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BUDDHISM AND
HIERARCHY

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Cover: The Worshipping Buddha
Spiritual Hierarchy at the highest
level – the Buddha, after his
Enlightenment, paying 'respect and
honour' to the Dharma.

See Sangharakshita,
Who is the Buddha, page 71f

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grasping the nettle of hierarchy

IS BUDDHISM HIERARCHICAL? Maybe up until the second half of the present century it would not have occurred to anyone—either Buddhists in the East or scholars in the West—to ask this question. The only issue at stake would have been the clarification of the ways in which Buddhist institutions and teachings expressed or embodied hierarchical principles. But it happens that the last thirty or so years, which have seen Buddhism take firm root in the West, have also seen the emergence of social and intellectual trends which, in many quarters, have rendered the very word ‘hierarchy’ anathema.

The trends in question are those that have most recently found expression in that rag-bag of rationalized prejudice, intellectual vacuity, and misguided good intentions known as ‘political correctness’. This is a vast subject, and a full understanding of the frequently detrimental effects of these trends, on the levels of both social and spiritual life, calls out for a thoroughgoing Buddhist critique. However, even to outline this task would require a full-length book. The object of this issue of *Golden Drum* is a lot more modest but, all the same, I think that the issues that it raises in relation to current views about hierarchy, and about the significance of hierarchy in Buddhism, are of vital importance to all Western Buddhists.

The articles in this issue of *Golden Drum* demonstrate that hierarchy—that is, essentially, *spiritual* hierarchy—is not only integral to Buddhism, but is an indispensable part of the way to Awakening. They approach this from several standpoints. Firstly, I outline some aspects of the basis of spiritual hierarchy in Buddhist teaching, showing that spiritual hierarchy is inherent in all notions of spiritual development that are subsumed under Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. Next, given the prevailing tendency—which can afflict Buddhists as much as anybody else—to deny the validity of any kind of hierarchy, we need a critique of the kinds of view which underlie this attitude. This is provided by Subhuti in the first part of his article, where he points to ‘pseudo-egalitarianism’ as the principal wrong view underlying rejection of hierarchy. From this, he proceeds to outline the theory and practice of spiritual hierarchy as it exists in our own Movement and, therefore, as it directly affects every person involved with the FWBO and the WBO. Finally, Ratnaguna brings the discussion on to the personal level, with an evocation of his own experience of spiritual hierarchy during more than twenty years in the Movement.

A great deal of the current ‘bad press’ for hierarchy arises from a basic confusion between two fundamentally different kinds of hierarchy. In the universe at large, and in human society, there are

many kinds of hierarchy—or to be more precise, the human mind is able to distinguish many different kinds. However, here we are concerned with two broad and fundamentally opposite types of hierarchy within human society. These are, firstly, power-based hierarchies, which have nothing to do with the Path to Awakening and which are, indeed, highly inimical to it and, secondly, spiritual hierarchies, which are an integral part of the Path. The confusion of these two kinds of hierarchy is an underlying factor in the anathematization of hierarchy in recent times. A power-based hierarchy is, in Sangharakshita’s terms, a characteristic of the ‘group’, and it essentially involves domination: to put it crudely, those higher up can tell those lower down what to do. In most people’s experience hierarchy essentially means this and nothing else. Given this kind of understanding, it is perhaps not difficult to appreciate why it may be that many Buddhists should reject hierarchy out of hand.

However, this view of hierarchy is very one-sided and it leads to a limited, and distorted, view of Buddhism. Spiritual hierarchy, which is characteristic of, and only found within, the spiritual community, is distinguished not by domination (self-aggrandizement) but by compassion (self-transcendence) which manifests, as Subhuti shows at length in his article, in the taking of responsibility for the welfare of others. The higher a person rises in the spiritual hierarchy, the less tendency there will be in him or her to relate to others in terms of power or domination, and the more he or she will relate to others through love (*metta*) and compassion. Sangharakshita has spoken of the spiritual community as being characterized by the ‘love mode’, in contrast to the ‘group’, which is characterized by the ‘power mode’, and it is essentially these two different modes of relation to others that the two kinds of hierarchy respectively embody.

Thus, spiritual hierarchy is diametrically opposite in nature to power-based hierarchy. It is vitally important for Western (not to say Eastern) Buddhists to be clear about the distinction between these two kinds of hierarchy, as it is only on this basis that an appreciation of the indispensability of spiritual hierarchy can be clearly established. Readers may well wish for a much fuller exposition of these points. Fortunately, they can be referred to a stimulating article by Saramati, ‘Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion’, which has appeared in the newly published *Western Buddhist Review*. This deals with a number of important aspects of the background and theory of spiritual hierarchy and can be recommended as further reading on the main topic of this *Golden Drum*.

Tejananda

OF ALL SANGHARAKSHITA'S achievements, perhaps the most significant has been his clarification of what is essential in Buddhist doctrine and practice, and his creation of a Buddhist movement and order which is based, firmly, on these essentials. Cutting through the accretions, elaborations, and misdirections of more than 2,000 years of Buddhist history, Sangharakshita has re-evaluated the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels – the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – as the central and definitive act of the Buddhist life. Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels means that one is consciously and actively directing one's life towards realization of the transcendental principles that are embodied in the Three Jewels. More exactly, one is directing one's life towards the single transcendental principle which each of the Three Jewels embodies in its

dissatisfaction through further self-orientated action, we perpetuate an endless, vicious round of self-induced suffering.

In contrast to this, moving towards others, or other-orientation, is the active expression of self-transcendence, or selflessness. Becoming orientated towards others means developing the ability to express selfless concern for another's welfare. This means being concerned purely for that person's own sake, and not because one hopes to get anything from him or her in return. Other words for this *selfless* concern are love (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*).

Thus, by moving towards ourselves, we manufacture the fetters that keep us bonded to the mundane; but by moving towards others, we loosen those fetters and move towards complete liberation from them in Awakening.

What makes spiritual hierarchy essential to Buddhism?
Tejananda explores

HIERARCHY

AND GOING FOR REFUGE

different way: Enlightenment, or Awakening, itself.

Thus, living the Buddhist life – Going for Refuge – means doing whatever is necessary to reorientate one's whole being towards the transcendental. This implicitly means leaving behind, or letting go of, the mundane. Mundane and transcendental are not just two remote metaphysical polarities which have little or nothing to do with our everyday life in the world. They represent the two fundamental directions or tendencies within our own being. At any given moment we are effectively choosing to move or orientate ourselves towards one of these directions. That is, we can either be moving towards *ourselves*, or towards *others*.

Moving towards ourselves can be expressed in terms of self-orientation, egocentricity, or ego-grasping. It means grasping at happiness and security by putting ourselves – our needs, wants, and wishes – effectively at the centre of everything. However, the belief that we can find happiness in this way is delusive because, as the Buddha taught, it is not in accord with the way things really are. In reality the world does not revolve around us, and our needs, wants, and wishes cannot possibly be totally fulfilled in the way that we expect them to be. This is why we never seem to find true, deep, permanent satisfaction in our lives and why, constantly seeking to alleviate that

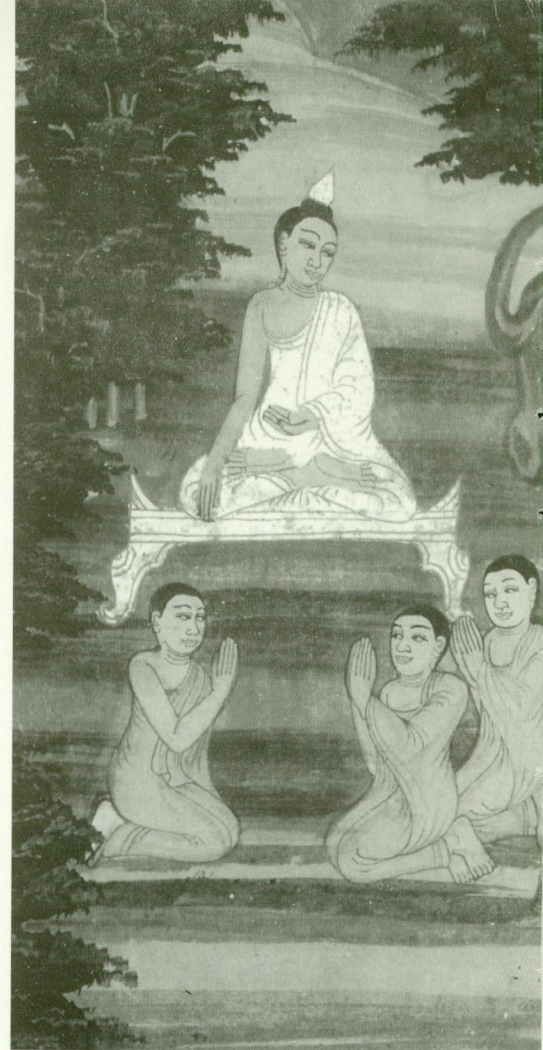
All this is, of course, basic Buddhist teaching. But what does it have to do with spiritual hierarchy? Spiritual hierarchy is, in fact, implicit in the very nature of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. It is only possible to go for Refuge in the first place on the basis of clearly recognizing and accepting that the Buddha is Awakened and we are not. If we believed, for example, that there was no real difference between ourselves and the Buddha, or that the Buddha was not Awakened, or, indeed, that we ourselves were already Awakened, then there could be no basis for our Going for Refuge to the Buddha. This is of great practical significance, because unless we go for Refuge to the Buddha in this way, we cannot be *moving towards* the Buddha, that is, we cannot be moving towards becoming an Awakened being ourselves.

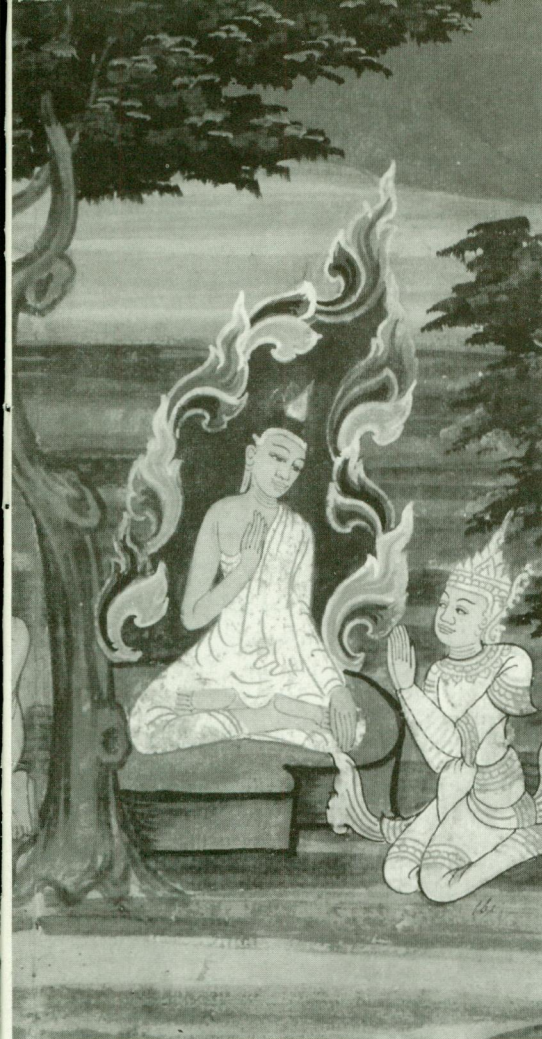
The difference between the Buddha and ourselves represents the spiritual hierarchy in its simplest and most radical terms: on the one hand there are those who are unawakened, and on the other those who are Awakened. This basic twofold hierarchy essentially remains if we bring into the picture the *arya* Sangha. This comprises all those beings who are either Awakened or who are irreversible from Awakening by virtue of the arising of transcendental insight. What all members of the *arya* Sangha have in common is their having seen through the tendency of self-orientation. They know, beyond any

shadow of doubt, that self-orientation does not lead to the satisfaction that ordinary people believe it will – that this belief is a delusion. Somebody who has realized this degree of Insight at its initial level will not yet have entirely eradicated the subtler impulses or inclinations towards self-orientation. However, knowing that these are by nature delusory, he or she will have no desire to follow them through.

As this implies, while all *arya* beings have realized transcendental wisdom, there is a spiritual hierarchy within the *arya* Sangha itself. Different Buddhist schools and systems treat this hierarchy in different ways. Early Buddhism, as exemplified by the Pali Canon, distinguishes a four-level hierarchy within the *arya* Sangha: Stream Entrant, Once-Returner, Non-Returner, and Worthy One (*arahat*) – the last being a fully Awakened person. Progress through these levels is determined by the successive breaking of ten fetters. As suggested above, these are what keep us bonded to the mundane, and they represent successively more subtle degrees of ego-grasping or self-orientation.* Thus, implicitly, the more fetters one overcomes, the more selflessness and other-orientation one develops.

Selflessness and other-orientation may be implicit in this teaching from the Pali Canon, but such qualities are both explicit and strongly emphasized in the Mahayana sutras. Here 'moving towards others' is





Going for Refuge consists in 'moving towards' the Buddha and bridging the great gulf between him and ourselves

brought to the fore in the mythos of the Bodhisattva career. Mahayana teaching gives equal weight to the two principal 'constituents' of Awakening, Wisdom and Compassion. Both of these relate to self-transcendence; Wisdom sees that there is absolutely no basis for self-orientation or ego-grasping, while Compassion is, precisely, selfless concern for others' welfare. These two qualities are therefore not separate but can be seen as the inner and outer expressions of the Awakened state.

The Mahayana *arya* Sangha is, then, the 'glorious company of Bodhisattvas', in whom the 'seed' of Wisdom and Compassion in the form of the *bodhichitta* or 'heart set upon Awakening' has arisen. The arising of the *bodhichitta* is broadly equivalent to the level of Stream Entrant in the Pali Canon, although it is not possible to make precise correlations between the two systems as systems. Prior to this, he or she is a novice or aspirant Bodhisattva. At

the moment that the *bodhichitta* arises, the Bodhisattva enters the first 'stage' (*bhumi*) of the Bodhisattva career proper, and then has another nine stages to traverse before full Awakening. According to Mahayana sutras, this career lasts three whole aeons, at each stage of which the Bodhisattva engages in particular kinds of compassionate deeds, as well as reaching particular levels of Wisdom. Thus, the spiritual hierarchy envisaged by Mahayana sutras consists first of novice Bodhisattvas, ordinary people who aspire to the Bodhisattva ideal, then Bodhisattvas of each of the ten *bhumis*, and finally fully-Awakened Buddhas.

In its teaching of the union of Wisdom and Compassion, the Mahayana highlights the Path to Awakening as 'moving towards others', but it should be clear that this dynamic or direction is inherent in the very nature of that Path and, above all, in Awakening itself, where it finds its apotheosis in the complete transcendence of the distinction between 'self' and 'other'. However, though we now have some idea of the spiritual hierarchy within the *arya* Sangha, it can probably be assumed that most Buddhists reading this are not yet *arya*-beings, so how does the principle of spiritual hierarchy relate to us? We need to return to where we started, with Sangharakshita's emphasis on Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as the central and definitive act of the Buddhist life.

Going for Refuge consists in 'moving towards' the Buddha and bridging the great gulf between him and ourselves. This is, of course, a metaphor for the process of spiritual development. As we practise the Dharma and traverse the Path, we develop qualities that we never previously had. Thus, there are naturally stages of development leading up to the moment of entry into the *arya* Sangha, which is marked by our finally seeing through the whole basis of our tendencies to self-orientation. Sangharakshita has clarified the entire process of spiritual development in terms of Going for Refuge by distinguishing a number of *levels* of Going for Refuge, three of which pertain to earlier, pre-*arya*, levels of spiritual practice. These are *ethnic*, *provisional*, and *effective* Going for Refuge.

Ethnic Going for Refuge is the level at which someone regards themselves as a 'born Buddhist', in other words is born into a culture where Buddhism is traditionally prevalent and is simply brought up as a Buddhist. Here there is perhaps a reflection of certain Buddhist values, but there is no conscious decision to go for Refuge. As Going for Refuge is essentially a conscious and active direction of one's life towards the realization of the principles embodied

by the Three Jewels, this level of Going for Refuge is very limited. Provisional Going for Refuge involves a gradually deepening awareness of the real significance of Going for Refuge, which is reflected initially in a rather intermittent Dharma practice as the individual experiments with and assimilates the implications of being a practising Buddhist. As this practice becomes increasingly steady, the stage of effective Going for Refuge is reached. 'Effective' means that the individual has developed sufficient integrity, self knowledge, and determination to maintain Going for Refuge as the central, guiding direction of his or her life.

These three levels – and more particularly, the provisional and effective levels – give a broad impression of spiritual development, and therefore of spiritual hierarchy, prior to entry into the *arya* Sangha. Within these levels, many further sub-levels or stages could be identified, a task addressed by the following article. There are two further levels of Going for Refuge distinguished by Sangharakshita which pertain to the *arya* Sangha itself: real Going for Refuge, which is equivalent to Stream Entry or the arising of the *bodhichitta*, and *absolute* Going for Refuge, which is full Awakening.

Spiritual development gradually occurs more as a continuum of progress, rather than in easily identifiable jumps to new stages. What the various paths or systems of levels illustrate are the underlying *principles* of spiritual development: as one practises the Dharma one is becoming less and less self-orientated and increasingly selfless. This selflessness manifests in particular ways, or to particular degrees, in relation to other people – especially in terms of one's capacity for loving and compassionate action towards them. It is this which determines one's own – dynamic and flexible – place in the spiritual hierarchy. By virtue of the hierarchy of levels of one's own developing being, one is inevitably entering into a dynamic process of hierarchical relation with one's fellow sangha members, and in this way the sangha exists as a complex network of relationships between people who are relatively more or less spiritually developed. Within the sangha, the essence of vertical hierarchical relation is spiritual friendship: taking active interest in and responsibility for the welfare and spiritual development of others. This is how the dynamic of other-orientation is developed and finds expression, and this is precisely why we need to be actively involved within the spiritual hierarchy.

*See Sangharakshita, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, p.105f.



Subhuti explains why, and how, our Movement embodies spiritual hierarchy

ASCENDING

THE SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY

Opposite:
The Buddha returning
from Indra's heaven,
on a staircase made
by the gods



THE MODERN WORLD contains a great many fashionable views and ideologies that are inimical to spiritual life. Probably the worst of these is what might be called 'pseudo-egalitarianism': the view that nobody is better than anybody else and that no one should be allowed to stand out in any way. This is one of the most deeply rooted and pernicious wrong views of our day, and has become so much a part of the spirit of the age that we take it more or less for granted.

Pseudo-egalitarianism prevents us from acknowledging and reverencing those who have gone further on the spiritual path than ourselves. It therefore prevents us from making spiritual progress, for if we see no special value in what they have become then we will never try to achieve it for ourselves.

In examining pseudo-egalitarianism we must start with the observation that all men, and indeed all women, are *not* created equal, despite the American Declaration of Independence. Human beings come into this world with very different endowments, both physical and mental. They also are far from equal by circumstance. Very different cultural, economic, and social conditions play upon different individuals. To take a very basic example, some parents give their children a lot of encouragement, while others are very discouraging: this has a strong influence on the growing child, and on the unfoldment of its capacities. Further, different people make very different things of the materials given them by nature and nurture: some grow in virtue and understanding, others fester in vice and ignorance.

This is not to say that the notion of equality should be dispensed with completely. It does have important, if strictly limited, applications in human affairs, although we cannot apply the concept in too exact a sense. For example, equality has great value in political affairs. In a representative democracy every adult has an equal quantum of power at the time of an election and this, briefly, helps to ensure political stability and the fair distribution of benefit throughout society. Equality of vote implies that each of us shares a basic degree of responsibility for the society in which we live – and this in turn implies deeper responsibilities that ultimately suggest a spiritual path. Also important are the notions that equal merit should have equal opportunity and that the law should be applied equally to all who find themselves in equal circumstances. Within the overall fact of human inequality, then, we should strive for these limited forms of equality within our society. In denying pseudo-egalitarianism, I am not denying important and useful



notions of equality such as these.

Pseudo-egalitarianism goes far beyond this. It demands, ultimately, that no one should enjoy greater wealth, power, happiness, respect, or benefit of any kind, than anyone else. In its most extreme form, it attempts to impose equality by totalitarian means. But even in everyday life, minor forms of such totalitarianism are frequent. Running somebody down because they are more capable than ourselves, or labelling our own inferiority in one form or another as an 'oppression' by others, or refusing to let somebody else lead when it is appropriate for them to do so – all use pseudo-egalitarian notions.

In these and many other ways, we try to evade the fact of inequality, and we do so because we experience inferiority as painful and unpleasant. But this pain is unavoidable. It arises ultimately from the fact that all our knowledge on the relative plane is built upon comparison. If we are to know anything useful and meaningful within space and time, or are to make any judgements, whether of quantity or quality, we have to compare. Especially, we have to compare in order to know anything about ourselves: we have to compare ourselves with others. It is in our interaction with others that we discover who we are, what qualities we have, and what we lack. When we look at ourselves in relation to other people, we come to recognize that in some respects – whether

significant or trivial – we are better, and in others we are inferior.

NO SINGLE PERSON is completely superior to *everybody* else in *every* respect. Comparison therefore inevitably leads to the realization that we are not as good as *some* other people in *certain* respects. Now, we generally have an infantile desire to be the centre of things and the most important, special person, and we feel insecure and threatened when we realize that we are not. These painful feelings of inferiority we have to deal with in one way or another. We can either do so in a healthy way, or we can react. Reaction may take the form of an inward collapse into discouragement: 'I'm no good, it's hopeless, I'll never do anything.' Or it may go outward, in the form of envy, that most unpleasant of emotions that leads us to pervert the achievements of others so that we feel justified in resenting them, whether for their superiority in worldly wealth and influence or in moral, intellectual, and spiritual qualities.

This envious disposition, so common amongst humanity, can easily be dogmatized and institutionalized, especially through political creeds that seek to impose equality by totalitarian means. But because of the inevitability of innate and acquired inequalities between us, these means cannot succeed in creating a genuine society of equals. What they may



Within the spiritual community, organisational matters are spiritual matters

create is a pseudo-equality, imposed by restricting some from excelling over others. Since someone must do the imposing, a new inequality is automatically created. Lesser forms of pseudo-egalitarianism flourish in society in many different ways, 'political correctness' being a topical brand. These sorts of ideas are so widespread, and people are so strongly influenced by them, that they can easily get imported into Buddhism. Much of modern Western Buddhism has been infected with pseudo-egalitarian ideas. The point has even arrived at which some Buddhists are unwilling to accept that others – even the Buddha! – may be more developed than them at all. This is the height of pseudo-egalitarian absurdity.

BUDDHISM IS INHERENTLY HIERARCHICAL. The Buddha has gone before us, achieving the highest a human can achieve, and there is a whole ladder of ascending spiritual being, stretching up from us to the Buddha himself. Unless we have a very positive attitude to that hierarchy, we cannot move

up that ladder for ourselves. So we must learn not to react with discouragement or with envy when we experience ourselves as inferior to some other people. We have to be able to face up to the fact that they have gone further than we have. We have to be able to assimilate our feelings of inferiority, and not feel discouraged or envious, especially in relation to those we know personally who are further up the spiritual hierarchy than ourselves, if only in certain respects.

The healthy response to those who are further on than we are would be to want to emulate them. Not only would we want to be like them but we would naturally and spontaneously feel sympathetic joy, reverence, respect, and devotion towards them and we would rejoice in their achievements. These natural responses will arise only if we are making the most of our own lives and realizing our own potential. Envy and discouragement arise from psychological and spiritual stagnation. If, in Buddhist terms, we are truly Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we will be energized and invigorated by seeing others more developed than ourselves.

SO FAR, I have been dealing with the general principle of spiritual hierarchy. However, where a genuine spiritual community exists, the spiritual hierarchy will take a recognizable form. It will be possible to see, broadly speaking, where people are on the hierarchy, although their position will never be fixed and static. This expressed hierarchy comes about because the spiritual community works in the world. The Western Buddhist Order, for instance, has a structure that includes a system of Chapters and a process for preparing men and women for ordination. The Order also tries to establish the best possible conditions for people to develop spiritually, and to create a bridge between the world and itself. All of this implies the existence of a movement with its various institutions: in our case, the spiritual movement we call the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, with its centres, communities, Right Livelihood businesses, and other institutions.

Within these structures of the WBO and the FWBO there are various responsibilities to be carried out. Some of these require very little commitment and experience, and more or less anybody can perform them. Others require a great deal of commitment and experience, and only a very few people are really capable of carrying them out. Here we should note that a responsibility is very different from a 'post' or 'position'. An important aspect of responsibility is that it can only be undertaken by someone who is genuinely capable of carrying it out.

You cannot 'have' a responsibility which you are incapable of fulfilling.

Within our movement, all responsibilities, ultimately, are towards other people. One's actions in carrying out one's responsibilities will have repercussions on the lives of others, and especially on their spiritual development. The weightier the responsibility, the greater the number of people one will affect and the more deeply they will be affected. It is in this sense that the spiritual community leads to an expressed hierarchy – it is a hierarchy of responsibility.

To move up that hierarchy of responsibility actually *is* to develop spiritually. This is because spiritual life is not just about ourselves. There is, in Sangharakshita's terms, an 'altruistic dimension' integral to Going for Refuge. Of course, we do have to work on ourselves. But in working on ourselves, we will become more and more sensitive to those around us, care more and more about and for other people, and be increasingly responsible in relation to them. By Going for Refuge more and more deeply, we will be moving up that hierarchy of responsibility.

BEFORE GOING FURTHER, I need to make it clear that this growth in responsibility in relation to other people is not just about teaching meditation and Buddhism. It includes 'organizational' responsibilities. We often have the idea that spiritual life means floating on a pink cloud somewhere, just blissfully meditating all the time, and that things such as organization have nothing to do with it. But we have to be careful not to think of the spiritual as having nothing to do with our day-to-day lives. Within the context of the spiritual community, organizational matters *are* spiritual matters, since they involve responsibility for others.

All organization, in the context of a spiritual community, is concerned ultimately with others. Firstly, we organize and run Buddhist centres or raise funds and so forth because we want others to benefit from the Dharma, so our work is an expression of altruism. Moreover, integral to any managerial responsibility within the Movement is responsibility for ensuring that work is a means of spiritual development for our co-workers. Here we need to reflect a little on the nature of spiritual life, and especially of Insight, that breakthrough into transcendental understanding that is the spiritual goal. We are so accustomed to thinking of Insight in terms of meditation that we forget that we meditate probably not more than an hour or so a day, and we expect the breakthrough to come in this one hour out of twenty-

four. But Insight requires much more than that. It requires that we are vividly and intensely involved with our lives and in vigorous contact with our spiritual friends, all in the context of Going for Refuge. Living and working with others in the spiritual community can provide a very effective context, supported of course by meditation, Dharma study, and so forth, in which we can make that breakthrough into the transcendental.

So running Right Livelihood businesses, centres, and so forth, is really a technique, a method of spiritual development. Those taking responsibility for such situations are responsible, above all, for ensuring that they are genuine arenas for the arising of Insight. This means making sure that the situations are sufficiently spiritually intense and that those within them are entering into vigorous enough interaction with each other for the breakthrough eventually to occur.

THIS IS THE NATURE of the hierarchy of responsibility that exists within the WBO and the FWBO. If it is to be of any spiritual value to us, we need to cultivate an attitude of respect and gratitude to those who demonstrate a higher capacity for responsibility for others and, in that sense, a greater degree of spiritual maturity than ourselves. This is not a hierarchy of power in which the lower are forced to defer to the higher. Rather, it is a hierarchy of spiritual friendship – *kalyana mitrata* – based on common spiritual commitment, mutual concern, sympathy, and *metta*. It is these qualities that bind the whole hierarchy together. The spiritual hierarchy only functions on the basis of the positive human emotions that flow upwards and downwards through all its levels.

So we need to be aware of this hierarchy and experience it for ourselves within our own movement. We have to be sensitive to it and allow ourselves to respond to it. We also have to be sensible about it. We should not too quickly assume that people who do not fit into the usual pattern, or do not function through the basic organizations of the Movement, are necessarily taking less responsibility than those who do. This said, the principle of ever-deepening responsibility does find expression as a general pattern in the structure of the WBO and FWBO. To help clarify how this works itself out within our movement, I am going to lay out its very broad outlines, though we must be careful not to become over-literalistic about this pattern, but should treat it as an illustration of the principle of hierarchy of responsibility.

At each level of involvement with our



movement, there is an appropriate level of responsibility. Responsibility starts even with the newest Friend. If one benefits at all from the activities of the Movement, then one has some responsibility towards it. We encourage Friends to express this, initially, just by making a financial contribution. The dana bowl is an opportunity to take responsibility for the Movement – or just for the class – that they are involved with. In fact we try, as a matter of deliberate policy, to provide many opportunities for people to take responsibility, such as cleaning the Centre or helping with fund-raising or other events.

Next, the mitra has made a specific commitment to this particular spiritual movement and in doing so explicitly commits himself or herself to helping out with the activities of the FWBO. In fact, mitras often take a great deal of responsibility, doing fund-raising and even taking classes or running businesses.

The next level is that of the Order member, who makes an implied commitment in the act of Going for Refuge to helping others go for Refuge. Order members do, by and large, fulfil that responsibility, working together to develop a movement that will help other people go for Refuge, though not always within the context of the Movement in a narrow sense. At this basic level of responsibility, Order members lead classes, befriend

Friends and mitras, take a lead in communities, and perhaps manage businesses.

The next level consists of Order members who undertake responsibilities requiring a much more explicit and long-term commitment. For instance, one can become a Kalyana Mitra, promising to keep up close contact and friendship with a mitra who has asked for ordination, thereby helping him or her become ready to join the Order. Other expressions of this level of responsibility include becoming a member of the Council of an FWBO centre or the director of a Right Livelihood business. Here one has undertaken a very deep responsibility that must be passed on properly – one cannot just say ‘my contract is up.’

Next, there are Order members who are leaders at a local level. There is the Mitra Convenor, who is responsible for making sure that mitras in a given area have the facilities and contact they need. The Chapter Convenor sees that the Order members in his or her Chapter are in tune with the wider Order and that the Chapter operates as a genuine ‘spiritual workshop’. The Centre Chairman ensures that the Centre functions effectively and is a genuine spiritual force in the local area. The Managing Director of a Right Livelihood business is responsible both for its commercial success and its spiritual effectiveness.



Order members, by and large, fulfil their responsibility working together to help other people go for Refuge

The next level is that of the Private Preceptors. These are Order members who witness someone's effective Going for Refuge in the private ordination ceremony. This is the first of the two parts of the ordination ceremony, and represents the fact that Going for Refuge is essentially an individual act. In this context, the person being ordained undertakes, alone with the Private Preceptor, to keep on Going for Refuge regardless of anybody else. The Private Preceptor's recognition of one's Going for Refuge helps give one a vital confidence in one's spiritual aspiration. The Private Preceptor's is therefore a very important responsibility in relation to other people.

Then, there is the level of those who take responsibility for the Movement and Order as a whole and who are committed to fulfilling Sangharakshita's vision for them even more than most Order members. The Overall Order Convenor looks after

the central functions of the Order and tries to make sure that it does operate as a genuine spiritual community. The Overall Mitra Convenors make sure that the mitra system works as a whole and that mitras are getting the help they need in order to make real spiritual progress. Then, each Centre has a President – a senior Order member who does not live locally but has a close relationship with the Centre. The President plays a very important role in reflecting what is going on in the Centre, and helps the Chairman and others make sure that it does really work effectively, in harmony with the rest of the Movement.

Finally, there are the Public Preceptors. It is in the public ordination ceremony that a person is finally accepted into the Order, by virtue of the Public Preceptor acknowledging that he or she is Going for Refuge effectively. So, in carrying out this responsibility, the Public Preceptors have the future of the Order in their hands. And in looking to the future of the Order, they have to consider not just the Order but the whole Movement, because the whole Movement is in effect the training process for people on the way to ordination. So the Public Preceptors stand in that axial



position both in the Order and in the FWBO, and therefore have the weightiest responsibility in this hierarchy of responsibility.

THIS, IN OUTLINE, is the hierarchy of responsibility in our movement. It is important to emphasize again that it is an illustration of a general principle. Not everyone fits neatly into this pattern – some people take a great deal of responsibility in ways that I have not mentioned, and the pattern is capable of expansion to include new kinds of responsibility. Especially, we should remember that it is not a status structure. One's position in the spiritual

hierarchy is a question of one's ability to take genuine spiritual responsibility for others, not of what office one holds. Thus it corresponds, at least to a large extent, to one's genuine spiritual attainment.

Naturally, there is always a potential for a true hierarchy of responsibility to decay into a hierarchy of status and power. One might even say, judging from history, that there was an inevitable tendency for this to happen. The only way we can overcome that tendency is for each and every one of us to put the principles of Going for Refuge and spiritual friendship before everything else. Let us hope that we can do so for many centuries to come.

All this is especially relevant at the moment to people at every level within the Movement, for Sangharakshita is now handing on his remaining responsibilities for its direction to the Preceptors and Presidents. This of course raises the question of his own responsibilities, which are irreplaceable and unique. Founding a spiritual movement is an act of the very greatest responsibility and has the very highest place in the hierarchy, above and beyond all the stages that I have already mentioned.

Hierarchy is, I think, a human need. If there is no ordering of society on genuine hierarchical principles, that is, on the grounds of real merit and skilful achievement, it becomes increasingly disorientated. But hierarchy needs to be dynamic. People rightly are unwilling to accept any more the static and artificial hierarchies, based on birth or wealth, that we have inherited from the past. In a dynamic hierarchy, all the stages are open to everyone who has the merit to climb them. Necessary as it is, we must be careful that we do not think that hierarchy absolves us from effort – we always have to make a great effort in order to take on further responsibilities. But, nonetheless, hierarchy gives a great sense of relief and ease, of orientation and genuine stability, because we know where we are, and where we are going.

This hierarchy within our movement gives us something definite to work with. We know that what we must do, from one point of view, is take more and more responsibility. This does not necessarily have to be in one of the forms that I have outlined, but these do give us a basic pattern of ways in which we can make spiritual progress, by taking more and more responsibility. We are then very fortunate indeed to have, in our movement, a scale of values that to some extent is represented concretely in an ordering of our community. The more we appreciate and value it, the more we ourselves will make spiritual progress.



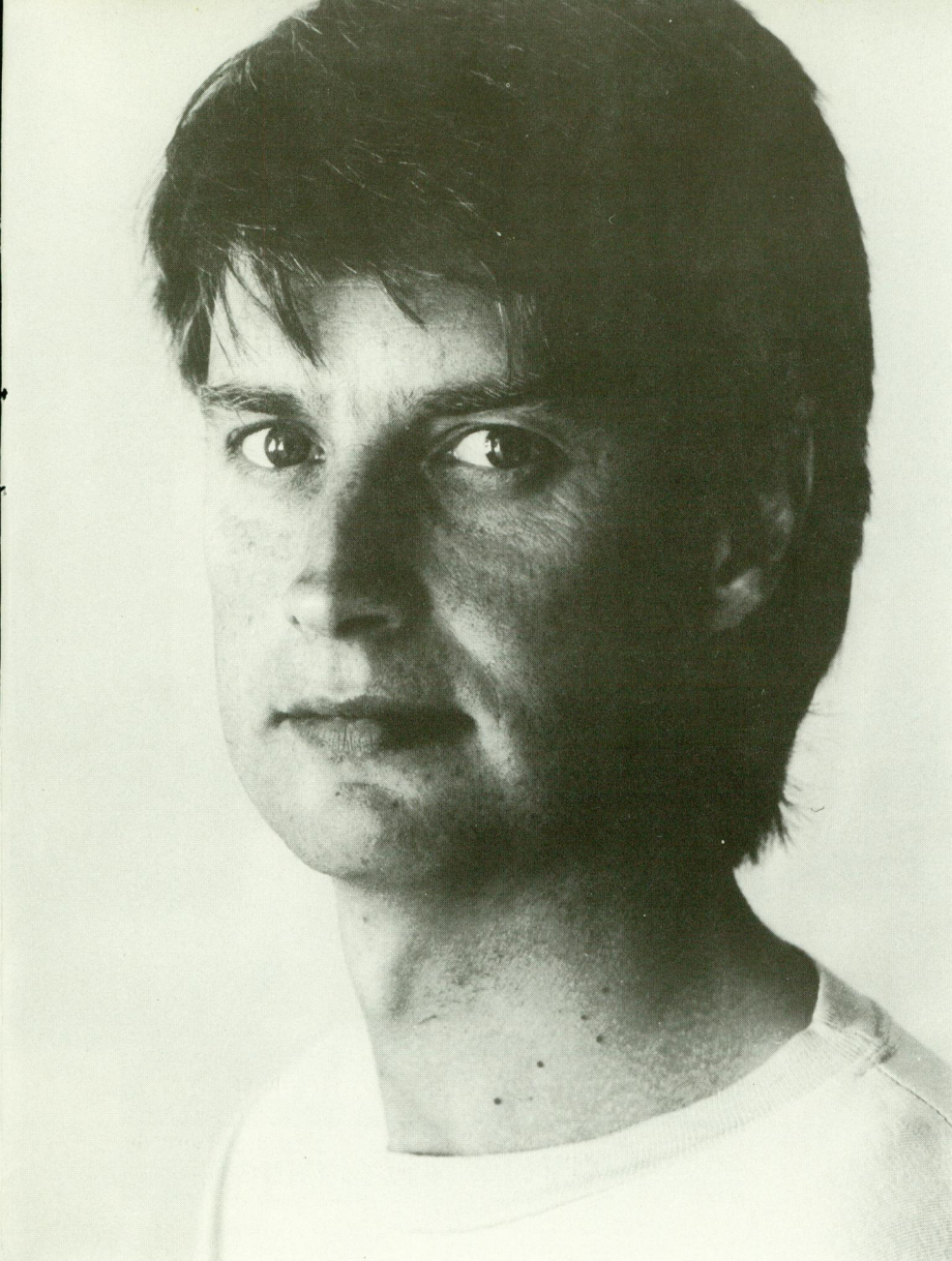
A HIERARCHY OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

How **Ratnaguna** discovered the heart of spiritual hierarchy

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE of spiritual hierarchy occurred before I even began to think in those terms. The first time I attended an FWBO class I was impressed by the Order members present – about five of them as I remember. I found it hard to express (as I do even now) what it was about them that impressed me, but I remember muttering something at the time about their seeming unpretentious, confident, and clear. There was something indefinable about them which, it seemed to me, set them apart from anyone else I had met. Whatever it was, it was something that I didn't 'have', and I admired and respected them for it. I was keen to learn from them whatever they had to teach.

And I did learn from them: about meditation, about Buddhism, and about the FWBO. But more important than any 'teachings' I received from them, I learnt from their example. They showed me how the teachings of Buddhism translated into human qualities and actions and I remember how happy I felt to meet people that I could emulate so unreservedly. I (like everyone else, I would guess) needed to admire and emulate others who were better than myself. Up until then my 'heroes' had been rock stars who, in some way, symbolized what I wanted to become. But now I had met people who really did have qualities that I lacked, and who genuinely were living examples of a better way of being.

All of these Order members talked about Sangharakshita with great respect, and I was becoming familiar with the very distinctive sound of his voice through listening to his taped lectures. Naturally, I wanted to meet him, and I remember the first time that I did so. At that time he lived in a cottage somewhere in Norfolk, and one day Lokamitra took me with him for a weekend visit. I remember Sangharakshita as being very calm, measured, and friendly. He seemed very pleased to meet me and, to my surprise, interested in me. I particularly remember one incident, I think it was after lunch on Saturday afternoon, while the three of us were sitting quietly in



Ratnaguna

Sangharakshita's front room, each reading a book. Every now and then I looked up and, somewhat to my dismay, Sangharakshita was looking at me. I smiled in embarrassment, and he smiled back at me. Not in embarrassment though, it seemed to me, but more to simply acknowledge my smile, and to put me at my ease. I felt that he was, in a way, studying me. Not in a cold, analytical way, but warmly and appreciatively. I intuitively felt that he could 'see through me' – an experience which could have been unnerving but wasn't, because I also felt that I could trust him.

Over the next few years I got to know him quite well, and now, after twenty years of friendship, I can say that my initial feeling of trust in him has never been betrayed. Although in those twenty years we haven't spent a great deal of time together, he knows me very well. It is obvious that he is well aware of my qualities and my faults. He has seen both my successes and my failures. On occasions, I'm afraid, I have done some

very foolish things, bringing suffering upon myself and others. Sangharakshita has often seen what I have done and commented on it, but never harshly – always with kindness and sensitivity. He would point out instances of my unskilfulness, but being fully aware that I was suffering would say just enough to show me my error. He has never been anything but kind to me.

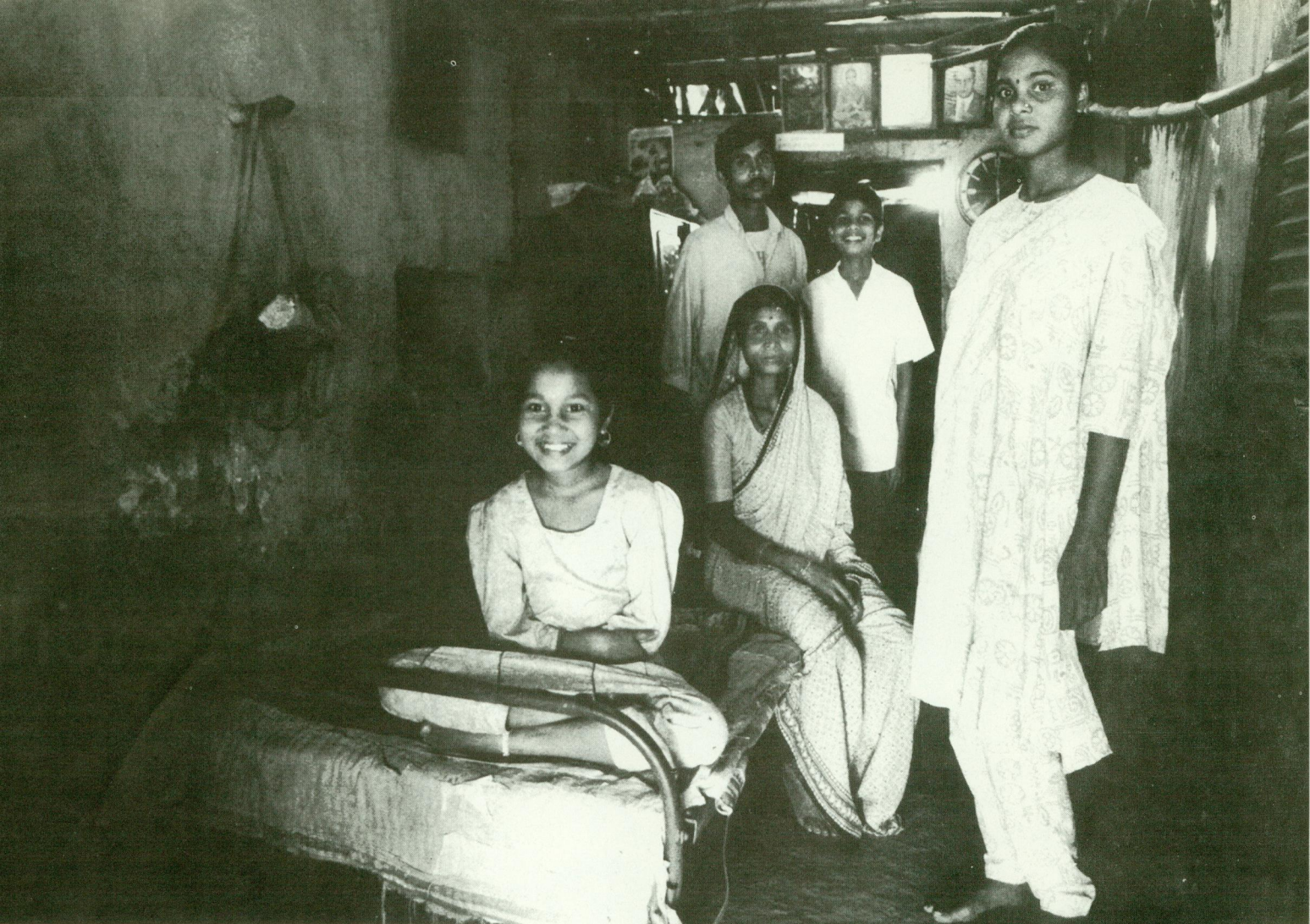
Not only this, he has always been encouraging. He has seen not only my faults but also my qualities, and he has given expression to his appreciation of them on many occasions. He has made it clear to me that he appreciates me for the qualities that I have, lacking as I may be in others. This has been very important to me in realizing that, much as I admire him and other members of the Order, I am not them and never can be. I am me, and the only way I will be able to grow is by being myself at my best. Of course, I see qualities in others that I need to develop, but by developing those qualities I will not become like those people, but more like

myself. This is one of Sangharakshita's teachings – that by becoming more like the Buddha one becomes, paradoxically, more like oneself. But Sangharakshita is not only my teacher, he has also shown his love by befriending me, and his friendship has allowed me to realize his teaching much more easily.

As will be obvious to you by now, I have gained an enormous amount through my association with Sangharakshita and the Order, and there is no doubt that others have gained from their association with me. Having gained so much myself I have been able to give to others, albeit in a more modest way than Sangharakshita. What I have discovered is that to help others – to be a spiritual friend – all I have needed to do is to practise the Dharma and to be myself. If I just do that, an atmosphere of trust will arise in which genuine, heartfelt communication takes place. In such an atmosphere, there has been no need to think in terms of 'teaching' or 'helping' – whatever experience and understanding I have has been communicated quite naturally.

I have also discovered that giving to someone in this way has been just as satisfying as receiving. To help another become clearer and develop beautiful qualities, and to be able to watch them grow almost before one's very eyes, is a wonderful experience which no book on Buddhism can adequately describe. This experience of looking up to others who are more developed than oneself, and of helping those who are less developed – especially through the medium of friendship and love – is to me an essential element of the Path. Without it, Buddhism could hardly be said to exist.

This experience is encapsulated for me in the private ordination ceremony. I still remember my own ceremony, which Sangharakshita performed eighteen years ago. I remember sitting opposite him in a tiny room with a shrine. As he recited and chanted the words, and as he explained for me the significance of each part of the ceremony, he was all the time looking at me, smiling and encouraging me, as if delighted in the step that I was taking. More recently, I have been appointed a Private Preceptor and I have now myself performed this ceremony for two men. On each occasion it felt as if we were taking part in a ritual which was 'bigger' than both of us. It felt as if we were joining a noble lineage that went back to the Buddha – a lineage of spiritual hierarchy recognized through friendship, in which one helps the other, and the other gratefully accepts that help. I felt intensely grateful to Sangharakshita and the Order for all that they had done for me and for helping me, in this way, to help others too.



Sandhya (right), a student at Vishrantwadi hostel, with her family

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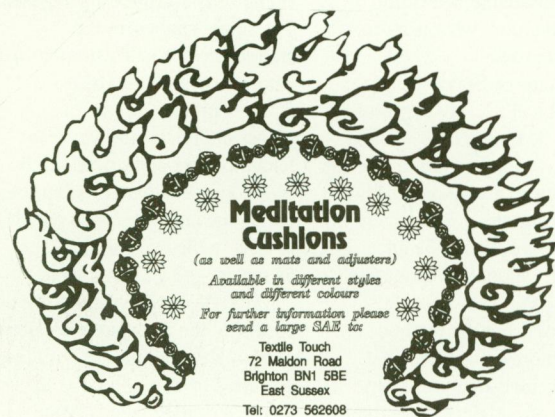
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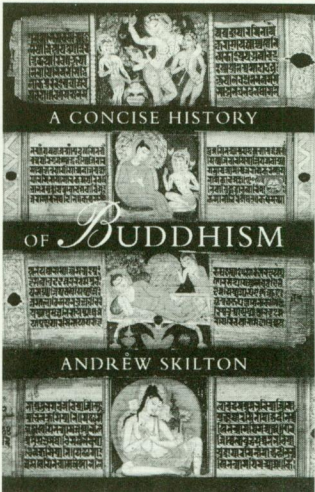
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Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru

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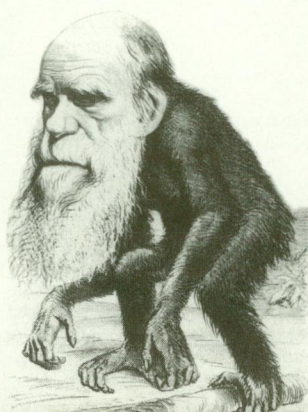
In 1848 two sisters, Katherine and Margaret Fox, started to hear rapping noises in their house in upstate New York. These noises, they claimed, were messages from the spirit world: they had broken through. The Fox sisters' celebrity was instant, and it quickly grew into the vast nineteenth century vogue for spiritualism. More than this, as Peter Washington argues in his excellent study of Western gurus, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*, these contacts with immaterial reality heralded an early attempt

to fill the void at the heart of modern Western religious life.

This void haunted the nineteenth century imagination and was the product of the split between the contrary claims of science and of religion. While the Bible was being discredited by geology, biology, and higher criticism the seance appeared to offer tangible evidence of a spiritual dimension. Madame Blavatsky (whose system of Theosophy was always really a development of spiritualism) celebrated the counter-attack on materialism by installing in her house a large, stuffed baboon, bespectacled, standing upright, and dressed in wing-collar, morning coat, and tie, and carrying under his arm a copy of *The Origin of Species*. The animal was a lampoon on Darwin's pretensions to have

defined man as a purely material creature. Madame Blavatsky knew better and, what is more, she could prove it.

The aims of Blavatsky's Theosophical Society expressed a desire to be true to *both* science and religion by promoting 'the investigation of unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man'. But was this to be an objective, rational investigation, deriving its authority from the prestige of scientific method? Or was it a more subjective, 'spiritual' investigation, whose authority would depend on the experiences and occurrences it evoked? Was this study or spiritual adventure? In practice there was far more of the latter, but the question of authority turned out to be central. The spiritualists' inchoate encounters with 'the other side' were gloriously trumped when Blavatsky claimed to be in direct communication with a brotherhood of spiritual masters who, dwelling apart from mankind, had chosen her as their channel. They 'precipitated' letters into her possession dealing on the one hand with such subjects as metaphysics and cosmology, whilst on the other



Madame Blavatsky

they intervened in the continual feuds between their emissary and her colleagues and rivals. While Blavatsky was alive the masters' testimony made her virtually unassailable within the Society (in spite of the fact that the messages and the psychic phenomena that surrounded her were repeatedly exposed as fraudulent). After her death, as Blavatsky's heirs squabbled for power, the masters mysteriously resumed their communication with the various parties, invariably delivering the good news that the recipient was indeed in the right and should be granted ascendancy.

Washington suggests that Theosophy and the other movements he discusses appealed to the desire for the mysteries of religion to be tangibly present in the world. The Bible and the Church, after all, had been relativized; God had been removed to an abstract transcendence; and the various world religions now appeared as historical accidents, dimly reflecting an older and deeper path to wisdom. What, then, could connect the spiritual seeker with the realm of authentic meanings? The evidence of the seance and the testimony of the masters were fine, but perhaps they were still not enough to excite fully spiritual sensibilities. The stage was set for the emergence of the Western guru who would embody the lost realities in his very person; one whose utterances (however far-fetched) were authorized not by tradition, precedent, or scripture, but by the attributes with which – at least in the eyes of his disciples – he was endowed.

The Theosophists themselves produced the first major Western guru in Krishnamurti, whom they groomed from boyhood as the 'Next World Teacher'. After Krishnamurti's rejection of Theosophy (and, indeed, of all claims that there was a path by which the Truth might be approached) he occupied the paradoxical role of a teacher without a teaching. This did not, however, make him teach any less or forgo the wealth and celebrity which his position brought him. This combination made him the object of countless projections: romantic, maternal, filial, and oedipal. He was formed in the mould of Western images of an Eastern sage, and adapted himself to the task even whilst he was forswearing it.

Like Krishnamurti, it was

often remarked that no two pupils of Gurdjieff could ever agree on exactly what their teacher had said. Gurdjieff himself urged that his teaching – with its injunction to ‘know less and be more’ – was not capable of systematic formulation. ‘The Work’ (as the process of following his teachings was known) was essentially a function of Gurdjieff’s character. So, was everything he said a teaching? Washington describes an emblematic encounter between Gurdjieff and a new acolyte. The master placed an orange on the table between them, fixed the pupil with his gaze and declared: ‘this is the most important thing in the universe.’ What choice does the poor spiritual aspirant have except to submit his rational faculties or else be cast as a sceptic and materialist? Those who seek certainty will find it in such encounters, but at what price?

Gurdjieff’s behaviour towards his pupils was certainly imperious and capricious, but was he skilfully challenging their egotistic limitations, or was Gurdjieff, himself, the real monster of egotism? Was the Work a path to freedom, or was it simply creating further dependency? And in the end, for all his extraordinary personal magnetism, was Gurdjieff as dependent on the submission of his pupils as they were on the dominance of their teacher? Were Washington’s gurus, in general, sincere or were they wilfully manipulative? All of these questions are raised by *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon*, but perhaps the answers exist in a region of deep ambiguity, reminiscent of the territory thorough which Edward Gibbon attempted to track Muhammed: ‘As a wise man may deceive himself, and a good man may deceive others, the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud.’

Washington’s previous book was a highly entertaining polemic against the cults and dogmas of modern literary theory, but something of his earlier verve is lost here in his desire to keep a straight face. Unlike Voltaire or Gibbon he has not quite enough sympathy with the power of his subjects to make their appeal fully comprehensible, and his irony is too heavily veiled to expose fully their failings. For all that, the story told in *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon* has much to say about the excitements and

dangers of religious life loosed from the moorings of tradition or social context, about our aspirations, and about our credulity.

In addition to the guru-syndrome, a number of other developments in modern religion can trace their origins back to Theosophy. These include the ‘New Age’ movement as well as Western interest in Buddhism. Many Western Buddhists will doubtless be curious as to whether their view of Buddhist tradition has been coloured by such influences. But I rather doubt whether Lama Ole Nydahl has had time to engage in such reflections. *Riding The Tiger* tells, in hectic fashion, the story of the establishment of the Danish lama’s network of over a hundred Kagyupa centres, mainly located ‘between Vladivostok and the Rhine’. He gazes out from the book’s innumerable illustrations with the physique and energy of a marine, but he has no doubt of the source of all the energy: his own teacher, the Karmapa. ‘Feeling the potential constantly unfolding in his powerfield beat any drug’ and the book is full of semi-miraculous happenings in the Karmapa’s presence. This is all doubtless highly attractive, but there is little in the way of reflection on the projections that may cloud the students’ relation to the Karmapa or, indeed, Nydahl himself. There is scarcely a hint of self-doubt or self-analysis in the book, and the ‘shadow’ is reserved for dark hints about other teachers, including one or two stories about Trungpa Rimpoche which one can only hope were first checked with Nydahl’s lawyers.

Quite a different picture of contemporary Buddhism emerges from Helen Tworkov’s *Zen in America* which was first published in 1989 and is now reprinted with a new Afterword. Since writing this book Ms Tworkov has gone on to edit the excellent journal *Tricycle: the Buddhist Review*, but already this book had established her as one of the acutest observers of the Buddhist scene. Her subject is precisely the difficulty of reconciling the absolutist claims to authority which accompany the status of a Zen roshi with the complex and messy reality of modern America.

The book features portraits of five American Zen teachers and it was written at a time when scandals involving prominent Buddhist teachers (including one

or two of the subjects of this book) had raised innumerable questions about the relationship between teachers and students. Tworkov’s analysis of the problem starts with distinction between the ‘role’ of the teacher and their ‘personality’. In traditional societies the former predominates and personal failings are secondary matters, whilst modern sensibility tends to conflate the two. The first generation of Zen teachers in the West, who were Japanese, subordinated their personalities to their role and consequently were idealized by their students. But the trouble started with the next generation, who were Westerners, and in relation to whom the projections broke down. Baker-roshi’s spectacularly successful development of San Francisco Zen Center in the 1970s was clearly an expression of his personality as much as the fulfilment of his role. For him it was a ‘giant social experiment’. The result was that others felt their lives had been subordinated to the pursuit of one man’s ambitions, and when sexual scandal revealed that Baker’s personality was not infallible, the whole edifice was called into question.

Tworkov is a demystifier and all of her subjects appear as fallible individuals, who are doing good work in difficult circumstances. She is also a cool judge who makes her interpretations from within the terms of her training as an anthropologist. But as a Buddhist herself, Tworkov cannot help

being deeply involved in the issues she raises. The new Afterword redresses the balance in important ways. It is a strong argument against those who would respond to the dangers posed by the status of teachers by formulating codes of ‘ethics’ to police their behaviour, particularly in the area of sex. In the end, she suggests, this is an attempt to translate the Dharma into the secular and democratic values of American liberalism: an attempt to make the Dharma ‘safe’.

Tworkov argues that this approach is a potential betrayal of the principle of Enlightenment that lies at the heart of the Buddhism. She is surely right: the Dharma, gurus, teachers, and indeed the whole process of spiritual life are intrinsically dangerous, because they demand change and because they take one into unknown territory. And yet one should not excuse the excesses of teachers who use the opportunities afforded by the naivety of their students and the absence of a regulating social context to exploit the prestige afforded by their position in order to give full rein to the various currents of their personality. The only way to mediate these relationships – role and personality, teacher and student, guru and disciple – is surely a renewed emphasis on Buddhist ethics, for only this offers a framework for human relationship which expresses the perspective of Enlightenment and speaks to the whole of our lives.

Vishvapani



Packed with Treasures

The Wisdom of the Buddha

by Jean Boisselier

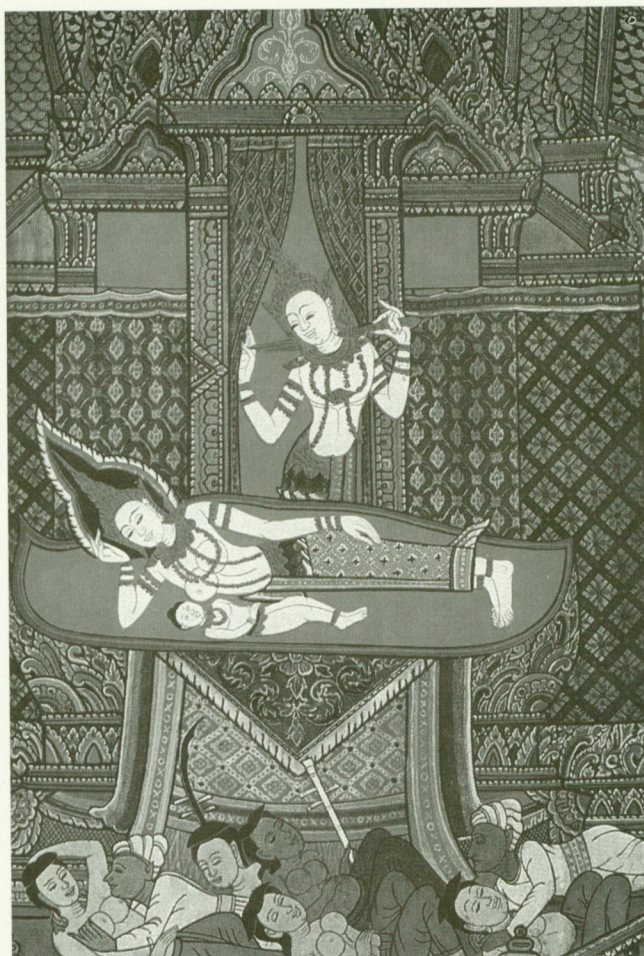
Thames and Hudson

£6.95, paperback

Jean Boisselier's *The Wisdom of the Buddha* is like a jewel. It is small – it will fit in your pocket – but, beneath a slightly dull cover, shines full of light and colour. The book falls into two sections: in the first and main part, dealing with the life of the Buddha and his immediate disciples, every page-opening has at least one photographic illustration, many three or four, all in full colour. From the first nine pages of the book – completely devoid of text but glowing with full-page reproductions of a series of paintings from Thailand and Burma illustrating the life of the Buddha – we are confronted by a visual account of stories and teachings that we usually encounter only in the written word.

Printed on high-quality art paper, the effect is of a glowing evocation of the richness of the visual arts which were inspired by the Buddha's life and work. The impact of the images, dominating the text as they do, is immediate and telling. We are reminded that the visual arts have been of enormous significance in the history of Buddhism. Even more, that it is they along with the spoken word – and not the written word, which was usually hidden away in monasteries – that have been the vehicle for the communication of the Dharma in traditional Buddhist cultures. By contrast, the predominantly text-bound perspective on the Dharma in the West seems impoverished and idiosyncratic.

Again, many of these fascinating pictures are from South-east Asia, and reveal the richness and vitality of Buddhist culture in the region. Exploring the life and teachings of the Buddha means that relatively little attention is given to late developments in Buddhist history, with the result that there is for once little representation of the obscure and fatiguing prolixity of Tibetan Tantric art. This should not give the impression that the range of images is limited. All Buddhist cultures have been employed in the creation of this work, and even modern paintings have found their place on its pages. We are presented with a balanced picture of mainstream Buddhist



art. Extraordinary continuities are revealed, as by the juxtaposition of illustrations of identical themes from cultures separated by thousands of miles and a thousand years.

The significance of each image is explained in a marginal note on the same page. All images are catalogued in an easy-to-use index at the back of the book, although for some reason one is not always told the medium used, nor given the exact provenance. The result is the equivalent of a study of Buddhist art free from the two-dimensional and style-obsessed pretentiousness of so many art history books, and informed, as any such study should be if it is to make any sense, by frequent and full reference to Buddhist history and doctrine.

This brings me to the text. It is informative and verges on the scholarly, without going to the extent of using a distracting apparatus of footnotes or original languages. Adopting a concise style, the author packs a surprising amount of information into this small space, producing a text that is still introductory but not simplistic. The main section of the book contains six chapters. The first provides an account of the society within which the

Buddha lived and taught; the others give accounts of his career as Bodhisattva, his Enlightenment and first sermon, his 'teachings and peregrinations', the *parinirvana* and, finally, the events of the century or so immediately after his death. This emphasis on the life of the Buddha is in many ways traditional, as is affirmed by the wealth of art work that illustrates it, and gives us entry to the Buddhist mainstream through one of its most accessible dimensions.

I must also mention here the second and shorter section, entitled 'Documents'. This is different, both in style and presentation. Laid out in double columns on matt paper, illustrations are still frequent but monochrome – even here there are only two page openings not illustrated! Now the author uses extensive quotations from other sources to examine a number of topics, under the general rubric 'From the Buddha to Buddhism, the birth of a religion'. Even after this, space is still found for a glossary, chronology, further reading list, and index.

In this 'Documents' section we find the most dissatisfying aspect of the book. The passages are well chosen, but if we are

looking for a complete or balanced account of the historical development of Buddhism in Asia (twentieth century offshoots in the West are a little better served) we will be disappointed. From a broader viewpoint, some sub-sections seem a little unbalanced. Unfortunately, only the briefest account is given of Madhyamaka doctrine, and there is none at all of other Mahayana schools, such that one ends up with a picture of the Mahayana as an undifferentiated strand of Buddhist tradition, with little to distinguish it from the non-Mahayana traditions. Although this last characteristic is increasingly thought by modern scholars to have been the case, it is not clear in this book that the point is intentional, rather than the result of too little space being given to too large a subject. Likewise, the development of Buddhism in Asia is recapitulated in only ten pages, and the clarity of this material is not helped by the section on the origin of the Tantra coming after those on Tibetan Buddhism and 'Lamaism' (sic).

It is here, too, that we become more clearly aware that *The Wisdom of the Buddha* was first published in France. Relieving the uncomfortable pressure on a single author to comprehend the entire history of Buddhism, Prof. Boisselier aptly quotes passages from the greatest French-language authorities, most frequently André Bareau, Etienne Lamotte, and Jean Filliozat – although one feels bound to point out, with the greatest respect, that the work of these authors is in some ways a little dated. All these quotations are translated, of course, whilst those from scripture have been resourced (I assume) to existing English translations.

Reservations aside, we have here a very erudite and useful resource, which has the enviable virtue of being short, enjoyable to look at, and much more than just another book on Buddhism. The more one looks, the more there is one catches one's eye. I have little doubt that this book will be of use to adults and younger readers alike. In a pocket-sized paperback of less than 200 pages, author and publisher achieve what one would expect only from a coffee table book many times this size and price. *The Wisdom of the Buddha* can only be described as a bargain.

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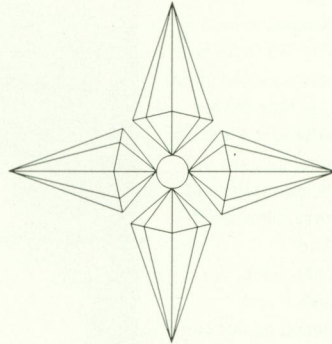
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Sangharakshita Diary

The principal event of Sangharakshita's autumn was his visit to the USA (which is featured in a separate article). Just before going, he spent a few days at Padmaloka and was interviewed for an 'alternative' Spanish magazine called *Mas Alla*. Sangharakshita returned to the UK on 30 October and a few days later travelled up to Padmaloka again, in time for the men's National Order Weekend. On the Saturday evening he gave a talk recounting his impressions of his American journey, after which Vajragupta launched Sangharakshita's new book, *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?* and Sangharakshita signed copies (see separate article). On Friday 25 November he was interviewed by Mr Kini for the 'London Letters' of



was the BUDDHA
a BHIKKHU?
SANGHARAKSHITA



Delhi's *National Herald*, one of the oldest English-language newspapers in India.

During this period Sangharakshita completed Chapter 11 of the next volume of his memoirs. This chapter concerns a part of the summer and autumn of 1954 and is entitled 'Brickbats – and a Bouquet'. He also spent some time preparing his earlier memoirs, *Learning to Walk* and *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, for publication in the form in which they were originally intended to be seen: as a single volume. At the time of writing, Sangharakshita was engaged in a further literary project, arranging the text of his collected poems for publication on or around his seventieth birthday.

One excursion took Sangharakshita to see an exhibition on the life of Christina Rossetti at the National Portrait Gallery and much of the rest of his time was spent giving interviews to Order members, mitras, and Friends from the UK and many other countries.

Sangharakshita in the USA

In late September, Sangharakshita began a five-week visit to the United States, accompanied by Kulananda. The trip was prompted by an invitation to speak at a Buddhist conference in Tucson, Arizona, the subject of which was 'The Nature of Reality: Buddhism as Transformation'. However, this was only one event in a very full itinerary.

Sangharakshita's first stop was Aryaloka, the FWBO retreat centre in New England, where he led a shrine dedication ceremony. He also visited the White Mountains to enjoy the spectacular colours of fall, amid waterfalls, rivers, and streams.

The distance of the flight from Boston to Tucson almost equalled that from London to Boston. The hotel resort complex in which the conference was held was on the side of one of the many mountains that surround Tucson. One of the first duties of the conference host, Lopon Claude d'Estree – a personal disciple of the Dalai Lama – was to buy Sangharakshita and Kulananda straw hats as protection from the sun, Tucson being in the nineties whilst they were there.

One-hundred-and-fifty people attended the five-day conference, including a dozen or so Order members and mitras from the FWBO. Each of the four main speakers gave two talks and answered questions. There was also a talk from one of the four so-called 'junior' speakers each evening. On the final day, the main speakers formed a panel to

answer participants' questions.

One of the other three main speakers was Gunaratana, a Theravadin bhikkhu originally from Sri Lanka. In the course of the conference Gunaratana and Sangharakshita, who are of a similar age, discovered they had mutual friends among Sri Lankan bhikkhus and ex-Untouchable Buddhists in India. They had also both moved from East to West thirty years previously, though unbeknown to each other.

The other main speakers were Roshi Robert Aitken, a prominent American Zen teacher, and Chetsang Rimpoche, a Tibetan incarnate lama of the Kagyupa School. The junior speakers were Yvonne Rand, an American Zen Buddhist from San Francisco, Sarah Scholtzberg of the International Meditation Center, Thubten Chodron, a very lively American nun belonging to the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, and Lopon Claude.

One subject among the many that Sangharakshita commented upon was the seemingly indiscriminate bestowing of high tantric initiations by some Tibetan lamas, the recipients in some cases not even necessarily being Buddhists. This he felt to be very inappropriate.

Following the conference, Sangharakshita and Kulananda spent six days touring with Manjuvajra, who had attended the conference and represented Windhorse Publications there. They covered 2,600 miles in six days, travelling through four states.

In Arizona they saw the mile-

deep Grand Canyon, one of the world's natural wonders.

However, some of Nevada's sights were slightly less natural, the bizarre architecture of some casinos in Las Vegas including one in the style of a Victorian railway station and another on the theme of Camelot! On the last day of the tour they visited Death Valley in California.

Next stop was San Francisco, where Sangharakshita stayed at the new FWBO premises in the Mission District. These accommodate a public centre as well as a men's and a women's community. There he gave a talk which was attended by about a hundred people, and led the dedication of the Center's shrine on the eve of his departure.

As well as spending time with members of the local FWBO sangha, Sangharakshita had lunch with Yvonne Rand and visited Hertford Street Zen Center. This centre runs a hospice for men living with AIDS as part of its activities. Whilst in the city he was also visited by Norman Fischer – abbot elect of Green Gulch Retreat Center – and Buddhist scholar Mark Tatz.

Finally, after returning to Aryaloka, Sangharakshita took a trip to visit the site of a 'Perfectionist' community in New York State. This utopian religious society was founded in 1848 by John Humphrey Noyse and his followers. Striving to work together to 'build a new Eden', the three hundred community members initially held all property in common.

Their aim was to create a



Speakers' panel, Tucson

society which would set an example to a country in the midst of a turbulent transition from a mainly agricultural to a mainly industrial economy. FWBO institutions such as team based right livelihood businesses and spiritual communities, where Buddhists can live and work together in the creation of a 'New Society', clearly suggest some resonances with the practices of the Perfectionists.

Buddhists from other groups in the USA showed a lot of interest in the structure of the FWBO and in the way it is run. The FWBO emphasis on the practice of 'horizontal' spiritual friendship was a revelation to some American Buddhists. This is spiritual friendship between peers in the sangha, which is regarded in the FWBO as no less important than 'vertical' spiritual friendship between teacher and disciple. In American Buddhism, there is usually an almost exclusive emphasis on the 'vertical' relationship.

There was especial interest in the approach that is being taken within the Western Buddhist Order to the handing on of responsibility from the founder to his disciples. Issues of 'succession' have been the source of a number of serious problems in American Buddhism of late. The WBO approach to this issue, and other aspects of the structure of the WBO and the FWBO, could well provide a helpful blueprint for the creation of other enduring Buddhist organizational structures in the West.



Book Launch

Sangharakshita's new book *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?* is a response to an article written by an Australian Theravadin bhikkhu criticizing Sangharakshita's book *Forty-Three Years Ago*, which itself is a rejection of the identification of the spiritual life with the monastic life, and of the monastic life itself with 'pseudo-monastic formalism'. *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?* was launched by Sangharakshita on the Men's National Order Weekend at Padmaloka Retreat Centre in November, on which occasion he also talked about his recent trip to the United States.

Preceptors' College Latest

The Sangharakshita Appeal – a drive to raise £400,000 to establish the Preceptor's College in time for Sangharakshita's birthday in August 1995 – was launched on last year's UK August National Order Weekends. Shortly afterwards, appeals were made at local centres and at events for mitras and Friends. Every person seriously involved in the Movement (and hence concerned for its future after Sangharakshita's death) is being asked to pledge at least £250 to the Appeal.

By early December Pramudita, the Appeal treasurer, had received 407 pledges ranging from £250 to £5,000. The total raised, in pledges and donations, is, at the time of writing, £158,391.

Meanwhile, the refurbishment and redecoration of the first of the two College communities in Birmingham has been advancing rapidly under the able direction of Kovida, with the help of many Friends, mitras, and Order members from the Birmingham Buddhist Centre. The house,

formerly called Brackley Dene, has been renamed *Madhyamaloka*, which means 'the central realm'. It will be used for the main public functions of the College and will house offices, meeting rooms, guest rooms, and the men's community. The property includes a separate flat for Sangharakshita and grounds large enough for a library, which will be built at a later date. A second house nearby is to be purchased for the women's community and their support staff.

Kamalashila and Nagabodhi moved in at the beginning of December, joined by several other members of the College in early January. Sangharakshita held a meeting there for the whole College over the Christmas period. He wants to see the College take up his remaining responsibilities over the coming year.

The amount that still needs to be raised is £241,609 for the purchase of the women's community, the repayment of short-term loans, and for running costs.



Ratnaguna co-ordinates fundraising for the Preceptors' College

Nityajyoti in Wellington

Nityajyoti, former chairman of the Vajraloka Meditation Centre in North Wales, is the latest FWBO recruit in Wellington, New Zealand. Following in Ratnavira's footsteps, he accepted Centre chairwoman Varadevi's invitation to work with the Order team in Wellington for one year.

Achala established the FWBO in Wellington in 1976 and the past few years have seen activities grow from strength to strength. More recently, in July 1993, Navachitta moved there and she is now fully involved in meditation and Dharma teaching.

Nityajyoti is involved particularly in developing the men's wing of the FWBO sangha: 'It seems that there was a time when very few New Zealand men were attracted to specifically Buddhist activities. This is changing, and the Wellington sangha, which has already proved its hardiness, looks set to bloom with beauty and vigour. The best is yet to come.'



South Pacific Order Convention

Twenty-six Order members gathered last September near Auckland, New Zealand for the third South Pacific Order Convention. This biennial event was led for the second time by Vessantara. Dharmadhara writes:

'During the mornings we heard reports from the four centres. We looked at developing the region as a whole by working more closely together in the future.'

In front of the lavish shrines Vessantara introduced us to four Order meditation practices, the *mula yogas*. Outside, the weather was stormy with flashes of lightning on cue during the led meditations. The hail storms and lashing rain marked the end of a long drought in Auckland. May the rain of the Dharma nourish the whole of the South Pacific Region!

The Guhyaloka Vihara



In his book *Forty-Three Years Ago*, Sangharakshita expresses his desire to see a revival of monasticism along the lines of that portrayed in the sutras. The Guhyaloka Vihara project is at the leading edge of such a development in the FWBO. It is there, in the Spanish mountains near Alicante, that five anagarika members of the Western Buddhist Order are beginning a practical exploration of monasticism, guided by Sangharakshita's illuminating exposition of monastic life.

The basis of their involvement in the Vihara is a commitment to exploring the simple life under a vow of chastity. Their main emphasis at present is work. Along with the retreat support team, who also live in the valley, they are working to create an environment which will support a life-style of regular study and meditation.

For half of the first year the Vihara members are running a working retreat, in which they are improving the facilities of the retreat centre, planting trees, and maintaining fire-breaks. Fire is a pressing hazard at Guhyaloka, particularly in the heat of the summer. Last year was reported to be the driest locally in living memory. The water source in the valley dried up, which forced the planned building project to be shelved for the time being.

Yashodeva, one of the Vihara members, writes: 'Working retreats have a special dynamic. On the one hand, they are retreats, providing a simple life which helps us to look more deeply into ourselves and the Dharma, and preventing us from taking refuge in external objects. On the other hand there is the work, which demands that bit more energy and altruism from us, and which prevents us from taking refuge in our fluctuating emotional states. Of course it's demanding, but it is a great opportunity to live in nature with a dynamic community and become wonderfully fit! Any men with a little experience of the FWBO are welcome to come and join in the retreat.'

Taraloka on Tour

Teams from Taraloka, the women's retreat centre in Shropshire, went 'on tour' for three weeks last October. Eleven Buddhist centres in the North, East Anglia, and London regions hosted the 'Taraloka Roadshow', during which Taraloka's developing role as a meditation and study retreat centre for women was promoted. The event was timed to coincide with the launch of the 1995 retreat programme, celebrating Taraloka's tenth anniversary.

Members of the Roadshow team – Dayanandi, Ratnavandana, Kalyanavacha, and Akasashuri – presented an overview of developments at the retreat centre and introduced 'Tara's realm' to those who had never been to Taraloka.

Dayanandi, the chairwoman of Taraloka, commented: 'People appreciated finding out how Taraloka came into being and how pioneering a project it was. They hadn't realized that it was the only Buddhist retreat centre for women in the West at its inception, and that there are still very few others.'

Out of necessity, the retreat centre initially aimed to be 'all things to all women', including the taking of a prominent role in the women's ordination process. The first ordination, outside India, of a woman into the Western Buddhist Order by women preceptors took place at Taraloka in 1989, with thirty-six more women following in the next three years.

The main talk of the evening revealed how Taraloka's new emphasis on study and meditation emerged: 'The formation of the Women's Ordination Retreat Centre has allowed Taraloka to step back from that role. We can now assess what the women's wing of the FWBO needs most and what Taraloka can best offer,' said Ratnavandana. 'We felt we wanted to bring more depth to people's practice. We're introducing retreats at all levels. People can come to Taraloka for their very first experience of meditation, or to deepen and extend their existing practice.'

The Roadshow gave the Taraloka team a welcome chance to meet women mitras and Friends at their own centres. They were particularly pleased to meet women at the Blackburn, Bristol, Colchester, and Leeds Centres, where there are currently no Dharmacharinis.

Ratnavandana summed up her experience of the Roadshow: 'It gave me a broader view of the effect which Taraloka has had on the Movement. Seeing how that early vision had been brought about – what heroines Ratnashuri and Sanghadevi were in setting up the project – gave people a sense of the potential within themselves and in the Movement. I felt very inspired to be part of it.'

After nearly 2,000 miles on the road and delivering 22 talks, the team returned home tired but very pleased with the tour, and already thinking of doing another.



Women's Ordination Retreat Centre

In September last year – after two-and-a-half years of fundraising and property searches, and a string of ‘ones that got away’ – contracts were finally exchanged on Aberclydach House in the Brecon Beacons of South Wales. This is now the new Women's Ordination Retreat Centre. The first Going for Refuge retreat



began less than three weeks later, with the shrine-room carpet still being laid on the evening that the retreat began!

The purchase of this retreat centre is the culmination of developments in the ordination process for women that started back in 1989 (see article on Taraloka Roadshow). Early in 1992, Dhammadinna, Samata, Anoma, and Anjali moved into a house about eleven miles away from Taraloka. There they formed the nucleus of the women's ordination process, which they ran in conjunction with Sanghadevi and Ratnashuri who were living at Taraloka, and Shrimala who was living in Norwich. This move was intended to benefit the growing number of women who had asked for ordination, by enabling the team to get to know them through regular personal contact in the context of Going for Refuge retreats.

In March 1993 they began the huge task of searching for a retreat centre property. Before finding Aberclydach House, Samata, who led the search, had viewed forty-three properties around the country, from the Scottish Borders to South Wales. Of these, the team had been seriously interested in seven.

The team had hoped to be running retreats in their new centre by January 1994, but as by that time no suitable property had been found they continued fundraising and searching, whilst

running retreats at Dhanakosha, the Scottish retreat centre. By the spring, the search was focused on the borders of England and Wales and the team were convinced that their search was nearing an end.

Aberclydach House was the most suitable property they had yet seen. However, legal negotiations were very slow and

it took most of the summer to finalize the sale. The house had been completely refurbished as a conference centre in 1991, and so was in good condition. It is set in pleasant gardens, just outside the tiny village of Aber in the Brecon Beacons National Park, surrounded by hills and woods and with a river nearby.

Dhammadinna writes: ‘We are very happy that we can now start holding retreats here and have mailed out our programme of Going for Refuge retreats for 1995. We feel confident that having a women's ordination team running our own Going for Refuge retreat centre will help the many women who have asked for ordination to deepen their understanding and practice of the Dharma and to become members of the Order. Over the last two-and-a-half years we have received much support from throughout the Movement, and have raised £340,000 in total towards the property, as well as over £40,000 for our first two years’ support as a community.

‘The retreat centre itself is big enough to accommodate twenty-two people comfortably in shared rooms, many of which have an *en suite* shower or bath. The community is housed in an adjoining annexe which has six bedrooms.

‘We look forward to many women entering the Order as a result of the opportunities we can offer at the new retreat centre.’

New Manchester Centre

A five-storey warehouse in the centre of Manchester is in the process of becoming the new Manchester Buddhist Centre. The project is the biggest ever undertaken by the FWBO in Manchester and involves the complete renovation of a structurally sound but neglected 14,000 ft² of space.

Although the site is very close to the heart of the city, it is in a relatively quiet street in a rapidly changing part of town. In recent years the area has become the home of the clothing trade, and growing numbers of fashionable stores and bars are now moving into the area. This location will make the Centre much more accessible to a greater number of people. It is sure to raise the profile of Buddhism in the city substantially.

Plans for the building include a lot more than the relocation of the Manchester Centre's old activities. As well as extensive reception, shrine, and study rooms, it will contain a library, alternative health facilities including a yoga studio, and rooms for massage and acupuncture. It will also house *Clear Vision*, the video production and archive wing of the FWBO, office space for *Dakini*, the FWBO magazine for women Buddhists, and a community for six men. Further plans include a café and a performance space in the basement.

Most of the conversion work is being carried out by building teams from within the Manchester sangha. The project manager is Mokshapriya, who has brought his considerable talents to the lengthy negotiations involved in a project of this magnitude. He is also in charge of the interior design of the building, and aims to bring out as much of the character of the existing structure as possible. One outcome of this will be the task of sandblasting every square inch of wall to expose the original brick interior. It is hoped that the Centre will open in April or May.



Dharmachari Shakyananda



DHARMACHARI ANAGARIKA Shakyananda died at 7am on Tuesday 25 October, in Poona, India. His funeral took place at 5pm the same day. The following is an extract from an article written by Padmavajra, for the Order newsletter *Shabda*, entitled 'Remembering Shakyananda':

I first met Shakyananda in the very early days of the TBMSG. This would have been some time in 1979. He was not Shakyananda in those days, but Mr Sownone from Poona City. I cannot say that I got to know him well in those early days, but he did make a strong impression on me. My most vivid memory of him from those times is from a retreat. The memory centres around food.

Before Mr Sownone came on men's retreats, the food had been of an appallingly low standard, but Mr Sownone knew how to cook. I particularly remember a fine aubergine and coriander chutney he prepared in the bare kitchen. As I sat chopping vegetables, he was busy roasting the aubergines over a naked flame and later pounding their flesh with a mixture of fresh coriander leaves, green chillies, and garlic. It proved to be a delicious mixture.

When I returned to India in 1986 I made a point of asking Lokamitra what had happened to Mr Sownone. Lokamitra replied, very happily indeed, that he was now Shakyananda, and was

spearheading the development of activities in the district of Kolhapur in southern Maharashtra.

At some point in 1986 or 1987, Shakyananda began to approach me to visit Kolhapur and help him spread the Dharma there. I agreed to visit for four days to give some talks, with Bodhisena as my translator. Bodhisena and I arrived in Kolhapur after a particularly gruelling bus ride from Bombay. A delighted Shakyananda was there to greet us and, beaming with delight, he whisked us off to a nearby milk bar. 'How many talks will we be doing, Shakyananda?' I asked. 'Seventeen' came the reply. 'Seventeen?' I exclaimed, staggered at the prospect of having to come up with a major Dharma talk four times a day. I must confess I even felt a bit resentful, tired as I was from the journey, but I melted as Shakyananda hymned the importance of what we were doing and how important the Dharma was for people. Listening to him and looking at his chubby and kindly face, with his bright eyes shining through his red framed spectacles, my reactions began to subside.

For the next four days, a party of Order members, mitras, and Friends crammed into a saloon car driven by a manic driver on a whirlwind tour of the villages and

towns of Kolhapur. After about a day, I was already beginning to feel the strain, but Shakyananda was always the last to go to bed and the first to rise. I would doze off listening to Shakyananda in earnest conversation with people who had come to the talk. When I awoke, I would see that he was already up and sitting in meditation. 'How did he do it?' I would ask myself, because he was an old man and ill with diabetes, high blood pressure, and a weak heart. But there he was, making far more effort than me – even the usually tireless Bodhisena found Shakyananda's pace a bit hard to keep up with.

Wherever we went, Shakyananda was treated with great respect, and he in his turn treated everybody he met with great respect. He was particularly warm to those people from other caste backgrounds and religions who came to our talks. He would go out of his way to welcome such people, so strongly did he feel that all people in India needed the liberating message of the Dharma.

Wherever Shakyananda is now, I salute him and I thank him. I thank him for showing me how to love others. I thank him for showing me that it is never too late to practise the Dharma. I thank him for his joy and largeness of spirit. I thank him for just being always, irrepressibly, Shakyananda.

LAST AUTUMN, Pope John Paul II published a new book called *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, amid a blaze of publicity. Although the work turns out to be simply the reworking of an old interview, and although the content rarely rises above the level of conventional piety, the publisher is reported to have paid \$10 million to the Holy See for the rights. It duly appeared in simultaneous world-wide publication and, in multiple translation, has stayed in the best-seller lists ever since.

So much for the idea that the Pope's influence is waning. But what will attract the interest of Buddhists is the fact that he has a number of things to say about Buddhism; indeed, a whole chapter seeks to address those Catholics who are interested in it. A little earlier in the book the Pope approvingly quotes the ecumenical words of Vatican II: 'The Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. The Church has a high regard for their conduct and way of life, for those precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many points from that which the Church believes in and propounds, often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men.'

Given the Catholic Church's traditional exclusivity and intolerance (not to say its persecution of those who question its authority) it might seem invidious to do anything other than welcome these liberal sentiments. From such statements, and from the changes in attitudes which they reflect, have grown large and influential areas of inter-faith dialogue and ecumenical approaches to religious practice. Buddhists have involved themselves in this through participation in such activities as the 1993 World Parliament of Religions and the Assisi Conference on World Peace. Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Scotland is planning to open an inter-denominational retreat centre on Holy Island to accompany its Buddhist activities and, perhaps most controversially, in America at least one Catholic priest has recently received Dharma transmission, affording him the status of Catholic-Zen roshi. Surely, all of this is to the good?

But another dimension to these encounters is suggested by the Pope, himself, when he says in his chapter on Buddhism: 'the doctrines of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity are opposed.' The Pope is to be applauded for declaring the essential difference of Buddhism and Catholicism in spite of the quasi-universalist propensity to blur difference. However, Buddhists most certainly will not agree with his reasons for saying so.

John Paul argues that 'the Buddhist doctrine of salvation constitutes the central point or rather the only point of this system. Nevertheless, both the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively negative soteriology [i.e. doctrine of salvation]'. As he understands it, the Buddha's Enlightenment 'comes down to the conviction that the world is bad' and the practice of Buddhism involves severing links with the world. In other words, he sees Buddhism as a rather primitive form of Calvinism, or as a Manichean heresy reminiscent of those the Church has spent much of its history persecuting. For Catholicism, by contrast, 'the world is God's creation, redeemed by Christ.... At the beginning of the world we find God the Creator who loves his creation, a God who ... gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life....'

It is perhaps unnecessary here to go through the ways in which John Paul's characterization of Buddhism is a crass misrepresentation. It is, however, surprising that a man who is in other ways so demonstrably well-read (indeed, one whom Catholics consider infallible) has never heard of the Bodhisattva ideal, or that Enlightenment is characterized by Wisdom and Compassion, has no knowledge of the many positive formulations of the Path, and chooses to ignore the many examples of Buddhist engagement in the world. In fact, it is not Buddhist soteriology which is characterized by negation, but Buddhist metaphysics, and it is precisely this difference which makes Buddhism a path of Wisdom and liberation, whilst Catholicism is a religion of dogma and authority.



Crossing the Threshold of Falsehood

Buddhism teaches that there are no fixed and unchanging essences; the Catholic Church teaches man's relationship to a fixed essence in the shape of the soul and the creator God. Buddhism teaches that failure to understand the impermanent and insubstantial nature of existence is the ultimate cause of the many kinds of suffering and that with Wisdom comes freedom; the Church teaches that (in the Pope's words) 'at the beginning of the world we find God' to whom one submits for the sake of salvation. Buddhism teaches that conceptual formulations cannot adequately describe Reality; the Church propounds credos and dogmas to which one must subscribe or else face eternal damnation. Buddhism comes armed with a variety of spiritual techniques such as meditation, which make the transformation it enjoins a practical reality; Catholicism finds that its offering of Faith and Works seems increasingly irrelevant to many people.

Behind the Pope's particular concern to 'caution those Christians who enthusiastically welcome certain ideas originating in the religious traditions of the East' lies a Catholic anxiety about the growing popularity of Buddhism in Catholic countries already discussed in this column

(Golden Drum no.33). Those familiar with the history of the Church and its methods of dealing with threats to its power will not be surprised at the Pope's mendacious propaganda. Sri Lankan Buddhists suffered centuries of intense Catholic persecution while their country was a part of the Portuguese empire and it comes as no surprise that the Federation of Buddhist Organizations in Sri Lanka recently demanded an apology from John Paul for his comments on Buddhism in this book. Western Buddhists should support this response, but it is doubtful if many of them, naïve in their understanding of the Church and beguiled by universalist ideas and pseudo-tolerance, will be able to do so.

Vishvapana

still building the new society

WHEN I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE FWBO in 1979 most of the Buddhists I met were in their twenties and many had come to Buddhism through the counter-culture. They were defiantly at odds with conventional society and enthusiastically engaged in the process of starting co-ops and developing community life as a radical social experiment. To use the popular phrase of the period, they were 'building a New Society' which would be a viable alternative to the old society and an agent in its transformation.

These days there are far more FWBO businesses, centres, and communities, but paradoxically I hear much less talk of the 'New Society'. The phrase has rather dropped out of usage and I fear that with it has gone some sense of the significance of the structures we have created. There are, after all, many good reasons to work in a Right Livelihood business. It pays the rent; it supports one's meditation practice; one can use work as a way of becoming more mindful; one can make friends; one's colleagues are probably far more pleasant than in most work-places; and so on. But though these are all good reasons, they are not enough. What they lack is the aspiration to change the world through one's actions. As a result they are perpetually in danger of lapsing into selfishness.

The phrase 'the New Society' slipped out of usage for a variety of reasons. To some people it seemed insular, implying that the members of the 'old society' were enemies. Others felt it was hubristic to suggest that our motley collection of houses, flats, and break-even business ventures possessed a millennial significance. Then, there was a desire to emphasize that – for all the virtues of the FWBO's infrastructure of living, working, and teaching situations – it was quite possible to practise Buddhism effectively outside of them. And finally, there was a concern to present the FWBO not as a social movement but as a Buddhist one, in which social change was important only to the extent that it created conditions for individuals to make spiritual progress towards Enlightenment.

But I suspect another reason. The world has changed in ways which make it harder to be idealistic and harder to be radical. The counter-cultural wave of the sixties has long since spent itself and in the eighties all of us, Buddhists included, were deeply influenced by the vast societal assertions of individualism and materialism. At the same time, many Western societies have fragmented to a point where it is impossible to say what is 'conventional' and what is 'unconventional'. My non-Buddhist friends do not consider it exceptional that I live in a Buddhist

community. To them it is simply one possible living situation among many.

A positive consequence of this pluralism is that once-ubiquitous feelings of alienation from 'society' and the state have become much more undefined. It is possible to appreciate more easily the sense in which we are all members of society, deriving innumerable benefits from it and owing it duties of citizenship. But there are also dangers in this new *modus vivendi*. We can forget that the basic values underlying the lives of those who are trying to develop, to practise, to evolve, *are* radically different from other lives. And the social forms in which those evolving lives express themselves must be radically different from, and ultimately opposed to, the values and forms that make up 'mainstream society'.

One consequence of the loss of this perspective is the recent assertion of 'lay Buddhism' among some Western Buddhists outside the FWBO. The Dharma, they insist, can be practised in any context (to argue otherwise is to be 'dualistic') and, in any case, it has to adapt to life in the West. Whilst this is an understandable reaction to the traditional – and increasingly untenable – monastic domination of the Buddhist community, this 'secularized Dharma' contains faults of its own. It means remaining tied to a particular life-style which is supported *by* spiritual practice, rather than allowing life-style to become an expression *of* spiritual practice. One must not exclude the possibility that the Dharma will challenge and even threaten the way one currently lives. Among the spectres raised by this kind of 'adaptation' to the West is the prospect that it will lead Buddhism to dwindle into another minor non-conformist sect along with the Methodists and the Unitarians, the old fire burnt down to a few embers and an aging Buddhist population turned into 'respectable' members of society.

The structures that the FWBO has sought to develop constitute far more than simply an alternative life-style, and their implications go far beyond what we can take from them for ourselves. Properly understood they are neither 'Western' nor 'lay' but an extraordinary experiment; an attempt to 'work from the Dharma up', and create an entirely New Society. In the seventies the issue was clearer because this New Society existed largely in the realm of theory and visionary utterance. Now that it is an increasingly tangible reality it should not be taken for granted or defined by its present limitations. Nor should its vast potential to do good in the world be politely forgotten. **Vishvapani**

VAJRALOKA

Buddhist Meditation Retreat Centre for Men
Tyn-y-Ddol, Corwen, Clwyd LL21 0EN.
Tel: 0490 460406

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February	28 - Mar 11	Just Sitting Retreat	
March	14 - 24	Refresher Retreat	
	24 - Apr 7	Brahmaviharas Retreat	
April	14 - 21	Spring Retreat 1	Introductory
	21 - May 5	Mindfulness Retreat	
May	13 - 27	Meditation and Insight Retreat	
	27 - Jun 3	Spring Retreat 2	Introductory

‘an image of the **VAST SKY**
everywhere *free* from obstructions
how EXCELLENT”



The *Lotus Blooms* TARALOKA BUDDHIST RETREAT CENTRE FOR WOMEN 1995

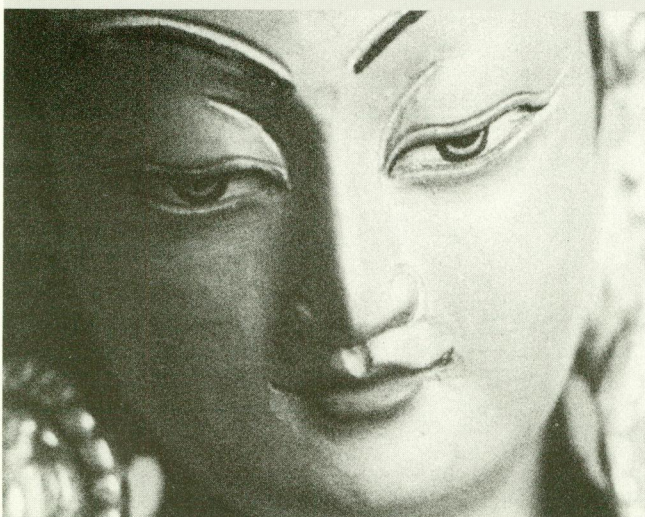
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MARCH

3 - 5	Tai Chi
6 - 10	Gardening retreat
10-17	Gay men's retreat
17 -24*	Yoga and meditation
24 -26	Women's weekend retreat
27 - 31	Gardening retreat
31 - 2	Men's weekend retreat

APRIL

2 - 7	Men's sesshin
7 - 10	Families retreat
10 -14	Regional Chairmen's Meeting
14 - 21	Open retreat
21 - 28*	Yoga and meditation
28 - 5*	Hill-walking and meditation

MAY

5 - 12*	Voice workshop & meditation
12 - 19	OM/Mitra Lesbian's retreat
19 -21	Buddha Day Weekend festival
22 - 26	Women's sesshin
26 - 2*	Hill-walking & meditation

JUNE

2 - 9*	Drawing & painting retreat
9 - 11	Women's retreat
11 - 16	Working retreat
16 - 23*	Study retreat
23 - 30*	Tai Chi

JULY

1 - 8	Yoga, meditation & Massage
8 - 21**	Open retreat
22	Open Day
22 - 4	Men's Summer retreat

AUGUST

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Brighton Buddhist Centre, 15 Park Crescent Place, Brighton, Sussex, BN2 3HF. Tel: 01273-698420
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West London Buddhist Centre, 94 Westbourne Park Villas, London, W2 5PL Tel: 0171-727 9382

Europe

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Centro Budista de Valencia, Calle Ciscar 5, pta 3a, 46005 Valencia, Spain. Tel: 6-374 0564
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FWBO Germany, Buddhistisches Zentrum Essen, Herkulesstr 13, 45127 Essen, Germany. Tel: 201-230155
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