear why some should have acquired 'classic' status while other no less important texts still await translation, let alone popular dissemination. Perhaps it is just that 'nothing succeeds like success' – though one can hardly help remarking that an important quality for a text if it is to become a (popular) 'Buddhist classic' is that it *shouldn't be too long*.

This is not to suggest that the appearance of new or more popular translations of important Buddhist texts is in any sense a bad thing. The more accessible the Dharma becomes in the West, the better. The *Bardo Thodol* is a rather curious case, though, having acquired its 'classic' status from among the many Tibetan texts dealing with dying and after-death experiences mainly (I suspect) because the redoubtable W.Y. Evans-Wenz happened upon a Tibetan xylograph of this particular text in 1919. The published edition struck a chord of considerable interest with the general public which has kept it – complete with Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's translation, C.G. Jung's 'Psychological Commentary', and Evans-Wenz's own considerable annotations – in print ever since.

The nature of Robert Thurman's new translation and commentary is suggestive of changes that have taken place in popular Western perceptions of Buddhism over the last sixty years or so. Evans-Wenz and, especially, Jung, were attempting to 'translate' what must have appeared to most Westerners at



the time as a strange, exotic, oriental text into terms which would make it at least to some degree anthropologically and psychologically comprehensible. Thurman's translation, by contrast, is designed to be used.

Indeed, as Thurman points out in his preface, the idea of using 'yogas for dying' is, even outside Buddhist circles, increasingly well-known in America, effective practical approaches having been developed by Buddhist-orientated teachers such as Stephen Levine. Levine himself, Thurman tells us, found the imagery of the *Bardo Thodol* 'too cumbersome and unfamiliar for the ordinary person confronting his or her death'. Thurman's objective, then, was to produce a translation with commentary which would be 'simple and useful, easy for bereaved relatives to read, and easy for lost souls to hear in the room where they anxiously hover about their corpses and wonder what has happened to them'. Moreover, as becomes clear as Thurman's commentary

progresses, he aimed to produce a version which could be used by people of any religious background, or none.

To what extent he succeeds in fulfilling these objectives, I'm not sure. From a Buddhist point of view, his commentary provides a much more authentic introduction to the work than Evans-Wenz's, and is more comprehensive and practical than that in the 1975 version by Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa. The main introduction, which occupies Part One of the book, gives a brief overview of Buddhism in general, and Tibetan Buddhism in particular, before moving on to a discussion of death, the approach to death exemplified by the *Bardo Thodol*, and an outline of the yogic meditation practices of the inner (or *anuttara*) tantras.

This contains a great deal of interesting and useful material. For example, I found Thurman's discussion of 'nothing' very stimulating. He focuses on the untenability of perhaps the most prevalent modern manifestation of

'annihilationism', the idea that at death one simply enters into a state of 'nothingness'. As he points out: 'This ultimate end of everything ... is nothing in itself. And yet we think of nothing as something. Clearly, "nothing" is that conceptual entity that shows most clearly the illusory status of all conceptual entities.... "Nothing" is categorically unimaginable, so it is incorrect to picture nothing as a destination.... It cannot be entered.' (pp.23-4)

Also excellent is his argument – from a clearly Mahayanistic perspective – against viewing *nirvana* as 'extinction' or total separation from existence, and his subsequent discussion of 'naked vision' (pp.45-50). And the section on the inner tantras, though increasingly technical and perhaps less comprehensible for readers comparatively new to Buddhism, nevertheless contains one of the most useful brief surveys of this area that I have come across.

However, his attempts to universalize the text are not always so convincing. While some Buddhist practices, such as contemplation of death and impermanence, are relatively easy to present in a form meaningful to agnostics or adherents of other religions, I have my doubts as to whether a simple substitution of, say, a visualized image of Jesus or Muhammad for one of the *bardo* deities would have quite the same meaning or effect for a Christian or Muslim. And when it comes to Thurman's exposition of the Perfection Stages of the *anuttara-tantra*, he has to admit 'it is hard to make suggestions about how a non-Buddhist yogi or yogini might learn about [them] and design parallel processes that fit in with his or her worldview.'

Another problem with regard to Thurman's wish that the translation be 'simple and useful, easy for bereaved relatives to read...' is the nature of the terminology that he uses to translate some of the original

Tibetan. This version is 'through translated' in a way that neither of the previous ones are. One might think that this would make for a clearer and more approachable text, but, strangely, this is not altogether the case. All too often Thurman comes up with strings of phrases which are mind-bogglingly difficult to grasp. For example, 'So I have called these two the "central channel reality clear-light death-point between" and the "out-of-body reality clear-light death-point between"' (p.120). In some cases, too, I think it would have been far preferable to have left proper nouns untranslated. 'Angel' summons up very different images for Westerners from '*dakini*'; likewise 'scientist', though viable, seems a very misleading translation to have chosen for '*vidyadhara*', even if Thurman takes care to note that these 'scientists' don't wear white coats!

Still, it is possible to argue about terminology *ad infinitum*; although there were a number of other terms that I wasn't happy with (particularly 'soul' – I really think it is better to steer clear of words with strong Judaeo-Christian connotations wherever possible), in general this is a stimulating and helpful translation and commentary. As a bonus, Thurman translates two additional texts from the Natural Liberation cycle from which the *Bardo Thodol* comes, the second of which is Padmasambhava's marvellous 'Natural Liberation Through Naked Vision'. Well worth investing in, even if rather overpriced.

Another book which, like the *Bardo Thodol*, has its roots in the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism is Michael Hookham's *Openness, Clarity, Sensitivity*. Edited from talks, it is presented in a very simple, direct, and approachable style. Those familiar with *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness* by Ven. Khenpo Tsultrim Rimpoché (edited by Shenpen Hookham) will quickly recognize the basis of Michael

Hookham's teaching as the *shentong* position within Tibetan Buddhism.

Most schools of Buddhism teach that the nature of reality – 'things as they really are' – transcends both subject and object. Unenlightened beings, who misperceive things as existing dualistically – that is, precisely in terms of subject and object – can therefore approach reality from a subjective or an objective angle. The objective angle sees reality as 'out there', to be moved towards and ultimately attained. The subjective angle – of which *shentong* is an expression – sees reality as 'in here' already, and needing to be uncovered or revealed (the 'jewel in the lotus' image embodies this).

Misunderstanding of this approach is to be avoided: people have been known to jump to the conclusion that they must be 'Buddhas already' and therefore don't need to practise the Dharma! But it has to be remembered that both approaches are equally 'true' and 'untrue', in that they are both but dualistic pointers to the non-dual nature of reality which, when realized, transcends them both.

Openness, Clarity, Sensitivity proceeds from the understanding that the three qualities embodied in the title are the very nature of mind. The unenlightened mind is a distorted expression of them; the wisdom and compassion of Enlightenment is their efflorescence when the true nature of mind is fully realized. At this point it also becomes evident that in fact 'all three are a single experience of awareness that is everywhere,' (p.34).

With this as the basis, the rest of the book is a lucid, comprehensive, and often inspiring meditation manual, covering everything from posture, through *shamatha* and *vipashyana* approaches, to daily life awareness practice and much more besides, mostly with a *shentong* orientation. Experienced meditators will

find much of interest and use in this book.

Finally, a brief mention of *Entering the Stream*, edited by Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn. This, as the banner on the front cover makes clear, is the 'companion reader to the film *Little Buddha*'. It's surprisingly good. Two brief introductory sections covering the Buddha's life and the development of Buddhism are followed by a well-selected group of extracts from the literature of most major Buddhist traditions. It's well illustrated, well produced, and reasonably priced. Definitely recommended as a reader for those comparatively new to Buddhism.

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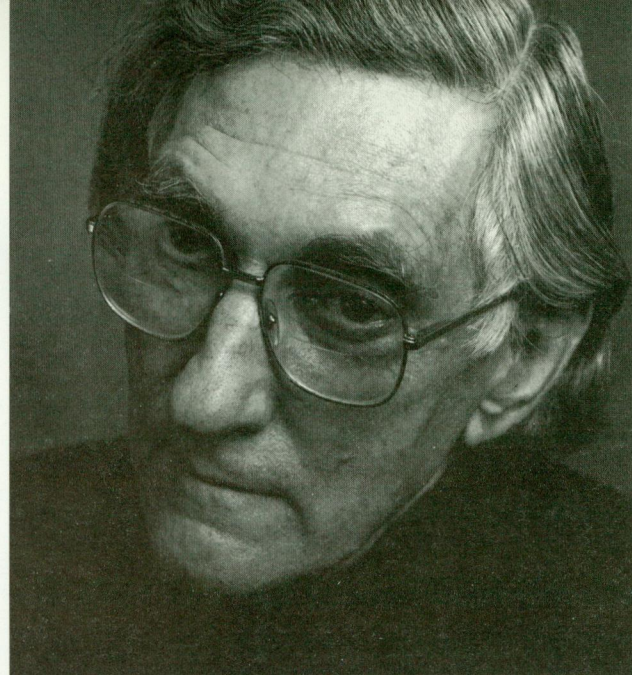


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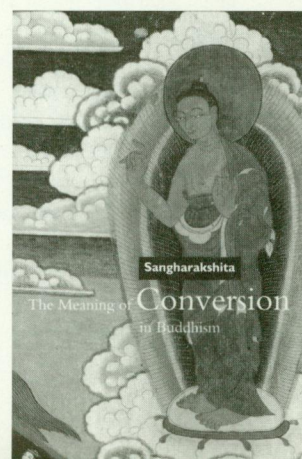
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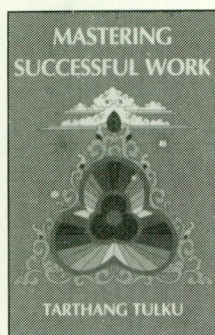
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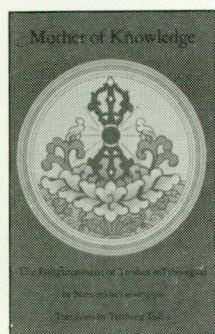
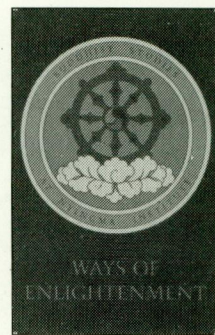


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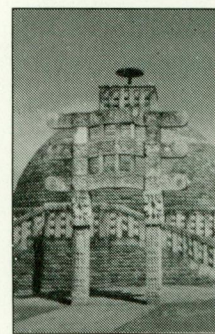


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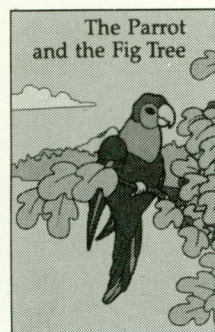
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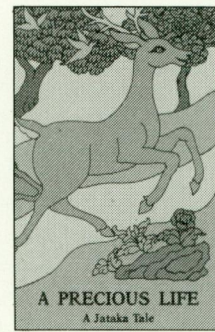
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an imaginal world

Two FWBO arts centres opened recently.

Vidyadevi reports on progress so far

For several years the Croydon Buddhist Centre ran a highly successful arts centre which blazed the trail for the emergence of public FWBO arts activities. These days many centres run arts events, and even arts retreats; I remember learning on my visit to Nagpur in India that 'arts and sports' were a facet of centre activities there. And last September two new arts centres were opened, one in London, the other in Brighton. But what are 'Buddhist arts centres' trying to do? I recently visited both centres to find out.

The London Buddhist Arts Centre is in Bethnal Green. The neighbourhood is a mixture of East End tradition – I was fascinated to discover a 'pie and mash' shop of the kind that I imagine flourished in the area in Victorian times – and newer elements like cafés and art galleries. The London Buddhist Centre has been based in Bethnal Green since 1978, and around it has grown a mandala of activities which have contributed to the local cultural mix – a bookshop, gift shop, café, wholefood shop,

Bodywise (a natural health centre) – and now an arts centre. Although the new venture has close associations with the local Buddhist centre, it is run by FWBO Arts, a charity committed to supporting the arts throughout the Movement. The centre has premises on the top floors of the Globetown Community Association building, the space having been offered on the strength of longstanding good relations between Buddhists and the local community. After a climb up several flights of stone stairs, you emerge in a large, light space, with a wooden floor smooth enough to be used for dance rehearsals, and light-coloured walls contrasting with one of deep indigo-blue, a dramatic background for performances and talks. Next to this elegant space is a studio which is rented out to local

Buddhist artists; and on the floor below is the busy arts centre office. Here I met Srivati, a member of the centre team. Srivati's background is in teaching and community theatre, and she hopes that the arts centre will be a point of contact between local Buddhists and the wider community. 'Not everybody is interested in learning to meditate – or even going to yoga classes or buying wholefoods – but they might fancy learning to draw.... The arts centre provides workshops which teach skills and self-expression. People could create something for the whole community – a mural, a performance in the park, storytelling.' The centre also runs a 'learning about art' programme: for example, an introduction to Mahler's Seventh Symphony followed by a visit to the Barbican

concert hall to hear the work performed. The idea is not just to pass on information, Srivati told me, but to put people in contact with men and women of genius, giving an approach to higher states of consciousness. So is the underlying aim of the centre to get people meditating and studying the Dharma? Srivati was quite clear: 'Whether or not people are inspired to learn to meditate, something of Buddhist values is being communicated. We've attempted to make the arts centre premises themselves a work of art in the true sense, a work of art which communicates values and beauty. The way people work together here is also a work of art.' All the centre's activities are run by Buddhists, so that the team's vision will not be compromised. Next I met Mallika, also a key member of the arts centre team, in



London: Chintamani at work on a Rupa, Jo Chandler dancing
Brighton: Indrabodhi's Albion

another local institution, the Burger Bar. For many years Mallika was the director of a community arts centre in Glasgow; the coming into being of the new centre fulfils a long-cherished ambition. In outlining her vision for the centre, she emphasized friendliness. 'The Buddhist artists based here are trying to work in harmony and observe the precepts. This creates an atmosphere which affects all those who come to the centre.'



Mallika observed that people engaged in artistic activity have a strong meditative quality. 'We can solve a lot of psychological problems through the arts. They let us release the energy we've suppressed and channel it in a positive way.' Back at the arts centre, I met Chintamani in his flat there. Chintamani is well-known for his paintings and sculptures of Buddha images (including those at the London Buddhist Centre). I had seen him earlier in the day, at work on the memorial stupa for Dhardo Rimpoche which was shortly to be dedicated at Padmaloka. Now he expanded on the theme of the connection between Buddhism and the arts. 'Everybody has to learn to perceive in the way that the practice and appreciation of art encourages one to perceive. If you're practising meditation or studying the Dharma, you should

be perceiving in that way – the practice of art is simply a "hands on" approach to such perception. Through the arts one can create the imaginal world "out there" in order to bring it "in here". Not many people are capable of experiencing it "in here" straightaway.' Did Chintamani feel that the arts centre would contribute to a renaissance in which the integration of Buddhism with Western art forms would produce great art? A big question, and Chintamani took a pragmatic approach to it. "Great art" probably won't happen for fifty or a hundred years. What we're doing now is simply laying the ground for that.' It's a cliché that art is the product of conflict, but I wondered whether harmonious conditions really support artistic activity. Chintamani thought so: 'I'm pretty certain that the situation is conducive to good work. It's only now and here that I've begun to experience the kind of intensity of creativity I felt as a child. My work is taken seriously here.' 'I once thought "I'm a Buddhist artist, I paint pictures of traditional Buddhist images" – but that keeps whole areas held down, creativity to be freed. I don't want to keep referring to the Indian medieval period – it's not good for the psyche. We've got our own cultural experience to assimilate. Western Buddhist art will be whatever art reflects our ideals and striving.' The next day I visited the Evolution Arts and Natural Health Centre in Brighton. Brighton is a seaside town with a thriving alternative culture, and the new arts centre has premises above the FWBO Evolution gift shop in the main shopping street. You approach the centre from the quiet terrace which runs behind the shops. Here too there are lots of stairs, brightly painted, with students' work pinned to the walls. When I visited, one of the two teaching rooms was strewn with the works of the batik class, the other occupied by a class learning papier mâché. Up the stairs past the health practitioners' room is a cluster of studios: a genuine 'artist's garret'! Clay,

wire, paper everywhere; and, by contrast, a meticulously set-out jeweller's workshop, with a view over rooftops to the silver-grey line of sea and sky. In one of the studios works Indrabodhi, the inspiration behind the arts centre, and now a member of the centre team. He told me that the Brighton centre differs from the London one in that non-Buddhists as well as FWBO artists run courses and take studio space there. There's a practical reason for this – for financial reasons the centre has had to run a full programme of events right from the start – but Indrabodhi also values the creation of a meeting point with local artists. At present the centre is running twenty-four weekly classes – in drawing, print-making, batik, book illustration, papier mâché, voice work, imaginative writing, drama, movement and rhythm – as well as weekend events. Indrabodhi reckons that over two hundred people attend the centre every week in term time. Another facet of the centre is the natural health programme run in the practitioners' room, which has a strongly peaceful atmosphere. According to Indrabodhi there's a natural connection between the arts and health. 'Health isn't just a state of lack of illness; it's a state of vitality and creativity. The arts help people to be healthy through expressing their creativity.' It was my impression that the Brighton centre is less overtly 'Buddhist' than the London one, although meditation is taught twice a week as part of the natural health programme. During my visit I met Susan Egan, who teaches the papier mâché class, and was interested to hear her impressions of the centre. Susan learned to meditate at the Brighton Buddhist Centre, but she doesn't particularly think of the Evolution Arts & Natural Health Centre as being 'Buddhist'. She wanted to work with people with a holistic approach, and was attracted to the centre as an 'alternative' environment. She finds it a pleasant, easy-going, friendly place to work. My conversation with Susan stimulated me into reflecting that the connections between

Buddhism and the arts are intrinsic, even when they are not made explicit. Susan's approach to art – her interest in the impermanence of environmental sculpture, the way she encourages students to bring their awareness to what's happening in front of them – had resonances with the Buddhist approach to life – mindfulness, metta, awareness of impermanence. And the process of creating artwork which she described – the struggle to focus, the sense of boredom, the breaking through to enjoyment and concentration – reminded me of my own battles with the hindrances in meditation. That evening I was back at the London Buddhist Arts Centre for the launch of Sangharakshita's latest book, *Who is the Buddha?*. To mark the occasion, Sangharakshita read his own poetry about the Buddha as well as excerpts from Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. As I listened to his sensitive and devotional reading, I reflected on my experience of the two arts centres which his teaching on the religion of art has inspired. Both centres have a friendly and lively atmosphere, but in some ways they're very different. To generalize, my impression is that the London centre has begun by focusing on events – talks, exhibitions, presentations – while also running a programme of workshops. I was impressed by the effort that's gone into making the centre beautiful, despite a tight budget. The Brighton centre, meanwhile, has begun by specializing in classes, courses, and workshops, with the occasional public event. The centre reminded me of an art school; it's a place that makes you want to roll your sleeves up and get on with it. Both centres struck me as having, in Srivati's phrase, 'a mixture of strong ideals and nitty-gritty realism'. And as Indrabodhi pointed out, the fact that the two centres have begun with different approaches adds value to the experiment. On the evidence so far I imagine that, like FWBO Buddhist centres, our arts centres, within the context of a shared vision, will each have a distinctive approach of their own.

Sangharakshita Diary

As Sangharakshita approaches seventy, one of his principal concerns is to hand over his remaining responsibilities to the Order members who are able to assume them (which in practice means the public preceptors and the presidents). But he comments: 'It isn't just a matter of handing over the files.' It also involves sharing his concerns, his understanding of the Dharma, and his views of the FWBO, as well as deepening links of spiritual friendship. In this spirit Sangharakshita spent the week before Christmas at Padmaloka with a number of the presidents and preceptors (see photo) for an enjoyable period of informal discussion.

After Christmas Sangharakshita spent two days at Brancaster in north Norfolk, on retreat with the Order members who work for Windhorse Trading. He was there at their request, as they wanted to explore the



subject of Right Livelihood with him, and they held three or four discussion sessions on the subject. He returned to Padmaloka for two days to go through old photographs with Mokshapriya, who is establishing an FWBO photographic archive.

Sangharakshita returned to London before the New Year, but on 5 January he travelled to Oxford with Kulananda to meet Shenpen Hookham, Rigdzen Shikpo (Mike Hookham), Jampa Thaye (Dr David Stott), and Lama Denis Teundroup. This was a continuation of a series of meetings between Buddhist teachers, and the purpose was to explore the basis for co-operation between Buddhist groups. In a similar vein Sangharakshita was very happy to accept an invitation to participate in a symposium entitled 'The Nature of Reality: Buddhism as Transformation', to be held in Tucson, Arizona, in October. The four day event will be attended by over a thousand people and the three other principal participants will represent Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism while Sangharakshita represents Western Buddhism. While he is in America he also hopes to visit Aryaloka and the new San Francisco Buddhist Centre.

Sangharakshita visited the Art of the Ancient World exhibition at the Royal Academy and the Claude exhibition at the National Gallery and he had interviews with people from USA, Brazil, Holland, Mexico, Germany, Holland, and the UK. And finally he has completed three more chapters of his memoirs. These chapters cover the period from late 1953 to early 1954 and describe his work with the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta, the sudden death of a Western Buddhist friend in Kalimpong, and a lecture tour in Assam among Thai Buddhists. Sangharakshita commented that it sometimes takes him longer to write about the events than they took to occur. The tour, for example, lasted ten days while writing about it forty years later occupied him for two weeks.

Burns Evening

In late January, Kovida and Sarvananda celebrated the life and poetry of Robert Burns when they took their 'Burns Evening' around four British FWBO centres. The evenings combined songs, sketches, and historical and poetic readings; and they also included recitals and music from local artistes at each of the four venues: Glasgow, Cambridge, and Norwich Buddhist Centres, and the London Buddhist Arts Centre.

Sarvananda writes:

We decided to do a Burns Evening for a number of reasons. Kovida and I are both very involved with FWBO Arts, and are obviously interested in beginning to translate the Dharma into the language and imagery of our own culture. We didn't try to force particular connections between Burns and Buddhism, but to let the poetry speak for itself. As victims of many unhappy Burns Suppers from our youth in Scotland, we wanted to do something different with our own Burns Evening: to show that Robert Burns's poetry did not spring up out of the soil of Scotland in isolation, but that there was much of huge worth written both before his time and after it.

Scottish poetry has been very rich and potent since the 1920s and we read quite a few modern pieces. We also wanted to make fun of a few stereotypes, and show that Burns is far more than kilts and haggis. This is all very much a beginning – obviously a full synthesis of the Dharma and Western culture will take a very long time – but it is very exciting to read something that is so obviously Dharmic. Burns had a huge empathy for people (and animals), and a very strong sense of the impermanence of all phenomena. As he wrote in 'Tam O'Shanter', his great narrative poem: 'But pleasures are like poppies spread, You seize the flower, the bloom is shed; Or like the snowfall in the river, A moment white – then melts forever.'

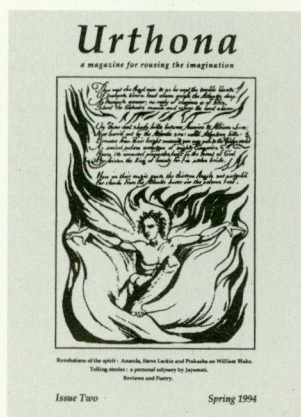
Sarvananda



Urthona

1993 saw the launch of *Urthona*, a magazine dedicated to promoting the arts within the FWBO. The second edition focuses on the work of William Blake, and the story-telling project which was initiated in both England and India by Jayamati. It is available at Buddhist centres, or subscriptions are available at £7 for three issues from:

Urthona, 17 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8EG, UK.



Ordinations

On the morning of 25 November 1993 there was a fresh snowfall at Dhanakosha retreat centre in Scotland, an auspicious beginning for the day on which twelve women were ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. The ordinations were notable for the way in which they established a further link in some very long-standing relationships. This was particularly the case with the ordinations of Satyadevi and Pundarikini, two New Zealanders who had had their mitra ceremonies together in Auckland some fifteen years previously.

Two months later, on 30 January, in a very different setting, the Saddhammapredeep retreat centre at Bhaja, India, another public ordination ceremony took place. This one, conducted by Srimala, marked the entry into the Order of seven Indian women. This was a very important day in the life of the women's wing of TBMSG, inspiring Indian Buddhist women with the knowledge that it is possible to commit oneself fully to the Three Jewels, even in what are very often difficult circumstances. With these seven ordinations (which bring the number of Dhammacharinis in India to twelve) the women's wing of the Order has not only grown in strength, but also made its presence felt throughout the state of Maharashtra: three of the new Dhammacharinis come from Vidarbha (the Nagpur region), one from Bombay, and three from Poona.

And on 4 February 1994 Dharmachari Saccanama was publicly ordained by Subhuti on the Men's National Order Weekend at Padmaloka retreat centre. Saccanama attended some of the ordination retreat at Guhyaloka in 1992, but had to return home because of health problems. In the week leading up to his ordination, the Dharmacharis ordained in 1992 were at Padmaloka on a post-ordination retreat, so they were all present to welcome Saccanama into the Order.

Sakyadhita's 3rd International Conference

Sanghadevi and Punyamegha participated in the Sakyadhita ('Daughters of the Buddha') Third International Conference held in Sri Lanka in October last year. Sanghadevi had been invited to deliver a paper entitled 'The Role of Laywomen in Buddhism', and Punyamegha gave a slide-show presentation of the work of the Karuna Trust. The theme of the conference was 'Buddhist Women in Modern Society', reflecting the objectives of Sakyadhita as formulated in its founding meeting, held at Bodh Gaya in 1989. The inaugural address was given by His Excellency D.B. Wijetunge, President of Sri Lanka, at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall. Topics covered by the papers given at the conference included: 'Maintaining Human Values in a Time of Rapid Change', 'Challenges in Monastic Life Today', 'The Order of Buddhist Nuns – its Revival, Arguments For and Against', and 'Comparing Buddhist and Christian Women's Experience'.

In addressing the theme of 'The Role of Laywomen in Buddhism', Sanghadevi took the opportunity to point out that although the tradition of the bhikkhuni ordination had 'died out' in many countries, there were other means by which women could practise the Dharma fully. She stressed the centrality of Going for Refuge in an individual's effective practice of Buddhism, and cautioned against a tendency to over-identify with the monastic life-style.

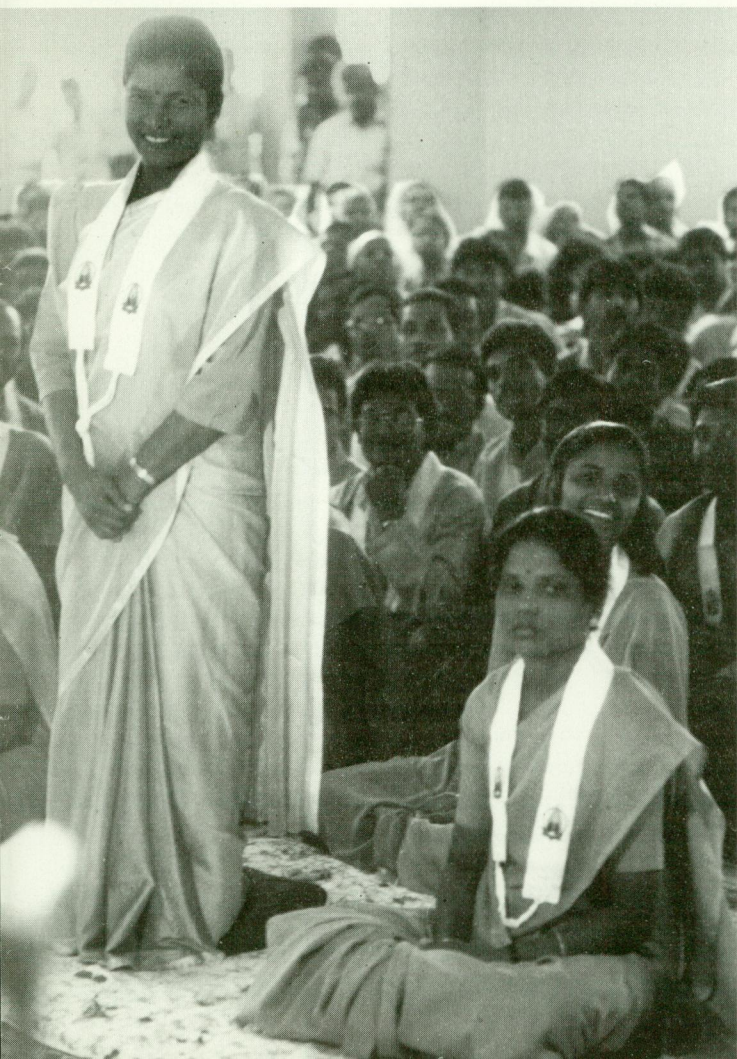
The 150 or so women who attended the conference consisted of three main groups: foreign delegates, Sri Lankan nuns, and Sri Lankan lay-women. Punyamegha comments that she found the conference an opportunity to meet with other women Buddhists, and to discover the different ways in which they expressed their commitment to the Three Jewels; and it also provided a platform on which to hold up Sangharakshita's vision and that of the Western Buddhist Order to the wider Buddhist world.

Manchester

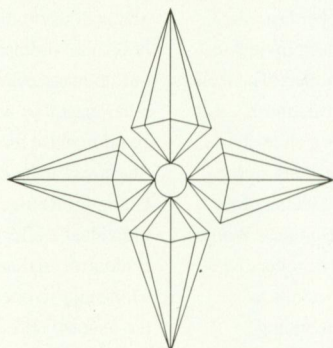
FWBO activities are expanding in the Greater Manchester area. The Manchester Buddhist Centre is outgrowing its current home in the southern Manchester suburb of Chorlton, with courses over-subscribed and ongoing classes bursting the centre at its seams. The centre team has been looking into the possibilities of the acquisition of new premises in the city centre. Classes for gay men and lesbians have also been started in the area, and in March Arthapriya, the Centre chairman, spoke on Radio Four's *Prayer For Today* slot.

As part of an attempt to make the Dharma more widely available in this area, which is a conurbation with a very large population and good transport links, activities have been initiated in Bolton, a large town north of Manchester. So far three courses have been run by Priyavadita, Nagapriya, and more than sixty people have attended.

Vijaya, standing, and Ratnamati, newly ordained in India

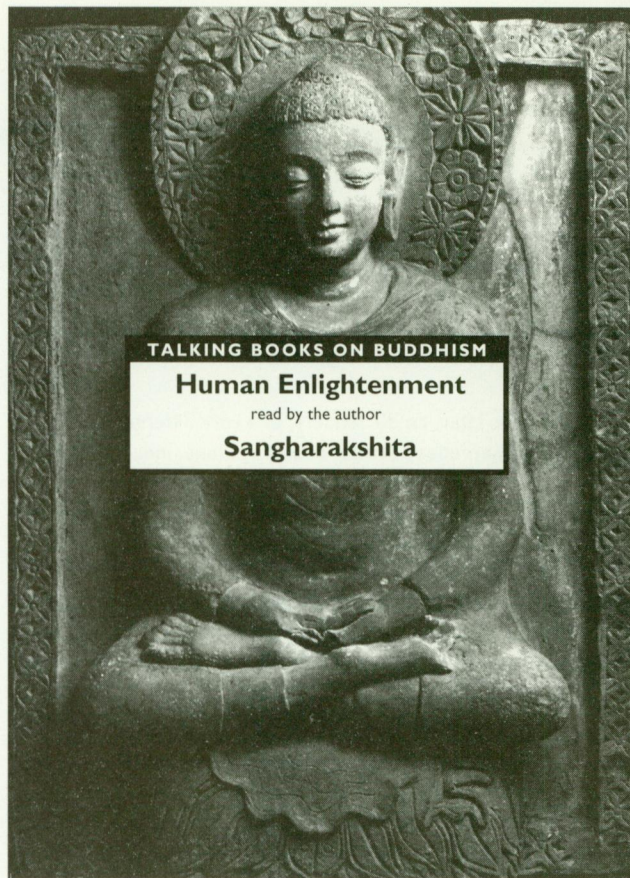


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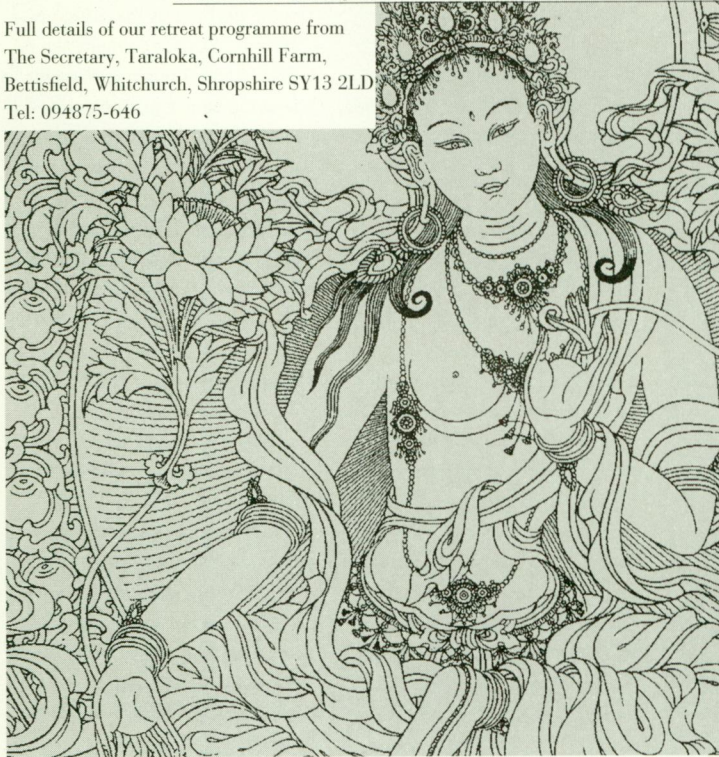
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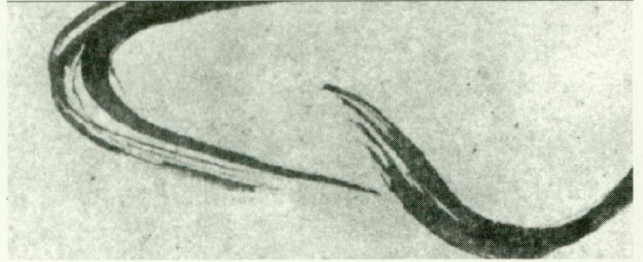


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	23 - Aug 4	Teachers retreat, for men Order members
Aug	12 - 19	Summer retreat
	19 - Sept 2	Insight retreat, for men Order members
Sept	6 - 17	Refresher retreat
	17 - 29	Teachers retreat, for women Order members
Oct	8 - 22	Brahmavihara's retreat
	22 - Nov 4	Mindfulness retreat
Nov	11 - 25	Meditation & Insight retreat
	25 - Dec 2	Winter retreat
Dec	6 - 17	Sesshin
	17 - 31	Mitra retreat



Earthquake

On September 30th 1993, an earthquake rocked central India, claiming over 15,000 lives and shattering 300,000 more. Karuna in India is helping in the rebuilding of the communities in the region by providing accommodation for children from the very poorest families.

In 1994, we are funding 3 hostels there, each housing 60 children. Priority places will be given to those left without family or proper home. For these boys and girls, the hostels will provide the supportive environment necessary in overcoming the trauma of the disaster, and the opportunity to complete their education.

Since 1980 Karuna has been successful in working with ex-untouchable Buddhists in India to create education and health projects which promote dignity and self reliance. In India your generosity can go a long way: £10 will support a child for a month, £200 will establish a new place.

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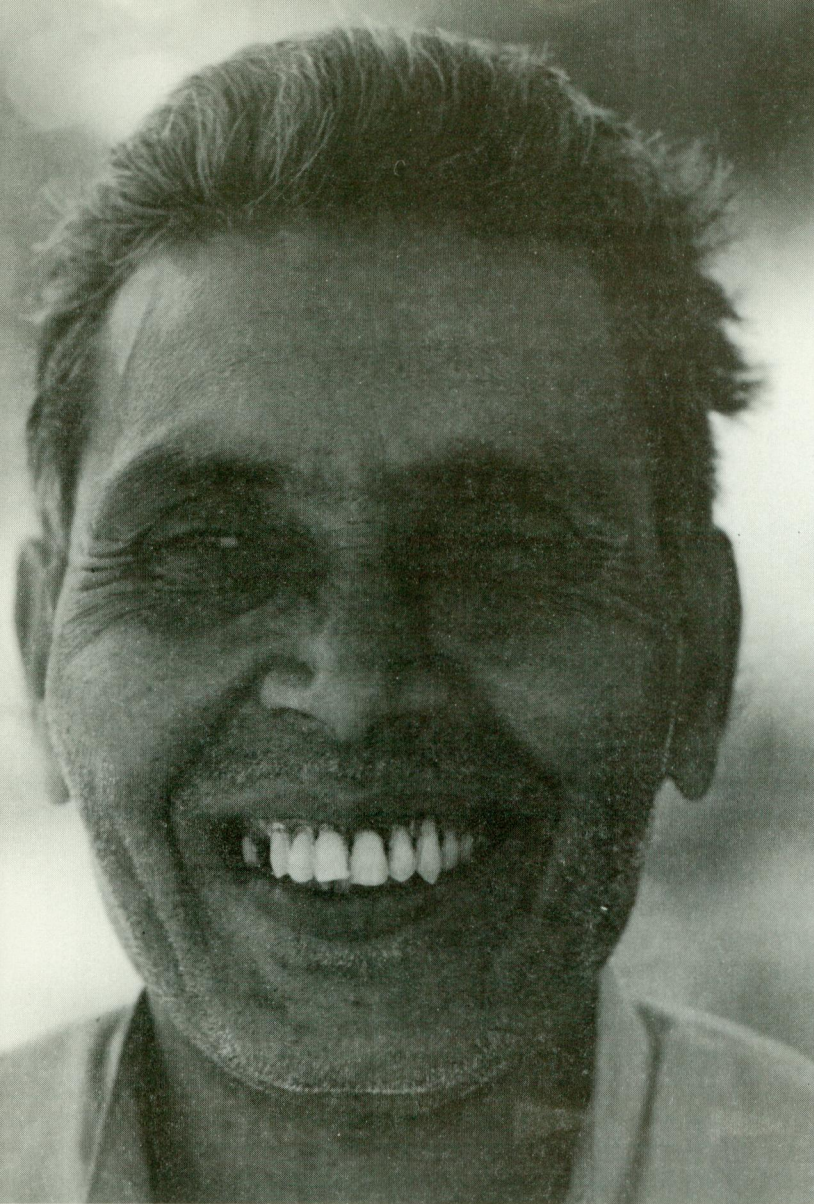
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**Indian
Earthquake
Appeal**



Dharmachari Munindra

Dharmachari Munindra died in Poona at 10am GMT on Thursday 23 December 1993. He had been in intensive care for a few days before he died, with suspected viral encephalitis complicated by a severe attack of asthma. The cremation ceremony was held on the evening of the same day.

Padmavajra writes: Munindra was a key member of a core team that came together not long after Lokamitra and I arrived at the start of TBMSG (as the FWBO is known in India) activities in India. He was a very quiet man, indeed a silent man, but he had an impressive presence which seemed to me rather strange and mysterious. I was not surprised when Sangharakshita gave him the name Munindra, which means 'The Lord of the Silent Ones', at the time of his ordination.

Munindra had a strong feeling for the inner spiritual nature of the Order, and he also felt very concerned about the harmony and unity of the Order. The only time I remember seeing him sad or puzzled in those early days was when there was disharmony between Order members. He quickly connected with the practice of meditation, and would sometimes talk about his visions. On one occasion during a retreat he told me that he kept seeing the Buddha in his meditation practice and everything was 'Black, all black'. He communicated this with great feeling and intensity; it was evidently a very positive experience for him.

I salute and praise Munindra. One day we will meet again, united by the Dharma.

In the News in Venezuela

The FWBO has made a few appearances in the local media in Venezuela during recent months. In December last year Manjunatha and Vajranatha appeared twice on Radio Universidad, a privately-owned radio station in the city of Merida. First Manjunatha spoke on the station's popular midday chat show, then a week later he and Vajranatha were interviewed about meditation for a programme called *Ethereal Waves*.

As well as running meditation classes, Manjunatha and Vajranatha have given a number of public talks under the auspices of the extramural department of the University of the Andes. They began with a series of talks on 'The Foundations of Buddhism', and followed that with a lecture on 'The Integration of Buddhism into Western Society'. This year the University invited them back to give a further series of talks, this time on the ever-popular topic of 'Karma, Death, and Rebirth'. Two local newspapers published articles in connection with this series.

All this publicity has generated a great deal of interest. Manjunatha and Vajranatha recently ran their first course on Buddhism, and it was fully booked. As well as continuing to run the weekly beginners' meditation class, they are now also holding a class for people with more experience of meditation and Buddhism, and they have recently held their first meditation retreat in the countryside near Merida.

They have also published inexpensive editions of two of Sangharakshita's works translated into Spanish, including a pocket edition of *Human Enlightenment*. These, and a six-monthly newsletter about FWBO activities in Venezuela called *El Correo Del Dharma*, are available, with further information, from this P.O. Box address: c/o Antonio Perez, Apartado 130, 5101-A Merida, Venezuela.

Missoula, USA

One stop on Sangharakshita's recent tour of the US was Missoula, Montana, a university town located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, familiar to some perhaps as the setting of Norman McLean's recent film *A River Runs Through It*. Missoula is at the centre of Montana's widely respected literary scene, as well as being the home of a variety of Buddhist activities, including a young but thriving FWBO sangha inaugurated three years ago by Saramati and Jean Pietarinen, with assistance from Manjuvajra and Vidyavati. Rocky Mountain FWBO now offers a full programme of activities, including a regular schedule of retreats held jointly with FWBO Seattle.

Saramati is also a Professor of Asian Philosophy and Religion at the University of Montana, where he offers instruction in Buddhist meditation, as well as running a lecture course in Buddhism, the latter being fairly common in American universities. He sees this opportunity for students to explore Buddhist teachings in a more 'experiential' manner to be a sound expression of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. Buddhist meditation is also to be included as part of the undergraduate cross-cultural studies programme.

Whilst the student interest generated by these academic programmes has certainly stimulated the FWBO sangha, Saramati's work also offers interested parties in the wider FWBO sangha the opportunity to undertake formal academic study of Buddhism at the M.A. level, which could be combined with helping to take activities further along in the Montana region.

The Rise of Dharma-Chic

Bertolucci's *Little Buddha* is the first mainstream movie to deal directly with Buddhism, but it comes hard on the heels of Tina Turner's *What's Love Got to Do With It?* which features the singer's practice of Nicherin Shoshu Buddhism and Oliver Stone's Vietnam movie *Heaven and Earth* in which Buddhism also plays a prominent part. Next into production is a Harrison Ford version of the Dalai Lama's autobiography *Freedom In Exile*.

There is no doubt about it, Buddhism – particularly Tibetan Buddhism – has become fashionable. It is in the papers, in the magazines, in the movies. Buddhism has been 'on the shelf' for decades, so all this attention is very flattering but before the romance proceeds any further perhaps it is time to ponder the terms on which it is taking place.

Part of its current allure is a sense that Buddhism reflects the concerns of the modern world, the most frequently cited examples being its convergence with

psychotherapy, the environmental movement, and the New Science. A recent feature in the US fashion magazine *Harpers Bazaar* suggested that 'Buddhism, or at least the Buddhist outlook on man and the universe is rapidly becoming the universally accepted world-view'. This is a gratifying thought, but the similarities can also obscure the differences between Buddhism and popular post-modern opinion. To a large extent these differences – particularly in the areas of ethics and life-style – are precisely what Buddhism has to contribute.

In Tibetan Buddhism the Dharma comes clothed in exotic cultural apparel and enveloped by an aura of spiritual mystery. While for some it offers a genuine spiritual path, for others it provides a romantic back-cloth to 'real life' without seriously impinging upon it or challenging the values by which it is lived. In *Harpers and Queens* photographer Koo Stark (whose Buddhist friends include Princess Helena

Moutafian and Francesca Thyssen) described her discovery of Buddhism on a trip to Nepal. 'Suddenly in the middle of the most beautiful nowhere there rose the majestic silhouette of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. A majestic sight.' Returning home she found 'you don't have to renounce anything to become a Buddhist, you simply incorporate it into your daily life.' As *Harpers Bazaar* puts it: 'You may be able to keep your job ... wear Chanel ... eat chocolate ... and still be enlightened.'

Film star Richard Gere exemplifies the contradictions in the position of a celebrity Buddhist. A devout disciple of the Dalai Lama, he has given generously to Tibetan causes and tried to use his fame to spread knowledge of Buddhism and the plight of Tibet. Last January he was in London to open the Harrods sale, and accompanying him at the opening were two Tibetan monks. The intention was presumably to publicize their cause but the London press simply took away the impression that an oppressed people was to be the next designer accessory. The event took place on Harrods' terms, not those of the monks, so inevitably they were compromised. Consumerism is sometimes described as the modern religion, and the Harrods Sale is one of its most extravagantly rapacious rituals. Buddhists should think twice before agreeing to administer its sacraments.

Maybe this is the way consumer society deals with subversive challenges. Rather than fighting them it co-opts them, makes them its own, and discards them when they are no longer a threat. Hollywood and the media have a limited attention span and perhaps in ten years time Tibetan Buddhism will be seen as 'a 90s thing' much as Nicherin Shoshu Buddhism is now disparaged as 'an 80s thing'. It is said that publicity is oxygen, but sometimes you can suffocate on it.

Catholic Buddhism

English Catholics have been encouraged by several prominent conversions from the Church of England to proclaim 'the conversion of England'. Such triumphalists should perhaps take note of the recent story in *The Catholic Herald*, under the headline 'Italy Faces Threat of Buddhism'.

'Buddhism is likely to win hundreds of thousands of converts among European Catholics by the year 2,000 according to a new Church study.

'The countries most "exposed" will be France and Spain as well as Italy, claims the report. Buddhism already has over 100,000 sympathisers in Italy said the study in the Italian Episcopal Conference Daily *Avvenire*.

'Nearly 10,000 Italian Catholics have converted to Buddhism. But Rome fears that one quarter of all Italians share Buddhist beliefs such as reincarnation and others incompatible with the Catholic Faith.'

Meanwhile, the latest academic research estimates that there are around 130,000 Buddhists in the UK, a high percentage of whom are ethnically Chinese.

Buddhism spreads through the culture: A Biff cartoon from *The Guardian*, Xmas 93



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Idols of the Marketplace

comment

Sir Francis Bacon (the philosopher not the artist) spoke of the deep-seated limitations of the human mind as idols. An idol was a false god which was set up and worshipped in place of truth. There were idols of the Tribe, idols of the Den (or Cave), idols of the Market Place, and idols of the Theatre. Numerous enough in Bacon's own day, such idols are even more numerous in ours. This is particularly true of the idols of the Market Place, or those words and phrases which corrupt and muddle our thinking.

In recent years three particularly monstrous idols of the Market Place have been set up on the other side of the Atlantic, and now Western Buddhists are being invited to fall down and worship them. If one does not do so one is in danger of being branded as unprogressive and reactionary and even as un-Buddhist. The three new idols are Democratization, Feminization, and Integration.

Representative democracy is probably the best form of government humanity has succeeded in devising, despite its evident shortcomings in certain respects. The democratization of Buddhism is quite another matter. Buddhism is a spiritual teaching. It is a teaching about a path – a path leading from Samsara to Nirvana, from the mundane to the transcendental. That path consists of a number of successive stages, and those who tread that path – the True followers of the Buddha – occupy positions on one or another of those stages, either a higher one or a lower one. Thus there is a hierarchy of stages, or experiences, and a hierarchy of persons. This hierarchy is a *spiritual* hierarchy, and is not to be confused with the purely ecclesiastical hierarchy of (largely self-styled) Holinesses and Eminences and their appointees, even though in the person of

certain exceptional individuals the two may occasionally coincide. A Buddhism that was democratized to the extent of refusing to recognize the existence of a spiritual hierarchy would not be Buddhism at all, for it would have abandoned the principle of the path with its successive stages, and have ceased, therefore, really to practise the Dharma.

Feminization means, in effect, refashioning the Buddha in the image of that darling of the women's pages the so-called New Man, with his much-advertised vulnerability, his touching efforts to domesticate himself, and his pathetic emotional dependence on women – and hence refashioning Buddhism accordingly. It means creating a 'nice' Buddhism, an inoffensive, unchallenging teaching in which there would be no place for initiative, boldness, daring, courage, adventurousness, and enterprise, or for any of the more typically masculine qualities and virtues. It would be a Buddhism for eunuchs, not men, and probably would not appeal to the majority of women either. The feminization of Buddhism follows from its democratization. Since women (it is argued) form fifty percent of the Buddhist community they ought to have an equal share in determining the general character of the religion. It also follows from the demonization of the masculine and the (alleged) necessity of its redemption by the feminine consciousness.

Integration means the integration of Buddhism into the world, or the practice of the Path to liberation without withdrawing from worldly life. In practice this amounts, only too often, to trying to develop spiritually without giving up one's affluent North American or West European life-style. Such integration is also spoken of in terms of the creation of

a lay Buddhism as distinct from the predominantly monastic Buddhism of the East. What is really wanted is a Buddhism that is neither lay nor monastic in the traditional sense, but which is firmly based on the centrality for the Buddhist life of the act of Going for Refuge, supported by the observance of the fundamental ethical precepts. The integration that is needed is not the integration of Buddhism into the world, but of the world into Buddhism.

Rather than falling down and worshipping the monstrous idols of Democratization, Feminization, and Integration as we have been invited to do, let us take to them the hammer of Right View and reduce them and all other idols of the Market Place to a heap of rubble, however fashionable for the moment they may happen to be.

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