

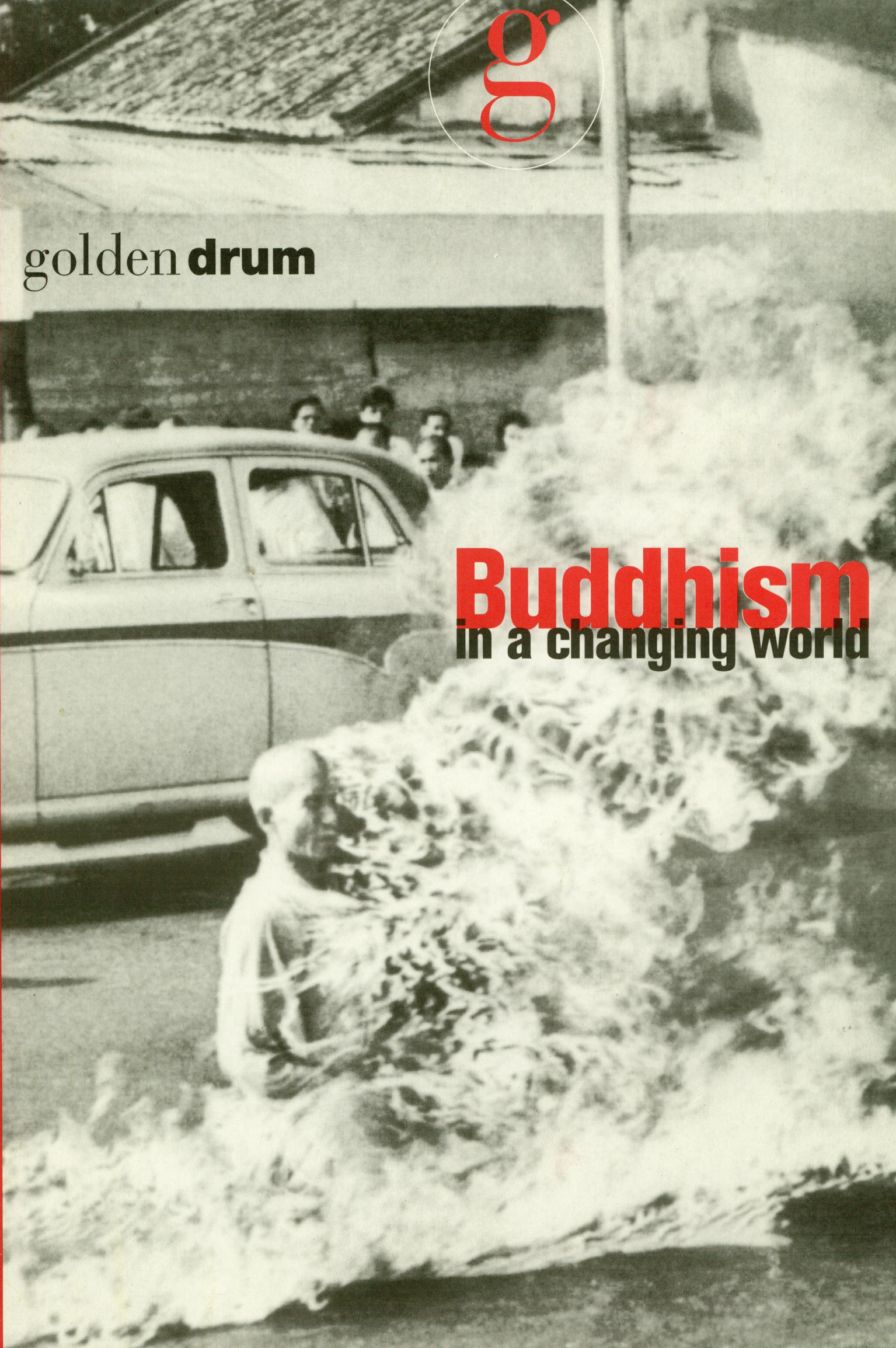


golden **drum**

Buddhism

in a changing world

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living in a changing world

THE IMAGE of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk burning himself to death while seated quietly in meditation posture became one of the emblematic images of the Vietnam war: a symbol of non-violent protest against the sufferings that the war imposed upon the Vietnamese. It was also misunderstood as a nihilistic capitulation to the forces of modernity. But in being turned into a symbol the exact nature of the monk's protest is seldom recalled. It was not aimed at the war in general, but was more specifically a protest against the suppression of Buddhism by the US-backed, Catholic-dominated regime of South Vietnam. Vietnamese Buddhists found themselves caught between the contrary forces of authoritarian Communism and despotic, colonially-inspired capitalism. The monks tried to find non-violent ways of addressing the conflict rather than standing passively by, but many were killed or imprisoned as a result.

Their predicament epitomized the fate that much of Asian Buddhism has suffered throughout the twentieth century. Millions have been killed because of their Buddhist beliefs, largely at the hands of Communist regimes, and countless others have suffered some kind of persecution. This Buddhist holocaust has gone largely unmarked but one can still make a grim role-call of its locations: Mongolia, Russia, Tibet, China, North Korea, Cambodia, Laos. As the report of the recent arrests of Vietnamese Buddhists in the *Outlook* section of this issue demonstrates, the troubles of Eastern Buddhists are very far from over. In countries such as Japan, Thailand, and South Korea Buddhism has encountered the contrary but no less serious danger of the erosion of the values that once sustained it in the face of capitalism and consumerism. Elsewhere, as in Burma, the forces of authoritarian nationalism have created more enemies still.

Over the years many people have asked the question: How can Buddhism face up to the challenges posed by the modern world? One of the leading international Tibetan Buddhist organizations is called the Foundation for the *Preservation* of Mahayana Tradition, and for many Eastern Buddhists 'preservation' – survival – has been the over-riding concern. Western Buddhists have a different perspective. We do not have a history of our own which is a burden, and our thoughts are often filled with the bright prospect of the Buddhist world we are building for the future. And yet many of the forces that have overwhelmed Buddhism in many parts of Asia are also at work in the West. Indeed, we often speak of the changes taking place around us as the passage of the modern world into the world of the post-modern which in turn will present us with fresh challenges and new dangers.

Using the levers of technology and economics, grim-faced Yama, the figure who holds the 'Wheel of Life', has given the turning wheel an extra spin. In traditional societies depictions of the processes of change have always been expressed in cyclic terms as figurations of the cycles of nature. In the modern world material development gave rise to the linear idea of change as

progress. Our current 'post-modern' experience of ubiquitous and baffling change defies figuration and we tend to speak of change as chaos. The extra speed has also increased the power of disintegrating, centrifugal forces and our culture (at least as it is depicted in the news media) often seems to be caught in a succession of moral and social crises, crying to us 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.'

Above all there is the fact and rate of change. This is, in the first instance, simply an expression of a perennial truth which Buddhism expresses as the truth of impermanence. To say that nothing endures is another way of saying that everything, everywhere is always in flux. It is, likewise, a truth acknowledged in the West since Heraclitus told us that we could never step twice into the waters of the same river. But in certain respects the world as we perceive it is changing more quickly than ever it has in the past.

A contemplation of change takes us close to the fundamentally mysterious nature of life. If things do not stay the same, it means that our knowledge of them is always of how they were in the past and therefore is not really knowledge at all. It is not possible for Buddhists – or for anyone else – to have a collective understanding of the ways in which the world is changing. We just do not know. This means that it is also impossible for us to have a consensual view of how Buddhism should look in the future. Buddhism has always adapted itself to the conditions around it in order to re-express its truths. Yet how can it do so when those conditions are profoundly unstable?

In principle Buddhists should embrace change, of whatever type. But this surely does not mean becoming entangled in our culture's infatuation with novelty. What of the perennial values and principles that transcend the particularities of any time? What of the need for a simple life in order to find the conditions that will support deeper perceptions? The principles of the Buddhist tradition embrace both change and permanence and Buddhists ought, therefore, to be able to provide a better framework for addressing our new circumstances than any other. But how, in practice, can we do so?

These intriguing perspectives prompted me to ask Mahaprabha, Nagabodhi, and Kulananda to address some impossible questions: How has the world changed? How is it changing? And how we should respond? Mahaprabha's background as a business strategist has placed him in a position where success and failure mean enabling businesses to respond appropriately to the change. He has tried to draw lessons from that experience for Buddhists. Nagabodhi has worked the other way around and sought to apply to modern experience the Buddha's advice to his contemporaries on how a society should best be run. Kulananda has outlined a Buddhist response to the ethical and existential discontents of modernity by trying to find a basis for values in a world without God. **Vishvapani**

The pace of change is getting faster and faster. Mahaprabha looks for a Buddhist alternative to wising up or going under

in the turning WORLD

THE OLD OAK desk spoke of permanence. Behind it, Sir John allowed a frown to cross his finely bred aquiline features. The Board had told him that the cartels had to end. For decades these entrenched agreements had sheltered this and other firms from competition but now, the lawyers said, were close to illegality: conspiracies, some argued, to defraud consumers by collusive pricing.

A fraudulent conspiracy? While always one to conceal aversion, Sir John allowed himself a few moments in which to consider his distaste for even senior members of the legal profession. He would have a few wry chuckles at their expense were they ever to meet his consumers. These were cunning quarrymen, fly-by-night ready-mix concrete vendors, and surly builders' merchants, who, to judge by reports of their secret meetings on the golf course or in smoke-filled rooms above the pub, hardly had their customers at heart when fixing their own, most questionable, market sharing deals. Did it make sense to disrupt a whole industry – a way of life even – just to squeeze a few pence off the price of a bag of cement?

Responsible competition had been the cement manufacturers' watch-word for generations: embodied in a well constructed network of alliances across Europe, counter-pointed by the sporting seasons. Price fixing and salmon in Norway in March, wild boar in Germany come summer-time, and then the autumn pheasant shoot with competitive quotas to settle in Kent: this was the stuff of grand strategy.

When the lawyers had left, a team of clever strategy consultants scarcely out of their teens, it seemed, had joined the Board to present a series of concise graphs and charts. These had apparently convinced his colleagues that cartels were, in any case, no longer proof against the inroads of new and

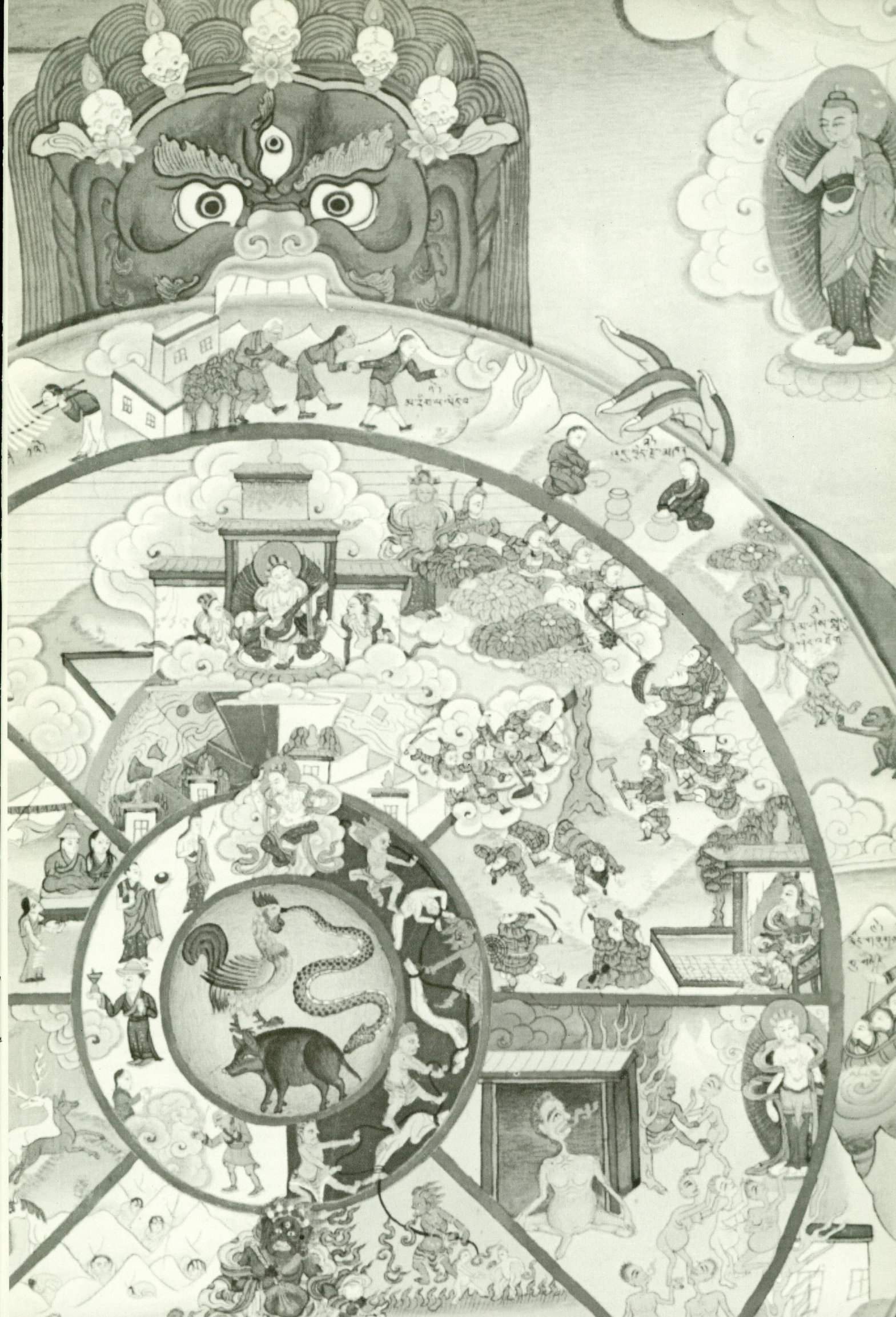
maverick foreign rivals. Ending the agreements, the consultants politely suggested, would no doubt stimulate the firm's competitiveness, and counter the genteel complacency which had for decades burdened this like so much of British industry. Sir John looked out on the sparkling lake beneath the award-winning headquarters building that he had commissioned in gentler days. He permitted himself a sigh. He was soon to retire as Chairman. His successors would be busier men with less inclination for good works like the Save the Children Fund from which so much enjoyment and his knighthood sprang. They would be harsher men too, with little tolerance for the give and take of union negotiations without the former latitude for collusive price increases. They would lack the human interest in the rural communities which supported the environmentally destructive operations that had given local wage earners both companionship and worth-while work. He arranged his black tie and smoothed the dinner jacket's silk lapels. It would be hard to break the news to his old Spanish friend that evening at the Opera House, after so many easy years of civilized competing.

Those events took place in 1986, and the conditions that gave rise to them were inspiring many similar reflections across the god-like realm of board rooms throughout the world. Since the days of Adam Smith, the commentators have held competition to be the very essence of the capitalist. And yet, unlike the academics who observed them, the capitalist's mind was always set upon its limitation. In the United States, where actual agreements to restrict competitive rivalry had long been offences that were imprisonable, the entire thrust of business strategy was centred on containing competition. Economists had shown that no producer could earn profits in a market which was fully competitive.

The discipline of strategy proposed a set of means to find 'attractive' or less competitive business sectors, and made techniques available to reduce the business power of customers, the firm's suppliers, and its rivals. Without the crudity of cartels, the strategist sought to find safe havens for a business and those within it: safe from the forces of competitive change.

Three years after those events, I joined Sir John's company to help guide it through the fierce competitive world that had been inaugurated. We closed old factories. Others were modernized through innovation to great effect. We thought carefully about customers' wants, anticipating them systematically. Managers ceased to be custodians of old traditions and were recast as the agents of competitive change. Of the 24,000 employees there in 1989 only half still held their jobs by 1993. Those who stayed worked harder, were better paid, and became more creative. Notwithstanding the recession, the invigorated business led the sector in its delivery of wealth to its investors. But those who did not stay were cast aside like rubble. Some had trusted in their union, but the TGWU had little help to offer. Some had trusted in their skills or social status, to find that both were obsolete.

This story has been repeated so many times in recent years, as old safe havens have been washed away by the waves of change. Far out at sea is the long reach churned by the winds of consumer democracy, the winds that beat down with the roaring message that each consumer is equal and paramount, whipping up the currents of technological innovation that bring all wants within the grasp, and shipwreck those who are not sufficiently intelligent, energetic, and bold to ride them. 'We are going to win and the industrial West is going to lose,' says Konosuke Matsushita, who founded the





There is terror at being excluded from the energetic brightness

Japanese electronics giant NEC. 'There is not much you can do about it because the reasons for your failure are within yourselves.... We are beyond your mindset. Business, we know, is now so complex and difficult, and the survival of firms so hazardous,... that continued existence depends on the day-to-day mobilization of every ounce of intelligence.' Strategists have given up ideas of containment, and have recast their own discipline to focus on ways of changing faster, to learn and innovate at ever greater speed, as they attempt to respond to versions of Matsushita's challenge. Even the world's spiritual traditions are now being mined to uncover means of harnessing human creativity to the task of satisfying wants better and faster than any competitor. At London Business School, where I teach part-time, managers learn about the dangers of fixed views, practise mindfulness, seek to establish positive human communication in their knowledge-based activities, and discuss processes of developing vision and transformation (they use these words): all to understand their customers with intimacy, and to innovate technologically so as to fulfil the competitive purpose. Today, competitive advantage springs not from secure, superior positions so much as from speed in responding to change. Changing faster than competitors avoids the destruction wrought by the stalemate rivalry of equals.

Governments are powerless to contain competitive change and in any case do not seem to want to do so. Flows of money, and hence national markets, can be contained only at a huge price. Money, as raw energy, is the carrier for innovation and ideas, setting the scale of rewards for speed in responding to change and the penalties for tardiness. The collapse of quixotic attempts at containment on a grand scale such as the Soviet Union, or more modest attempts such as those embarked upon through the UK's National Plan in the 1960s or even the ERM debacle of a few years ago bear witness both to the impotence of institutions and to the human cost of their inevitable failure. In one sense the Soviet Union was beaten by its inability to sustain the 1980s arms-race. In a more fundamental sense it was beaten by the realization of its cumbersome systems' inability to promote innovation and the consequent failure of confidence of even its central guardians, the KGB, who, it now appears, paradoxically led the internal revolution of the early 1990s. British endeavours to contain change through an agreeable alliance of monopoly capitalism, organized labour, and government collapsed in the loss of collective self-confidence represented by Thatcherism.

The futile containment experiment of the ERM cost £15 billion in British intervention costs alone and grossly exacerbated unemployment in the UK, France, and Spain.

Competitive innovation delivers what it promises, which is why governments come to like it. It creates wealth, it satisfies the wants of the capable. The less competent are denied its fruits, but in all developed societies these now represent a minority: a substantial minority but one with less cohesion, leadership, or voice than the underclass of earlier eras, precisely because it has been robbed of competence. While it would be cathartically satisfying to predict an apocalypse of social and environmental collapse, with all the usual fire and brimstone that the dispossessed reserve for sinners, it is not a likelihood for our time. The competent will be rewarded and those rewards will be better spread among those who possess them; the ecological environment will be well protected to the extent that it features high on the scale of consumer wants; crime, terrorism, and war will for most be faint shadows in the shining, abundant world of the competent and energetic. We may wish it were otherwise. We may even hark back nostalgically to the world of bourgeois decency that so many of us have come to despise. But this is the indecent world of change in which we have to live as Buddhists.

Buddhist teaching gives us guidance on how to live in this world of change. The Tibetan 'Wheel of Life' is a mirror for the world and our own lives in it. In the mirror we see Yama-Raja, the Lord of Death and Change, and as we look closer, we see the spinning Wheel, spinning faster in these days, spinning around the hub of greed for the satisfaction of wants, the intelligent hatred of competitive rivalry, and the delusion that such a narrow conception of human life is sufficient. The Wheel embodies vital energy that it is our task to transform. We risk, however, being captivated by the majestic display, alternately fascinated and struck by terror at its awesome force.

I am fascinated by its abundance and power: fascinated by the vigour of people released from old constraints and static assumptions about their place in life. An old friend has turned his back on his school-teacher parents' quiet, civilized values, spurning an academic career to enjoy a life-style of power and luxury beyond their understanding. A cousin's family worry that their youngest, slow and idle but only seven years old, is already consigned to an underclass of feckless indigents from which no privilege, they fear, can save him. His older brother, now

eleven, has been passing exams from the age of five and is already marked for competence, for a life of confident conquests in the face of ambient insecurity, where all is work. My other cousin's husband had relied upon his steady progress in the now depleted accounting profession to secure his family's future and, at 48, has been unemployed and hopeless for the last three years. His more energetic counterparts have learned new skills and applied to themselves the principles of competitive innovation to survive. At London Business School my colleagues tell executives that they have embarked on a continuous life-long process of learning in which no one skill can be assumed to endure. Students are told that there are now no careers, only a series of projects. Studies have shown that large Western European corporations have a life-expectancy that is shorter than the span of those who work within them, and that term of survival is falling as corporate entities fall apart through de-merger and down-sizing, releasing their resources to be reconstituted in other forms.

Those who fall off the spinning Wheel will never clamber back. And there is terror at the prospect of being excluded from the energetic brightness, to huddle around the ashes beyond the encampment of the strong in frustration and despair, disenfranchised from its wealth of choices. For all the talk of rights and duties now expressed by British politicians of all persuasions, there is no credible commitment to maintaining the protective structures of state pensions, social security, and housing benefits which we would do well to assume will subside into the dust of social archaeology within our own lifetimes.

The fascination and terror of Yama-Raja inspire the false views of nihilism and eternalism.

The nihilistic reaction to the accelerating pace of change is most obviously that of rising fury and the millennial fantasy of desire to see the strong perish, alternating with descent into hopelessness and the wish to have nothing whatever to do with the world's structures and crass assumptions. Less obviously – but no less nihilistic – is the tendency to embark upon the project of equipping oneself for freelance survival: to learn new skills for each successive project. This holds out the seductive prospect of a personal independence from unreliable institutions, an independence based on personal mastery of new knowledge, the whole secured by a computer, modem, health insurance, and a mobile private pension plan. The grosser nihilism loses sight of the inextricable interconnections between our lives and the world; the

subtler form approximates to this by casting life as a survival expedition for which our skills and even meditation practice become our personal buoyancy aids.

The eternalist reaction answers the prospect of change with denial. Companies seek to immunize themselves from change by insulation from its effects, offering security within. Notable Japanese corporations used to offer life-time employment to their cadre staff, but this was achieved by externalizing the consequences of change. Sub-contractors, women employees, or foreign subsidiaries would take the strain, leaving certainty and a promise of almost religious satisfaction from continued employment to the privileged core. Western companies now emulate this, defining core competencies to command and core employees to protect by contracts, thus establishing a penumbra of the less secure. The utopian fantasies of religious cults, which offer a safe, warm, intolerant, and self-referential world to their adherents, with immunity from the dark forces beyond the magic circle, embody an equivalent eternalist delusion, denying impermanence.

The Middle Way guides us between these two delusive reactions through the insight that there is no possibility of permanence, separateness from other beings, or independent completeness. How does this apply to living with change? How does it apply to the institutions of the FWBO, as an antidote to our own reactions towards nihilism or eternalism? To the extent that the FWBO is brim-full of *kalyana mitrata*, we will be able to soar on the waves of change: meeting impermanence with heroism; meeting the illusion of separateness with the cultivation of responsibility for each other; and developing our common richness in the face of what is incomplete.

In the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* the Buddha speaks about the Bodhisattva as a compassionate hero. 'Now suppose' he says to Subhuti 'that this person, so greatly accomplished, should have taken his family with him on a journey, his mother and father, his sons and daughters. By some circumstance they find themselves in a great, wild forest. The foolish ones among them would feel fright, terror, and hair-raising fear. He, however, would fearlessly say to his family: Do not be afraid! I shall soon take you safely and securely out of this terrible and frightening forest.' Note that the Bodhisattva is not leading an army or even a band of religious followers: those he leads are his family, with the closest possible connections of love and respect.

Earlier, the text describes how the

Bodhisattva is able to provide this leadership, and it is not on the basis of pious intentions.

'Suppose, Subhuti, there were a most excellent hero, very vigorous, of high social position, handsome, attractive, and most fair to behold, of many virtues, in possession of all the finest virtues, of those virtues which spring from the very height of sovereignty, morality, learning, renunciation, and so forth. He is judicious, able to express himself, to formulate his views clearly, to substantiate his claims; one who always knows the suitable time, place, and situation for everything. In archery he has gone as far as one can go, he is successful in warding off all manner of attack, most skilled in all arts, and foremost, through his fine achievements, in all crafts.... He is versed in all the treatises, has many friends, is wealthy, strong of body, with large limbs, with all his faculties complete, generous to all, dear and pleasant to many. Any work he might undertake he manages to complete, he speaks methodically, shares his great riches with the many, honours what should be honoured, reveres what should be revered, worships what should be worshipped. Would not such a person, Subhuti, feel ever increasing joy and zest?'

To this, Subhuti could hardly have answered other than 'Yes.' The Buddha's compassionate hero is extraordinarily well endowed: worldly skills have not been laid aside in quietist disgust, but in no sense are they present as part of the furniture of an individual lifeboat. They are the basis for leadership through *kalyana mitrata*: the basis for helping others to be more truly themselves out of warm love for them and what they can become. If we seek to apply this image as a test for the presence of nihilism and eternalism in reaction to change in our lives, then the test is this: are we becoming a compassionate hero or heroine? And we can ask if our institutions (which for the FWBO means our centres, communities, and businesses) are giving birth to compassion. Do they create this abundant richness and strength in the face of change for the individuals within them? Do those within institutions develop skills and the generosity to share them? Are they imbued first and foremost with this spiralling energy of friendship and responsibility, giving rise to ever increasing joy and zest notwithstanding the tempest of change? The outcome is that if Buddhists can create as our collective gift a school for compassionate heroes, then the sangha will indeed, in the words of the *Tiratana Vandana*, be 'an incomparable store of goodness to the world.'

Before ordination into the WBO in 1994, Mahaprabha was Strategy Director for a major UK company and he currently teaches at the London Business School



WHEN KING AJATASATTU of Maghada was planning an attack on the Vaggians he ordered his prime minister, Vassakara, to question the Buddha about the likely outcome of the venture. Understandably, the Buddha wouldn't answer Vassakara's questions directly. Instead, he referred to some advice he had once given the Vaggians while passing through their realm:

'So long as the Vaggians meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out their undertakings in concord – so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has already been enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vaggians as established in former days – so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vaggian elders, and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words – so long as no women or girls belonging to their clans are detained among them by forcing or abduction – so long as they esteem and revere and support the Vaggian shrines in town or country, and allow not the proper offerings and rites, as formerly given and performed, to fall into desuetude – so long as the rightful

protection, defence, and support shall be fully provided for the Arahats among them, so that Arahats from a distance may enter the realm, and the Arahats therein may live at ease – so long may the Vaggians be expected not to decline, but to prosper.' (*Maha-parinibbana Sutta*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids)

On hearing that the Vaggians were still following the Buddha's advice, Vassakara knew instinctively that they could not be defeated in battle, and set off to help his master plot their downfall through diplomacy and propaganda.

Nothing is permanent; everything changes. Throughout history the Buddha's followers have had to work with an ever-shifting set of circumstances. Studying, reflecting, and meditating on the original teachings, they have had to uncover, again and again, the Buddha's transcendental insights and apply them to the particular dangers and opportunities of their own time and place. This is how Buddhism has evolved.

Even if Ajatasattu's ambition may strike a familiar chord, the material facts of human life and human society have changed vastly in the past two-and-a-half

thousand years. What are we to make now of the Buddha's advice to the Vaggians? Does it have any value for a world caught in an endless turmoil of social, political, and economic change, whose technological achievements could reduce the Vaggians and the Magadhans to ashes in an instant? Does it have anything to say about society, or about the Buddhist in society, today?

'So long as the Vaggians meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out their undertakings in concord....'

The suggestion here is that the Vaggians, like the classical Greeks, were able to come together physically in order to do the business of the state. Theirs was a society in which everybody not only had a voice but could make it heard at once by the entire population. It was a community to which one tangibly belonged, and upon which one could exert a meaningful influence. The Buddha's advice, that the preservation of concord: harmony, consensus, and mutual friendliness, should be regarded as an ultimate value – more important than any single issue under debate – is stunningly simple, but absolutely humane. Suddenly we are in the company of people who respect and listen



to each other, who are prepared to discuss – even argue – their way to a conclusion, but who are prepared when necessary to agree quite happily to differ. It is a society without manipulation or coercion, and one which can have justifiable confidence in its laws and goals. It is also rather different to any of the societies that we are familiar with today!

So to heed the Buddha's advice in the modern world is perhaps above all to recognize the danger of giving up on a society to which we feel little or no healthy sense of belonging. The societies we live in today are vast impersonal affairs. Caught up in the day-to-day struggles of our own lives we survive – often with a certain sense of insecurity – in a bubble of self-sufficiency while abdicating responsibility for the world that surrounds us. We follow news reports about the homeless, the murdered, the oppressed, and the war-ravaged as so much background noise or, worse, as a distraction from the petty tensions and disappointments of our own lives. At times we may feel an urge to reach out, to connect and help; but unless we are prepared to undertake the hard work involved, or even to contemplate it, then

that fragile bud of humanity becomes cocooned in indifference or cynicism.

I wonder how Daniel Defoe would have felt had he known that Robinson Crusoe would become one of the great mythic heroes of the modern era. Surely his absurdly resourceful creation, forever glorying in a mounting stock of comfort and capital, was intended as a semi-tragic satire on a new breed of social individual, cast away by the forces of change from the ties of extended family, village, guild, indeed from all human society, free to make as comfortable and secure a domain for himself as his native wit would allow.

But is this the kind of freedom we want? Is it healthy to be so alone, so uninvolved, when one lives not on a desert island but in the middle of a modern state? Surely the answer has to be no. *We do* belong, and our societies are composed of human beings like ourselves, with needs, hopes, and pains. Is it actually possible to live with any humanity – let alone with awareness, wisdom, and compassion, unless we are willing to look at each other, touch each other, and take some responsibility for our interconnectedness?

There are many of ways of contributing: through a socially valuable career, through voluntary work, through participation in pressure groups, or by simply setting an example – in our

communication and friendliness, our personal morality, or our upholding of higher values. We can have an effect. But we may sometimes need to check our motivation. The gravitational pull of the solipsistic individualism that our culture has come to condone can be very strong. Are we seeking concord? Do we genuinely want to work with others, to participate? Do we really want to make the world a better place for everyone, or just for ourselves?

An interesting fact of modern life is that the more complex and global the world's political and economic institutions become, the more scope there actually seems to be for devolution, for a splitting down of societies into more manageable and coherent sub-cultures in which people can live and have some effect on a meaningful, human scale. One such sub-culture is, of course, the spiritual community: a free association of those who have devoted their lives to the quest for truth – but who recognize that it is very hard to so on one's own.

A spiritual community is one in which a number of individuals chose to associate and co-operate with each other in order to create the conditions for a life based on the highest ideals. They come together entirely as a matter of free choice, so there is no need and no excuse for coercion or manipulation in their dealings with each

BUDDHA'S WORDS modern ears

Nagabodhi explores the relevance the Buddha's prescription for a healthy society has for the modern world



other. Concord and co-operation are not just useful operating principles: they are the whole point of the enterprise. A Buddhist society, on no matter what scale, is one whose members meet, enjoy their common activities, and depart in concord or not at all. These are not just 'nice features' of a Buddhist movement; they are its essence.

The Buddha's advice to the Vaggians had to do with their society as a whole. We have to face the fact that it is unlikely that an entire state – even less so a modern one – could follow that advice *en masse*. But a smaller community of spiritually motivated people should be able to do so. Is it too much to hope that such a community could provide a vision of co-operative human existence that others might feel inspired to watch and learn from?

'...so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has already been enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vaggians...'

Some people can be quite shocked by these words. Was the Buddha really such a conservative? No he wasn't. But it is important to remember what he was: a spiritual teacher who wanted his disciples to transcend all limitations of social and psychological conditioning whatsoever. Although able and willing to speak out against social injustice when he saw it, the Buddha's first, direct concern was not with society but with the individual.

Those of us alive today have grown up in a world in which social change has been regarded as an inevitability. Change is not just something we put up with: it is the element we breath. The Buddha lived in a

far more stable world. Perhaps it was more healthy than our own, perhaps not; but it was certainly one in which sudden shifts and changes in the political and social climate, or in personal life-style, were at least as likely to do harm as they might do good. He encouraged his followers to live simple lives of meditation, reflection, helpful communication, and moral effort. For this, a stable social context – assuming it was a reasonably just and fair one – provided a good working context. Against such a backdrop, of course, others would notice his disciples living in their midst and perhaps recognize the revolution they represented for what it was.

In these days of jet travel, many of us are aware of the phenomenon of culture shock, a disorientating sense of inner and outer dislocation as one struggles to make sense of the sights, sounds, smells, customs, even the world-view, of a new and different place. While not without interest, and a certain galvanizing value, it is a state that few people find conducive to calm, tranquillity, and inner harmony, the ideal state of mind in someone trying to penetrate life's mysteries.

Today's world is one in which things are changing so fast that it is possible to have culture shock without straying from one's living room. User-friendly newspaper articles and TV programmes do their best to help us adjust to the implications of the latest silicon chip, political earthquake, or ecological warning signal, but it is a losing battle. For all its excitement, the atmosphere of constant change in which we live breeds an undeniable quantum of distraction, superficiality, and anxiety.

A spiritual community is one where individuals choose to associate and co-operate with each other

Sukhavati community 1988/photo Vajradipa

Other than trying not to support or participate in any negative developments, there is little we can do about this on the global level. As they say, you can't stand in the way of progress. But that does not mean we have to be entirely passive to the process in our own lives, or intoxicated by the idea of change for its own sake. It is possible to resist craving the latest technological gadget the moment it becomes available; it is possible to enter a career or a relationship with an attitude of commitment over time. And it is possible to live a regular, organized life with time built in for reflection and absorption. In a fast-changing world our lives have to become mandalas of order, consistency, purpose, and depth. We cannot rely on our surroundings to support this intention, so we must work that much harder to ensure that we are keeping the initiative in our lives.

One of the great joys of the spiritual community is the opportunity it gives us to enjoy and develop friendships over decades, and to feel engaged in a project whose scope extends over centuries. Of course, we are still very much in the process of building and refining our spiritual communities, so here too we need

to be cautious of making sudden changes simply because change is the mood of our times. The working principles and institutions we establish will have implications for the future of Buddhism perhaps over millennia. We would do well to take our time, pool our deepest resources, and take a broad, historical perspective. And we would do well to study and understand our heritage, always checking our own adaptations and modifications in its light. Buddhism has already weathered innumerable shifts in time, space, and culture; we have much to learn from our predecessors.

‘...so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vaggian elders...’

In a traditional society the elders are the guardians of culture. To respect, listen to, and care for them is not just a kind and humanitarian thing to do; it is the way one learns about and makes sense of the world. It is the way one becomes a healthy human being, emotionally and psychologically ready, if and when so inspired, to develop that simple humanity into enlightened humanity.

Older people are still worthy of far more respect and receptivity – not to speak of kindness – than they generally receive nowadays. Perhaps one of the most aberrant features of modern life is the extent to which our ‘elders’ are being marginalized by a society increasingly run by and dominated by the young, quick-witted, and adaptable. Even so, the elderly clearly do not play their former role in a modern, post-industrial society. Our older friends and relatives have much to teach us about who we are, where we fit, and how we could live, but so too does the preserved wisdom of our wider social culture.

Against the backdrop of an idyllic Polynesian Eden, Paul Gauguin scrawled his questions: ‘Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?’ If we want to know what our culture has to say on the matter, we children of the global village must be prepared to trace and revel in roots that thread their way not only through the soil of family history and local custom, but along the corridors of libraries, concert halls, and art galleries as well. As modern education gives less and less attention to such matters, it may well fall to the spiritual community and its institutions to give them the respect, esteem, and support they need, and to encourage people to take advantage of them.

‘...so long as no women or girls belonging to their clans are detained among them by forcing or abduction...’

At first glance this might seem like a recapitulation of the third precept – to

abstain from sexual misconduct. But the significance here is more far-reaching. In a tribal society exogamy, the mixing, and thus strengthening, of a clan’s blood through marriage with ‘outsiders’ is an important collective preoccupation. When based on abduction, as they often are, such marriages can cause friction and even war; when based on willing agreement, they are a cause of new alliances and general rejoicing.

Although most of us live in a social climate that has little real stake in these matters, we should nevertheless recognize that our personal sexual choices and our consistency with regard to them are not entirely ‘private’ matters. They can have a powerful effect on at least our immediate families and social circles. Sex may or may not be ‘one of the great gods’, as D.H. Lawrence put it, but it is certainly a force more powerful and potentially more destructive than most of us are prepared to admit. It is something to be handled with great care, not only for the sake of ourselves and our partners, but for the sake of our ‘clan’ as well.

In Britain, one in three marriages now ends in divorce. While some deplore this collapse of ‘basic values’, others believe it to be excellent news. The institution of marriage, they argue, is outdated, and was anyway never intended to be founded on a love match, or focused on the nuclear family. Let’s throw things wide open, experiment, look for new institutions that are less ridden with neurosis and more suited to the frantically mobile life-styles – both socially and geographically – we now live.

Whatever the ultimate fate of the nuclear family, there is no doubt that the evolving social institutions of Western Buddhism are benefiting from the current uncertainty. Having grown up in a social and emotional environment dominated by the couple rather than the individual or the extended family, we are freer than people have been for some time to experiment with new arrangements – from ‘single-sex’ residential spiritual communities to family communities – without much resistance from our subjective, cultural conditioning or from a coherently hostile surrounding society. We especially need this freedom because there is so much still to explore, so much that we don’t yet know.

‘...so long as they esteem and revere and support the Vaggian shrines in town or country ... so long as the rightful protection, defence, and support shall be fully provided for the Arahats among them...’

A lot could be said about each of these precepts in turn, but I will concentrate here on one single message they seem to be communicating. A healthy society is one

which is ‘open-ended’, that is, receptive to higher, even spiritual, values and ideals. These values can be kept alive by shrines – the native religions – or by the presence and example of Arahats – in this context, the wise.

Local shrines may be limited in scope and value; they may even cloud and distort the pure light of spiritual truth. But they do at least serve to remind people that there is more to life than merely mundane, material considerations. A beautiful cathedral, a Bach Passion, or even the heartfelt genuflection of a believer glimpsed in a dark church, can give the most hardened atheist pause for thought. Someone who has grown up with at least a vague sense of something higher, something mysterious to life, may well turn eventually to the spiritual life in a more potent form – so long as there are a few people around able to guide them towards it.

In the West the Christian church is in decline. It is by no means down and out but its power to influence the daily lives even of its followers, let alone society at large, is on the wane. While the more triumphalistic among us may rejoice in this, the Buddha’s words might give us some pause for thought too. It may not be our job to shore up the declining fortunes of a curious and arguably corrupt institution, but we would nevertheless do well to reflect on the implications of trying to establish our Buddhist presence in a society devoid of the – albeit ambiguous – influence of its primary spiritual tradition, and in which such wise people as can be found are expected to look sexually attractive and deliver their treasures in sound-bites.

If the influence of Christianity is truly in decline, then it is up to us to create the literature, the art, the architecture, the rituals, the examples of well-lived lives,... all those elements with which our surrounding culture must be infiltrated and nourished if people are to remember that there is a path to the deathless. In these fluid and confused times we must learn also to recognize, make room for, support, and listen to the wise. In time, of course, we might join the ranks of the wise ourselves. Should even a few of us manage that, then we will have succeeded in bringing the Buddha’s teachings to life in this very strange and different world.

The Buddha’s advice to the Vaggians may not have the look of a ‘ready-to-wear’ social manifesto for the modern era, but there is much in it we can reflect on. I have taken a very brief look at just a few points of contact. I invite you to continue the exercise.

Nagabodhi is Chairman of Windhorse Publications and President of several FWBO centres

'Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the market-place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" ... "Where is God?" he cried "I will tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this?... Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.... There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed will belong to a higher history than all history before.'"

VALUES AND THE

death of

Kulananda searches for a basis for ethical values in a world without God

THUS WROTE Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* in 1882. Truly, few events have been more significant than the death of God. No aspect of our culture has been unaffected by it. And although we may not mourn God's passing, perhaps we can see that with his death we have lost something else as well. We have wiped away 'the entire horizon'. The seemingly impermeable dividing line between God and Man, heaven and earth, the sacred and the secular – that has gone too. And with it the 'vertical' dimension has gone out of life. We have come to live on a 'horizontal' plane of value where nothing is worth very much more than anything else.

At least as far back as the time of Plato, Western man divided the universe in two: the real and the apparent, the transcendental and the mundane, the absolute and the relative. And man, living at the level of the mundane, derived his values from the transcendental. In the Bible morality was what God commanded:

'And the Lord said unto Moses, come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tablets of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written that thou mayest teach them.'

But now the horizon is gone. We still have his churches – as Nietzsche prophesied:

'God is dead, but considering the state the species Man is in, there will perhaps be caves, for ages yet, in which his shadow

will be shown.'

But, at least in the industrialized West, the Church has almost no moral or spiritual authority. It can find no basis on which it can claim authority.

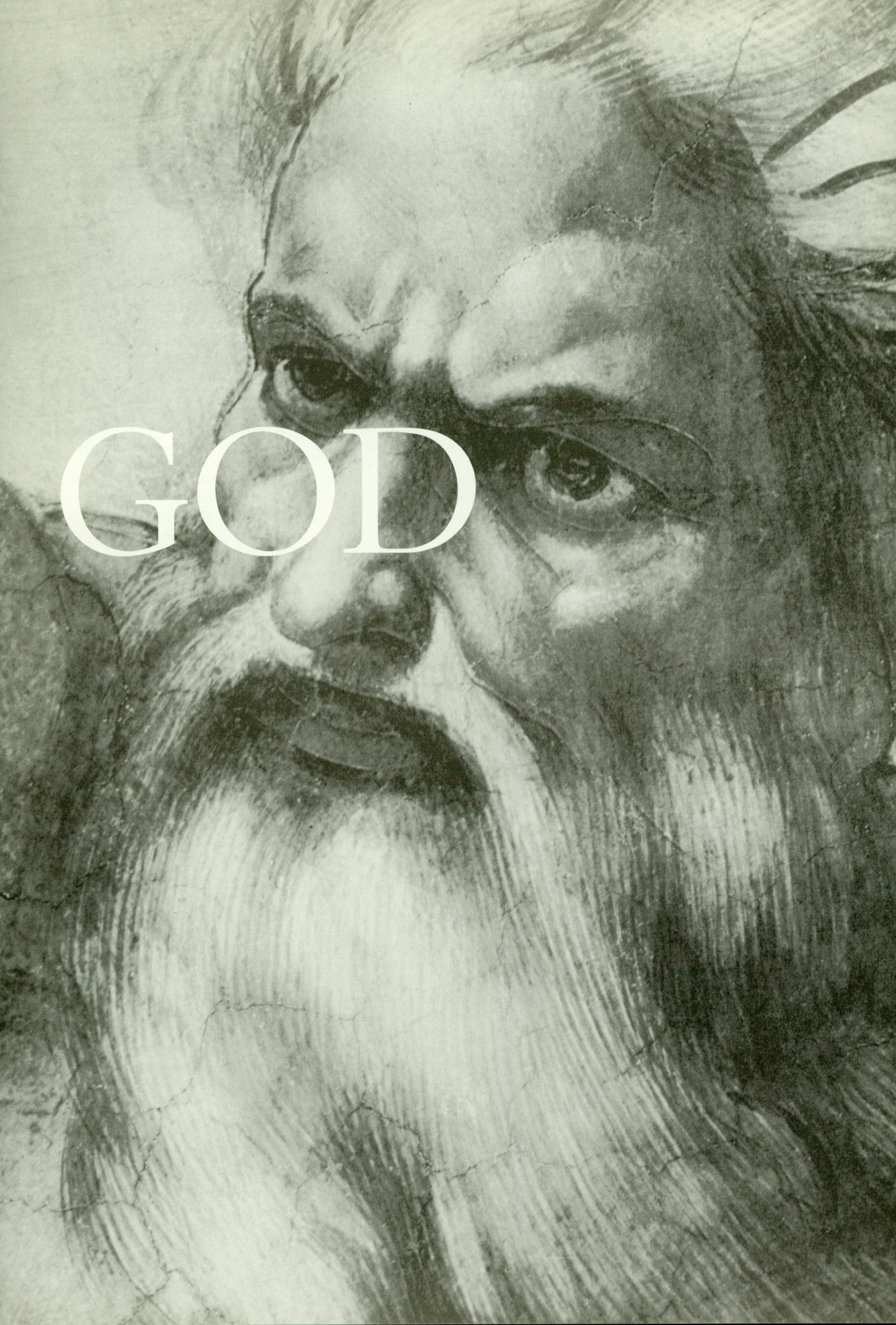
Moral certainty began to die with the end of traditional societies and its death became apparent with the passing of the Victorian era. Its image has been fading ever since. To our modern, sophisticated eyes, the old Victorian convictions – values which powered the creation of a vast and confident Empire – seem somehow naïve and uninformed. We know more than that now. For example, the Victorians were certain that bigamy was an abomination. The Bible told them so, and those cultures which practised bigamy, polygamy, or polyandry, thereby displayed their cultural inferiority. Such brute heathens were self-evidently in need of the civilizing influence of one of the many Victorian missionary societies.

We can't think like that today. We've seen, read, and travelled too much. We know that different people do things differently and, in the pluralistic, multi-cultural modern West, the tolerance which such sophistication affords us is no bad thing. But it is tolerance bought at a price, for we now face a peculiarly modern dilemma. Having wiped away the horizon between God and Man, we have also begun to lose the distinction between certainty and bigotry, conviction and prejudice.

History appears to teach us that those who claim to be in possession of a unique truth which gives them moral authority tend to impose their will on others. Our history tells us of religious wars and ideological conflicts. From the Crusaders to the Khmer Rouge, atrocity and dogma have gone hand in hand, and we have come to believe that anyone who claims to know the absolute truth of things will inevitably be driven to impose their beliefs on others – by force if necessary.

We have moved from recognizing that absolutist claims have often led to tyranny to a belief that all claims to moral authority inevitably lead to tyranny, and this has led to a widespread scepticism in the whole area of moral judgement. For who really has the right to stand in judgement over anyone else? We may believe that eating people is wrong, but can we foist our own beliefs on cultures where cannibalism has long been the norm?

And where can one stand to make one's judgement? When God went out of the picture we also lost the one fixed point in a shifting world. Now that we know just how much our views and opinions are simply the products of our particular upbringing – determined as much as anything by the views of our parents, our class, nation, and culture – what confidence can we have in their validity? If all our judgements are merely expressions of the cultural norms we've inherited, then there is no value-free



GOD

objective standpoint whence we can cast a clear and unbiased eye upon the world about us.

From this perspective, all our judgements can easily be seen as nothing more than the expression of our particular prejudices, and to make a judgement is simply to be 'judgemental': something decent people are definitely not supposed to be these days.

It is a problem, but we cannot go back. Nor should we want to. The British politicians' injunction to get 'back to basics', and their American counterparts' espousal of 'family values' have been revealed time and again for what they are – a hollow sentimentalism, with nothing meaningful to offer our modern conundrum. The old public certainties have been reduced to the status of private opinion and the values which for so long lent coherence to social life are fast disappearing. We stand on a cliff's edge, watching the sea eat away the very ground beneath our feet. 'The Sea of Faith', which once 'lay like the folds of a bright girdle' round earth's shore, and whose 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar' Matthew Arnold so lamented, has given way to the Sea of Scepticism.

As the old value consensus collapses, two broad strands of opinion seem to be emerging. On the apparently liberal wing are the inclusivist minoritarians, the postmoderns, for whom 'marginalization' is the worst of ills. Seeking to empower the weak they are often willing to weaken the strong. Thus, to provide special schools for gifted pupils would be seen as 'elitist', one of the gravest sins in the postmodern canon. From their standpoint, the only valid judgements one can make are those which *level*. To say that Shakespeare was a great poet is no longer allowable. It puts him too much on a pedestal and betrays one's masculine Euro-centricism. People *think* of him as great because he is like oneself and to assert his greatness is to assert the primacy of one's own values. To do so is implicitly to denigrate those who are not like oneself, and therefore not like Shakespeare. Better, then, to dismiss him as a Dead White Male, which knocks him off his marble pedestal and evens things out again.

On the other wing are the proponents of free-market individualism who, in the cause of freedom and for the sake of 'market efficiencies', would always leave the weak to be exploited by the strong. But for all their different postures, what both these stances have in common is that neither of them looks beyond immediate, short-term, material concerns.

Whichever strand of opinion we tend towards, the collapse of a social value-

consensus has thrown us back upon ourselves and into states of excessive self-concern. Failing to find reliable sources of value outside of ourselves we fall back into preoccupation with our subjective mental states in a self-enclosed world where immediate gratification of our desires is the only authentic course open to us. A British government minister with responsibility for public transport recently made the following extraordinary statement –

'[Cars are extraordinarily convenient because] you have your own company, your own temperature control, your own music – and you don't have to put up with dreadful human beings sitting alongside you.'

From government ministers in air-conditioned, stereophonic limousines to blank-eyed teenagers plugged into Walkmans on public transport, alienation and isolation are the order of the day. This is the modern malaise. And here is the modern conundrum: can we find a path between the discredited, divine absolute on the one hand and modern self-enclosed subjectivity on the other? Is there a way of thinking about ethics and values which avoids the pitfalls of authoritarianism? And can one speak of 'higher values' without invoking theism? These questions go to the heart of the Buddhist approach to values. Can Buddhism show us a way out of the modern malaise?

Buddhism avoids both poles of the issue. It is non-theistic, but it doesn't fall back from there into a mono-dimensional humanism, where current human experience restricts the boundaries of possibility to a single plane. There is a transcendental dimension to Buddhism which can help us to restore the vertical dimension to our lives but which, at the same time, cannot be confused with that ghostly transcendental being who is also our ruler and judge. The theist and the Buddhist talk about transcendence in very different ways.

To begin with, they each have a different conception of what is meant by 'faith'. 'In dependence upon suffering, faith arises' – the Buddhist path begins with the recognition that things could be better. This is the fundamental basis of all Buddhist doctrines and methods: it is always possible to move from 'less' to 'more'. Clearly this is a matter of faith. It is not susceptible to logical proof and can only be asserted with reference to one's own, personal experience. But it rigorously takes its stand *upon* personal experience, and nowhere requires that we simply suspend disbelief and make a 'leap of faith':

'Of whatever teachings you can assure yourself: "These teachings conduce to

negative mental states, not to freedom from them; to bondage, not to liberation; to increase of worldly attachments, not to decrease of them; to covetousness, not to frugality; to discontent, not to content..." Of such teachings you may certainly know "This is not the Dharma. This is not the Discipline. This is not the Buddha's Teaching."

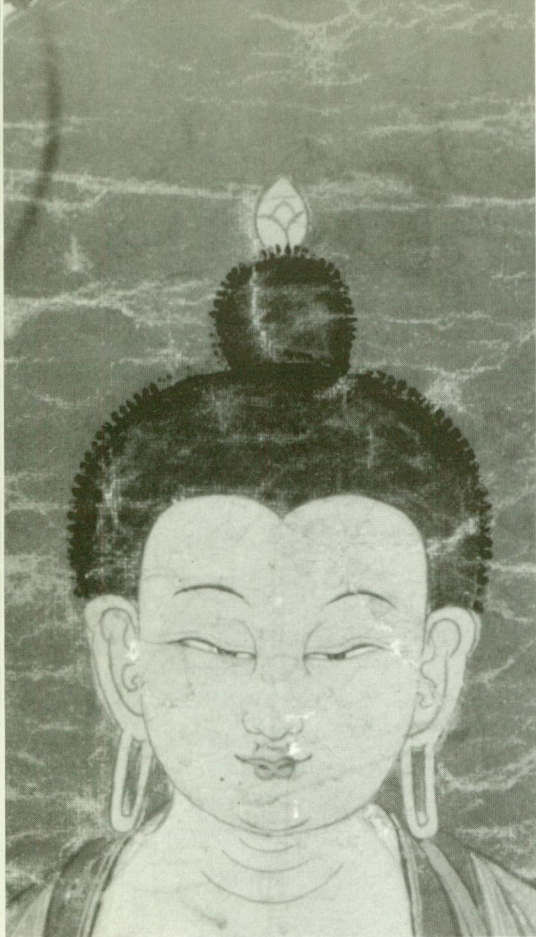
Buddhists are never enjoined simply to believe – there is no Buddhist equivalent of the first Commandment:

'I am the Lord thy God.... Thou shalt have no other gods before me.... for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me....'

Nonetheless, founded upon the simple proposition, verified by our own experience, that it is possible to move from 'less' to 'more', the whole of Buddhism can be unfolded and a vertical dimension to life revealed. For if it is *always* possible to move from 'less' to 'more' then the possibilities of what might constitute 'more' are ultimately limitless and we can begin to imagine a path of personal development which passes entirely beyond the horizon of our current level of being and consciousness.

Buddhism restores the horizon that Nietzsche saw had been wiped away. But it does so without resort to a transcendental divinity. The horizon is simply the furthest point we can conceive of in the development of consciousness. Enlightenment, Buddhahood, the Transcendental Dimension – call it what you will – are all over that horizon. But the separation between us and Buddhahood is not itself ultimate. We can all become Buddhas. We can, ourselves, begin to move towards and eventually over the horizon, by way of a process of continual self-transcendence.

This process of self-transcendence is the key concept underlying the Buddhist system of values. We suffer because we experience ourselves as limited – constricted within the boundaries of a tight ego-identity which we constantly strive to augment and protect under the threefold compulsion of greed, hatred, and delusion. Greed is the impulse to seek out and try to incorporate into our ego-identity the things that we like in the hope that we will derive security from them; hatred is the impulse to push away from ourselves whatever we dislike or which threatens our ego-identity – and this whole process is driven by the vain delusion that our ego-identity can ever be securely established in the face of a continually changing world. The volitional tendencies which lead us again and again to repeat this kind of profitless behaviour are deep-seated indeed. They



Is there a way of thinking about ethics and values which avoids the pitfalls of authoritarianism?

are the cause of all of our own and others' suffering.

No one wants to suffer. We all want happiness. But in seeking happiness by clinging to a restrictive ego-identity, again and again we cause ourselves and others to suffer. Such forms of behaviour are therefore intrinsically dysfunctional. In traditional Buddhist terms they are *akushala* – unskilful. Skilful actions, on the other hand, cause us, at least momentarily, to transcend our narrow ego-identity. Generosity, kindness, clarity, aesthetic appreciation – actions based in states such as these lead away from self-preoccupation, towards self-transcendence. They lead us along the path which lies between ourselves and Buddhahood.

According to Buddhism, nothing is ever fixed and final. Everything, always, changes. The entire universe, ourselves included, is not constructed of fixed, static building blocks, but is rather an ever-changing flux of fleeting conditions, 'empty' of a fixed, unchanging nature. This 'emptiness' – *shunyata* – can also be represented by the idea that there is an Open Dimension to every event.

This Open Dimension represents the

possibility that anything can be changed for the better. It is the source of all creativity, for all creative acts proceed by way of a move from the known into the unknown, a stepping out of our habitual rut and into something previously untried. In any situation leaving the known, the safe, the familiar, drawn by a sense that more is possible, we can transcend our previous, limited sense of ourselves and grow larger. In doing so, howsoever temporarily, we enter the Open Dimension – to that extent and in that moment, transcendence manifests.

This experience of transcendence can be seen from the subjective or from the objective perspective. Neither is ultimately right or wrong; they *are* viewpoints. Subject and object are not ultimately separate – they are different aspects of or different perspectives on reality. From the subjective point of view, transcendence can be seen, more or less psychologically, as self-transcendence. From the objective point of view it is seen, more or less spiritually, as the manifestation of the transcendental dimension of being. Viewed with the eye of the imagination, this process of transcendence is epitomized by the figures of the archetypal Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, beings whose very nature is unending self-transcendence, whilst from a historical point of view it is epitomized in the figure of Shakyamuni – the human, historical Buddha.

As we are unenlightened we experience ourselves in the terms of our limited ego-identity and think of ourselves as acting in a world of discrete subjects and objects. In this state we cannot fully conceive the nature of the Buddha's Enlightenment – that state of being which is not limited by attachment to selfhood and which resonates with total compassion for all living beings. But what we do know from our own experience is that self-transcendence is possible. Extrapolating from this we can discern a path which leads over the horizon, a path between us as we currently are and a possible future state of ever-increasing moments of self-transcendence and creativity.

This is the path of the Dharma. Attracted by the creative possibilities it unfolds, we can set out along that path, emulating those who have gone before us – who are known as the *arya sangha*. The orientation towards the Open Dimension which I have been describing is more traditionally known in Buddhism as 'Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels'. It means steering for what is the best in any situation. Being willing to go change oneself for the sake of something kinder, broader, clearer, wiser.

It is from this orientation towards transcendence that the Buddhist system of values derives. For Buddhists there *is* a

hierarchy of values, but it is a hierarchy which is entirely pragmatic. Thoughts, words, and deeds that conduce towards self-transcendence are skilful, those that lead away from it are not. This is what Buddhism has to offer the world: a system of values that leads away from nihilistic self-preoccupation, that continually refers to the transcendental, but that is neither authoritarian nor theistic. It is the Middle Way.

The *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, from the Pali *Sutta Nipata*, beautifully illustrates this path. It begins conditionally – 'if you know what is really good for you, and want to gain Enlightenment, then you should behave like this,' – and it goes on to delineate the path which leads from the cultivation of ethics, to loving kindness, and finally perfect wisdom:

*If you know your own good
and know where peace dwells
then this is the task:*

*Lead a simple and frugal life
uncorrupted, capable, and just,
be mild, speak soft, eradicate conceit,
keep appetites and sense calm.*

*Be discrete and unassuming,
do not seek rewards,*

*do not have to be ashamed
in the presence of the wise.*

May everything that lives be well!

*Weak or strong, large or small,
seen or unseen, here or elsewhere,
present or to come, in heights or
depths.*

*Have that mind for all the world,
get rid of lies and pride,
a mother's mind for her baby,
her love, but now unbounded.*

*Secure this mind of love,
no enemies, no obstructions,
wherever or however you may be!*

*It is sublime, this,
it escapes birth and death,
losing lust and delusion,
and living in the truth!*

These teachings are more than mere pious sentiments. Their import is fundamentally practical. One *can* cultivate loving kindness – we teach practical methods of doing so all the time at FWBO centres. And this is vitally important work, for unless substantial numbers of people can be convinced that there *are* credible higher values, that there *is* a meaningful vertical dimension to life, then it is hard to see any future for the modern West (and therefore in the world at large) other than a slide towards nihilism. The Dharma has often been likened to a raft. Today it is more like a lifeboat, a desperately needed vessel afloat upon the Sea of Scepticism.

Kulananda's first book, The Principles of Buddhism, is forthcoming from HarperCollins later this year.



At Windhorse Trading we are transforming work into a spiritual practice. We are also running a successful wholesale and retail gift business which is growing fast, and we need more people to join us. If you are interested in leading a full time Buddhist life living in a residential spiritual community and working in a Team Based Right Livelihood business, then this could be a great opportunity for you. You could consider joining us permanently or simply come and help us for a few weeks. We are looking for at least a dozen men and a few women to come and live and work in Cambridge, in order to do a wide variety of jobs made necessary by our growing commercial success.

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- 2 To generate money to give to Buddhist projects.
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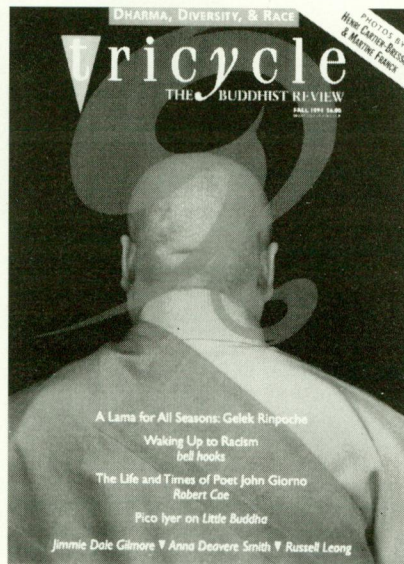
The financial and commercial success of the business is partly the result of an effective spiritual practice, connecting spiritual ideals with everyday living is not only inspiring but also produces more effective ways of working. We have now been listed in the Sunday Independent's Top 100 fastest growing independent companies three times in a row, and this year we are giving away over £165,000 to Buddhist projects throughout the world.

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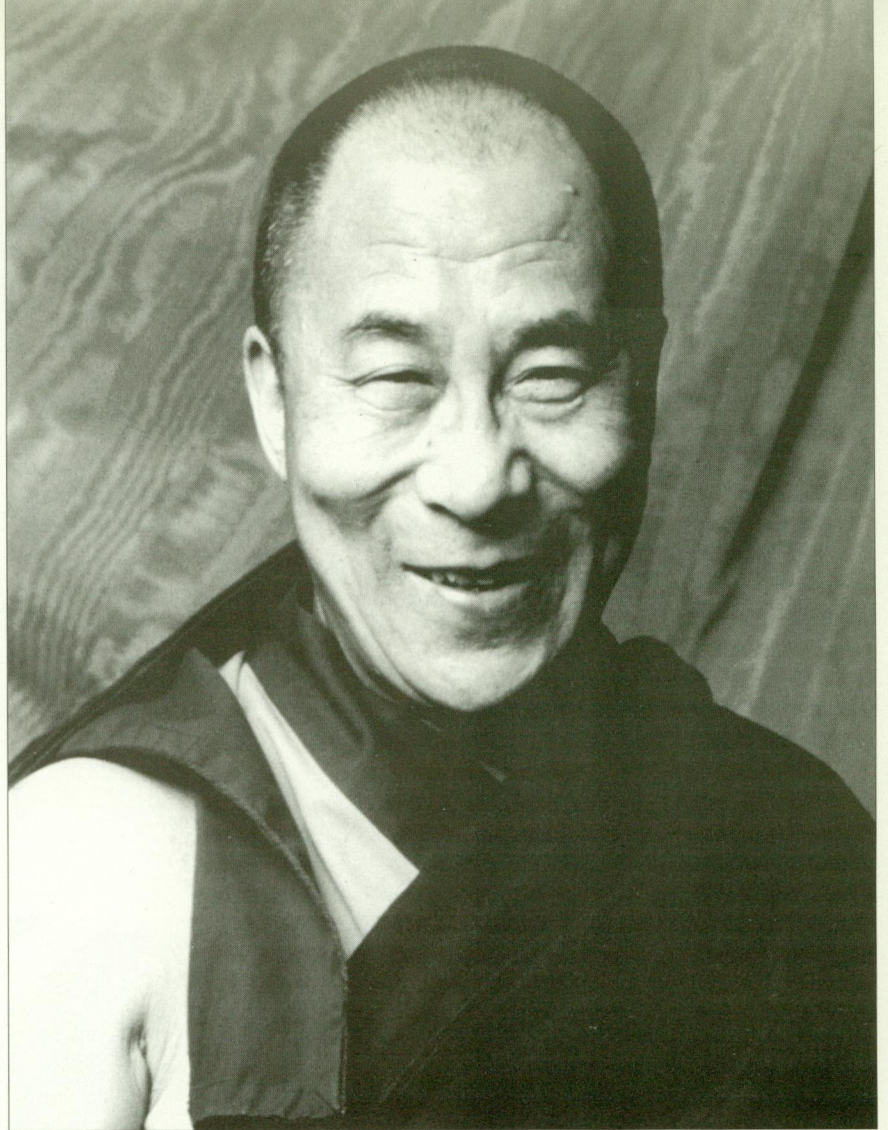
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ONE OF THE most popular forms of teaching in Tibetan Buddhism is *lam rim* or 'stages of the path'. Following the example of Atisha's *Lamp for the Path*, which followed earlier Indian models in synthesizing all the main teachings of Indian Buddhism into a single graded path, all the main schools of Buddhism in Tibet developed their own particular exegesis. Indeed, *lam rim* – though not always under this name – has become one of the most widely available forms of Tibetan Buddhist teaching available in English translation. The first work of this type to be published in English was an early classic of the genre, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa, founder of the Kagyupa School, translated (relatively comprehensibly) by Herbert V. Guenther. Between this and *The Path to Enlightenment*, edited from teachings by the present Dalai Lama, at least ten other *lam rim*-type texts have been translated and published. One or two, such as Pabongka Rimpoche's *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, are truly monumental in scale, others are far more modest.

The Path to Enlightenment comes towards the modest end of the scale. Like most *lam rim* texts, it is in the form of a commentary, in this case a sub-commentary (by the Dalai Lama) on a commentary (by the Third Dalai Lama) on an original concise *lam rim* text: the beautiful poem *Song on the Stages of the Spiritual Path*. Its author is Tsongkhapa, one of the great spiritual geniuses of Tibetan Buddhist history, justly venerated as teacher and yogi, and as founder of the New Kadampa or Gelugpa School which is, of course, that with which the Dalai Lamas themselves are primarily associated.

However, there is a slightly deceptive element to this publication: it is not a new book. Tsongkhapa's poem, together with the Third Dalai Lama's commentary, *Essence of Refined Gold*, translated as here by Glenn H. Mullin, was first published in 1978. It was then re-published together with the present Dalai Lama's sub-commentary in 1982 as *Selected Works of the Dalai Lama III*, and has been available in this form until recently. Perhaps it is understandable that the publishers should wish to make the most of the deserved



popularity of the present Dalai Lama by re-publishing the work under a different title. But be warned, if you own a copy of *Selected Works of the Dalai Lama III*, don't buy this book – you already have it!

The book follows the general structure of *lam rim* texts. Starting with an exposition of the *lam rim* lineage, it moves on to the importance of relying on 'sacred friends who reveal the path' – that is, one's teachers and lamas or gurus, followed by reflections on the precious opportunity of human life and on the need to 'base yourself upon Refuge [in the Three Jewels]'. Then come contemplations on the sufferings of *samsara*, intended to promote the spirit of renunciation. This comprises the Hinayana practice. Next there is the development of *bodhichitta* and the practice of the Six Perfections of the Bodhisattva, the last of these, the Perfection of Wisdom, culminating in the application of the Madhyamaka view and the meditative realization of 'space-like emptiness' (i.e. *shunyata*). This comprises the Mahayana practice. Finally, the Dalai Lama touches upon the practice of the lower and higher Tantras, comprising the Vajrayana, and with this, the culmination of the entire path in Liberation. The book concludes with a translation of a *lam rim* Preliminary Rite, an integral part of the Third Dalai Lama's text, and a short

biography of the Third Dalai Lama himself.

The main portion of the book is, then, an embodiment of the basic *triyana* scheme of Tibetan Buddhism. As Sangharakshita has pointed out, this scheme has its limitations in so far as, for example, it embodies the literalistic view that Mahayana and Vajrayana represent *per se* more advanced levels of practice than the 'basic Buddhism' of the Buddha – which served, after all, to bring innumerable disciples to full Awakening. This means that the book does need to be read with a degree of critical awareness.

It must be borne in mind, though, that in its original context the *lam rim* approach was a considerable achievement. A vast number of Buddhist teachings and schools were brought into Tibet between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, not only from India but also from China and Central Asia. All this could have been very confusing in itself and led to an equally confused sectarianism in the emerging Tibetan Buddhism. However, the Chinese developments were effectively put to one side (though some still claim that Dzogchen is a tantricized form of Ch'an), and the entire range of Indian Buddhist teaching was forged into a single viable system of Buddhist practice by way of the *triyana, lam rim* approach.

There is much of value in the present text, particularly for readers who have not explored *lam rim* literature before. Perhaps some of the most affecting portions will be found in the earlier part of the book, including the Dalai Lama's reflections on the insecurity of human life and the unavoidability of death: 'All beings seek happiness; but most of them, lacking knowledge of how to gain it, find themselves continually immersed in frustration and pain. What we need is an effective approach.'

Overall, as a relatively concise outline of the main *lam rim* teachings, the book is fine: a solid, reliable, traditional Dharma teaching. Perhaps my response is less than effusive because what comes through in the Dalai Lama's prose is far more the Gelugpa-trained *geshe* than the very impressive man who was giving this teaching. Occasionally, a glimpse does shine through, for example in the thoughtful comments that the Dalai Lama makes about choosing a guru – it is quite clear that this is something he feels strongly about. 'I could think to myself, "[People] see me as a Buddha, and therefore will accept anything I tell them." Too much faith and imputed purity of perception can quite easily turn things rotten. I always recommend that the teaching on seeing the guru's actions as perfect should not be stressed in the lives of ordinary practitioners.'

However, most of the text does not seem to embody the Dalai Lama's own individual perceptions of the Dharma in this kind of way. In fact, it could have been written, or spoken, in virtually the same words by practically any well-trained Gelugpa teacher. Indeed, this is more or less exactly what one does find if one looks at other *lam rim* texts, especially modern ones, from any school. I do not intend this as a plea for individualism – to present the Dharma in such a way as to emphasize the Dharma itself rather than the character of the teacher is valid and traditional. However, I cannot deny that I find this approach, particularly as embodied in many *lam rim* texts, and most of all those from Gelugpa sources, at times rather *dull*, especially if it is the umpteenth text that seems to have dealt with exactly the same topics in exactly the same way. I cannot help wondering quite why publishers keep on churning them out.

Tantric *Grounds and Paths* embodies no less traditional teachings, presented by a Gelugpa-trained *geshe*, Kelsang Gyatso, whose literary style makes the Dalai Lama's seem positively racy and whose unabashedly medieval

Tibetan world-view sometimes makes his printed works appear to be intended for the inhabitants of another planet. This is a book of a kind that until recently you would not have found on the shelves of your local bookshops at all, and I cannot help wondering whether it should be there even now. Subtitled 'How to enter, progress on, and complete the Vajrayana path', it is the fullest and most explicit general guide that I have yet come across (with the possible exception of the same author's *Guide to Dakiniland*) to the practical 'inner workings' of Vajrayana meditation, and particularly to that known by the Kagyupa, Sakyapa, and Gelugpa Schools of Tibetan Buddhism as *anuttarayoga tantra*, or Highest Yoga Tantra.

The book does, in fact, cover all four classes of Tantra recognized by these schools, though the three 'lower Tantras', Action, Performance, and Yoga Tantra, are given rather short shrift, getting a mere twenty-three pages together – Performance and Yoga Tantra being dispatched in a mere three. The entire remainder of the book is devoted to the two stages of the Highest Yoga Tantra.

In the Introduction, Kelsang Gyatso emphasizes the need for proper initiation into each of the various classes of Tantra, by a qualified guru. He also illustrates the difference between the four classes of Tantra 'by the methods they reveal for transforming sensual pleasure into the spiritual path'. Here he refers to a common analogy for the degree of bliss engendered by each of the four classes of Tantra. In Action Tantra, he says, it is equal to the delight of gazing at a beautiful *devi* or goddess (if the practitioner is male; a *deva* if she is female), and so on up to Highest Yoga Tantra where the delight is compared with that of sexual union with the *devi* or *deva*. As is well known, Highest Yoga Tantras do involve self-visualization as a 'deity' (i.e. male and female Buddha form) in sexual union. However, Kelsang Gyatso tells us: 'When practitioners of Action Tantra generate themselves as ... Manjushri or Avalokiteshvara, they visualize a beautiful Goddess in front of them and by gazing at the Goddess they generate bliss which they then use to meditate on emptiness.' Well, here is one practitioner of Action *sadhanas* (visualization practices) who has never come across such instructions. I cannot help wondering whether Kelsang Gyatso is treating an analogy rather literally here, especially as he makes no further reference to it in his general outline of Action *sadhanas*.

As for the greater part of the book, there is not, in a sense, a great deal that I can say, as a non-practitioner of Highest Yoga

Tantra. The teachings on the Generation and Completion stages *appear* to be authentic and fairly detailed. Here and there, sections stand out as of interest or relevance to non-Highest Yoga Tantra practitioners, and some incidental observations such as this one on emptiness: 'The ultimate nature of form is the emptiness of form. Of all the many parts of or aspects of form, only its emptiness is true. A wristwatch, for example, has many parts, but within the collection of all these parts only its emptiness is true and real.'

What strikes me quite forcibly, though, is that while this book may be useful for Kelsang Gyatso's own followers, and perhaps for some other practitioners of Highest Yoga Tantra, it is difficult to see at whom else, exactly, the book is aimed. Maybe some academics will find it of ... well, academic interest, but I doubt whether many Buddhists who are not practitioners of Highest Yoga Tantra will find most of it even that. Unfortunately, it is all too possible that some people will casually buy this book and, ignoring Kelsang Gyatso's strictures concerning the imperative need for initiation (or 'empowerment') and instruction by a qualified guru, attempt to practise the complex and potentially hazardous completion stage yogas. I am fairly sure that some details of the practice are deliberately glossed over to some extent, but at the same time there is sufficient detail given for inquisitive or ill-advised readers, perhaps bedazzled with the idea of having access to 'secret' and 'advanced' teachings, to get themselves into trouble.

Surely, this is precisely why the Tantras in general and the *anuttara yoga* Tantras in particular have traditionally been passed down in esoteric lineages. Surely, also, this is why the seventh root downfall of the Secret Mantra vows is, to quote Kelsang Gyatso from the book itself, 'Revealing secrets to an unsuitable person ... knowingly teaching Secret Mantra to those who have not received a Tantric empowerment.'

Of course, Kelsang Gyatso is not the only Tibetan lama doing this sort of thing. Some freely give out high Tantric initiations, whilst others make esoteric teachings available indiscriminately. If anything, the former is more excusable than the latter, as a mass 'Tantric initiation' can be seen simply – if very reductively – as a kind of blessing from the lama, whereas detailed descriptions of Tantric yogas could, as I have observed above, be very easily misused if they get into the wrong hands. My own feeling is that making this kind of material generally available is culpably irresponsible.

Tejananda

Feminist siddhas and tantric new men

Passionate Enlightenment

Women in Tantric Buddhism

by Miranda Shaw

Princeton University Press

£22.50, hardback.

THE TANTRIC PATH is not without pitfalls, because passion becomes an obstacle for one who does not have purity of heart and mind.' (*Passionate Enlightenment*, p.24).

In her recent book, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, Rita Gross asks why feminist historians should want to discover 'an accurate and usable past'. 'Recognizing that history is never neutral and objective, but always reinforces certain values and perspectives, the feminist historian seeks a past that is not only accurate, but usable. S/he seeks historical models, often ignored in androcentric record keeping and interpretations, of historical events that empower, rather than disempower, women ... A "usable past" is important precisely because a religious community constitutes itself by means of its collective memory, the past that it recalls and emulates.' (Rita Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, State University of New York, 1993, p.20).

How 'usable' Western Buddhists might find the past outlined in Miranda Shaw's *Passionate Enlightenment* is a moot point. The history Shaw spent months persuading lamas and rinpoches to impart is that of women's role in the development and practice of the Tantra. In particular she looked for evidence to counter the view held by some scholars that women had only an inferior role to play in Tantric practice. Shaw confesses 'a hunger to discover accomplished women of the past, to savour words they had written, and to be nourished by inspiring understandings of female embodiment.'

The first half of *Passionate Enlightenment* gives an introduction to Indian Tantric Buddhism and the role women played in it, in particular emphasizing that men were exhorted not to disparage women, but to worship them and rely on them as a source of spiritual power. Then there is a section about women who founded or pioneered Tantric practices. And the last third of the book focuses – with an earnestness which is sometimes rather ridiculous – on 'intimacy as a path to Enlightenment'.

As she reads between the lines of Tantric history, Shaw certainly discovers the accomplished women she seeks. It is interesting to learn, for example, that when Milarepa's disciple Rechungpa went to India in search of teachings, it was a woman, Siddhirajni, a pioneer of the



Amitayus visualization practice, who gave him the teachings with which he returned to Tibet. There is also the story of Bhikshuni Lakshmi, who was cured of leprosy by the appearance of the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, and wrote hymns of praise to the Bodhisattva which are still recited today. Less impressive is the account of the female companion of Kukkuripa who 'had the talent of turning herself into a hen'.

But as well as these accounts of inspiring female practitioners (hens notwithstanding), we are presented with a Buddhist society in which men worship women and are dependent on them for spiritual progress ('A man's attainment of enlightened qualities is dependent upon his association with a female companion who possesses them.') and in which sexual practices are a means – even *the* means – by which Enlightenment is attained. Some of the attitudes described – 'the man should prostrate to the woman, rub her feet, cook for her, feed her...' – make the male Tantric practitioner into the best of new men, while others – 'a yogi worthy of the name "should always worship women"' – have a faint air of chivalry.

Shaw also makes the startling revelation that the Buddha's renunciation of palace life was staged 'for the benefit of people who would be inspired by that kind of detachment' whereas it was really 'the bliss of sexual union' that enabled him to attain Enlightenment (p.143). Western society is so firmly rooted in the idealization of the sexual couple and the material values associated with 'staying at home' that we can surely do without exhortations – or excuses – to retain the *status quo*. How 'usable' is it to be told 'Without meditating, without renouncing the world, stay at home in the company of your mate'? And isn't captioning an illustration of Vajrasattva with his consort 'Rapt, blissful gaze of divine couple' rather odd?

Advancing her own theory as to why misogynist scholars ignore the part women have played in the Tantra, Shaw says, 'One way to avoid the implicit challenge of a

dissonant voice is to recast its message into an exotic, orientalized version of one's own, which is what scholars have done when they "discover" in Tantra a medieval Indian mirror-reflection of their own denigration of women and exploitative model of society.' (p.196)

But Shaw herself also seems to avoid the implicit challenge of the Tantra, 'discovering' in it a mirror-reflection of her own model of society, a society in which women are neither inferior nor equal to men, but superior to them, a society which cherishes the 'utopian vision of men and women as companions in the spiritual quest'. Men and women practising Buddhism can certainly be expected to treat each other with kindness and respect, but it is quite another thing – and a distortion – to suggest that when the Buddha said 'Friendship is the whole of the spiritual life,' he meant that 'the intimate association of a like-minded woman makes all the difference to a man's spiritual life.' (p.146)

Shaw quotes the *Chandamaharosana Tantra* as saying 'Because people of "inferior faith" will not understand or benefit from teachings on sexual practices as a path of liberation, [the Buddha] hides it carefully and teaches the real truth secretly, saving the highest teaching for the rare person of superior faith and diligence who desires to attain Buddhahood quickly,' (p.145). Although it is perhaps only human to think of oneself as that rare person, I suspect that this is a 'real truth' which is best kept hidden from most of us for the time being. It is all too easy for us to misunderstand the Tantra, and misunderstandings lead to confusion and suffering.

Miranda Shaw's book gives us a perspective on Buddhist history which may well be accurate, and is perhaps needed to the extent that it genuinely counters misogyny. But, to be honest, if you want something 'usable' and have £22.50 to spare, I suggest you buy a copy of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, and give away the change. **Vidyadevi**

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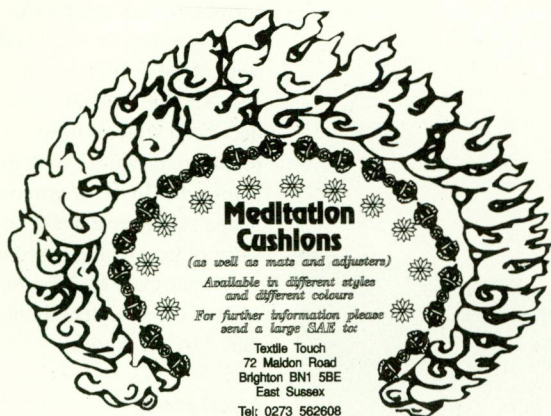
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FWBO France

On Sunday 19 February in Suresnes, a quiet suburb of Paris, a new chapter of FWBO history was begun. In premises loaned by a Sufi group, FWBO France held its first day retreat in Paris. The team of Order members running the event included Varashri and Varadakini (who are both French) and Sudhira (who runs FWBO activities in Carcassonne in the south of France). The day was very successful and the seven participants greatly appreciated the programme of meditation and discussion groups.

The team will be returning to run another event in September and envisage more activities developing gradually. They are interested in hearing from anyone who can help with the FWBO France project. Varadakini commented: 'We now know that the French want us. In the words of two of the participants, they want "French Buddhism", not English, not Occidental, so we shall go back, we shall even go and stay and make it *theirs*.'



Tiratanaloka

The new retreat centre helping women to prepare for ordination has been given a name. It is now called 'Tiratanaloka', which means 'the realm associated with the Three Jewels'.

Samata, who is a member of the ordination team and lives at Tiratanaloka, has been involved with the project since its beginning. She writes:

'After our long search for a suitable property, we are delighted to have found Tiratanaloka. It is between Brecon and Abergavenny and situated in a beautiful Welsh valley which is surrounded by the Brecon Beacons, a range of hills rising to almost 3,000 feet. We moved in on 29 October 1994. Three weeks later eighteen women joined us for our first retreat, and since then we have held four more retreats. From now until the end of the year we are planning to run on average two retreats a month. Most excitingly, in June we will be holding a three-week ordination retreat – the first in our very own retreat centre!'

Left: Retreat in Paris
Below: Tiratanaloka

Sangharakshita Appeal

According to Kamalashila, the overall fund-raising co-ordinator, the drive to raise £400,000 to establish the Preceptors' College in Birmingham has slackened off in recent months. 'We are about half way there in terms of pledged donations,' he says, 'but the Appeal has only a few months left to run.'

He is confident that the potential exists within the movement to raise this sum easily, but he commented 'it is taking longer because it takes time to absorb the inevitability of this venture. None of us wants Sangharakshita to leave us, but of course he has to. We are all currently trying to come to terms with Sangharakshita's need to pass on his responsibilities. In time, I feel sure that we all will. In the long term, of course, it's very important for everyone's future in the FWBO that we unite behind Sangharakshita's vision.'

Only a few dozen pledges have come in over the last two

months, but according to Pramudita at Padmaloka, the lull may be coming to an end. 'Donations or pledges are now coming in every day,' he says.

Some FWBO centres are setting up schemes to help pledgers to raise their £250. The Birmingham Buddhist Centre runs at least one stall at a car boot sale each weekend – especially for those with pledges to meet. The Glasgow Buddhist Centre ran a musical evening. Other ideas have included a skills auction; living a simple life for a period and donating the savings; and doing odd jobs like gardening or cleaning.

Appeal co-ordinators visit Madhyamaloka

A meeting for seventeen UK fund-raising co-ordinators was held at Madhyamaloka in Birmingham in February. They meditated in the new shrine-room and were taken on a guided tour of the house, enabling them to see the fruits of their labours so far. The public meeting rooms have been decorated with William Morris wallpaper and deep blue surrounds, rich against the Victorian dark brown wood-stain. A large Buddha rupa stands in the hallway, which is decorated with *thangkas* given to Sangharakshita by Dhardo Rimpoche. In the afternoon, Kamalashila gave a talk on the spirit of generosity, based on Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita*, and led discussion on issues raised by the Appeal.

Appeal priority: women's community

The Appeal is now exclusively directed towards finding a suitable property for the women Public Preceptors. Sanghadevi, who hopes to move to Birmingham in early 1996 with Shrimala, had been making enquiries about a house opposite Madhyamaloka. However there were no funds available for a down-payment. Although approximately £200,000 has been raised, this is mostly in pledges, not cash. If anyone is able to send in a donation or pledge money before August, please help now.

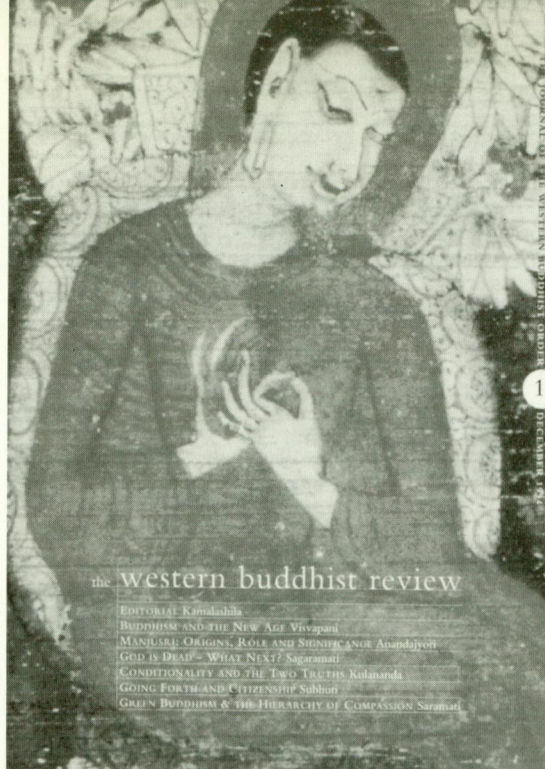


Americans in India

On 27 November 1994 about 5,000 people from all over western India gathered at Saddharma Pradeep (the retreat centre between Bombay and Poona) to witness the public ordinations of fifteen men into the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (as the Western Buddhist Order is known in India).

The public ordinations came at the end of a three-week retreat in the course of which eleven Indians, three Americans, and one Australian had received their private ordinations. In all, the retreat had included about fifty Indian men as well as twenty Westerners from the United States, Germany, Australasia, and Britain. The joyful and contemplative atmosphere of the retreat was transformed into a huge public festival with the arrival of train-loads of blue-shirted men, women in fluorescent saris, and all the attendant caravanserai of children, grand-parents, neighbours, and friends.

This was the first time that Westerners had travelled to India to receive ordination into the WBO and the retreat was a fascinating meeting of cultures. Many of the Indian men were brought up in city slums or primitive villages, their background one of severe poverty, social injustice, and with little formal education. Most of the Westerners were graduates who had grown up in middle-class suburbs. A number of the retreatants arrived in a state of deep culture-shock and, even at Bhaja, the travel, food, accommodation, and sanitary arrangements required certain adjustments. But these differences were transcended by a shared spiritual aspiration and practice and by the friendship this engenders. Back in California Viradhamma is a City Manager. He remarked that he experienced a far deeper affinity with one of his fellow Indian ordinands, an illiterate ex-Untouchable who had earned his livelihood by collecting scrap from street litter, than with his colleagues in the USA.



Reviewing Western Buddhism

The first edition of the *Western Buddhist Review* was published last December. It is a new kind of publication for the FWBO: a journal rather than a magazine, containing articles on matters about which the contributors care deeply and which they have considered carefully. Kamalashila, the editor, hopes that it will be read not only within the FWBO, but also by Buddhist academics and followers of other Buddhist traditions.

The articles in issue 1 range broadly. Vishvapani offers an entertaining analysis of 'Buddhism and the New Age'; similarly Saramati criticizes certain views held by 'Green' Buddhists in a paper on the relation of compassion to spiritual hierarchy. Subhuti's article, 'Going Forth and Citizenship', discusses ethical dilemmas arising for Buddhists in the field of politics. Sagaramati, in 'God is Dead - What Next?' discusses the effects of Nietzsche's misunderstanding of Buddhism on his writings. More traditional Buddhist themes are explored by Kulananda in 'Conditionality and the Two Truths', and by Anandajyoti in 'Manjusri - Origins, Role and Significance'.

The *Western Buddhist Review*, published by the Vajrakuta Buddhist Study Centre, is available from Windhorse Publications.

Sangharakshita Diary

Sangharakshita spent most of his time last winter occupied with writing his memoirs. In all he completed four further chapters, which took him up to the middle of 1955. He cut down to some extent on the number of personal interviews he was able to give, but he was nonetheless able to meet with people involved in the FWBO from many different countries.

Sangharakshita also found time for a few engagements. He spent Christmas 1994 at Madhyamaloka in Birmingham conferring with the presidents and preceptors. A month later he and Kulananda met with Helen Tworkov and Carole Tonkinson who are the editor and managing editor of *Tricycle* magazine, the New York based Buddhist review. A very productive discussion ensued in which the conversation ranged over many issues of common concern to both American and British Buddhists. On another occasion Sangharakshita also had a very friendly meeting with a German Theravadin bhikkhu called Sukhacitto.

Sangharakshita visited three art exhibitions in this period. He saw exhibitions of Byzantine art and culture at the British Museum, German Romanticism at the Hayward Gallery, and Poussin at the Tate.

This summer the Karuna Trust will be providing new ways for Dharmacharis and men who have asked for ordination to get a taste of door-to-door fund-raising. Alongside a men's appeal there will be two special weekends exploring the art of fund-raising and opportunities to accompany experienced fund-raisers on the streets as they endeavour to find new supporters. The aim is to broaden awareness of Karuna's fund-raising methods within the FWBO and attract new energy into this vital activity.

Taravajra, who works full time on fund-raising for the Karuna Trust, writes:

'I have recently returned from a month in India. One evening at the Mahavihara in Poona I met a man called Mr Ubale. He is a Government officer working with computers, and one of the growing number of professional people who are from the ex-Untouchable communities (or Scheduled Castes). Mr Ubale is also a mitra and a passionate follower of Dr Ambedkar, the great leader of



Shivling, a hostel boy from the Latur earthquake area

Opening the door to Karuna fund-raising

the ex-Untouchable people, who converted to Buddhism shortly before his death in 1956. According to Mr Ubale, twenty per cent of the Indian population falls within the Scheduled Castes. This means that there are something like 200,000,000 people who could potentially benefit from the Karuna Trust's projects.

'In the UK there are currently seven full-time members of the Karuna team and a network of contacts at most of the FWBO

centres whose task is to raise money and awareness of the work in India. Most of the £4,000,000 raised so far has come from door-to-door appeals carried out by men and women collecting cash and covenants from the general public. These appeals have also been potent opportunities for the participants to test their Buddhist practice. Out on the street, great reserves of both determination and sensitivity are called for.

'This year Karuna wishes to gain a higher profile within the FWBO, and indeed within the wider Buddhist world. There are many projects that need funding. Three hostels are planned in the region of southern Maharashtra which was recently devastated by an earthquake. Retreat centres are planned at Bodh-gaya and Sarnath: the land has been bought but there is no money to build. We hope that work will start in the next few months on our biggest project to date, the Nagarjuna Institute. On twelve acres of land in Nagpur we hope to create an array of social work and Buddhist institutions including hostels, a training institute, a library, perhaps a school,...

'The list continues but the resources available to respond to these demands inevitably lag behind. We need more money and, more importantly, we need more fund-raisers!'

Anyone interested in helping in any way should contact Taravajra at the Karuna Trust office.

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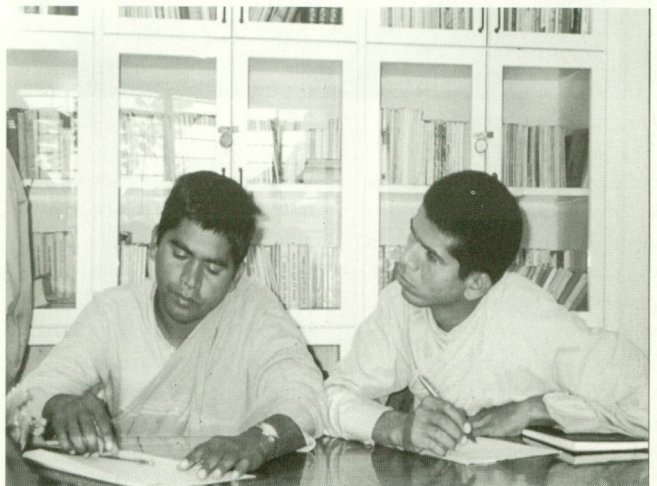
Last January I paid my first visit to India to see the work of TBMSG (as the FWBO is known there). Before leaving I was looking forward to visiting the country as the guest of a community rather than as a tourist. I would, I felt, in some sense be part of India. On the plane to Bombay I was sitting next to an engineer from a relatively high-caste background who lived in Poona, which is the centre of TBMSG activities. We got on very well until I mentioned that I was a Buddhist and that the purpose of my trip was to see my Buddhist friends. An awkward silence descended, as if some invisible barrier had come between us. My companion was plainly embarrassed and the conversation did not resume for several minutes, until he painfully found a way of changing the subject.

This was my introduction to the separation that exists between the millions of Indian Buddhists and much of the society that surrounds them. The great majority of Buddhists are ex-Untouchables who converted to Buddhism in order to find an identity outside the Hindu caste system. More than this, most of those who have converted to Buddhism come from a single ex-Untouchable sub-caste, the Mahars of western India. The result is that in Maharashtra being a 'Buddhist' is often a synonym for being a member of the ex-Mahar community. For some it also implies the political interests of that community, rather than anything more 'spiritual'. It works both ways. Caste Hindus see Buddhists as just another communal group

and some Buddhists themselves see their Buddhism as a form of group identity. The danger is that the vision of a Buddhist India reconstituted on a casteless basis, which informed Dr Ambedkar's decision to initiate the conversions, will be lost in the communal agenda of some ex-Mahars.

When TBMSG was started seventeen years ago its aim was to start to realize Ambedkar's ideals through a movement in which people of all backgrounds could create new identities for themselves as Buddhists. However, TBMSG has drawn its membership largely from the ex-Mahar community, and although it is plainly a spiritual movement of great integrity, people are inevitably influenced, both collectively and individually, by the particular perspective of that community. In order to discuss the effects of this, Lokamitra convened a seminar last January at the Poona Mahavihara to which he invited senior members of the Order in India as well as Subhuti and myself who were visiting from the West.

The seminar was entitled 'Caste Conditioning and Going for Refuge' and in introducing the three days of papers and discussion, Lokamitra commented that he felt the issues under discussion were crucial to the future success of TBMSG. Its aim was to look at the ways in which caste conditioning affected the work of the Movement and the individuals involved in it. The notion that we are all conditioned in various ways is, he suggested, central to Buddhism, and the Buddhist path consists in overcoming



Top: Subhuti, Gaganabodhi, and Mahamati
Below: Ratnasagara and Kumarajiva

that conditioning. Unless people in TBMSG do this they will reconstitute caste influences in the structures of the new movement.

I was surprised to hear Lokamitra say that this was the first time that such issues had been directly addressed systematically. I had assumed, perhaps naively, that Indian Buddhists would be deeply concerned with the effects that the background of Untouchability had had on them. But although there is a passionate interest in the need

to overcome the social, economic, and cultural effects of caste - and although the subject has often been raised in study groups - it seems that its *unconscious* effects have not been addressed in a systematic way. Not for the last time in the seminar, I found myself wondering in how many ways, of which I am quite unaware, I and my Western friends have been unconsciously conditioned by our *own* backgrounds.

Dharmachari Baku spoke movingly about his own



Amoghasiddhi and Lokamitra

childhood experiences of caste discrimination. But how did such experiences affect him in the present, and were younger generations (whose encounters with the stigma of Untouchability were often much more indirect) affected in the same way? Is the lack of confidence that many Indian Buddhists seem to experience attributable to the experience of Untouchability? And where does general human conditioning end and where do the particular effects of caste begin? All those involved found there was much material here for reflection.

Then arose the question of the ways in which the internal dynamics of the Order are themselves subtly affected by caste attitudes. Ratnasagara, the Chairman of the Hsuan Tsang Retreat Centre, spoke eloquently about some of the difficulties Indian Order members have faced in attempting to create a genuinely universal spiritual community. As the discussion

progressed I became aware how difficult this has been in a culture that traditionally does not permit people to take initiative and responsibility, where hierarchy is associated with caste domination, and where collective identities are rigidly defined along communal lines. Nonetheless, the ideals of the Order – a free association of individuals from all races and backgrounds – are themselves a response to these tendencies, and I was very impressed by the depth of faith the Indian Dharmacharis have in the Order and in the Movement they are creating. In India, the task of creating a new society is both more of a tangible reality and more of a struggle than in the West. It confronts forces that have a stubborn tenacity unlike anything I have seen before.

Part of the answer has to lie in the extension of the work of TBMSG to communities other than the Mahars. This is already happening as TBMSG activities develop in Uttar

Pradesh, Goa, and Gujarat where they encounter quite different communities. This in turn has raised issues around the integration of people from these varying backgrounds into the collective life of the Order. Amoghasiddhi, the chairman of the Nagpur Centre, spoke of his own experience of trying to attract people from all backgrounds to TBMSG activities. Young people, it seems, are less concerned with communal identity than are older generations and activities such as karate classes have appealed to them in particular. The social work of Bahujan Hitay also creates bridges into other communities.

Amoghasiddhi's conclusion won general assent. What appeals universally is the Dharma, because it addresses people individually rather than as members of a particular group. He urged that Order members place more emphasis on basic Dharma teachings in public forums and in their own lives. As people become more truly individual, he argued, they will be able to transcend the limitations of their backgrounds without forgetting them. As Dr Ambedkar said: 'He who forgets history cannot make history.'

As recent developments have emphasised, the political situation in India has the potential for unleashing fierce, ancient communal hatreds of which Buddhists could easily find themselves the victims. In such times it is doubly important that they are themselves free of communal feelings and are able to make a positive contribution to diffusing such tensions. For good and ill, the stakes are very high. **Vishvapani**

Dharmachari Bodhipala

Dharmachari Bodhipala died on 10 February 1995 at the age of 58. He was the only Order member in Pulgaon, a town in eastern Maharashtra where he had started TBMSG activities.

Bodhipala grew up in a very poor family in a small village near Pulgaon, and he worked for many years as the teacher in the village school. In 1980 he heard of the activities of the newly-founded TBMSG and travelled the 40 kilometres to Wardha to meet Sanghasena. This was to become a regular journey when, soon after, regular TBMSG activities were established in Wardha. Bodhipala was one of the most faithful supporters of those activities.

He was ordained at Bhaja in 1990 and soon after took voluntary retirement in order to work full-time for the Buddhist movement. He became the warden of the boys' hostel in Wardha for some time, but when his asthma forced him to retire he decided to devote himself to the practice and propagation of Buddhism.

Under Bodhipala's guidance thriving Dharma classes developed in Pulgaon as well as social work activities in the form of two kindergartens. His friends remember him for his kindness, sincerity, and friendliness and for his unswerving devotion to meditation and study.

The image of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk burning himself to death while seated quietly in meditation posture became one of the emblematic images of the Vietnam war: a symbol of non-violent protest against the sufferings that the war imposed upon the Vietnamese. But in being turned into a symbol the exact nature of the monk's protest is seldom recalled. It was not aimed at the war in general, but was more specifically a protest against the suppression of Buddhism by the US-backed, Catholic-dominated regime of South Vietnam. Vietnamese Buddhists found themselves caught between the contrary forces of authoritarian Communism and despotic, colonialy-inspired capitalism. They tried to find non-violent ways of addressing the conflict rather than standing passively by, but many were killed or imprisoned as a result. Their predicament epitomized the fate of Asian Buddhism throughout the twentieth century. Millions of people have been killed because of their Buddhist beliefs, and countless others have suffered some kind of persecution.

Twenty years after the fall of Saigon, the difficulties of Vietnamese Buddhists are very far from over. A communist government is still in power and, despite some liberalizations in recent years, it continues to regard independent-minded bodies, such as the Buddhist organizations, as threats to its authority. In fact, despite the guarantees of freedom of expression and freedom of religion in Vietnam's 1992 constitution, recent months have seen a fresh wave of arrests and repression.



Arrests in Vietnam

The first arrest was made on 29 October when Thich Long Tri, the abbot of a leading temple, arrived in Ho Chi Minh City to head a relief mission for the victims of floods in the Mekong Delta, where over 400 had died and thousands of others were made homeless. The United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBVC), which was banned in 1981, organized a relief convoy which the authorities deemed 'subversive' and detrimental to 'religion and national solidarity'. Thich Long Tri is now in detention. A number of others involved in the mission are also in detention, and government authorities later boasted of having 'smashed the [UBVC] plan'. Thich Huyen Quang, the Supreme Patriarch of the UBVC, started a hunger strike in protest at the arrests, and on 29 December he, too, was arrested and is due to stand trial for 'provoking trouble contrary to Vietnamese law'. The Secretary General of UBVC was also arrested and is now under house arrest.

Growing discontent against

government control over and repression of Buddhist activities has extended to the officially approved Vietnamese Buddhist Church (VBC). VBC protests in November 1994 against discriminatory entrance criteria and the obligatory political content in the syllabus of schools which the VBC runs were met with violent police action and further arrests. But these protests are expressions of more general resentment at government interference in religious affairs. For example, 1993 guidelines about the ordination of clergy state that 'the principal criterion for the choice of candidates is their good performance of their civic duties. The course of civic education must be integrated into the programmes of schools ... and considered as a major subject.'

Vietnam needs and wants to re-enter the wider community of nations. It is up to Buddhists in the West to insist to their governments that Vietnam's repression of its own citizens be taken seriously into account.

The Dharma school

The Dharma School, Britain's first ever Buddhist school, opened in September 1994. It has eight pupils and is currently squeezed into the front room of a house in suburban Brighton. But interest and enthusiasm for the project has been so great that it will soon be moving to much larger premises.

The school grew from the initiative of parents involved with the Theravadin Amaravati Buddhist Centre (which holds an annual summer camp for families). But it is non-denominational, open to children from all religious backgrounds, and now has the involvement of people from a variety of Buddhist traditions, including the FWBO.

The teachers are committed to finding ways of teaching which are expressions of Buddhist values, at the same time covering the usual school syllabus. The school has already outgrown its existing space and has found much larger premises in a former nursery school on the edge of the South Downs. This will allow it to take over fifty pupils and teach children up to the age of eleven. Over £200,000 has already been raised towards the move, but the school is appealing for a further £75,000 to complete the purchase and provide an endowment.

Kulananda comments 'The Dharma School in Brighton, which allows children to receive a non-sectarian Buddhist education, is one of the most welcome recent developments on the British Buddhist scene.'

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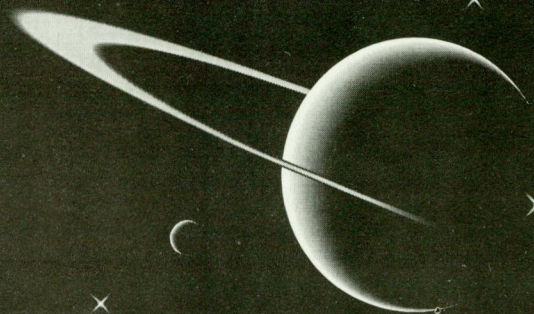
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homosexuality: has everyone got it wrong?

HOMOSEXUALITY is back in the British news with 'outed' bishops and Cardinal Hume's new soft line on 'gay love'. Whilst this is a refreshing change from Leviticus and its 'abominations', or from the Pope's 'abhorrent deviation', it still leaves us with a view of gay sex as morally wrong.

Where does one look for a sensible attitude to homosexuality? Not to Islam for certain, or to the hummings and hawings of Anglicanism. Perhaps then to Buddhism?

A few years ago I gave a talk at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre entitled 'Buddhism, Homosexuality, and Desire'. This was followed by an eight-week course for gay men and subsequently by retreats and weekend events. This provoked, amongst other things, an angry letter from a Theravadin bhikkhu saying that my course had confirmed everything he had always believed – which was that the FWBO was promoting sodomy and buggery! Oh, really? Is it true that the FWBO is promoting gay sex?

First things first. Sex, according to Buddhism, is inherently unskillful, in that it is an expression of craving. For Buddhism, sexuality is something that one seeks ultimately to transcend, and contented celibacy is the ideal. Its attitude to homosexuality, properly understood, is a non-attitude. There is nothing *a priori* unskillful about being a gay man or a lesbian. There is nothing that makes gay sex more or less unskillful than heterosexual sex. Buddhism does not see homosexuality as a problem either spiritually, ethically, or psychologically. It sees craving as a problem, yes, but whether that craving is expressed in sexual relationships with the opposite sex or with the same sex is neither here or there. Unthinking arguments that suggest that heterosexuality is in some curious way more 'normal' can as easily be turned on their head. One could also argue that homosexuality is less polarized and, being less tied up with children and family responsibilities, more spiritually efficacious.

The Judeo-Christian tradition has queered the pitch when it comes to sex, tending to see it as either sinful and immoral outside of marriage or else blessed within it. Seeing the body as sinful and sex as bad leads one to the spiritually crippling effects of irrational

guilt, self-hatred, and emotional alienation. On the other hand, seeing sex as blessed and sanctified within marriage tends to leave one in the 'cotton wool world' of sentimental affection, neurotic dependence, and rationalized craving.

Buddhism does not see sexual relationships as a spiritual matter and for this reason it has no marriage ceremony and does not engage in pseudo-spiritual fantasies about 'the loving couple'. However, transcending sexuality is a difficult matter and one that takes place gradually as one develops towards the ideal of human Enlightenment. If we are to make that move, if – gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual – we are to tread the Buddhist path, we will need to make sure that we are not burdened with the heavy baggage of Christian conditioning or confuse the real morality of Buddhism with the conventional morality of the day.

In a world that historically has seen homosexuality as an abomination, an offence against God, and an illness, the whole issue is understandably a touchy one. It challenges our conditioning and assumptions. Lesbians and gay men have long been aware that the major spiritual traditions of the West *say* that they are for everyone, but that when it comes to homosexuality and the vexed issue of gay sex, they are not. Buddhism is a practical path of spiritual development for all. The courses for gay men and the more recent ones for lesbians say simply: 'This includes you.'

Moreover, with the recent boom in gay clubs, pubs, and cafés and its attendant facile hedonism and sexual consumerism, Buddhism, and particularly the FWBO, offer individual gay men and lesbians a genuine path that neither denies their sexuality nor limits them within it. The FWBO offers gay men and lesbians incomparably more scope for personal development than the gay scene or gay politics possibly can.

On the issue of homosexuality, as in so many areas of modern life, we find, as Sangharakshita says, 'how totally we (in the FWBO) are in opposition to our environment and the way in which society at large thinks.... It is as though we represent a completely new beginning in just about every way.'

Maitreyabandhu

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