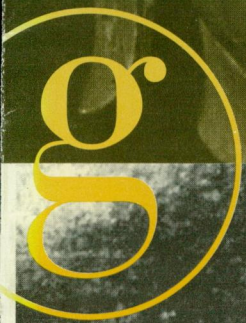
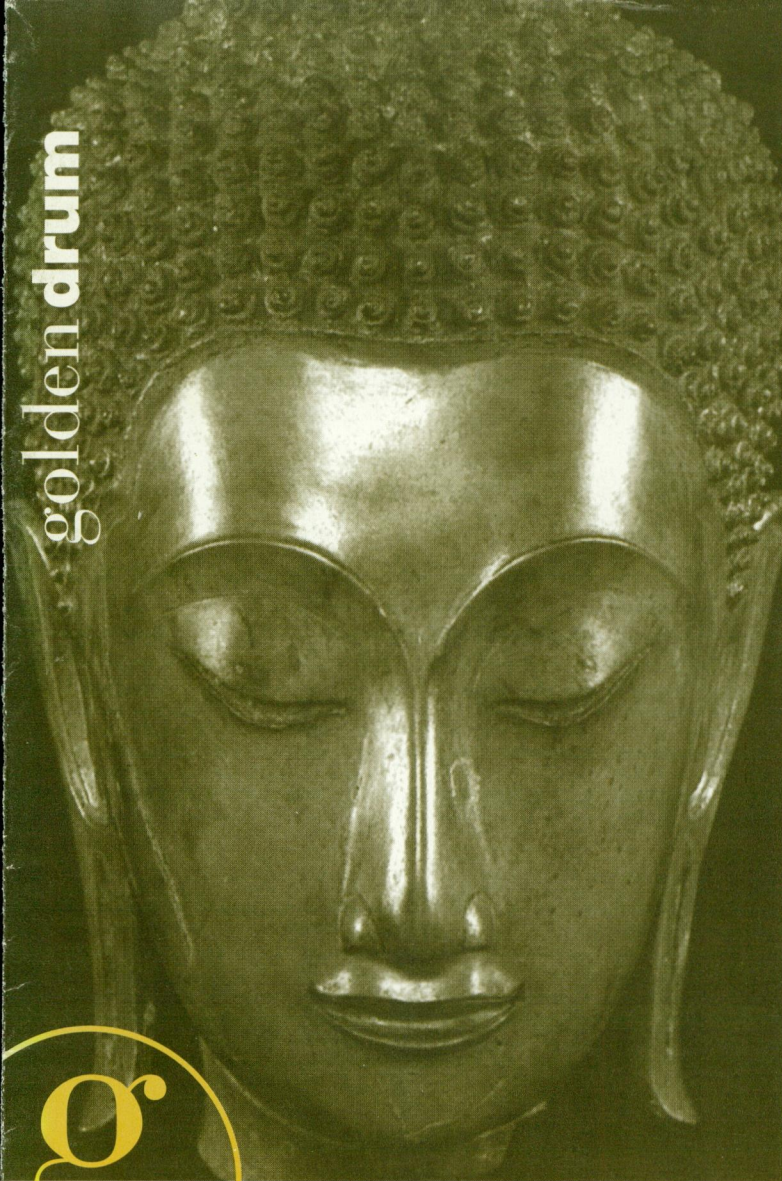


golden drum



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## The FWBO in the Buddhist World



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## Golden Drum 34

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# Learning to Talk

My father came to Britain in 1939 as a nine-year-old Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. In the school he was sent to he painfully developed his proficiency in the English language, but there are some things you can never quite catch up on. Several years after his arrival he was asked to read aloud to the class. He paused slightly over a word he was unsure of before pronouncing it: 'g-nat'. He blinked uncomprehendingly as the rest of the class dissolved into helpless laughter.

It's tough being a first generation immigrant. You have to learn the culture as well as the language, and you probably never quite lose your accent. Many Western Buddhists describe what sounds like the comparable difficulty of being a first generation Buddhist teacher or practitioner in the West. But my experience, and that of my contemporaries in the FWBO, is different. When I was ordained two years ago, along with twenty-five others, we took the three Refuges and ten Dharmachari precepts not from a wizened Eastern sage but from a Westerner. Our preceptor, Subhuti, in his turn, had been ordained some nineteen years previously by Sangharakshita, another Westerner.

This makes me a member of the third generation of Western Buddhists.

People often ask me where I studied Buddhism: 'Have you ever been to the East?' But I have no stories to tell of stumbling on snow-clad Himalayan lamaseries or of roadside *kensho* with itinerant *roshis* in the Japanese mountains. The first meditation class I attended was in a detached house in a particularly dreary suburb of South London, and my Dharma studies have never taken me further East than Norfolk. Like my contemporaries I learnt my Buddhism from Order members (as well as from my own studies), and in general I think we have received quite a good Buddhist education. When I made that first contact with the FWBO I was a young teenager, and although I am still (just) the right side of thirty, I have now been involved with it for half my life. In all that time (and I don't think it is for lack of imagination or opportunity) I have never felt I had to look outside the FWBO to get what I needed in my Buddhist practice. The FWBO is now a Western Buddhist tradition in its own right. There was never any need to go East.

Another question that is often asked is: where does the FWBO fit into Buddhism? It isn't Theravada; it isn't Mahayana; it isn't Vajrayana. What is it? Is it genuine Buddhism or is it a newfangled Westernized garbling of the Dharma? As the shape of the FWBO tradition becomes gradually clearer those who have grown up as Buddhists within it, following Sangharakshita's teaching, are starting to see where they stand in relation to the rest of the tradition. This edition of *Golden Drum* is part of that process of self-definition.

Modern Buddhists are heirs to the whole of Buddhism. Behind

us are a hundred generations of Buddhists and a host of schools and teachings that have evolved in the course of those generations. In fact there is a multiplicity of traditions emanating from a common source in the historical Buddha. In addition there is a lineage of texts – the Buddhist suttas, sutras, commentaries, biographies, essays, and poems which jostle unchronologically on our bookshelves, speaking across time to each other and to our generation. Tibetans represent their lineages as refuge trees – the generations of teachers in neat rows among the branches like ripened fruit. A representation of the influences bearing on Western Buddhism would be more like a phantasmagoric family tree – a tangle of connections, bifurcations, intermarriage, and incest like a nightmare vision imagined by the writer of Leviticus. Thus the question of how the FWBO relates to Buddhist tradition needs to be seen in the context of the wider question: how do the different manifestations of Buddhism relate to each other?

Sangharakshita's achievement has been to untangle the foliage of Buddhist tradition to reveal the trunk of the tree. For him and for the FWBO that trunk is the Three Jewels – the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. All genuine manifestations of the tradition grow from the trunk or, to put it another way, they are based on Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. The Refuge Tree which Sangharakshita has recently created for the Order (see page 5) is a product of this untangling. Perching in its branches are the great figures of Buddhist history as well as Sangharakshita himself and his teachers who mediate the tradition. From this perspective Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are branches which sprout and bifurcate in their turn. The FWBO chooses to identify itself not in relation to one or other branch but in relation to the trunk, and thus the tree as a whole. To describe the FWBO as tradition in its own right is to see it as a fresh and sturdy shoot emerging from that trunk.

If one steps out of the FWBO into the wider world of Buddhism in the West, one easily becomes entangled in its dense foliage. In the UK at least, Buddhists from different traditions are only just starting to get to know each other. Often we find ourselves speaking different languages; at our most literal-minded we even deny the possibility that meaning may exist in languages other than our own. How, then, can we know if we are trying to say the same thing? Only when we start to learn the art of translation will we be able to find out.

The FWBO is the product of a faithful but eloquent translation of the Dharma into a modern vernacular. As people within the FWBO grow more skilled in using the language, we will understand more fully the traditions we have inherited as well as the tradition we are creating. We are finding the words. May we also enjoy the fruits of communication. g

Vishvapani

A few years back I found myself involved in a surprising undertaking. I had recently moved to California, in part because I hoped that in San Francisco I would find a Dharma community more supportive of my Buddhist practice. As it turned out something quite different transpired. Instead of locating a congenial, well-established sangha as I had planned, I ended up helping to launch one of the only forms of Buddhism *not* already present on the San Francisco scene, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. Introducing yet another form of Buddhism to California is surely the Dharmic equivalent of bringing coals to Newcastle, yet in retrospect it was clearly an appropriate endeavour, and one that marked for me both the culmination of a twenty-year long spiritual odyssey and the beginning of a new phase of my spiritual practice. So how did this come about?

Let me begin by noting an intriguing anomaly. Buddhism developed over its 2,500-year history a remarkable diversity of teachings and techniques. One of the great ironies of that history is the fact that a greater variety of those expressions of the Dharma are currently being taught and practised in the West than was ever the case in any of the traditional Buddhist cultures of Asia. It is no exaggeration to say that quantitatively, at least, Buddhists today literally have access to much more of the Dharma than has ever been the case, and this is especially true of Buddhists in the West. Yet this is as much a curse as a blessing, for if the tide of the Dharma is currently running very broad in the West, it runs also very shallow. Each week brings new Dharma teachers, new forms of practice, and new Dharma books. Ever more Dharma becomes ever more available. But how is a contemporary Buddhist to make use of these riches? How can this plethora of views and practices be integrated into an effective path for personal transformation? These are questions that have concerned me, both as a practitioner and a scholar of Buddhism, for the last twenty-five years. And they are questions perhaps even more urgent and vexing today than when I first encountered Buddhism in 1966.

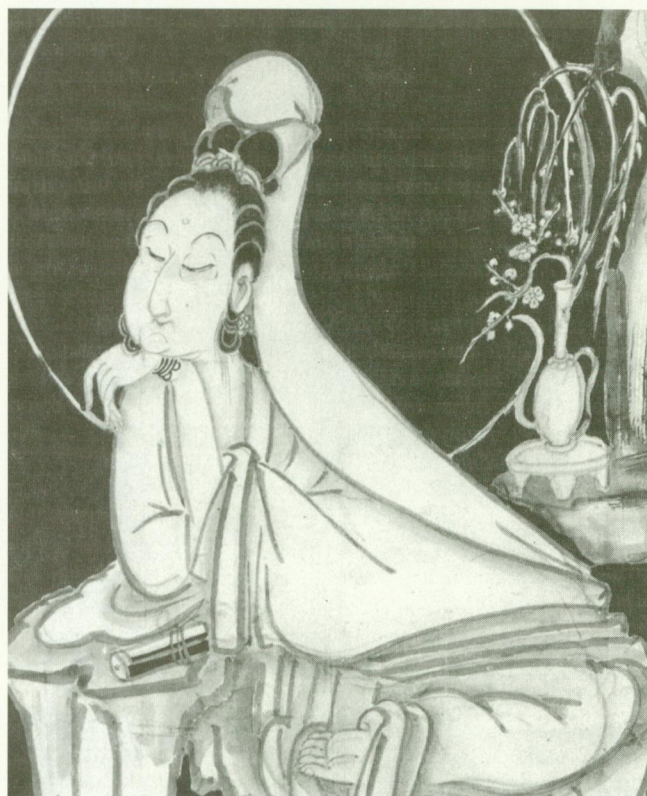
My introduction to the Dharma initially came through Alan Watts's *Zen Buddhism*, coupled with an undergraduate course in Indian Philosophy. No formal instruction in Buddhist meditation was available to me at the time, and I had to make do with the sitting instructions Philip Kapleau provided in *Three Pillars of Zen*, one of the three books I later brought with me as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal in 1968. Living in a mixed Hindu and Buddhist culture confirmed my preference for Shakyamuni's Dharma, but it was not until several years later that I finally found myself in touch with an active tradition of Buddhist practice. I had come to Vancouver to continue graduate work in Buddhist Studies and it was there that I made first contact with a Dharma community, a Zen group affiliated to one of the Japanese roshis active on the West Coast during the early 1970s.

Grounded in the discipline of zazen, my sitting practice flourished, yet I found myself confronted by an incongruity between the appreciation I was developing for the Dharma in my academic studies and the naïve but often belligerent anti-intellectualism of my Zen cushion mates, most of whom scorned the idea of learning anything of use from reading or even discussion. In those circles, in fact, it seemed a point of honour that one never discussed one's views or one's practice, except perhaps in the brief and highly ritualized encounters with the roshi during *dokusan*. Slowly it began to dawn on me that however well this method of Zen minimalism might work within a traditionally Buddhist culture, it was hardly appropriate to a Western situation.

For us in the West with no historical grounding in Dharmic culture, the anti-traditionalism and anti-scholasticism of Zen had quite a different effect than in a culture where Buddhism was so thoroughly established that it had become rigid and ossified. With no prior foundation in the Dharma the clarion call to transcend conceptual thought became little more than a sort of spiritual ink-blot test, a suggestive blob on to which we could project unchecked a fantastic hotchpotch of hopes and fancies stemming entirely from our own delusions and ignorance. The intensity of our practice was strong, but so too was the tenacity of our 'spiritually sanctioned' wrong views. This struck me as quite contrary to the actual spirit of Zen within the historical framework of the Buddhist tradition.

Towards the end of the seventies a new tendency in North American Buddhism began to emerge. The early intensity, along with its inclination towards narrowness and rigidity, was shifting towards a new theme of openness and acceptance. Initially we had seized on Buddhism as a rejection of all that was wrong with Western culture, but now, finding ourselves increasingly ensconced in the comforts of that culture, many of us began to seek in Buddhism an inclusivist endorsement of all possible lifestyles and views. Buddhism was no longer so much about transformation as about learning to feel OK with the way things are. As the *me-first* materialism of the Reagan era prospered during the eighties our Buddhist sensibilities were still offended. But what now seemed most important was to find a safe and secure

**'The anti-traditionalism and anti-scholasticism of Zen had quite a different effect than in a culture where Buddhism was established'**



**A New World Buddhist**

**Odyssey**

place – and a warm and fuzzy sense of the Dharma to go with it, one that above all else affirmed each person's right to find his or her own path.

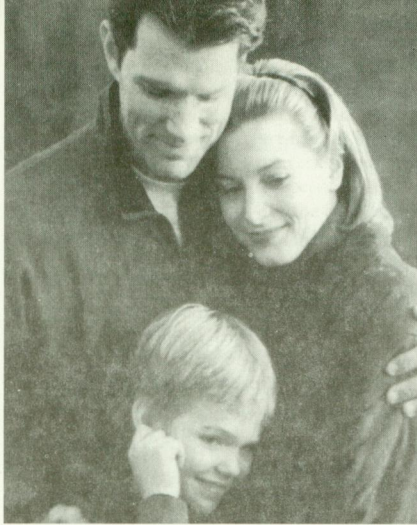
It was this dual legacy of the seventies and eighties that I brought with me to California as I struggled to sort out the tensions in my own life between career, family, and spiritual life. Although Buddhism had clearly had an impact on American culture, and even though both of the tendencies I had noted among my Dharma cohorts had their origins in authentic spiritual seeking, I nonetheless sensed that we were somehow missing the boat – or rather the raft – first with our narrow intensity and later with our fuzzy inclusivity.

We were in fact making a similar mistake either way we turned. In both cases we saw in Buddhism the invitation, indeed the warrant, to make Buddhism what we wanted it to be. We sought to make up our own Truth, thus failing to see, in Steven Collins's felicitous phrase, that the real task was rather 'to make Truth our own.'

On arriving in California I found many individuals in the San Francisco Buddhist scene that I admired, yet the more I looked the more I became convinced that the issues that concerned me remained largely overlooked – except in the case of one group, the one that was *not* there. As I was travelling from the East Coast to the West in the summer of 1987, I had met Nagabodhi, Manjuvajra, and Aryadaka at a conference of Asian and American Buddhists. While I was familiar with Sangharakshita's scholarship on Buddhism, I, like most American Buddhists, was completely unaware of his efforts to found a new Western Buddhist Order. As I learned more about this order over the following months it became clear that Sangharakshita had been striving for some time to find answers to questions we had hardly begun to ask.

Sangharakshita was addressing many of the questions I was grappling with, but I also saw that the significance of what the FWBO has to offer North American Buddhism goes well beyond my own personal affinity for his teaching and well beyond any specific structures of his movement. What Sangharakshita offers Western Buddhists of all traditions is a perspective, indeed a vision, of how to go about being Western Buddhists. And this is a challenge we all must face – whether our immediate teachers are Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or Tibetan, whether the specific forms of our practice derive from South Asia or from East Asia. My desire to introduce the FWBO to the San Francisco Bay Area arose not from an expectation that it would necessarily be the best practice tradition for all Americans, but rather because I thought Sangharakshita and his Order had a new and different voice to add to the on-going exploration of what Buddhism is to become in the West, a voice that I, for one, had waited some time to hear.

Yet introducing this new voice is only a beginning. The discussion among North American Buddhists has hardly begun and our best efforts seem increasingly diffused, even as we become materially more secure. The same two distinct and divergent tendencies I identified above continue to shape American Buddhism today, even if their forms have shifted somewhat. We continue to define Buddhism in terms of our own spiritual presuppositions, and we do so now in ways that are even



**'What now seemed most important was to find a safe and secure place - and a warm and fuzzy sense of the Dharma to go with it.' Family values in Bertolucci's *Little Buddha*.**


more deeply and subtly embedded in historically Western modes of thought.

The second tendency continues to prevail, expressing itself now in the quest for a Buddhistically framed inclusivism that affirms the universal truths of all religions while rejecting nothing – except perhaps all that might challenge us in any uncomfortable way. This approach is particularly appealing to the many of us who have fled the intolerant exclusivity we associate with Western religious institutions. And though we rightly seek to avoid sectarian narrowness, it is easy, in our fear, to flee too far, eventually reaching a position that allows no critical perspective, no serious challenge to whatever already exists. The false

assumption is that true tolerance allows no real difference of opinion; and the result is a kind of 'sectarian non-sectarianism'. The only option, a bland 'lowest-common-denominator' Buddhism.

In spite of the broad appeal of this inclusivist tendency, the earlier tendency has also persisted, re-emerging now in a new, more fashionable guise. In the past the impetus was an intense critique of bourgeois Western values. Now it is more the fascinating allure of cultural exoticism. The two are not unrelated, yet something has been lost in the transition. While this approach, even in its new form, is perhaps more likely than the inclusivist tendency to maintain some awareness of the radical, culture-critical aspects of the Dharma, it has its own hidden hazards which we must also take care to identify. The attempt to do the Buddhist equivalent of a 'heart-brain transplant' adopts, however unconsciously, a fundamentally anti-Western bias, often suggesting that only Asians in funny clothes can really understand the profundities of the Dharma. Little reflection is needed to see the basic, self-defeating problem with this perspective: it excludes from the outset the possibility of ever developing a Western Buddhism with Western teachers, and thus it runs contrary to the cultural history of Buddhism which has always expressed its vision anew in each successive cultural and historical setting.

Often coupled with this 'transplantation' tendency, moreover, is the idea that Asian spiritual masters have some sort of mysterious, magical power: if we simply sit at their feet and wait they will, somehow, miraculously transform *our* greed, hatred, and delusion for us. With this prospect implicitly if not always consciously in mind, many have made a spiritual career of trekking from one fashionable guru to another, not unlike the rock-star groupies of an earlier era.

So even as American Buddhism becomes more successful and better established, the real challenges faced by the Dharma here become only more subtle and elusive. To meet these challenges we must keep in touch with a truly radical and traditional vision of what the Dharma offers, and we must simultaneously strive to express that vision in a uniquely Western idiom capable of speaking to our own distinctly Western delusions. It is the effort to do this – and to support others in doing it – that I have found so refreshing in my encounter with FWBO. 

**Saramati (Alan Sponberg)** is Professor of Eastern Religion at the University of Montana.

**Saramati** reflects on the experiences which led him to the FWBO

## A new **branch** of an **old tree**



Sangharakshita and Dhardo Rimpoche in the 1950s

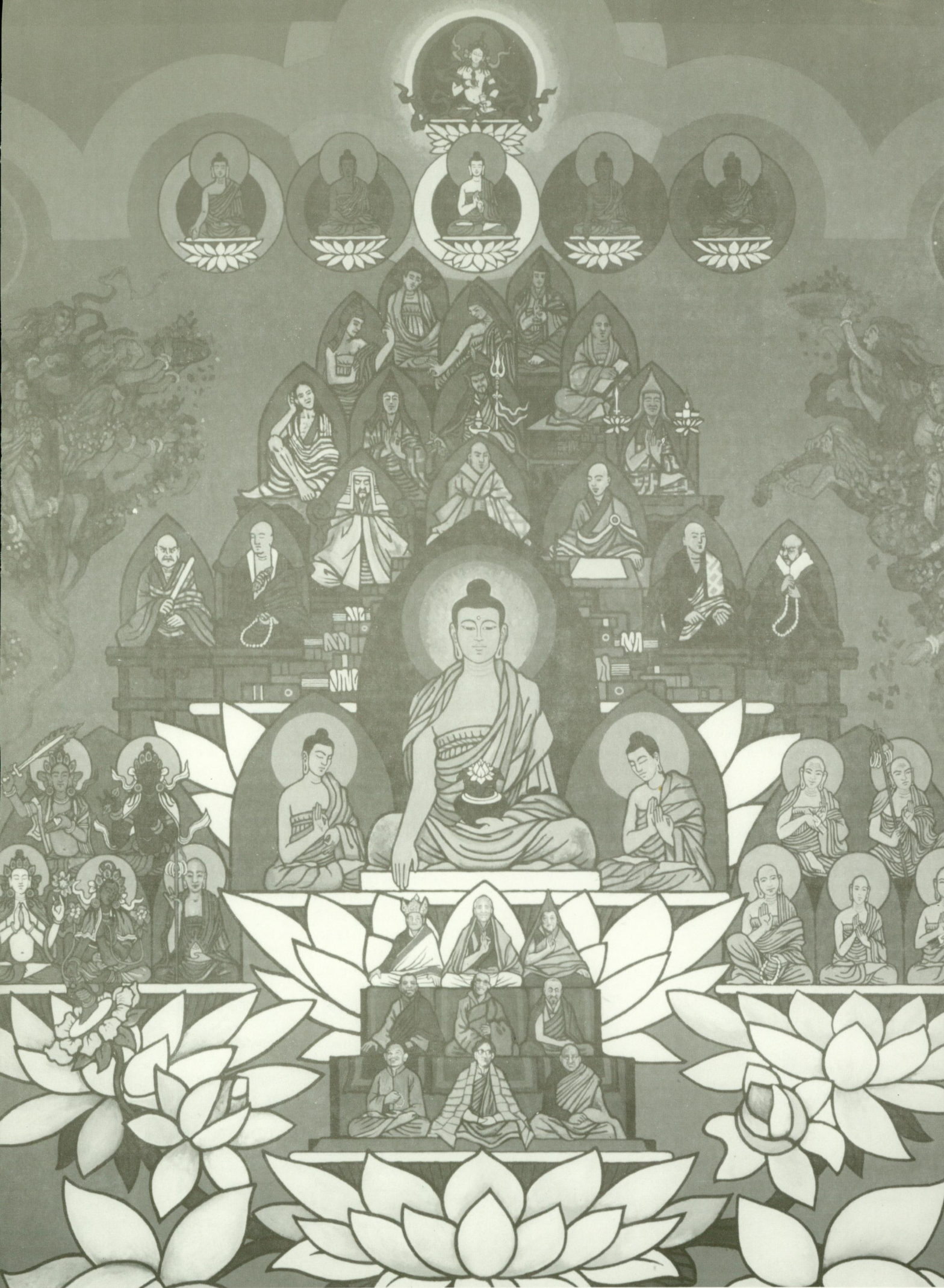
In 1968 Sangharakshita founded an entirely new Buddhist Order. He is, however, but a reluctant revolutionary. He has a profound love and reverence for many aspects of traditional Buddhism and has worked for many years within the framework of that tradition. From the outset he saw Buddhism as a whole and he studied and practised within each of the three *yanas* (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana), the principal divisions of the Buddhist world.

He was ordained in 1950 as a *bhikkhu* or Buddhist monk by yellow-robed Theravadins, and his first teacher was the Ven. Jagdish Kashyap, a Theravadin scholar-monk with whom he studied the vast spiritual riches of the Pali Canon. He had first encountered Buddhism reading the great Mahayana *Diamond Sutra*, and he continued to be greatly inspired by the lofty perspective of that tradition. His devotion to the Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal of selfless action culminated in 1962 when he received the Bodhisattva ordination from the Tibetan *tulku*, Dhardo Rimpoche. Finally, he was able to study Tibetan

Buddhism and practise Vajrayana meditation since he spent fourteen years living in the Himalayan foothills, at a time when many Tibetan teachers were fleeing the Chinese invasion of their country. He received initiation and teaching from several leading Rinpoches: Chetul Sangye Dorje, Jamyang Khentse, Dudjom, Dhillgo Khentse, Dhardo, and Khachu. He received additional guidance in Vajrayana practice from a Chinese hermit, C.M. Chen. Indeed, this exceptionally learned scholar and yogi was able to give him great insight into Buddhist meditation in general and into Ch'an (the Chinese forerunner to Japanese Zen) in particular.

Although Sangharakshita functioned for many years within the framework of traditional Buddhism, he was aware of many limitations and failings within contemporary Buddhist groups. He did what he could to point these out, notably as managing editor of the *Maha Bodhi*, which was then the leading English-language Buddhist periodical. He found similar limitations among Western Buddhists when he came to England in 1964 with a mission to help sort out the confusion and disharmony among English Buddhists. He soon began to wonder whether the existing English Buddhist groups offered any real spiritual future. Often they were narrowly sectarian, espousing vociferously one or other Eastern Buddhist school as if they were Christian sects. These groups were societies, not spiritual communities, and were therefore run on purely organizational lines. Finally, a peculiarly unwholesome atmosphere had developed: cold, lifeless, and narrowly rational.

Sangharakshita breathed what spiritual vitality he could into these unpromising materials, becoming very popular among many of those attending activities. Seeing the great interest in Buddhism amongst English people, he decided to shift his base permanently to London. However, his approach had somehow offended some of the trustees of the English Sangha Trust and, while he was in India closing up his activities, he received a letter from them, telling him that he could no longer continue under the Trust's ►



**L to R from top: Vajrasattva; The five Jinas:** Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Vairochana, Akshobhya, Amoghasiddhi; **Historical teachers:** Nagarjuna, Asanga; Vasubandhu, Shantideva, Buddhagoshya; Milarepa, Atisha, Padmasambhava, Tsongkhapa; Hui-Neng, Chih-I, Hsuan-tsang; Hakuin, Kukai, Dogen, Shinran; **Dharma texts; Buddhas of the past, present and future:** Dipankara, Shakyamuni, Maitreya; **Bodhisattvas:** Manjushri, Vajrapani; Avalokiteshvara, Green Tara, Kshitigarbha; **Arahants:** Maudgalyayana, Ananda; Shariputra, Dhammadinna, Kashyapa; **Sangharakshita and his teachers:** Dudjom, Jamyang Khentse; Chetal Sangye Dorje, Kachu, Dhardo; Mr Chen, Sangharakshita, Jagdish Kashyap



Clockwise: Sangharakshita's bhikkhu ordination  
 Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche, Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche,

auspices. Sangharakshita heard the message with relief. At last he was free from the limitations of the old Buddhist world and could start afresh, without compromise or dilution.

Sangharakshita was determined that his new Buddhist movement would not repeat the errors of its predecessors. It would not be a mere society or group; it would be a spiritual community, placing spiritual fellowship before organizational status. It would not fall into the trap of monastic formalism: the belief that being a Buddhist is being a monk, and being a monk is wearing a robe and following certain rules. It would transcend the artificial divisions of traditional Eastern Buddhism, particularly the division between monks and laity. It would not be sectarian, following the teachings and practices of just one oriental school. It would just be Buddhist, and would draw on the entire Buddhist tradition for its teachings and practices. Finally, it would address itself to the modern world, not simply continuing Eastern cultural practices that had little relevance in the contemporary West.

In order to extract Buddhist principles from their cultural surroundings Sangharakshita had to ask a fundamental question: what, in the final analysis, is Buddhism? He saw that its essence is simply a movement from where we are now to a higher level of being and consciousness. What makes one a Buddhist is one's determination to make that shift – and to keep making it on higher and higher levels. Commitment to moving to those higher levels is expressed in the traditional formula of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – a formula used in the Buddha's time and acknowledged by all Buddhist schools. When one goes for Refuge, one places those three cardinal ideals of Buddhism at the centre of one's own life. One commits oneself to transforming one's life in accordance with them and one actually takes the steps from where one is now towards the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Western Buddhist Order and its surrounding movement, the



Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, were established to help individuals go for Refuge. The Order itself was made up of those whose Going for Refuge had achieved a decisive degree so that they were putting their aspiration into effect.

Having placed the essential Buddhist act of Going for Refuge at the centre of the order he founded, Sangharakshita gathered a body of teachings and practices that would help his disciples in their spiritual efforts. In accordance with the principle that the Dharma – the Truth or path – is whatever conduces to Enlightenment, he could simply take from all aspects of the tradition whatever actually worked for his disciples now. Thus the Western Buddhist Order was distinctive in many ways, but especially in basing itself upon Going for Refuge rather than monastic ordination. However, through the act of Going for Refuge the Order was related to the entire tradition. Each member of the Order was a member of the total Buddhist spiritual community by virtue of the Going for Refuge he held in common with every other sincere Buddhist.

In rediscovering the primacy of Going for Refuge Sangharakshita saw Buddhism in its unity in a way that few Buddhists had been able to do throughout its history. Since the first century after the Buddha, a multiplicity of schools, each with its own teachings, practices, customs, and institutions, has proliferated. Diverging doctrine and praxis have been filtered for centuries through the many climates and cultures of Asia to a point where external differences now make it almost impossible to recognize the same spirit uniting them all.

This problem has constantly confronted Buddhists over the millennia. A few have simply rejected other forms of Buddhism as aberrations and distortions, conceiving of themselves as the preservers of the pure truth. But the mildness of Buddhism (so edifying to the theistic religions) has usually led to more charitable solutions. According to these, all known schools were accepted as enshrining genuine teachings of the Buddha. However, those teachings were said to belong to different phases in the Buddha's teaching career or else to be his communication to individuals of different spiritual capacities. In this way hierarchies of teachings and schools were constructed to comprehend and unify the tradition. Different schemas were developed by different schools – the best known being the *triyana* perspective preserved in Tibetan Buddhism. The three *yanas* or ways are said to enshrine the Buddha's teachings to beings of inferior, middling, and superior spiritual capacity respectively. Thus a kind of unity was made, but it was one not without its problems. Followers of so-called Hinayana schools, for instance, do not like to be thought of as belonging to the 'small way'! The main problem is, however, that such a schematization is really a myth, since it does not fit known historical facts.

## It is not often realized just how diverse Buddhism has become and how exclusive most schools are



These schematizations attempted to make sense of a bewildering inheritance of millennia of doctrinal developments. But they did so without an appreciation of historical development or a critical analysis of texts and other evidence. This evidence suggests that after the death of the Buddha doctrine continued to evolve as aspects of the Buddha's teaching were explored in greater depth and as new problems and issues arose. Doctrinal evolution was also patterned by a dialectic in which spiritual creativity gradually ossified into scholastic interpretation and popular literalism, requiring a fresh creative upsurge to revivify rigidities and degenerations. Without a historical perspective, later Buddhists were not able to see the processes that had led to the gradual piling up of successive stages of doctrine. They could not enquire what principle lay behind the various doctrines and had to regard each phase of this dialectical process as if it were literally uttered by the Buddha at different phases in his career and to people of differing spiritual capacities.

Such views are myths, which, whilst they may once have been spiritually effective, have little to offer the modern practitioner. Not only is this mythologizing of Buddhist history untenable in the face of modern scholarship, it is spiritually less and less efficacious. The unity of the tradition is lost in mutually antagonistic assessments and in increasingly divergent conceptions of what it really means to be a Buddhist. The credulity of the modern aspirant is strained and he is enmeshed in the complexities of long forgotten doctrinal debates. Some new way of making sense of the entire tradition is urgently needed.

An appreciation that Going for Refuge is the primary act of a Buddhist allows us to do this. It enables us to perceive the unity of Buddhism, and to recognize that the various schools are but exploring different aspects of that primary act.

Going for Refuge was the earliest term used to indicate the essential Buddhist act, but over time its full meaning was gradually obscured. To compensate for that loss, 'higher' teachings requiring further acts emerged to encompass dimensions of the spiritual life no longer visible in Going for Refuge. Thus in Tibetan *triyana* Going for Refuge could be said to characterize the Hinayana stage, whilst the Bodhisattva vow characterizes the Mahayana, and Tantric initiation the Vajrayana. In this way there are different acts at each phase of the path and the original unity of the teaching has been lost. Sangharakshita argues that these are not, in fact, higher or further acts but explorations of different aspects or dimensions of the one act of Going for Refuge. The Bodhisattva ideal, for instance, explores its altruistic dimension, whilst Tantric initiation explores the release of spiritual energy inherent in Going for Refuge. All the different terminologies adopted by different schools can be unified if one sees them simply as aspects of the one act recognized by all.

Going for Refuge not only unifies the Buddhist tradition horizontally, by relating all teachings to a single principle common to all schools, it unifies it vertically. Buddhists at all levels of spiritual attainment are Going for Refuge: the more developed they are, the deeper their Going for Refuge. Sangharakshita distinguishes five levels of Going for Refuge. To the *cultural* level belong those who are Buddhists by virtue simply of having been born into a 'Buddhist' culture; next is the *provisional* level of one who begins to take a sincere interest; one who actually commits himself to the path is at the *effective* level; one who attains so decisive a degree of transcendental insight that he cannot fall back is *really* going for Refuge; and the Buddha, having completely eradicated all worldly dispositions, goes for Refuge *absolutely*.

All Buddhists of all schools and at all levels are united in so far as they go for Refuge. It is in and through the act of Going for Refuge that the individual Buddhist becomes a member of the Buddhist spiritual community or sangha, and finds his solidarity with all other Buddhists. It is upon Going for Refuge that the ►

Western Buddhist Order bases itself and it is in Going for Refuge that the Order is united with all those other Buddhists who go for Refuge. There can be no other point of unity since the total Buddhist community has long been divided on the basis of teachings, practices, and institutions. It is not often realized just how diverse Buddhism has become and how exclusive most schools are. There is no single pure sangha that preserves untainted the Buddha's own direct teachings and rules. Some schools like to think that they do, but the evidence is against them. The tradition has constantly thrown up new schools in a process that can be rejoiced in as creative, so long as that unifying perspective of Going for Refuge is retained.

The WBO is simply another manifestation of that creative unfolding. It is completely traditional in that it bases itself on Going for Refuge and on the basic teachings of the Buddha. From that perspective it is free to draw on the entire tradition for its spiritual nourishment – as well as on other traditions, whether cultural or religious, that offer materials for Going for Refuge. And since it is founded on a spiritual principle rather than on an external form, it is able to respond appropriately to new circumstances and situations. In this way it is able to create a Buddhist community in the modern world.

A central image used within the Order illustrates its relationship to the Buddhist tradition. Following Tibetan custom, Sangharakshita has composed a Refuge Tree for the Order, in which are arranged its principal sources of inspiration, representing the ideals to which Order members go for Refuge. At the centre is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, the founder of the Buddhist tradition, and he is surrounded by historical and archetypal figures, drawn not simply from a single school but from across the entire Buddhist tradition. Closest to us on the tree is Sangharakshita, the Order's direct link with the tradition, and he is surrounded by his eight teachers, who are, in their turn, his links with the tradition. This image expresses the WBO's relationship with the Buddhist tradition through the act of Going for Refuge – for the Tree is used in an important meditation-cum-devotional practice undertaken by members and aspirant members of the Order. One visualizes the Tree and then prostrates before it, over and over again, vigorously enacting one's Going for Refuge to these figures as embodying the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

The Order's relationship with the Buddhist tradition through the act of Going for Refuge may be plain, but its relationship to other modern representatives of that tradition has been, in a sense, less clear-cut. Although he has many friends all over the Buddhist world, Sangharakshita deliberately kept the fledgeling Order somewhat distant from other Buddhist groups in the first few years of its existence. He considered it vital that the Order be able to establish its distinctive approach free from the complexities and confusions of much modern Buddhism, since most of his disciples were still far from clear what Buddhism really meant. As time went on and Order members gained in experience, contacts began to be made. Landmarks in that growing communication are Sangharakshita's lecturing at the London Buddhist Society in 1974 and the FWBO's joining the European Buddhist Union in 1980.

Though contacts were friendly, they were not uncritical. The Order had been founded to get away from many of the problems of the contemporary Buddhist world and it could not simply ignore them. Indeed, by virtue of its solidarity with other Buddhists, Order members had to speak out and a number of critical points were made in articles in the *FWBO Newsletter* and its successor *Golden Drum*, as well as in other writings by Sangharakshita and some of his leading disciples.

These growing contacts affected relatively few Order members. Most were very much engaged with their daily work of creating centres, communities, and Right Livelihood businesses and had little time or experience to give to the wider Buddhist world. A few Order members, working closely with Sangharakshita,

therefore co-ordinated relations. This led to the foundation, in 1992, of the FWBO Liaison Office whose duty this now is.

The principles of that contact should by now be obvious. Although there will be a degree of solidarity with all who go for Refuge to whatever extent, the deeper and more complete the sharing of that common Going for Refuge the greater will be the solidarity. This determines the attitude of Order members to other Buddhists. They will have a basic sense of identity with all other Buddhists, towards whom, it is to be hoped, they will behave in a polite and friendly manner, working together where they have clearly defined common tasks.

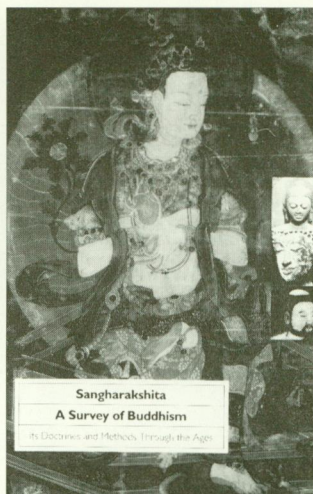
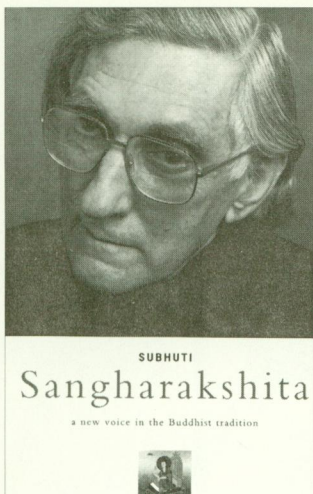
Deeper communion is much more demanding. In the first place, there is a coherence to the practices, teachings, and institutions of any spiritual community. They form a system of spiritual discipline in which each aspect works with every other to help the individual to go for Refuge more and more deeply. Practices and teachings from one system of spiritual discipline do not necessarily work well within another system or only work if they are properly assimilated. The interaction of those systems therefore implies considerable understanding on both sides. For that reason, most Order members and all mitras are asked to work entirely within the system of the Order, not doing practices or having teachers from outside that system. In this way much confusion is avoided. Usually it will only be the more senior and experienced Order members who engage in deeper contact with other Buddhists and especially who investigate their practices and teachings. In that way an informed evaluation can take place, and, if something is found to be of value, it can be assimilated fully and consciously into the Order's system of spiritual discipline.

Deeper contact with Buddhists from beyond the Order is regulated by the difficulties of arriving at a high level of spiritual harmony with people who operate within a somewhat different system of discipline. Although Order members will have a basic sense of solidarity with all who call themselves Buddhists, for that solidarity to grow there must be an investigation of each other's ideas and actions – there must be a growth of real spiritual friendship. Not all that goes by the name of Buddhist is truly representative of the Buddha's essential message. Not all Buddhists are Going for Refuge in anything more than a cultural or provisional way. Contact, therefore, whilst being sympathetic and friendly, must also be critical. There must be an effort to understand what appears divergent and a willingness to point out and discuss what is against the spirit and letter of the Dharma. Again only a few Order members are truly qualified for this task.

Despite the difficulties of deeper communion, the Order is part of the wider Buddhist community and its members are sensible of that solidarity. Our own Order and movement are still relatively small and it is only in conjunction with others who go for Refuge that we will be able to let the Dharma have the transforming impact that the world so desperately needs. Further, the Order and its system of discipline are never finalized and complete. They are always capable of including more teachings and techniques that may help individuals to go for Refuge more deeply. Through our contact with other Buddhists we may discover something about ourselves and learn things of value for our own system.

Finally, Sangharakshita has thought more thoroughly than most about the issues confronting the modern Buddhist, and the Order he has founded has established a practical basis for living the Buddhist life today, bypassing many of the difficulties in which some other Buddhists are entangled. Through our contact with them, we hope others may find much that is of value in the teachings of Sangharakshita and the practice of the Order. A contact between Buddhists of different spiritual communities that is friendly, mindful, and discriminating will surely be very fruitful. ☸

**Subhuti's** new book *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* further explores the issues in this article.



# Sangharakshita

## Sangharakshita

a new voice in the Buddhist Tradition  
by Subhuti (Alex Kennedy)

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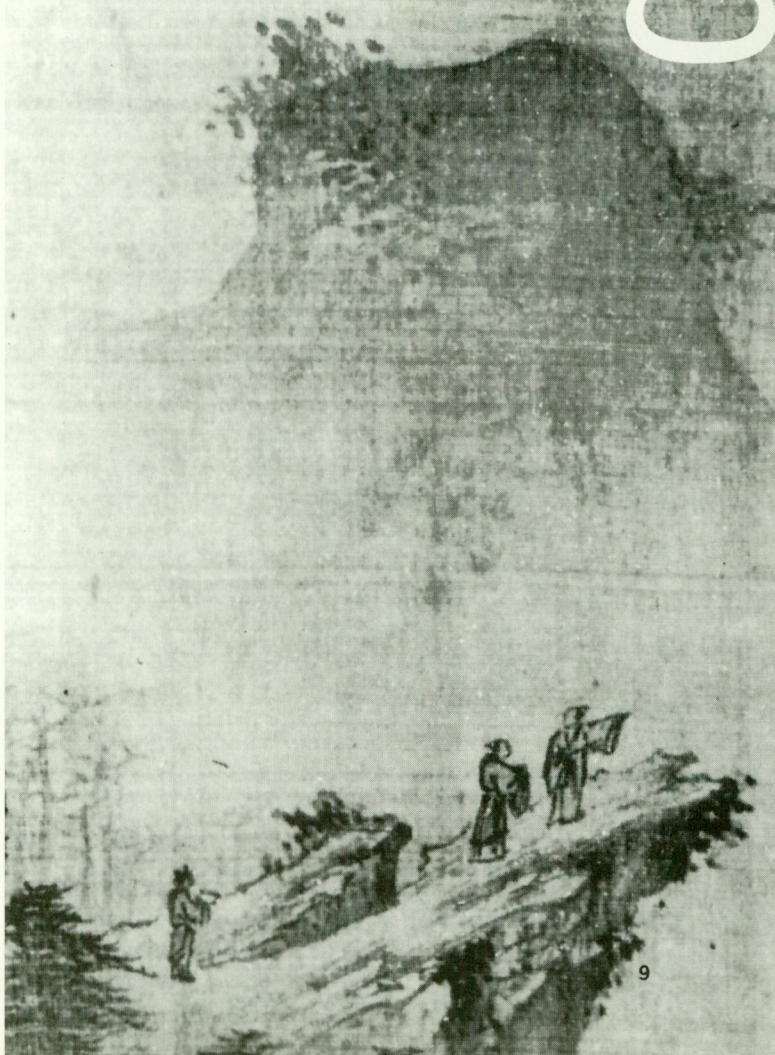
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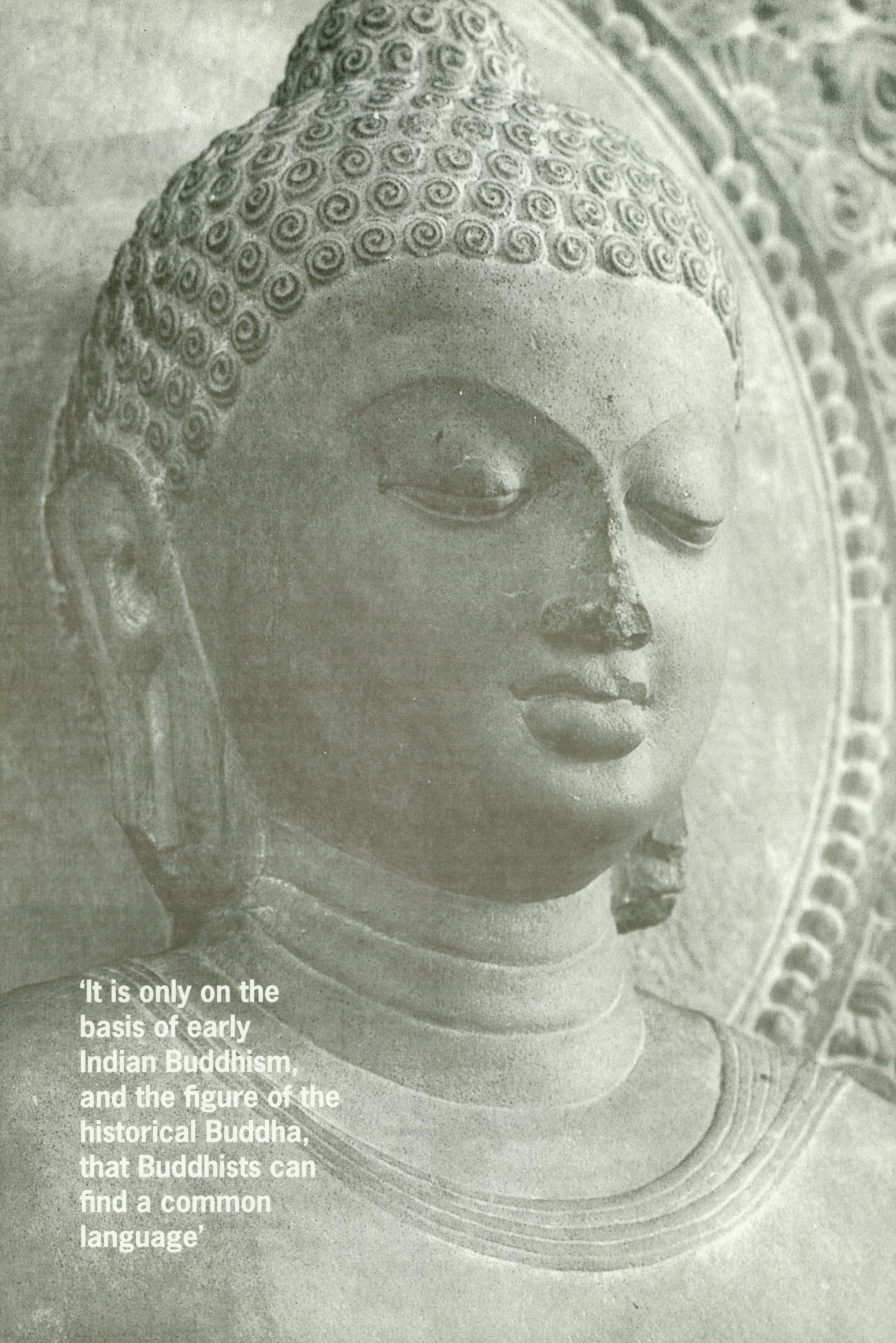
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**'It is only on the basis of early Indian Buddhism, and the figure of the historical Buddha, that Buddhists can find a common language'**

# Melting Pot or Tower of Babel?

**What happens when Buddhists from different traditions meet together? Vishvapani asked some of the leading figures in British Buddhism**

In March 1993 twenty-two men and women met with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. Looked at one way they were a fairly homogenous group. They were educated, white, and middle class, and although they came from across Europe and America, they were members of the same post-war generation. Their formative years had been influenced by the same international youth culture: the same music, the same books, and, quite possibly, the same drugs. What is more they were all experienced Buddhists and many attending the conference were delighted to recognize themselves as the first generation of Western Buddhist teachers.

But from another point of view it was a wildly divergent meeting. Tantric maroons rubbed against the blacks and browns of Zen roshis and the saffron of Theravadin bhikkhus. Perhaps for the first time representatives of wildly diverse forms of Buddhism gathered in an open forum to discuss issues of common concern. There were lay practitioners; there were those who have sought to adapt the forms of Eastern Buddhism to the West; and finally there was Kulananda representing the Western Buddhist Order which seeks neither to follow nor to adapt traditional Eastern Buddhism but to radicalize it – to practise timeless Buddhist principles in the context of the modern world.

In microcosm the Dharamsala meeting embodied the paradoxes of contemporary Western Buddhism. What happens when the divergent constituents of the Western Buddhist world encounter one another? Is it a melting pot or a Tower of Babel? Does the shared cultural background of the participants facilitate their communication as Buddhists or does it mean that they meet primarily as Westerners? What opportunities are opened up by such encounters and what dangers? And what is the aim: should the protagonists seek to create an increasingly united Western Buddhism or would this simply increase confusion?

These questions have concerned me since, as a student already fully involved with the FWBO, I helped found the Cambridge University Buddhist Society, which hosted speakers from all traditions of Buddhism. I was motivated in part by curiosity. For all its virtues, the FWBO

seemed a small and rather self-enclosed world and I wanted to test its synthesis of Buddhist tradition against other approaches. More recently my work for the FWBO has meant a good deal of contact with Buddhists from other traditions, and I have been reconsidering my views. It seems to me now that Sangharakshita's ideas and the experience of the FWBO are uniquely successful attempts to address issues which face all Western Buddhists. But can that experience be shared? Is it possible to find a basis for real dialogue? I asked some of the leading British figures involved in the emerging inter-Buddhist dialogue how they viewed the scene.

The process of British Buddhists meeting together is only just beginning. Kulananda spends much of his time cultivating links with Buddhists outside the FWBO. He commented 'the British Buddhist scene is far more polarized than in America.' The Buddhist Society in London continues to see itself as an umbrella organization representing British Buddhism but none of the representatives of Buddhist organizations I spoke to shared this view. While the Buddhist Society may have been central to British Buddhism some thirty years ago, it is increasingly marginal. One experienced Theravadin commentator remarked that 'the Society now seems like a vestige of a past era'. In the intervening years a range of Buddhist movements including the FWBO have grown up more or less in isolation from each another. According to Kulananda 'there's a sad history of difficulties, some of which have never been resolved. People have withdrawn to their own quarters and got on with their own lives.'

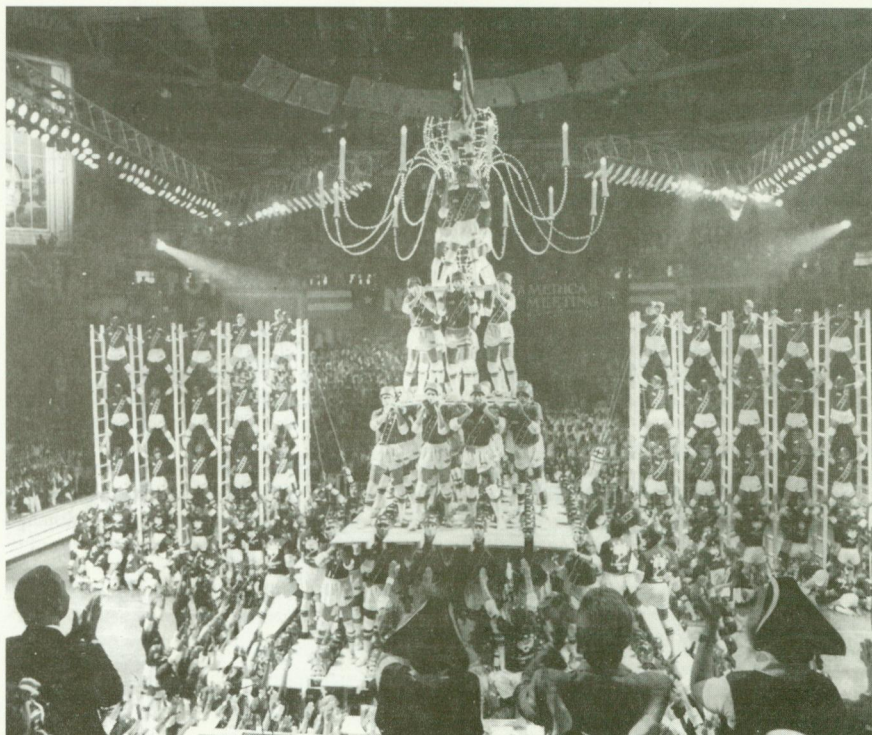
Two of the largest UK Buddhist organizations have no formal links with other Buddhists – the New Khadampa Tradition, based at the Manjushri Institute in Cumbria, and Sokka Gakkai, the well-known lay branch of Nichiren Shoshu. Sokka Gakkai inherits the legacy of Nichiren Daishonin, the thirteenth century Japanese teacher who claimed that previous forms of Buddhism had been made redundant by his teaching. However Jamie Cresswell, of Sokka Gakkai, UK told me he feels that Japanese insularity does not work in the West. 'It is time to start getting to know other Buddhists and forming friendships.'

The New Khadampa Tradition grew out of a split within the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, and this painful birth has doubtless influenced its desire to keep itself separate. Peter Davis, a spokesman for the NKT, emphasized that whilst practitioners are encouraged to respect other traditions the organization's overriding priority is to develop its own activities. ►

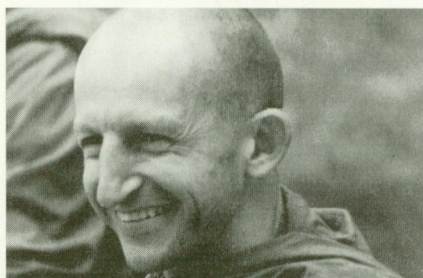


Delegates at the Dharamsala conference

The more the Dharma becomes an essential part of your life the more you are able to stand as an individual with other Buddhists



Above: Nichiren Shoshu America General Meeting, 1987  
 Left, clockwise from top: Ajahn Amaro, Stephen Batchelor, Kulananda



Is there anything wrong with this approach? After all, for much of its history the FWBO has chosen to keep formal contacts with other Buddhists to a minimum in order to develop its own tradition free from the confusions of outside influences. But separation becomes a problem if it turns into narrowness and factionalism. For Stephen Batchelor, author of a new study of Western Buddhism, *The Awakening of the West*, 'the virtues of commitment have to be balanced against the dangers of exclusivism. People are often so concerned with their own agendas that they can develop a blinkered approach. There is an incredible amount of misinformation about other Buddhists in the British Buddhist world in general and a great deal of ignorance.'

Narrow sectarianism sometimes receives the endorsement of traditional Buddhist schools. Batchelor comments: 'Theravadins often have the idea that they possess the original teaching and that other traditions are really just corruptions. Then again, Tibetan Buddhists often believe that they possess the fullest and highest teachings – it's the bees knees, so far as they are concerned. Often they simply have no interest in anything outside their tradition because they think they have everything already. It's the kind of thinking that kept Tibet a world unto itself for a thousand years. But when I got to Korea they just called the Tibetans 'shama' – 'barbarians.' Buddhist sectarianism has not, generally speaking, implied the fierce intolerance associated with its Christian counterpart. Nonetheless it forms part of

the background of fragmentation against which meetings of Western Buddhists take place. If we wish to move beyond these conflicts, how are we to find the basis on which we can relate to each other?

One model for the development of inter-Buddhist connections is the non-sectarian and unaffiliated Buddhist scene that is emerging in the USA. American Buddhist magazines such as *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* and *Shambhala Sun* are attractively cosmopolitan, and represent an important attempt to naturalize Buddhism in America. But Kulananda feels that the non-sectarian model does not offer a basis for genuine spiritual life. 'I think one has to be wary of any situation that purports to be non-sectarian when it may just be non-committed. You end up not having any particular practice or any particular group of people you are developing spiritual friendship with. If you just choose what suits you, you end up with a conflicting mishmash of ideas.'

An important basis for inter-Buddhist dialogue is the Buddhist tradition of tolerance, but what form should this take? For Ajahn Amaro, a senior Theravadin monk at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, just north of London, divisions are anathema. 'If you define yourself as a Theravadin, a Mahayanist, a Christian, or an atheist it is just a mental construct, a concept held in your mind as a way of constructing a false self.' I was surprised to hear such liberal attitudes from a representative of what is generally seen as one of the most conservative forms of Buddhism. Amaro proudly showed me around the ecumenical library at

Amaravati. 'There is a saying,' he told me. "When theologians meet they argue; when contemplatives meet they smile."

Amaro's approach offers a basis for friendly relations, but what about the kind of dialogue which might also include debate, disagreement, criticism, and the possibility of changing one's views and practices? How deep can this avowed eclecticism go? A thoroughly eclectic position implies pluralism, the belief that all paths ultimately lead to the same goal. For Kulananda such a position is incompatible with commitment to Buddhism. 'I take the Buddha's teaching to be the nearest expression of the truth that we have. Similarly, in the FWBO we are committed to living out Sangharakshita's teaching. This doesn't mean disdaining other approaches or failing to see areas of intersection. It means not jumping to the conclusion that we are all doing the same thing.'

For Stephen Batchelor a problem arises when the practices and hierarchies of Eastern Buddhism are afforded an unquestionable and immutable authority. Only by understanding the historical context from which those forms developed can Western Buddhists avoid the mistakes of their Eastern forerunners. 'The traditional forms of Buddhism don't teach history. They emphasize the timeless truths of doctrine with little awareness of the historical forces which have moulded the forms Buddhism takes. The historical perspective almost seems an alien way of thinking to many traditional Buddhists.'

To see Buddhist practices as the product of historical forces is to relativize them and open up the possibility of finding common principles underlying the forms. But a further problem arises. Where are we to find a common language to express those principles? One option is to look to secular Western culture – like a recent conference exploring ethical issues in American Buddhism where most of the discussion used concepts from humanistic psychology. Surely we should look for guidance from the Buddhist tradition itself. But where should we look within that tradition? Kulananda suggests that common terms of reference can only be found at Buddhism's shared historical root. 'It is only on the basis of early Indian Buddhism, and the figure of the historical Buddha, that Buddhists can find a common language.' In particular Sangharakshita emphasizes that the heart of the tradition – historically and spiritually – is the central Buddhist act of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha (i.e. committing oneself to the ideals of Buddhism on increasingly deeper levels). For Kulananda this is the only real basis for meetings between Buddhists. 'We can

only come together as Buddhists to the extent to which we are Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.' Is this an approach that other Buddhists would recognize? I asked Amaro if he felt happy with this way of talking. 'It is a very familiar term for us, yes. The Refuges precede all the main activities we undertake. It seems a very normal, middle-of-the-road way for Buddhists to talk.' But does this necessarily mean we have a common understanding of what the term implies? In Sangharakshita's usage Going for Refuge is a matter of degree, and although all Buddhists subscribe to the term, in practice, Kulananda suggested, one cannot assume they are all living out its spirit. 'It is hard to know whether other people are Going for Refuge. It takes time to discern, and we must be open to the possibility that we will conclude that what they are doing has more to do with a certain kind of lifestyle or a particular culture than with Going for Refuge.'

All the people I spoke to agreed that the most fruitful meetings were between experienced practitioners. Batchelor commented 'the more the Dharma becomes an essential part of your life the more you are able to stand as an individual with other Buddhists.' This is part of the rationale behind the FWBO's policy of keeping its activities separate. FWBO centres do not host non-FWBO teachers, and once people decide to commit themselves to practising within the FWBO (when they become mitras) they are asked to 'stop shopping around' other groups. In some quarters this has led to a view that the FWBO is intolerant, but Kulananda disagrees. 'There is a tradition in Buddhism that you settle down with one teacher until you are established with them. This is not a very common approach in Western Buddhist circles. I find that perplexing – I see tremendous advantages in settling down.' Stephen Batchelor agreed that commitment is essential, at least to start with. 'I would definitely recommend that anyone serious about practising Buddhism just stick with one tradition for a good number of years.'

Batchelor runs a programme of colloquia at the beautiful Sharpham House in Devon where small groups of people



gather to present papers and discuss issues of common concern. 'The best way to diffuse prejudice is to get people together in the same room,' he said. Kulananda sees his own work in a similar way. 'There is an ambiguity in what I do. In a sense I represent the FWBO. But I often just want to discuss how my Going for Refuge is made manifest, and try to make friends with people on the basis of our common Going for Refuge.' However he finds that his interest in personal communication is often not shared. 'In the FWBO we value communication as a spiritual practice and I find not many other Buddhists do.' Instead forums such as the UK Network of Buddhist Organizations and the European Buddhist Union quickly turn into business meetings. Kulananda commented: 'very often one is simply involved in different degrees of Buddhist bureaucracy. People want to rush into activity which I think will be doomed because the participants don't know each other sufficiently.'

Not only do British Buddhists not know each other personally, there is often little understanding of the approaches of different organizations and traditions. For example there is generally little awareness of the FWBO among other Buddhists, size and success notwithstanding. Batchelor said 'I seem to spend a lot of my time explaining the FWBO's position to other people. It is sometimes misunderstanding, but more often it's just complete ignorance.'

For me there is a sense in which all Western Buddhists who are genuinely Going for Refuge are engaged in a common project: introducing the Dharma to Western culture where, I believe, it has a uniquely valuable contribution to make. When I suggested such a project to Amaro he rejected a missionary agenda: 'Bringing Buddhism to the Brits! We don't think like that. We respond to interest as best we can and we're glad at success, but we don't see it as our goal.' Stephen Batchelor felt there was, indeed, a broad sense of shared purpose among Western Buddhists, but that it was mitigated by lack of a historical sense and by mutual ignorance. Kulananda emphasized that our project is shared specifically with others to the extent that they go for Refuge.

Such a project is inevitably larger than any one organization but, nonetheless, most Western Buddhists still seem to inhabit separate universes of discourse. We still need to learn one another's languages. My student desire to find a braver, newer world outside the FWBO led me prodigally back to a deeper appreciation of what it has to offer – and particularly what it has to offer other Buddhists. Hopefully, the process of communication is just beginning. ☸



*The Buddha* by Odilon Redon.  
Probably the first Western artistic  
depiction of the Buddha

## The West awakes

### **The Awakening of the West**

The Encounter of Buddhism and  
Western Culture

Stephen Batchelor

Aquarian

pp.416, paperback, £12.99

I was standing with Sangharakshita on a London Underground railway platform recently. Across the tracks a large poster advertised Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*. Behind us, a smaller one drew our attention to the British Museum's collection of relief carvings from the Amaravati stupa. On the train we were politely accosted by a young man from southern England – 'Excuse me, but you're Sangharakshita aren't you...?' We were on our way to a central London bookshop for the launch of Stephen Batchelor's new book – *The Awakening of the West*. Buddhism has come to the West, and Stephen Batchelor's account of the history of the encounter between Buddhism and Western culture charts the course by which it arrived.

Formerly a monk in the Tibetan Gelugpa and then Korean Zen tradition, latterly a lay Buddhist teacher, writer, and translator, Stephen Batchelor is well placed to carry out the task he sets himself. He has a broad and catholic knowledge of Buddhist history, doctrine, and practice combined with an extensive personal experience of the contemporary Western Buddhist scene.

Batchelor's ingenious structuring of his material makes this a fascinating book. The narrative flashes backwards and forwards in time, connecting the present to the past, revealing the historical roots of contemporary Buddhist schools and traditions, and tracing the emergence of the complex collection of doctrines and methods that we now call Buddhism. The result is a panoramic synopsis of Buddhist history viewed from a specifically European perspective, cleverly compressed into a single, coherent account. In fact, it is really four books magically rolled into one: a synoptic presentation of Buddhist



history; an introduction to fundamental Buddhist doctrines and methods; a survey of the current European Buddhist scene; and a personal credo.

The story begins in central Asia in 182BCE – fifty years after the death of Ashoka, one-hundred-and-fifty years after Alexander the Great began his great eastern expedition – when Menander, a general in the army of the Greek king of Bactria, crossed the Beas River and laid siege to the capital of Magadha. Although he was defeated in that campaign, Menander went on to become king in his own right, as well as a Buddhist, and his dialogues with the sage Nagasena are the first records of the encounter between Buddhism and Hellenistic culture.

‘Venerable Nagasena,’ said the king, ‘where does wisdom dwell?’

‘Nowhere, sir.’

‘Then there is no wisdom?’

‘Where does the wind dwell, sir?’

‘Nowhere, Nagasena.’

‘Then there is no wind?’

The Greek side of the story leads to the Gnostic Christian Basilides and the erstwhile Saint Jehosophat – Bodhisat, the Buddha before his Enlightenment – whose story, transubstantiated by Roman Catholicism, symbolizes the veil of ignorance through which the West viewed Buddhism for two-and-a-half-thousand years.

From here the story leaps in time and space to the Chithurst Forest Monastery in Sussex and then circles back to Ashoka’s mission to Sri Lanka, to the founding of the Ceylonese monastic sangha, to Thailand and the first Buddhist Thai kings, closing the circle with Ajahn Chah whose Western disciples established the Chithurst monastery. And so the story goes, shuttling backwards and forwards in time, drawing out different aspects of history, doctrine, and practice, weaving the multi-dimensional fabric of European Buddhist history; leading us through France, Italy, Germany, Japan, China, Britain, Tibet, and Russia; introducing us *en route* to Shantideva, Padmasambhava, the great Rime lamas, Franciscan and Jesuit

missionaries – Italian popes, French kings, the Mongol hordes, and many others.

This is a rich feast for European Buddhists curious about their antecedents, both in distant Asia and closer to home. From a British point of view, it is revealing to learn about the early impact of Buddhism on Germany, France, and Italy, and especially to have laid to rest the rather Anglocentric view that the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society, later to become the Buddhist Society of Great Britain, was foremost in the spread of the Dharma in Europe. We learn, instead, how much we are indebted to, for example, the early German Buddhist pioneers who were among the first Europeans to engage with the Dharma with any depth of practice.

Sangharakshita is accorded a chapter to himself and Batchelor skilfully draws on previously published biographical material to show the influences that worked upon the man to make him what he is. It is an accurate and thoughtful account. Less accurate, however, is his characterization of the FWBO itself, which is portrayed, once again, as *the Buddhist group that does Right Livelihood*. Nowhere in this account would one discover, for example, that the FWBO probably does more Dharma and meditation teaching to the general public than any other British Buddhist group, nor, in the picture given of a ‘self-enclosed’ organization, do I recognize the FWBO which makes such efforts to cultivate inter-Buddhist dialogue in the UK, Europe, and the USA. But if Batchelor’s treatment of the FWBO is incomplete, at least it is fair and he has clearly made a considerable effort to understand our position.

According to Batchelor the European encounter with Buddhism has been marked by five attitudes: blind indifference, self-righteous rejection, rational knowledge, romantic fantasy, and existential engagement. In the current era, blind indifference and self-righteous rejection are on the wane, but existential engagement continues to be confused with merely rational

knowledge and romantic fantasy. Such existential engagement is not possible without the opportunity for people to develop wholeheartedly Buddhist life-styles. Only a very exceptional few have the capacity to sustain such life-styles outside of the context of some kind of Buddhist organization. Nor can there be existential engagement without commitment. It is in this area, of organization and commitment, that Batchelor reveals his personal credo, and it is here that I take greatest issue with him.

‘... has not Buddhism as an organized religion had its day? Have we not witnessed in the history of Asian Buddhist institutions the weakness inherent in investing so much authority in wealthy, hierarchic monasteries and churches...? Could we not imagine an individuated form of the Dharma grounded in small autonomous communities of spiritual friendship? Could we not envision an existential, therapeutic, democratic, imaginative, anarchic and *agnostic* Buddhism for the West?’

Well, yes and no. Small autonomous communities of spiritual friendship: existential, therapeutic, imaginative? Indeed. These are some of the attributes of the various chapters of the Western Buddhist Order. Anarchic? Perhaps. There is certainly no room in Buddhism for relationships based on power. But democratic? Can that allow for differences in spiritual experience? Are the truths of the teachings to be decided by majority vote? Are beginners to tell the teachers what they are to teach? And *agnostic* (the author’s italics)? What does that mean? Granted, we must distinguish between absolute and conventional truth, but are we to doubt that the phenomena of this world are unsatisfying, insubstantial, and impermanent? Can’t we assert the spiritual efficacy of the path of ethics, meditation, and wisdom? Existentially meaningful practice proceeds from commitment, howsoever provisional, and the deeper our existential engagement, the deeper our commitment. An open-minded agnosticism

might characterize our very first steps along the path, but direct experience of the truth of the teachings – personal spiritual experience – dispels agnosticism at every stage of the path. Spiritual experience leads to gnosis, not its opposite. Such gnosis is not the same as the rigid orthodoxy that Batchelor seems to fear. Indeed it is the very opposite: it is radical, non-conventional, and revolutionary.

All institutions will in time become institutionalized, and the most radical of contemporary Buddhist groups will one day settle down and ossify. But in the hundreds of years which may pass between now and then how much good can an organization dedicated to helping people live a Buddhist life-style not do? Without such organized institutions how is the Dharma going to spread in the West? How can these ‘small autonomous communities of spiritual friendship’ come into being? The living flame of the Dharma may burn through sticks and leave ashes behind. But because it leaves ash behind that doesn’t mean you can have flames without wood. We need to learn to distinguish between ash and wood, not preach the conjuring of flames in thin air. The Dharma needs institutions to spread but it can never be confined to them: the message may transcend the medium, but no medium, no message. Most Buddhists need Buddhist organizations, but those organizations must support, not hinder, individuals’ efforts to practise the Dharma.

The open-mindedness which has so evidently allowed Batchelor to roam with thoughtful objectivity through the European Buddhist past and present has, as a near enemy, a state of passive disengagement from the existential vicissitudes of commitment to the living Buddhist tradition. With that caveat I strongly recommend this feast of a book to all Eastern and Western Buddhists. May its clear exposition of Buddhist history, doctrine, and method inspire its readers to overcome the gap between theory and practice. May it help them to go for Refuge.

**Kulananda**

## Lofty Vision

### The Flight of the Garuda

compiled and translated by

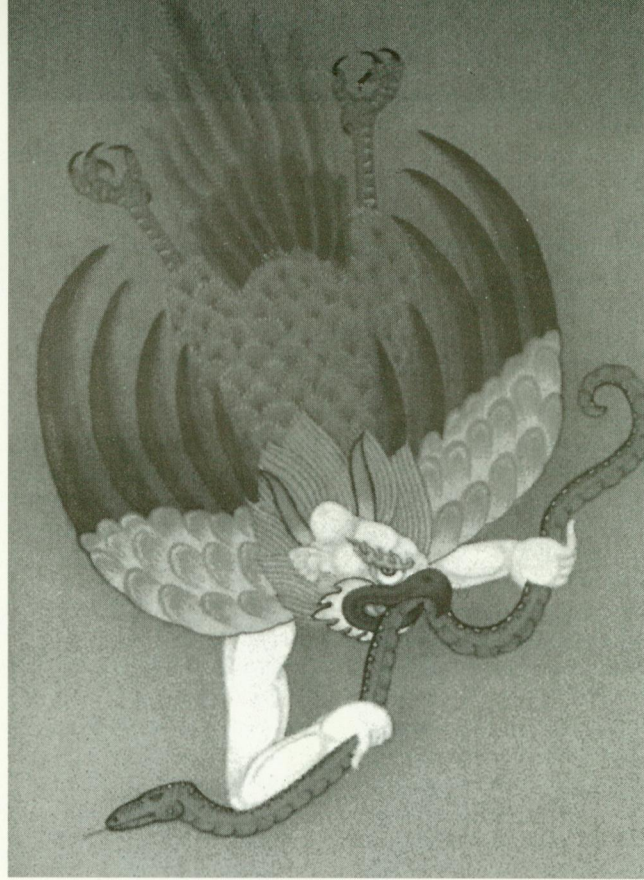
Keith Dowman

Wisdom Publications

pp.225, paperback, £9.95

In recent years, a number of books have appeared in English on Dzogchen, a teaching which is most closely associated with the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism. Dzogchen is a synonym for *atiyoga* or the highest of the nine *yanas* of the Nyingmapas. Historically, the influence of Dzogchen has been felt throughout the Tibetan tradition with practitioners among the Dalai Lamas (who belong to the Gelugpa School), most famously the fifth, and also among the Bonpos, who represent the indigenous, non-Buddhist, shamanic traditions of Tibet. These teachings are particularly associated with Padmasambhava and some of his main disciples such as Vimalamitra and Yeshe Tsogyal: Among more recent lamas who taught Dzogchen were some of Sangharakshita's teachers, such as Jamyang Khyentse, Dudjom Rinpoche, and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. The *Bardo Thodol* (or *Tibetan Book of the Dead*) is probably the best known of the texts available in English which pertain to the Dzogchen teachings.

The current interest in these teachings and practices is easily understandable. A number of writers have whetted the appetite with descriptions of



Dzogchen practitioners attaining the 'rainbow body', where at death the body dissolves into rainbow light, leaving only the hair and fingernails behind. Interest has also been aroused by the present Dalai Lama recently giving teachings on Dzogchen in the West. But this interest has not arisen only because of the exotic context of such teachings or their claim to be the 'highest'. Dzogchen has its own particular flavour, and in comparison with the complexity of most Vajrayana Buddhism, it communicates with a refreshing simplicity and directness.

In outline, this approach involves the practitioner first gaining a direct introduction to the true nature of the mind, usually from a lama. This experience is known as 'vision'. The practice from then onwards consists in doing whatever is necessary to sustain and deepen this vision. The basis of the practice is that 'knowledge is the direct recognition of the here and now'. So the stress is on mindfulness in every moment, coupled with a realization of *shunyata* or emptiness. Anybody who has ever tried to develop mindfulness or do insight practices will be able to confirm from their experience that to dwell in such a state all the time and to integrate it with their everyday activity does indeed represent a very

'advanced' practice.

The *Flight of the Garuda* by Keith Dowman is the most accessible book on Dzogchen I have come across. It has a lengthy introduction written in a simple style which conveys the author's fascination and enthusiasm for his subject. At times he becomes quite lyrical in his descriptions of a life dedicated to remaining in contact with experience and insight at all times. His use of language can be colourful, for example he translates the four preliminary foundations (or the four reflections that turn the mind to the Dharma) as the 'four mind benders', but this does not detract from the clarity. Much literature on Dzogchen is highly technical in its approach, but Keith Dowman succeeds above all in his attempt to place it in a much less abstract, more human context.

The main text which Dowman translates here is the one which provides the title of the book, *The Flight of the Garuda*. This was written by Shabkar Lama, the archetype of the 'rag-clad, lock-matted, mystic-minstrel hermit', who was one of the lamas responsible for the *Rime* or eclectic tradition in Tibet. He lived well into the present century, dying only in 1922. *The Flight of the Garuda* consists of a collection of songs on the vision and practice of the Dzogchen way. The songs

divide into three types. Firstly, there are those concerned with introduction to the vision or true nature of mind, secondly there are those which give precepts for practice, and thirdly there are songs which are strings of aphorisms. This material is certainly not easy. These are highly condensed teachings which are by turns inspiring, illuminating, and downright baffling. In his introduction to this section, Dowman makes a good job of giving the reader a way of approaching this difficult text.

The remainder of the book consists of translations of three shorter Dzogchen texts. 'Emptying the Depths of Hell' is a rite of confession couched in the Dzogchen style. Thus one 'atones' for losing one's vision of the true nature of things by recommitting oneself to dwelling in such a perception, rather than by confessing sins as such. 'The Wish Granting Prayer of Kuntu Zangpo' is a revealed or *terma* text by Rikdzin Godemchan. Kuntu Zangpo, the *adibuddha*, may be more familiar to readers by the Sanskrit name of Samantabhadra. This prayer is a plea for recognition that the passions are, in reality, none other than the Five Wisdoms of the Buddhas. It also includes a description, couched in typical Dzogchen terms, of how our delusions arise. The final text is the *Secret Instruction in a Garland of Vision* by Padmasambhava, which is a concise description of the Dzogchen vision and how to sustain it in practice.

So what is the value of this book to those who are not themselves practising in the Dzogchen tradition? Well, as a restatement of Buddhism in a very particular framework which insists on the primacy of experience, insight, and continual twenty-four-hours-a-day practice, it can force us to question and extend our grasp and practice of the Dharma. It has been said that 'there are no higher teachings, only deeper understandings'. If that is the case then the Dzogchen tradition offers us, from its own deep understanding, a profound restatement of the fundamentals of the Dharma which is a challenge to us all.

**Virachitta**



## ICA Buddhist Film Season

In May and June the Institute of Contemporary Arts (one of London's leading arts venues) ran a season of Buddhist films with the co-operation of the London Buddhist Arts Centre. Initially the LBAC had hoped to run the season itself but when this proved impractical the ICA were happy to co-operate. Some of the films, including a season of documentaries on contemporary religious life in Tibet, were proposed by the ICA, whilst others were selected by Suryaprabha of the LBAC. These



Bertolucci on the *Little Buddha* set

included Far Eastern classics such as Ozu's *The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice* and Mizoguchi's *Sancho the Bailiff*, a devastating account of impermanence and a meditation on the conflict between the love mode and the power mode.

## Buddhism and Bertolucci

In May FWBO centres across Britain ran a range of activities to coincide with the release of Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*. The centres in London declared the first week of May 'London Meditation Week' and taught free meditation classes across the city. The week was centred on the Covent Garden Meditation Centre which held three meditation classes each afternoon and organized an exhibition on the FWBO in the London Ecology Centre next door. The centres in North, East, and West London held

lunch-time classes on each day. The week generated a good deal of coverage in the media including articles in the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *Independent*.

Shortly afterwards the Croydon Buddhist Centre ran 'Buddha Week', which included public talks, lunch-time readings of *The Light of Asia* in Hockney's Café, and a guitar recital by Dharmapani. The Dublin Meditation Centre ran a meditation week when *Little Buddha* opened in Ireland. The week was based at a city-centre art gallery which had an installation of stupas, ongoing meditation practice, and a talk each lunchtime.



Dublin Meditation Week

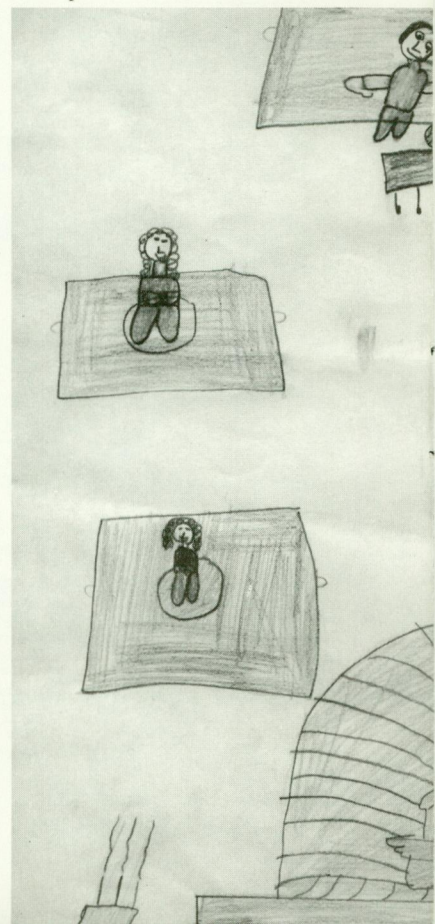
## Points for Parents

In April, around 150 people attended a day devoted to parenthood at the London Buddhist Arts Centre, at which Sangharakshita gave a talk entitled 'Fifteen points for Buddhist Parents'. Drawing on his own childhood experience, knowledge of child psychology, and observation, Sangharakshita had important ideas for Buddhists who are bringing up children.

His principal point was that one should apply Buddhist principles to parenting – underlining the fact that one is a Buddhist first and a parent second. He encouraged parents to teach Buddhism to their children and suggested that parents are fighting a war against Samsara and one tactic they need to employ is to restrict television viewing.

Sangharakshita felt it important that parents should involve themselves in their children's lives by talking to them, and by joining a parent-teacher organization. He said that children need to be trained to be reasonable citizens by being taught to socialize, to have good manners, to speak properly, to care for the environment, and to empathize. He suggested it is important to introduce one's children to one's Buddhist friends and to take them to appropriate festivals.

Sangharakshita emphasized the importance of children



## Sangharakshita Diary

developing self-confidence. He warned parents about possessiveness and pointed to the need to let children go when the time comes. He quoted the Buddha: 'When your son is sixteen, cease to treat him as a son and treat him as a friend.' Finally he encouraged parents not to feel guilty about their children's limitations. Children bring their own karma with them, which parents cannot hold themselves ultimately responsible for.

After lunch, when some families picnicked in a local park, eighty Order members and mitras who were parents re-assembled for a question-and-answer session. The questions were wide-ranging, and topics included: approaching Christmas as a Buddhist; teaching children to meditate; religious education in schools; being a single parent; gaining Stream-Entry in a family context, and going forth from the family.

Many parents felt that the day represented a watershed in the FWBO's approach to families, perhaps marking the beginning of a more conscious exploration of the issues concerning Buddhist parents. Punyamala, a mother of two young children, commented: 'Now it is up to those who are parents to develop these ideas further and create a comprehensive framework of spiritual practice for Buddhist parents of the future.'



Sangharakshita launched *Who Is the Buddha?* at the London Buddhist Arts Centre on 11 March with a reading of poems about the Buddha. The book has been edited from his lectures and seminars about the Buddha, and its publication coincided with the UK release of Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha* which Sangharakshita saw later in the spring. He found the film a mixed experience. He was impressed by the story of Siddhartha up to his Enlightenment, especially the Going Forth, but he pointed out a number of solecisms and was critical of the scenes set in the West. He commented 'it seemed to imply that there was no point of contact between the Westerners and the Tibetans in Bhutan; there was no way in.'

Sangharakshita, meanwhile, continued writing his memoirs of life in Kalimpong in the 1950s when he had many Tibetan friends and several Tibetan teachers. The weekend after the book-launch marked the fourth anniversary of the death of one of his principal teachers, Dardo Rimpoche, and Sangharakshita travelled to Padmaloka on 19 March for the installation of the Rimpoche's ashes in a specially built stupa. He led a puja and introduced three talks before ceremonially placing the ashes in a ready-made compartment in the stupa and sealing them inside.

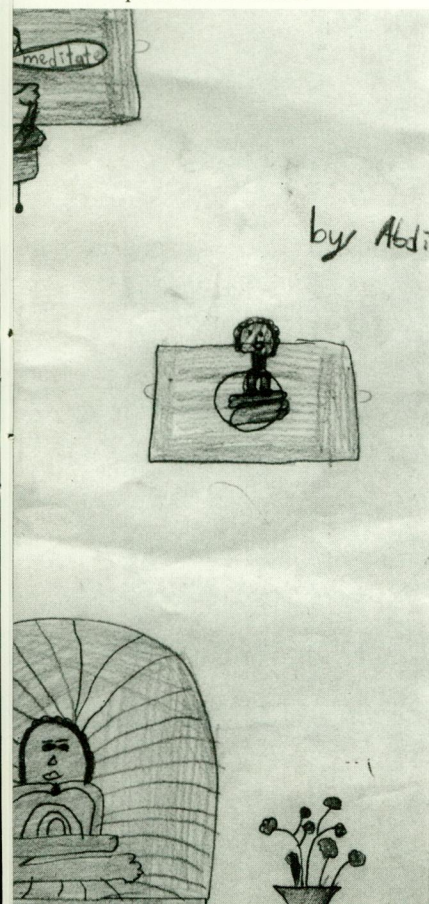
On 9-10 April people from across the FWBO gathered at Goldsmith's College in South London to celebrate FWBO Day, which marks the anniversary of the movement's foundation, and WBO Day which marks the anniversary of the first ordinations. Sangharakshita chaired a talk by Manjuvajra on

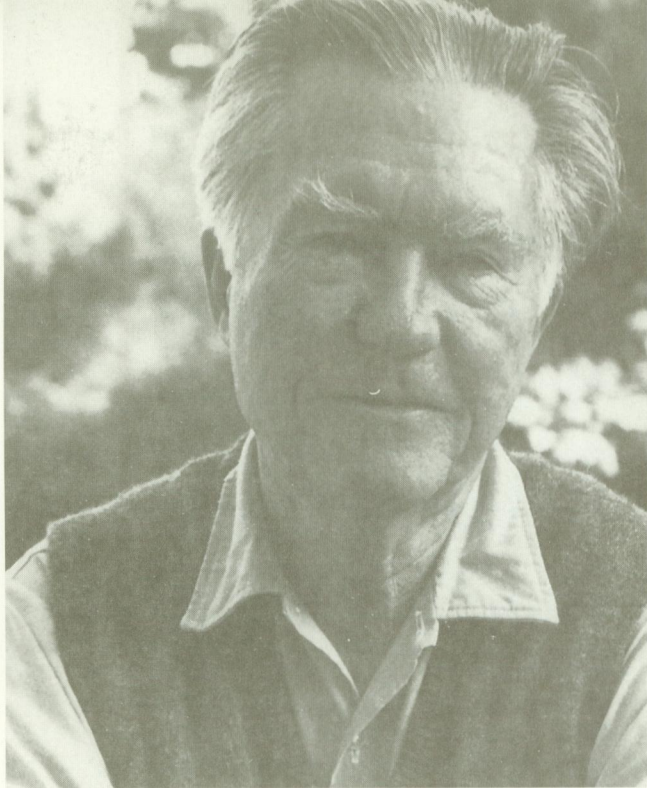
FWBO Day and on WBO Day he read Order members a chapter from his forthcoming memoirs. The chapter was an eloquent account of giving the series of lectures in 1954 which were to form the basis of *A Survey of Buddhism*.

On Saturday 23 April Sangharakshita held a day at the London Buddhist Arts Centre for parents in the FWBO. In the morning he gave a talk enumerating fifteen points of advice in bringing up children. Over 150 people attended the morning session and over 80 Order members and mitras were present in the afternoon when he answered questions which had been put to him by the audience.

Sangharakshita was interviewed for Indian television on 7 May as a part of a feature on Buddhism in the West for a nation-wide programme called *The World This Week*. Three days later he travelled with Kulananda to the launch of Stephen Batchelor's *The Awakening of the West* at a West London bookshop, and there he met many old friends. Sangharakshita is the subject of one of the book's chapters and he commented that he found its treatment of him very fair even if, due to the editor's stringency, it was a little pared down.

Also during this period Sangharakshita visited 'Jacob and his Twelve Sons', an exhibition of paintings by the 17th Century Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbaran at the National Gallery. He gave interviews to people from many countries including the UK, Spain, India, New Zealand, Japan, Venezuela, Finland, and Holland.





## Weatherlight Press: Leaping Poetry

*Manjushvara and Ananda, both of whom are published poets living in Bristol, are establishing Weatherlight Press to produce the work of contemporary American poets such as William Stafford and Robert Bly. They will be launching their first books in October with a tour of several FWBO Buddhist centres and arts centres in the UK. Manjushvara describes why he wanted to start Weatherlight:*

Many years ago, before I became a Buddhist, I tried to define why poetry mattered to me. What I eventually settled on was somewhat alchemical: 'To find magic in the everyday and the everyday in magic.'

It is this quality above all else that I appreciate in the poetry of William Stafford. Stafford was an American who was born in Kansas in 1914 and died in 1993 in Oregon, where he spent much of his life as a college teacher. I was lucky enough to get to know this wonderful poet in the last year of his life and this led me to establish Weatherlight Press. Weatherlight will be publishing the first ever edition of Stafford's work outside America in the summer of 1994 as well as the first UK collection of Robert Bly's prose poems.

William Stafford's poetry abounds in plain-spoken statements which on reflection seem to grow more wise and yet more mysterious. Like all great poets he charges (or perhaps recharges) language with meaning.

*Steel hardly knows what a hint is, but for thistledown all you have*

*to do is breathe.*  
(Different Things)

*There are people whose game is success, but others hear distance:*  
(A Ritual)

*Around our group I could hear the wilderness listen*  
(Travelling Through the Dark)

William Stafford reminds us that we live in a connected universe. Such was his awareness that he did not just *hear* the wilderness: he heard the wilderness *listen*.

If these first books of Weatherlight's are a success I hope we will continue to publish more editions of American poetry such as Bly's and Stafford's, because, to quote Bly, it 'leaps'

*'That leap can be described as a leap from the conscious to the unconscious and back again'*  
(Leaping Poetry)

I think American poetry has thus far learned leaping so much better than its British counterpart because of its openness to non-Western, non-Christian traditions:

*'Let the beauty we love be what we do.*  
*There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.'*  
(Rumi trans. Coleman Barks)

It is such rich, relaxed streams as these that I seek to explore in my own work as a Buddhist poet.

## Windhorse Publications

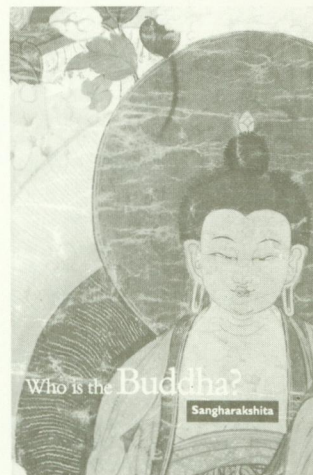
Windhorse Publications, the FWBO's publishing house, moved its business wing to Birmingham in January. A five-man team now carry out the work of administration, book development, and dispatch in an old Bird's Custard factory in a new media quarter near the city centre alongside units housing artists, designers, musicians, and recording and dance studios.

Windhorse Publications was established in 1976 on a shoe-string budget in order to publish works by Sangharakshita. A few years ago a team based in Glasgow was able to take on the accounts and distribution and since then both sales and production values have steadily improved. A team of sales representatives was established early in 1993 as part of an initiative to market books outside the FWBO. More titles have appeared each year and an increasing number of them are by writers other than Sangharakshita. Meanwhile in the USA, with its huge market for books on Buddhism, Manjuvra is now working full-time to market Windhorse books and early results have been encouraging. Windhorse has also recently started supplying Cygnus, a book club selling 'alternative' titles, and some outlets in Windhorse Trading's chain of Evolution gift shops. They are aiming to increase their mail order and direct sales, and will send a catalogue to anyone interested.

In May *Who is the Buddha?* by Sangharakshita was published to coincide with the opening of Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*. Window displays appeared in seventeen bookshops across the UK and Ireland featuring a shrine and a Buddha image. As a result *Who is the Buddha?* has sold

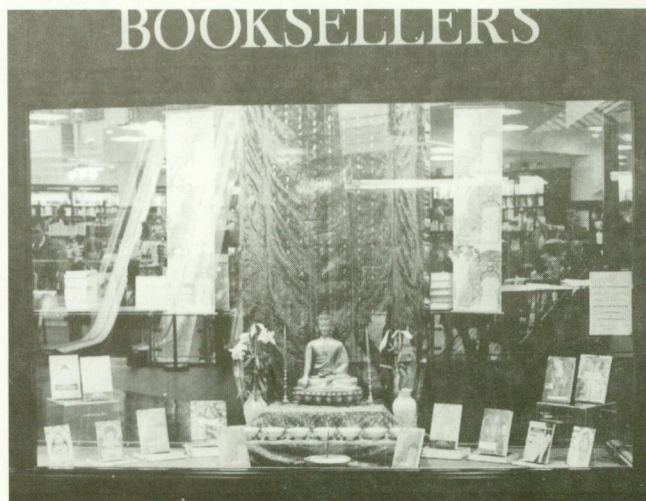
1,800 copies in the first few months since its publication. Other titles have also been selling well: Kamalashila's *Meditation* has recently been reprinted and Vessantara's *Meeting the Buddhas* will be reprinted soon.

The overall result is that sales are currently twenty-five percent higher than a year ago and rising. The Birmingham team is exploring further ways of increasing sales by looking at new markets in libraries and education and using distributors to reach smaller bookshops. The growing financial strength of the business also means that it can start to be more ambitious in its editorial policy. There are plans to start publishing translations of



sutras and other devotional texts and to produce hardback editions of some forthcoming titles.

Finally, an expanded editorial board is being developed to plan a publication programme and an editorial team created to provide help and assistance to would-be authors during the difficult process of writing books. If you think you could help with this work please contact Windhorse Publications.





Yashodeva

## New Activities

### Mexico

Upekshamati spent spring and summer 1994 running classes in meditation and Buddhism in Mexico City, his home town. He found venues via ecumenical groups and HIV-positive groups. Word spread quickly and after he was interviewed five or six times on the radio his regular meditation group swelled to between fifteen and forty people. The response was so enthusiastic that Upekshamati is planning to spend the autumn fund-raising before returning to Mexico in early 1995 to establish permanent activities.

### Holland

FWBO activities in Holland are currently based in Utrecht, where Khemasiri has recently taken over the chairmanship from Vajragita. However, a meditation course has recently been held in Amsterdam and, with a number of Order members considering moving to the city in the near future, Khemasiri hopes that regular activities will be established there before long. Republic of South Africa.

### Centre in Seattle

In April FWBO activities in Seattle moved from Aryadaka's house into a new Seattle Buddhist Centre. The move has made a big difference to the local sangha, who have pledged the necessary finance to support the new facilities. The larger programme of activities includes a weekday morning meditation at 6a.m. as well as classes and study activities at a variety of levels. FWBO activities in Seattle first

started some eight years ago, and Aryadaka believes that the strong personal connections within the sangha provide a firm basis for future expansion.

### Johannesburg

Several friends and mitras living in South Africa have come together to form the nucleus of an FWBO group in Johannesburg. For the time being they are focusing their efforts on the production of a newsletter based on writings by Sangharakshita and Order members. The contact address for the group is

**FWBO Information,**  
PO Box 1279, Parklands,  
Johannesburg 2121,

### Southampton

Since moving to Southampton in early 1994 Lalitaratna has been working full-time to develop a range of thriving FWBO activities in the city and at the University. Activities were first started in Southampton two years ago by mitra Zoe Matthews, and earlier in the year Lalitaratna led a retreat for the local group in the New Forest – Hampshire's most beautiful expanse of open space. At Southampton University next term he will be running three classes a week under the auspices of the newly-established University Buddhist Society.

FWBO groups have also recently started in Chatham, Cheltenham, and Glastonbury. There are now regular activities in Aberdeen, St Andrews, and Whitby. In total there are now around fifty FWBO centres and groups in the UK.

## Ordinations

On 27 March, at Sadhammapradip Retreat Centre at Bhaja in India, eight men were ordained in the context of a two week retreat. The private ordination ceremonies were performed by Suvajra, and the public ordinations by Subhuti. The men came from Bombay, Nagpur, and Poona. Blue skies greeted the retreatants on every day of the retreat, in the hottest March on record.

On 14 June, at Guhyaloka Retreat Centre in Spain, seventeen men were ordained in the course of the annual four month ordination retreat. The public ordinations were conducted by Sona. Guhyaloka is typically very warm at the time of this retreat with fields full of beautiful flowers, including rare and exotic orchids, set against a backdrop of dramatic limestone cliffs, mountains, and a vast blue sky. These conditions support the atmosphere of depth and harmony which is cultivated on these retreats through friendship, confession, meditation, study, and silence.

**Fire-fighting at Guhyaloka Retreat Centre during the men's ordination course. This summer Spain suffered some of its worst ever forest fires.**

### Khemasiri in Utrecht (see left)





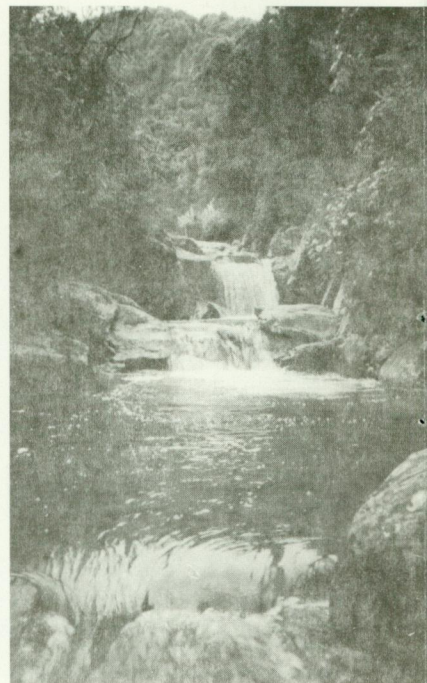
Most Indian Buddhists are ex-Untouchables who have been inspired to convert to Buddhism by the example of Dr Ambedkar. But this is not the whole story. This spring Vimalakirti was conducting a ceremony in Nagpur when twenty-seven members of the Wadar 'tribal' community arrived quite unexpectedly dressed in white and asked to be initiated into Buddhism. Vimalakirti was very happy to lead them in taking the refuges and precepts in the presence of about two hundred people.

## Tararu, NZ

It is now a year since Satyananda and a small band of Order members and mitras emptied their piggy banks into a trust and bought a 200-acre piece of mountain range 125km from Auckland. The land will henceforth be known as Tararu – derived from the name of a stream which forms one of its boundaries and suggesting Tara, who seems present in the intense green of the bush, in the bird-song, and in the constant sound of small waterfalls.

A growing number of people are giving days and weekends to Tararu's development. A solitary retreat hut has been built on a bush-clad ridge, and a house already sited on the property has been decorated and mostly furnished. In May six members of the Auckland men's chapter spent four days of working retreat there. More retreats are planned and the enthusiasm from the Auckland sangha means that an ambitious plan to develop the site into a full-scale retreat centre is proceeding apace.

Taranatha



## The Lotus unfolds

TARALOKA BUDDHIST RETREAT CENTRE FOR WOMEN 1994

**The Middle Years** October 3-7

**Delighting in the Present Moment** Mindfulness Retreat Oct 16-26

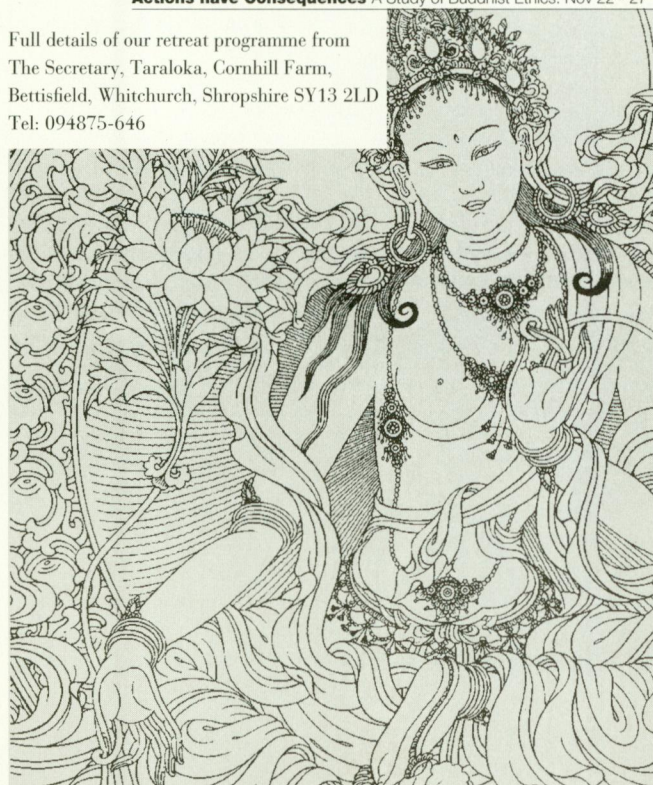
**Sesshin** December 1-8

**Retreats for New Friends**

**Meditation** A Step-by-Step Guide to Practice, October 10-15

**Actions have Consequences** A Study of Buddhist Ethics, Nov 22 - 27

Full details of our retreat programme from The Secretary, Taraloka, Cornhill Farm, Bettisfield, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 2LD  
Tel: 094875-646



## VAJRALOKA

Buddhist Meditation Retreat Centre for Men  
Tyn-y-Ddol, Corwen, Clwyd LL21 0EN.  
Tel: 049081 406 (0490 460406) from Sep 30

<b>September</b>	6 - 17	<b>Refresher Retreat</b>
	17 - 29	<b>Teachers Retreat</b> for women Order Members
<b>October</b>	8 - 22	<b>Brahmaviharas Retreat</b>
	22 - 4 Nov	<b>Mindfulness Retreat</b>
<b>November</b>	11 - 25	<b>Meditation and Insight Retreat</b>
	25 - 2 Dec	<b>Winter Retreat</b>
<b>December</b>	6 - 17	<b>Sesshin</b>
	17 - 31	<b>Mitra Retreat</b>

'an image of the VAST SKY

everywhere free from obstructions

how EXCELLENT





## The struggle for the Karmapa's Throne

On 18 March 1994 followers of Tibetan Buddhism fought one another with clubs, bricks, and bottles at the Nalanda Institute in New Delhi. The two sides were supporters of two Tibetan boys, rival candidates for recognition as the seventeenth Karmapa, the head of the Kagyupa tradition. This was the latest episode in a Byzantine succession crisis which has riven the Kagyupas and produced accusations of murder, attempted assassination, collusion with the Chinese, and forgery. It has resulted in a series of clashes which have involved the Indian army and Western followers.

When the sixteenth Karmapa died in 1981 he left behind him an extraordinary legacy. In Tibet the Kagyupas had taken second place to the Gelugpas, whose most prominent leader, the Dalai Lama, was also head of state. In just twenty-three years of exile Kagyupa teachers including Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche, and the Karmapa himself had established a network of worldwide organizations running hundreds of centres with many thousands of disciples. The Karmapa established his seat in exile at Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, from where he presided over the Kagyupa monastic establishment, Tibetan lay disciples, and the spectacular growth of the movements in the West. Rumtek became the focus of great wealth and power.

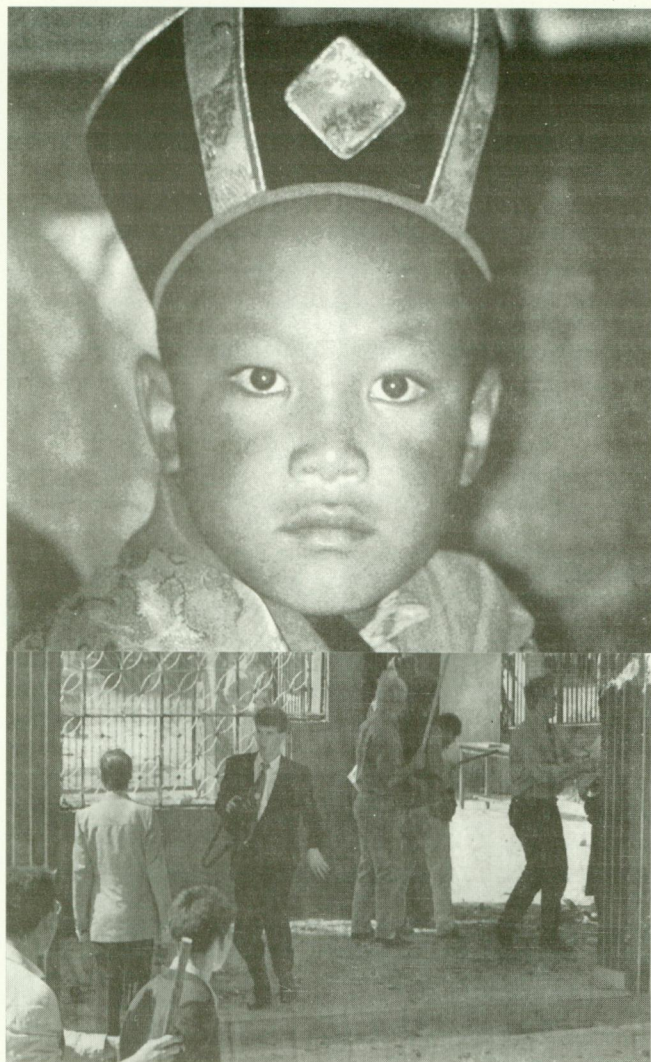
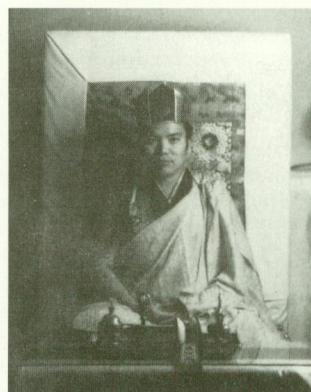
After the Karmapa's death four tulkus – Tai Situ Rinpoche, Shamar Rinpoche, Goshir Gyaltap Rinpoche, and Jamgon Kontrul Rinpoche – became joint regents with responsibility for identifying his rebirth and overseeing the transition. But the letter of prediction – which previous Karmapas had left to guide the search – could not be found. For ten years rumours abounded of dissension among the regents and intense pressure from lay followers to produce a candidate.

In March 1992 Tai Situ announced to the other regents that he had discovered the prediction letter in an amulet

given to him by the Karmapa which he had not previously thought of checking. Shamar Rinpoche expressed doubts about the letter's authenticity and sought to have it concealed but, despite this, Tai Situ, with the support of Goshir Gyaltap, publicized its contents. Jamgon Kontrul, who had been mediating between the two sides, was delegated to find the new incarnation in Tibet. But on 26 April he was killed in a car crash which has been the source of persistent, though unproven, rumours of foul play.

A boy from eastern Tibet, named Urgyen Thinley, had by now been identified as a candidate supported by Tai Situ and opposed by Shamar. On 12 June Shamar arrived at Rumtek which was under the control of Tai Situ to meet the other regents. He brought with him a bodyguard of Indian army troops 'for his protection', but their presence provoked violent clashes between the factions, involving the soldiers and Khampas who had arrived from Kathmandu to support Tai Situ.

Urgyen Thinley was recognized as the Karmapa by the Dalai Lama, the Chinese government, and (amid further accusations of coercion) a majority of Kagyupa lamas. On 27 September his enthronement ceremony took place at Tsurpu Monastery in Tibet, the ancient seat of the Karmapa. But Shamar would not recognize the boy and refused to attend. He accused Tai Situ of complicity with the Chinese, suggesting they had installed Urgyen Thinley to 'control Tibetan religious institutions.' As tension mounted there were



Top: Urgyen Thinley  
Above: Battle in New Delhi

skirmishes at Rumtek, and Shamar even claimed he had been fired at by a would-be assassin. The trouble was compounded by China's refusal to allow the Urgyen Thinley to leave Tibet.

Finally, in March this year Shamar produced a candidate of his own, an eleven-year-old boy called Tenzin Chetse, also from eastern Tibet. The boy was smuggled into India and his enthronement ceremony in New Delhi was the occasion of the clashes pictured above. Thus there are now two rival Karmapas, and the battle between the factions continues in a propaganda war of claims and counter-claims, both sides having published dossiers relating to the case. Tai Situ's followers claim that Tenzin Chetse is himself a Chinese plant and have raked over the dubious reputations of previous incarnations of Shamar Rinpoche. Meanwhile Shamar's followers are marshalling evidence that the prediction letter is a forgery. Shamar has expressed a wish to

install Tenzin Chetse at Rumtek, but Tai Situ warns 'I'm afraid that may lead to a blood-bath in Sikkim.' So far there is no sign of a resolution.

In Tibetan Buddhism figures such as the Karmapa and his regents are seen as embodiments of Enlightenment, and surrender of the disciple's will to the teacher is considered an indispensable condition for spiritual progress. But the highest lamas are political as well as spiritual figures, and a disciple has a quasi-feudal relationship with their teacher which implies political allegiance. In this way Western Buddhists have been caught up in a Tibetan factional war which is anathema to whatever genuine spiritual aspirations first drew them to Tibetan Buddhism. This story has nothing to do with the Dharma. It is a rebuke to Western idealizations of Tibetan Buddhism and a sharp reminder of the extent to which its spiritual riches are caught up in worldly affairs.

# Lamps unto Ourselves

'I guess we're going to have to get used to the idea of leaders who are a bit more human than we'd like them to be.'

I was attending a convention of American Buddhists and my dinner companion, a senior member of a prominent movement, had been confiding the latest upset to afflict his sangha. They were not alone: it seemed then, in 1987, as if half the American Buddhist world was in the grip of some kind of painful and disillusioning succession-related trauma. Inevitably, I was sometimes asked how we in the FWBO were planning to deal with the eventual loss of our founder, Sangharakshita. To my astonishment many assumed we would invite a monk from beyond the FWBO to take over. 'But even if we wanted to do such a thing,' I replied, 'where would we find a monk able even to understand the principles and traditions of our movement, let alone provide a lead?' Surely this very conference had demonstrated the extent to which the FWBO was unique in pioneering certain dimensions of Buddhist life and practice in the modern world. 'Sangharakshita's successor is going to have to come from us, the people who have lived through the development of his movement.' I spoke with confidence, but couldn't help noticing the covert glances that passed between those listening: '*Do these guys know what they are up against?*'

Actually, Sangharakshita has been sharing and handing on his responsibilities since the earliest days. Now, with Order members taking responsibility for our centres, businesses, and residential communities, with a human infrastructure of chairmen/women, mitra convenors, Order chapter convenors, presidents, and preceptors, Sangharakshita has gone a long way towards making himself dispensable. Now, however, he wants to pass on his 'residual responsibilities' to a 'college' of public preceptors and co-opted members. *Is this* where the trouble begins?

Sangharakshita is still healthy and vigorous. His continuing life and concern – if at an increasing distance – provide comforting reassurance. His legacy of practical and principial guidance is still growing. And the initial members of the College are already experienced in taking responsibility; they are widely known – in most cases warts and all, and they are, I think, trusted. Further, the expectations of the FWBO's membership are pretty realistic. There is no reason why things should not continue to run as smoothly as ever. But they may not. One has only to survey some of the

Western Buddhist world's recent difficulties to realize that the challenge is quite awesome, the stakes very high.

It will help, decisively, if we can recognize what is really happening. While a few people are being asked to provide a lead, Sangharakshita is not merely handing his movement over to them – and asking everyone else simply to trust, follow, and obey them. This would be to repeat the mistake that lies, I believe, at the heart of the problems afflicting many other groups. No matter how elaborate or technically perfect the rituals of transmission may be, and no matter how charismatic the individuals involved, for a founding father of a Western Buddhist movement to try to hand over a sort of total leadership to a single successor, or even team of successors, and to ask his sangha to accept that and carry on as before, is – quite irrespective of the successor's particular virtues or faults – a distraction from what is actually necessary.

What is necessary is that we Western Buddhists wake up to the fact that responsibility for the future of our movements, and therefore for the future of Buddhism in the West, is being handed on to *all* of us. We are all being asked to practise harder, study harder, reflect more deeply, and communicate more openly, honestly, and skilfully. We are all being asked to take responsibility not just for ourselves and our own Going for Refuge but – in whatever ways we can – for the world we are creating, the traditions we are laying down.

Within the FWBO/WBO Sangharakshita has given recognition to this by stating that the current membership of the College is but a start. It will be an open-ended body always looking for, and cultivating, potential members able to share, or take over, such responsibilities as fall to it. (Had Sangharakshita not devoted himself to the same task, the FWBO would still be housed in a single centre!) Thus, at best, the College will function as a focus and stimulus for ever higher levels of responsibility being taken by individuals throughout the Movement.

Whether or not it is being clearly perceived, and no matter how well or badly it is being handled by the various movements, responsibility for Western Buddhism is being passed on to a new generation: the first generation of truly Western Buddhists. Are we ready for it? The answer simply has to be yes, doesn't it? What alternative do we have? – But this means that each and every one of us must be willing to rise to that responsibility. **Nagabodhi**



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