



golden **drum**

SANGHARAKSHITA AT

70

Golden Drum 38

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1	Editorial	An unfashionable influence
2	Matters of Life and Death	Sangharakshita in conversation with Vidyadevi
	The Translator	A poem by Manjusvara
10	The Message of the Bowl	Padmavajra explores the theme of Going Forth in Sangharakshita's poetry
14	Book Reviews	<i>A Path with Heart</i> and <i>Wisdom of the Buddha</i>
20	News	Activities and events around the FWBO
23	Outlook	The tale of a Buddhist soldier
28	Comment	Mahaprabha on the last taboo: money

an unfashionable influence

Throughout his long career as a Buddhist teacher, whatever the current trend in spiritual teaching, Sangharakshita, who founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in 1967, has remained resolutely unfashionable. Old-fashioned to the extent that one sometimes feels that he would be more at home in an earlier century (perhaps the eighteenth, the time of Dr Johnson, whose *Dictionary* is Sangharakshita's favourite book), he has always favoured carefully constructed sentences over easy soundbites, and the rigorous application of clear thinking over comforting but vague platitudes. Above all, and increasingly, he refuses to compromise.

The facts of his life – the London childhood spent confined to bed devouring literature, the discovery that he was a Buddhist at the age of sixteen, the journey to India in the war, the years as a wandering truth-seeker and hermitage-dweller, the hippie days in sixties Britain – are already the stuff of FWBO legend. Today there are many people deeply involved in the FWBO, even members of the Order, who have never met him, but who regard him as the most influential person in their lives. I know people – in the West and in India – who are quite sure that they would be miserable, mad, or even dead if they had not come across Sangharakshita's unique exposition of the Dharma.

It is only natural that we should feel grateful. But in the West we may be at a loss to know how to express our gratitude. We live in a society which creates and destroys idols, in which some people are unbelievably gullible and others are immovably sceptical, and we cannot but be affected by this. The gratitude we feel may be tinged with cynicism, with an irresistible desire to expose weaknesses, or with a passive admiration that leaves us overawed, unable to imagine developing in ourselves the spiritual qualities we so admire.

Sangharakshita has always been careful to avoid being thought of as a 'guru', a word which, despite its beautiful original meaning, 'a bringer from darkness to light', has acquired unhelpful connotations. He has made the point that an effective relationship between a Buddhist teacher and his or her student depends not on absolute faith but on contact and receptivity. He has also pointed out that those involved in a Buddhist movement must recognize that they are capable of equalling and even surpassing their leader's spiritual attainment. Unless they think in those terms, how could the Movement continue beyond the death of its founder? It would just collapse.

Sangharakshita has, it seems to me, made a point of being uncharismatic. More than anyone I can think of, he is able just to be himself, whatever anyone else thinks. This self-possession has a strong effect. I remember once going to see him and, making conversation, remarking brightly that I wanted to go to Italy. 'Ah,' he said, 'to what purpose?' 'To look at works of art' is what I said, but in my heart I felt exposed in all my pettiness and vagueness. As those three words, 'To what purpose?' rang in my ears, they seemed to cut through me and expose the silly futility of my life, the vanity of human wishes. This is the effect, I suppose, of meeting someone whose own purpose in life is so clear and unswerving.

He is, of course, very kind. On another occasion I was in the depths of depression when I visited him. I couldn't work, I couldn't sleep – I felt so miserable and ashamed of myself. I think I somehow expected to be scolded and told to go away and do twenty *metta bhavanas*. What Bhante said was 'Johnson used to say "Divert yourself. Even a game of cards, played for just a little money..."' Sangharakshita is never, somehow, what you expect.

These days, most people get to know him through his writings and taped lectures on the Dharma. We can also read his memoirs – he is at present working on the third volume – and Subhuti's biography, *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, which was published this year. And we can read what he has called the Cinderella of his writings, his poems, which give a particular kind of insight into his spiritual career – 'revealing, or at least suggesting', as he has said, 'aspects of my life which would not otherwise be known'. In this issue of *Golden Drum*, Padmavajra explores this way in to an understanding of Sangharakshita's life. His article gives us a taste of a treat in store – a hardback edition of Sangharakshita's complete poems, including many never printed before, to be published this month by Windhorse Publications.

One thing that Sangharakshita's poetry reveals is that he has had to struggle to overcome many obstacles in his life, both inner and outer. It may be natural to think 'It's all very well for him, he's just naturally spiritual' – but a little reflection shows that all spiritual attainment must be based on effort made at some time, in this life or in previous ones. Spiritual progress is not a matter of luck or fate. What one person has overcome, we too can overcome.

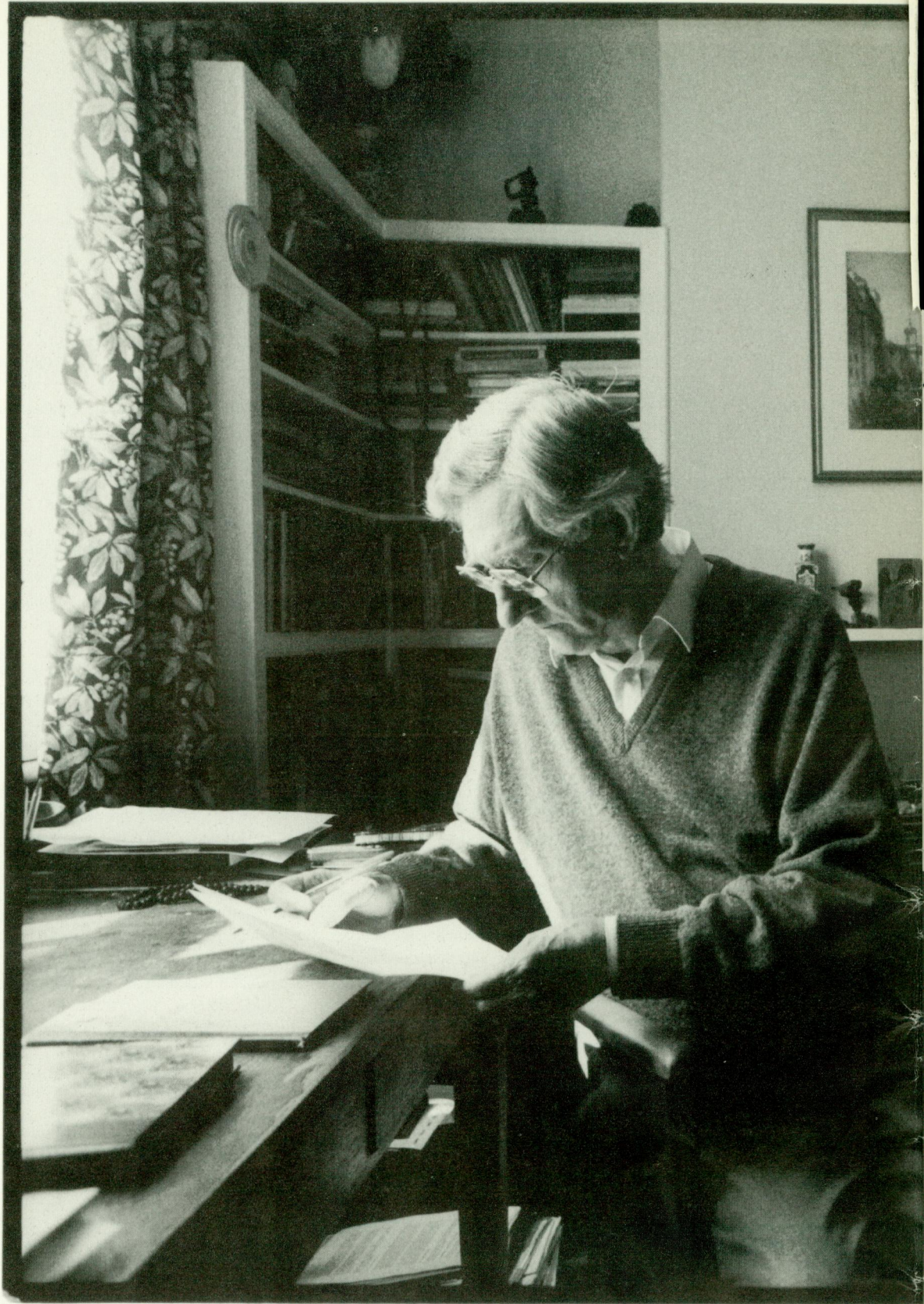
It has clearly not been at all easy to be the founder of a spiritual movement. For one thing, I imagine that people very seldom see you as a human being, as yourself. In his poem 'The Wondering Heart', Sangharakshita cries out:

*What can it do, when fairest words
Are changed to foul by devilish art?
What can it do when praises turn
To bitter taunts that scar and burn,
What can it do, the weary heart?*

Now, at seventy, Sangharakshita can see the fruits of his labours ripening in many parts of the world. And, with the establishment of the Preceptors College, he has done what he can to make sure that his work is not lost, but will continue to grow. When I visited him recently to interview him for this *Golden Drum*, however, it was clear that he was in no sense thinking of retiring. As we talked, the conversation ranging from the disappearance of forests from the world and the Buddhist tradition of planting trees to whether Sangharakshita has any regrets (not having learned to play the harpsichord, among others), what struck me again and again was Sangharakshita's vitality. He does not seem like an old man in any sense beyond the literal one of having lived for seventy years. This *Golden Drum*, then, which includes a poem specially written for the occasion, is not only a celebration of his many past achievements, but a look forward to the next phase of his remarkable life. Happy birthday, Bhante. **Vidyadevi**

SANGHARAKSHITA AT

70



LIFE AND



MATTERS OF DEATH

SANGHARAKSHITA IN CONVERSATION WITH VIDYADEVI

First of all, what led you to decide to appoint a College of preceptors and a Council as a way of handing on your responsibilities?

It's really quite simple. I have a lot of responsibilities which have to be handed on. Either I hand them over to one person or to a number of people. I thought it would be better to hand them over to a number of people working together in co-operation, partly because the responsibilities are growing all the time and I don't think it would have been fair to hand them all just to one person.



And perhaps there are also benefits from having a number of people sharing that responsibility?

Yes, provided, of course, that those people are the more senior and more experienced members of the Order, and that they are able to work smoothly and harmoniously together on a basis of mutual friendship.

Are there any precedents for this?

In a sense there are precedents everywhere. Although some Buddhist traditions do emphasize the guru, and although there is often a formal or ceremonial head of a tradition or lineage, it is usually in fact a body of senior and more experienced people who give general guidance to the direction of that particular tradition.

What areas of the FWBO do you feel the College members should pay attention to over the next few years?

That's rather a big question. I'll say just a few general things. I think the first thing that the members of the College have to do is to strengthen their own friendships and learn to work harmoniously together. Some of them, of course, will be living together, the men in one community, the women in another. So that's the first thing. They need to really work upon and deepen their friendships among themselves. In a way everything flows from that. Then they need to look carefully at the Movement as a whole, and the preceptors especially have to make sure that the standards represented by effective and possibly by real Going for Refuge are maintained throughout the Movement, and throughout the Order especially. They have to make sure that the same standards are observed throughout the Movement, with regard to meditation, to study, to team-based Right Livelihood, and so on. In this way they will act as a unifying influence.

The time may come when our conditions will be much more difficult, and that depth of friendship may be the thing that will hold us together.

Yes indeed. There might be a war, for instance, or a severe economic decline, or a very hostile non-Buddhist religious movement trying to wipe us out, if not in one country, in another.

It's your wish that a library be built in your memory. Why?

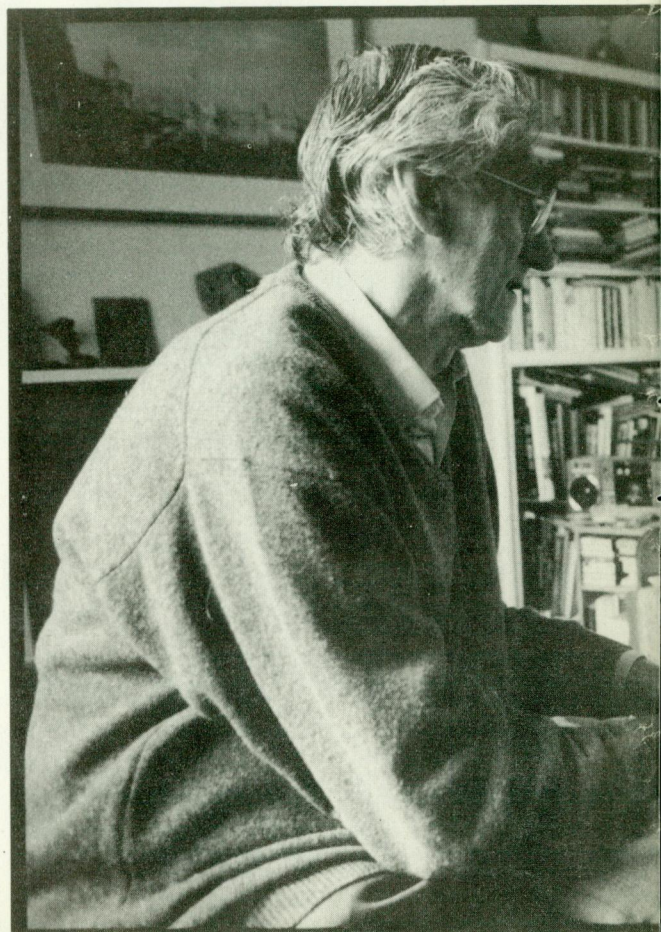
It's more that I have a wish that the books I've collected over the years should be preserved for the benefit of the Movement. That's the basis of it. Quite a few of the books I've collected are out of print or difficult to get hold of or very expensive. The collection needs to be housed and catalogued properly, and it also needs proper care and expansion. There are big gaps in the Buddhist collection which I would like to see filled.

When you think of your life, do you think of yourself as having been involved with a series of projects, the FWBO having been just one of them, or is that not how you see it?

I don't really see it like that at all. It's all within the scope of the Dharma – practising the Dharma, studying the Dharma, trying to spread and communicate the Dharma. It's as though there's just one big, continuous, ongoing project which is still going on. I certainly don't think that the 'FWBO project' is now more or less complete as far as I am concerned. Even if I do get on with some more writing after my withdrawal from organizational responsibilities, that writing, I hope, will be relevant to the Movement.

Do you feel you've succeeded with the FWBO in terms of what you set out to do?

I didn't set out at the beginning with some sort of blueprint, so there's no question of whether or not I have been able to execute that blueprint. But things have grown, things have developed. I think that I – or we – have been reasonably successful, certainly not unsuccessful, but there is so much still to be done, so many possibilities of further expansion, that I feel no inclination either to sit on my own laurels, such as they are, or to encourage others to sit on their laurels, those that have them. I hope that everybody will carry on doing more and more – not in a superficial activist way, but in a very genuine way, on the basis of their own



understanding and experience, and in co-operation and harmony with each other.

Subhuti has recently made a connection between spiritual hierarchy and the taking on of responsibility in an organizational sense. Is there any danger of taking something on in an external way as a substitute for commitment to the development of one's inner life?

Clearly there must be both. Sometimes it's the other way round – you escape into subjectivity in order to evade objective responsibility. So yes, one has to avoid both those dangers.

Can it be right for Order members to be giving the impression of being busy all the time?

Well, if they are busy they can't help giving the impression of being busy, but one should never try to give the impression that one is very busy as a way of increasing one's importance in other people's eyes. On the other hand, if someone is very busy externally, one shouldn't assume that they're 'out of touch with themselves'. And if they don't seem to be doing very much, one shouldn't assume that they are very much *in* touch with themselves.

You are withdrawing from your responsibilities to the FWBO. How far away, so to speak, are you going?

I've always said I will be withdrawing from *organizational* responsibilities (though by 'organizational' I don't mean something very mundane and unspiritual – perhaps practical would be a better word). I don't intend to withdraw from contact with people within the Movement. I may well be seeing quite a lot of Order members and mitras and others, as well as Buddhists outside the Movement. The assumption would seem to be that I'm going to go away to some little cave somewhere and be completely incommunicado, but that is not my idea at all. I may go away from time to time, say to somewhere like Guhyaloka, but I don't see that as being my permanent life-style.

Would you wish it to be?

I'd quite like to spend time on my own from time to time, but at present I have the greater part of the day on my own and I'm quite happy with that. I get on with my writing.

So you don't mind too much where you are?

If it was a possibility without jeopardizing other things I wanted to do, obviously I'd prefer to be surrounded by beautiful scenery, but that's certainly not a determining factor. Sometimes I'm a bit surprised that Order members who are thinking of going here or there, or setting up a centre here or there, seem to think first of all about whether it's the sort of place they'd like to live in, not whether it's the sort of place that really needs the Dharma. This is not very Bodhisattva-like, one might say. It's a bit self-indulgent.

But don't we need to consider how much we're affected by our surroundings?

As a practising Buddhist you shouldn't really be too strongly affected by your surroundings, or too dependent on having very supportive conditions. You don't want to put yourself into unnecessarily difficult situations, obviously, but you should have a certain independence from external conditions. Your moods should not depend upon whether you are surrounded by trees or whether you've got nice neighbours, whether you live in a nice street in a nice area in a nice part of town.

Being a nice Buddhist!

Yes.

That brings to mind another question. It seems that we are looking to spread the Dharma first to places which are more settled, more stable. Would it just be impractical to go to, say, Bosnia, where conditions are very difficult, and attempt to teach meditation?

I think we should go to places not only where we're most needed, but where we could most fruitfully employ our energy, and not just waste it. At present that means going to situations which are stable enough for us to get something started, to plant something that is going to last. If, on the other hand, an individual Order member has a strong urge to go to Bosnia and teach meditation to people there regardless, I'm not going to discourage them.

Subhuti says in his recent biography, Bringing Buddhism to the West, that you are considering what he calls 'a work that will place all your thinking in a clear philosophical context'. That sounds intriguing.

That does sound rather ambitious. What I'm going to do initially is to try to clarify my own terminology. In the past, in lectures and seminars, I think my English terminology has been rather loose and inconsistent. I tend to do my Buddhist thinking in Pali and Sanskrit – not of course just in Pali and Sanskrit, but using Pali and Sanskrit key terms, which I translate into English as I go along. But there are some English terms that I use which don't exactly correspond to any Pali or Sanskrit term, but which give expression to a very definitely Buddhist attitude or set of ideas. I think my English terminology needs straightening out. I'm thinking of words like 'individual' and 'person', 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned', 'positive' and 'negative', and even terms like 'Enlightenment' and 'the transcendental'. 'Transcendental' has a meaning in Western philosophical thought, but when I use the term I always use it as the English equivalent of the term





lokuttara. So I want initially to clarify my own terminology, and then see whether that leads to any more general considerations of a philosophical nature. If anybody comes across a term which I use regularly but inconsistently, or the meaning of which is not clear, they can write to me and ask me to include it in this list.

In your essay on Buddhism and William Blake you wrote 'Buddhism will not really spread in the West until it speaks the language of Western culture.' In recent times arts events have become a very important part of FWBO activities. How do you see this development?

Frankly I don't see arts events as having very much to do with Buddhism speaking the language of Western culture. For that, first of all there needs to be a very deep experience of Buddhism, and perhaps within the FWBO collectively we don't yet have that. Perhaps a few individuals approach it, but no more than that. And then there has to be a very deep immersion in Western culture, even the creation of a new Western culture.

I've always encouraged the practice of the arts, and I have always seen the serious practice of any of the arts as constituting a spiritual discipline, but I emphasize the serious practising. I think both inside and especially outside the FWBO there's a lot of dabbling in art, whether it's writing, painting, or whatever. If you dabble in Buddhism and dabble in one or other of the arts, that's really got nothing to do with Buddhism learning to speak the language of Western culture. If we're not careful that expression can become a bit of a cliché.

So how can Buddhism learn to speak the language of Western culture?

Well, it comes down to individuals. When one speaks of Buddhism, one means practising Buddhists. So Western Buddhists have to deepen their experience of the Dharma, and communicate that as best they can to people in the West who want to hear about it. They will therefore need to develop media of communication, including communicating through the arts – because the arts in the widest sense, including literature, do have a very powerful appeal, and reach far beyond the boundaries of organized religion. But it's not as though there's an art there ready to be used. You probably have to create the medium that you want to use; it has to grow out of your practice and experience of the Dharma.

There are two approaches to art: the passive or receptive, and the creative. The passive – the enjoyment of great works of art, great literature, great paintings, great music – can certainly help refine our emotional state. But that is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the more creative side of artistic activity, communication of Buddhist values through the medium of the arts, not in an artificial or didactic way, but a communication which takes place out of a deep involvement with Buddhism and with one or another of the arts.

I think the arts events taking place in the FWBO fall more into the former category – which is fine. Encouraging people to refine their emotional life through appreciating and enjoying the arts does contribute to their spiritual development. But the communication of the Dharma through works of art which you yourself create is another matter. Also, despite the language I've been using, I don't want to draw too hard and fast a distinction between the Dharma that you communicate and the work of art through which you communicate it. The two should be a sort of seamless garment, as it were.

Are there any developments in the area of the arts that you'd particularly like to see?

I'd just like to see them all develop. I'd like us to be producing works of visual art and music. For instance, I'd like to see a really good musical setting of the Sevenfold Puja, creating an appropriate mood for each of its seven stages. And I'd like to see the Buddha's life being illustrated. Of course there are some beautiful Buddha images that have been made by Order members and Friends. Perhaps that is one of the areas where we have produced something reasonably good. At the very least they are a step in the right direction.

At the end of Bringing Buddhism to the West Subhuti says that you 'regard these present times as largely ones of degeneracy and increasing barbarism'. There is a teaching that whole civilizations, being impermanent, will inevitably decline. In these 'barbarous' times, what do you think about that traditional teaching?

Some Buddhist schools in the Far East seem to believe that decline is inevitable – there's nothing we can do about it, we live in the age of decay, the dark age, the *kali-yuga*. But that's more a Hindu teaching than a Buddhist one, though I'm afraid this line of thought does rather disfigure some of Dr Conze's writings. I certainly don't believe that decay and decline are inevitable, whether for the collective or for the individual. Circumstances may be very difficult but that doesn't mean that you have to resign yourself to them. You can struggle against them, overcome them, even reverse them.

This raises the question 'What conditions are conducive to spiritual development?' Difficult times might be conducive – Would perhaps call forth more faith, more energy, more determination, more devotion. So yes, there is that question too. What, ultimately speaking, are difficult conditions? Life itself is a difficult condition because it's subject to suffering, to old age, disease, and death. If you're not going to be able to do anything worthwhile under unfavourable conditions, you might as well give up in view of the fact that you have been born, are going to grow old (with or without illness), and die. What could be more difficult than that?

So we should be confident that positive actions will have a positive effect –

And that there can be a positive response even to apparently unfavourable conditions. Say someone we know is dying of AIDS. Well, that's a very difficult situation, certainly difficult for that person. But that difficult situation may call forth so much love and sympathy and support from the friends and family of the person who is ill that in a sense the situation becomes very positive. Obviously one doesn't wish that anybody should get AIDS so that all that love may be called forth, but when something like that does happen, one doesn't have to just fold one's hands and lament. There can be a positive response on the part of all concerned.

There's the idea that the teachings of one Buddha will disappear before the arising of another.

That may well happen, but it doesn't have to happen. You can practise the Dharma in any situation, however apparently difficult. The Dharma is not like a rock that is gradually, inevitably worn away by the wind and the rain. It exists in the lives and hearts of people – to the extent that we practise it. Inasmuch as we have free will according to Buddhism, there's nothing to stop us practising the Dharma, so no individual is bound to decline.

Do you think that in the FWBO in the West we place too much importance on having good conditions?

I think perhaps we do. I think we've become too accustomed to comfort. Yes, it is good to have conditions which conduce to one's personal spiritual development, but it's very easy to begin to see that in terms of having easy, comfortable conditions. If you don't feel easy or comfortable with a certain set of conditions, you might think that they're not helpful to your spiritual development, and then you start thinking that you need better conditions. In that way, instead of thinking in terms of what *really* conduces to your spiritual development, you think in terms of what you like and what you dislike. There's a subtle shift. I think this is a trap into which people sometimes fall.

In Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition, Subhuti says 'Unless the new society starts to influence its environment, it will become increasingly isolated and therefore increasingly vulnerable.' As we move into the twenty-first century, to what extent is it a priority for us to begin to influence our environment in social, economic, and political ways?

This is the sort of complex question that I will just leave the members of the College and the Council to sort out. Whether or not I myself will see the twenty-first century is an open question. By the way, don't forget it isn't our Buddhist twenty-first century, just as it isn't going to be our second millennium. That belongs to a quite different chronology. So we mustn't think too much in these terms.

Are there any specific areas in which we might begin to have an effect on our environment?

It depends on the scale upon which one is thinking. Certainly one should try and have a good effect on one's immediate environment. I think it's a question of taking it step by step.

I know that there are places where FWBO groups are thinking of building their own Buddhist centres rather than converting existing buildings.

I think this would certainly be good, because then we'd be creating something more adapted to our own requirements. We've done this fairly successfully in India; we could do it in the West too. We've created our own images. Why not create our own temples, centres, communities, to house them?

It would be an opportunity for us to express ourselves in a new way – there are limits to what you can do to an existing building.

Yes. If, for instance, we built a community house, it would be built in accordance with our own life-style, so it would express that life-style, just as a monastery does. It would have a shrine-room and a common-room, study-bedrooms – some for one person, some for two or three – and a guest room and a spacious kitchen, a garden and a workshop. That would be an expression of the way we live, so that from the outside we don't look just like a family even down to the lace curtains. Just thinking off the top of my head, I think we should start by asking ourselves what our practical requirements are, and build accordingly. The development of a particular architectural style can come later.

You've said that Order members should remember that we are citizens. How does that relate to being an anagarika, a cityless one?

Literally *anagarika* means 'homeless one'. It is literally possible to get away from home in the narrow sense, but nowadays you can't get away from the State. In the Buddha's time in India perhaps you could, because there were forests where the king's writ didn't run. But nowadays every part of the earth's surface belongs to one or another sovereign state which has its own government and its own laws. If you live within that state, you can't escape from those laws. You may disagree with them, you may disobey them if you think that they are wrong or unjust, but you will have to suffer the consequences. So the *anagarika*, though he or she may leave home, can't literally leave the State. You may have an international outlook, you may not identify yourself mentally or emotionally with any particular state or nation or country or tribe or caste, but the world doesn't let you get away with that. And since we are perforce citizens, we have rights and we have duties. It's our responsibility as Buddhists to exercise those rights and perform those duties in a way which is most in accordance with the Dharma and most furthers the purposes of the Dharma.

Although I say 'remember that you're a citizen', I'm not suggesting that you are likely to forget, because you are always going to receive your tax returns, for instance, or in some countries your call-up papers, and so on and so forth. But we need to remember that we are citizens in the sense that we try to connect our rights and duties as citizens with our practice of Buddhism, rather than somehow keeping the two things in separate compartments of our lives.

You said once that you'd like to be remembered as a clear thinker. I didn't mean of course that I would like to be remembered only for that.

No, no. But why clear thinking in particular? What's so special about clarity of thought?

I think I've been inclined to emphasize clarity of thought because



in the course of my life, both in India and in the West, I've come up against so much muddled thinking. If you don't think clearly, if your thinking is muddled and confused, you can't develop Right View. And if you don't develop Right View, you can't develop Perfect Vision. It's as simple as that. So clear thinking, leading to

Right View, leading to Perfect Vision, seems to be a particular need of the times.

But in your teaching about Perfect Vision, you say that the arising of glimpses of vision need not be anything to do with thought.

That is true. It doesn't have to have anything to do with thought. It can arise independently of clear thinking, but not in the presence of muddled thinking.

So it is more to do with untangling muddled thinking.

Yes – and letting your imagination shine forth.

In his talk on FWBO Day this year Kamalashila said he thought that in general people in the FWBO lack mindfulness. Do you agree?

Yes. In fact, I have made the point myself more than once. I think people in the FWBO are not nearly mindful enough, and I include Order members in that. There's not enough mindfulness, awareness, in the affairs of everyday life, in carrying out one's ordinary everyday activities and in speaking. There's a lot of unmindful talk. Fairly recently I was concerned to learn that some Order members still indulged sometimes in bad language. That means that there isn't sufficient awareness of how one is speaking. I think it's very necessary to be aware of the person to whom we are speaking, and whether what we say is appropriate and skilful, conducive to harmony, and so on. And even, just to come down to quite ordinary, everyday situations, I've sometimes not been very happy to see how unmindfully people eat. I'm certainly not happy to see Order members walking along the street stuffing things into their mouths in the most unmindful way. That's the sort of thing I'm thinking of.

There are possibly two reasons why people in the FWBO don't seem to attach sufficient importance to mindfulness. I think they are rightly concerned not to develop alienated awareness. But that doesn't mean you should not develop awareness at all. And then I think – as a leftover, perhaps, from the sixties – there's an idea that you should be spontaneous and natural, and that being very mindful is somehow unnatural, as though mindfulness is almost *per se* alienated. So the practice of mindfulness tends to be undervalued. But as the Buddha said, mindfulness is always useful.

Which living person do you most admire?

Oh dear. Well, I'm glad you said 'most' because I can't say that there are many living persons that I admire at all. It's easy to admire someone for a particular trait, but you might not admire them as a total person. As I look around the world, even the

Buddhist world, I can't say that there are many people whom I admire at all. But if I was pressed, I would say Allen Ginsberg. It's not that I admire everything about him. It's not that I particularly like his poetry – in fact I think I rather don't like it. And it's not that I necessarily agree with all his ideas. But I do admire his honesty, and that is a very rare quality these days. It seems to me that Allen Ginsberg has always been completely honest, and I admire him very much for that.

Do you admire the Dalai Lama?

I think 'admire' is too strong a word. I certainly appreciate him, I appreciate the non-violent stand he has taken in connection with Tibet and China.

And within our own movement?

There's a lot of people I admire within the Movement and within the Order because I know their history. I know what difficult backgrounds they've come from, and what sufferings they've undergone before coming into contact with the Movement and changing their lives. So yes, there are lots of relatively unknown people, certainly unknown to the outside world, within our own Movement, our own Order, whom I do admire very much for the effort they've made over so many years, and are still making.

Have you any particular travel plans over the next few years? And is there anywhere in particular you'd like to visit?

I very definitely have travel plans, principally in fulfilment of a longstanding promise. I have been promising for years to visit New Zealand and Australia, and I think the time has come for me to keep that promise. So, all being well, I shall be leaving sometime in the late summer or early autumn of next year, and visiting first of all America and our centres there, then going across to Australia to visit our Sydney and Melbourne centres, and to New Zealand to visit our Auckland and Wellington centres. I have no plans to give talks or lead retreats or anything like that. I just want to see something of those two countries, do a little sightseeing in each, and of course meet up with people.

As for wishing to see places, I think it's rather late in life for that. These days I only do sightseeing as it were in the course of duty, just as side-interest. I would have liked to have seen, among other places, Istanbul and New Mexico, but it looks rather doubtful as to whether I'll see either.

Why New Mexico particularly?

I'm interested in New Mexico through my interest in D.H. Lawrence, because he has described it so beautifully in some of his writings, especially the country above Santa Fe. If there is any possibility of FWBO activities starting up there I may go. But I'm doubtful as to whether there will be FWBO activities in Istanbul just yet, though of course one doesn't know.

Do you see travelling round FWBO centres as part of your future, or is this a 'farewell tour'?

Well, it's obviously something I can always do. There are so many centres even in Britain, and a few more in Europe, and I know I'm welcome at each and every one of them. My priority definitely will be to get on with writing, so if I do any visiting of that sort – and I always enjoy my visits to FWBO centres – it'll be in the intervals between chapters or between books.

What are your impressions – on the strength of your most recent visit – of Buddhism in America? And what particular contributions do you think the FWBO could make to the practice of the Dharma there?

I do hope the FWBO can have a very strong and positive presence in the States. And I hope that we can have friendly contact with all the other Buddhist traditions and groups there, and have a positive influence on them, especially in the way of helping them to clarify the centrality of Going for Refuge in the Buddhist way of life. There are some that emphasize being a monk more, some that emphasize meditation more, some that emphasize receiving Tantric initiation more – and if any of these things is placed at the centre and made the dominating factor in Buddhism, that is obviously one-sided. I would like us to assist those Buddhist groups and traditions to see the centrality of Going for Refuge to a greater extent than most of them do at present.

A lot of thought is being put into what is to happen after your death. How does it feel to have your own death discussed so much?

To me it doesn't feel anything in particular. After all, I know that I'm going to die, and it's of some significance to the Movement, so why shouldn't people talk about it? I've been accustomed to that for years. At Padmaloka years ago people used to discuss it around the meal-table very freely, and I just listened as though in a sense they were talking about another person – not in an alienated way, I hope. I'm quite happy that people should talk about it. It seems quite sensible – it's not as though my death won't make any difference to anybody.

Sometimes people think about who they'd like to have present at their death, what funeral arrangements they'd like, and so on.

I don't have any particular wishes. I'm quite happy to leave it to whoever will be responsible. If I think of anything I'll let people know, but at the moment I've no particular wish for this piece of music to be played or that text to be read. Let people do as they please. It will be their funeral, not mine!

And how about your future rebirth?

I never think about it.

So not for you the whole business of incarnations and tulkus?

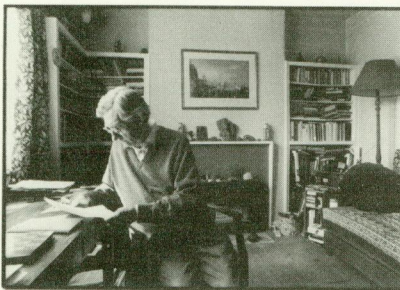
I assume that I will be reborn somewhere, and no doubt that will be determined by what I've done in the course of this lifetime. My concern is much more to do what is right in this lifetime than to bother about where I'll be reborn or what as. Look after the cause and the effect will look after itself.

Presumably that would be good general advice.

Yes indeed. One need have no unhealthy curiosity about previous lives or future lives. This life is enough for us to be getting on with. And if this life is right, how can any future life not be right?

Sogyal Rinpoche's book The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, which deals with the Tibetan approach to death and the various practices recommended by the Tibetan tradition, has sold very well. But how useful is that approach for Western people? I have to admit that when facing the death of somebody I know, I find the Tibetan Book of the Dead a bit foreign. Do you think we're going to need to find ways to relate to that, or will we need to come up with our own rituals and texts?

I think we just need to learn to relate to the fact of death, our own death and the death of other people. As regards our own death we have to learn to approach it as mindfully as we possibly can and in the best possible circumstances, so that we give ourselves the opportunity of a positive send-off. And so far as other people are concerned, we should try to make them comfortable, try to develop a positive atmosphere around them, and – both before they actually die, while they are dying, and after they're dead for some time – direct our positive thoughts of metta towards them. That, I think, is the essence of the matter: mindfulness and metta.



THE TRANSLATOR

for Sangharakshita on his Seventieth Birthday

**A long walk has brought you here,
step by step rescuing the past
and all the truth love requires.**

**Knowing some of us are learning.
Never forgetting the way by which you came.**
Manjusvara

THE MESSAGE OF THE BOWL

1978 saw the publication of a collection of poems by Sangharakshita entitled *The Enchanted Heart*, which contained a selection of poetry he wrote between the years 1946 and 1976. In his preface to the collection, Sangharakshita wrote:

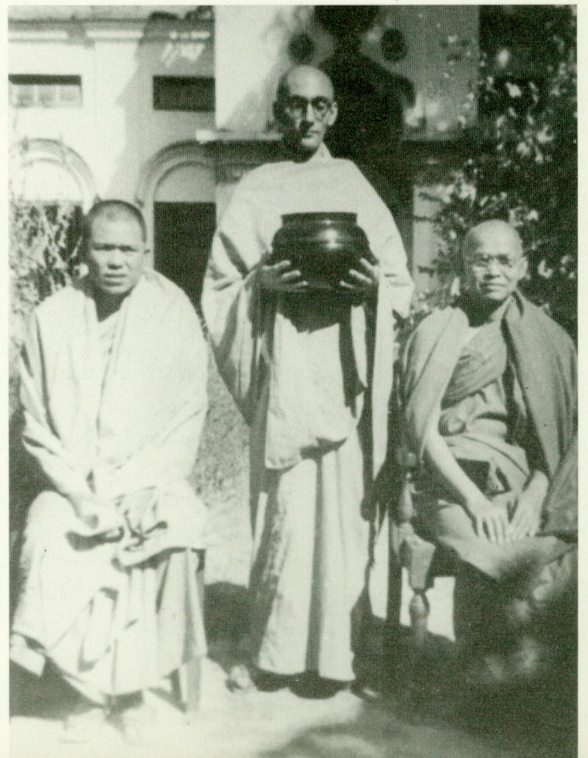
‘...[The poems] represent all that I would wish to preserve. Not that they are necessarily worth preserving as poetry. Many of them, if not the majority, have only a biographical – even a sentimental – interest. They give expression to passing moods and insights. They also reflect my response to my surroundings. As such they constitute a sort of spiritual autobiography, sketchy indeed, but perhaps revealing, or at least suggesting, aspects of my life which would not otherwise be known. Some of my friends, I believe, may find an autobiography of this sort of greater interest than a more formal account.’

Certainly, when *The Enchanted Heart* made its appearance in 1978 it had a marked impact on members of the Western Buddhist Order, if my correspondence of those days is anything to go by. At that time I was living in India and, even before the book reached me, letters from Order members revealed how much they had been touched by Sangharakshita’s poetry. A Dharmacharini wrote that ‘*The Enchanted Heart* is very much the heart of Sangharakshita’, while a Dharmachari said that the book had given him the sort of contact with Sangharakshita he had always longed for. Other Order members wrote out poems and quotations from poems to whet my appetite. None of my correspondents referred to the literary merits or otherwise of the poetry. That did not seem to be important to them. They had received it in the spirit in which it had been published: as a communication from Sangharakshita, a communication that revealed intimate aspects of his life and personality which could, perhaps, only be revealed through the medium of poetry.

When a copy of *The Enchanted Heart* eventually reached me I responded to it much as my correspondents had. As I read the poetry I began to discover that Sangharakshita was a much deeper, subtler, and richer person than I had previously seen. Until I read his poems I tended to see him as either the great, all-seeing, perfect guru or as a rather ordinary sort of man. Trying to fit him into these categories made communication with him – at times – somewhat strained. Reading *The Enchanted Heart* started to dissolve my tendencies to crude categorization. Sangharakshita, I began to see, eluded any ready-made labels.

I think the diversity and range of his poetry must have had something to do with this. It is written in a variety of voices and styles evoking very different moods. There are the intensely devotional poems of the late 1940s and early 1950s, in which the young Sangharakshita is filled with the yearning of the spiritual aspirant, and yet there are also the laconic, almost sardonic poems of the 1960s. There is poetry, written throughout his life, of protest and defiance – poetry that challenges the corruption of the world, including the Buddhist world. And there is poetry, again written throughout his life, which expresses his intense awareness of nature and the animals and human beings that inhabit it. The sheer variety of styles and moods in Sangharakshita’s poetry is the expression of a man with a highly developed capacity to identify imaginatively with a very wide range of experience.

Because of this range, it is difficult to write a short article that will give an adequate impression of Sangharakshita’s poetry. Rather than attempt to capture its range, I will attempt to trace a theme through some of his poems, a theme which charts something of his spiritual autobiography: Going Forth. Traditionally, Going Forth refers to the renouncing of home and family and the taking up of the life of the homeless wanderer. It is also understood to mean the leaving behind of a lower level of consciousness in order to enter into a higher level of consciousness. In Sangharakshita’s poetry both these dimensions of Going Forth can be seen at work.



Sangharakshita’s bhikkhu ordination 1950

A poem of 1948 reveals Sangharakshita at the threshold, the doorway, of a new, higher level of consciousness.

ADVENT

*I listened all day for the knock of the Stranger,
And I often looked out from the door.
The table was scrubbed, the brass shining,
And well swept the floor.*

*The shadows grew longer and longer,
In the grate the fire flickered and died.
'It's too late. He never will come now'
I said, and sighed.*

*I sat there musing and musing,
The spinning-wheel still at my side.
The moonlight came in through the window
White like a bride.*

*As the clock struck twelve I heard nothing
But felt He had come and stayed
Waiting outside. And I listened –
And I was afraid.*

Though short, this haunting poem, with its evocation of 'the Stranger' arriving in the depths of the night outside the well-kept house, tells us much about the spiritual life and how Sangharakshita experienced it as a young man. The scrubbed table, the well-swept floor, and the shining brass suggest, first of all, the necessity of working devotedly and diligently at our present level of consciousness by simply getting on with the daily tasks of spiritual practice. We can be sure that there will be no Going Forth from lower to higher levels of being without such devoted and diligent work. Yet, at the same time, the poem warns that when the mysterious stranger – the messenger of transcendence – arrives (arrives in the depths of the night, when least expected), although so worked for, so *longed* for, we are frightened at his presence. His sheer 'otherness' is a direct and immediate threat to our present level of being. Sangharakshita's 'Stranger' is reminiscent of the figure of the Angel found in Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, a figure that Sangharakshita would discover a few years after writing 'Advent'. Rilke said to his Polish translator 'The Angel is the being who vouches for the recognition of a higher degree of reality in the invisible. Therefore "terrible" to us, because we still cling to the visible.'

At thresholds between lower and higher states we encounter the presence of a more authentic, more beautiful state of being, yet its very reality and beauty is so different from what we are now that we can be filled with fear, an overwhelming fear sometimes. We have to enter and emerge from this fear if we are to continue Going Forth.

This Sangharakshita was prepared to do. He was prepared to cross the threshold and follow the invisible Stranger. In fact he had physically Gone Forth roughly a year before the composition of 'Advent'. He went forth

from home into homelessness quite literally. He and a friend gave away their possessions, destroyed their identification papers, and with only their robes, a blanket, and some books set off to wander the dust roads of India. They had no home, no money, and lived by begging. This continued after Sangharakshita's ordination as a shramanera ('novice monk'). A poem of 1949 entitled 'The Message of the Bowl' gives us a glimpse of Sangharakshita's wandering life. The poem – too long to quote in full – describes how after walking 'many a dusty mile' Sangharakshita and his friend beg their food in an Indian village. The poem movingly evokes the quiet of an Indian village in the middle of the day and the unselfconscious kindness of the village women as they placed their simple food into Sangharakshita's bowl. The humility of the poor village people and their willingness to identify with Sangharakshita's poverty affected him deeply, for at the end of the poem he reveals what the message of the bowl really is:

*Then did my deepest heart-thoughts feel
Knit with the poor through woe and weal,
And passionately longed to thrust
Plumed pride into that sacred dust,
And mingling there, foot-trampled, be
Levelled with holiest poverty
Which doth with love enrich the soul,
And spells the Message of the Bowl.*

The message of the bowl, then, is the message of poverty. It is the message of having nothing – not just in the material sense, but in the sense of having nothing that will make us feel superior or even separate from others. The begging-bowl is not only telling us to Go Forth from material things, it is also telling us to Go Forth from any sense of pride and separateness. An essay by Sangharakshita from this period entitled 'The Flowering Bowl' points out that the empty begging-bowl that the Buddha holds symbolizes 'the transcending of all dualistic concepts ... absolute spiritual poverty ... complete conceptual nakedness ... utter self-deprivation – in a word, *shunyata*, the voidness, itself.'

But it would be wrong to think that Sangharakshita's Going Forth was simply concerned with the realization of voidness. His wandering days also resulted in a deeper connectedness with others. Having begun to overcome pride and the sense of separateness, his identification with others becomes stronger. In a very tender poem, 'The White Calf', Sangharakshita and his companion are forced by a tremendous storm to take shelter for the night in a cowshed. In the dawn light, after waking, Sangharakshita sees a white calf,

*Nestling upon the same soft straw
As I, with head to hoof, he lay,
So peacefully that one who saw
Could hardly keep the tears away.*



*To me that small life did impart
A kind of aching tenderness,
Such as may fill a mother's heart
To see her infant's helplessness.*

*And in the deepest depths of me
I felt that I had understood
In one clear flash the mystery
Of universal brotherhood.*

Sangharakshita's poems of the late forties seem for the most part untroubled by conflict. They are filled with an intense youthful idealism. But it would be wrong to assume that the course of Sangharakshita's spiritual life has been completely smooth. He too has had to struggle. From his poetry we gain more of a sense of that struggle than from his other writings. We gain a sense, in the words of one of his sonnets,

*... that the Way's a hacked path, roughly made
Through densest jungle, deep in the Unknown ...
And that, though burn a thousand baleful eyes
Like death-lamps round, serene and unafraid,
Man through the hideous dark must plunge alone.*

A number of poems written in Kalimpong between 1950 and 1957 reveal the young Sangharakshita hacking his way through the dense jungle of conflict between love-desire and the call of the spiritual life. 'The Veil of Stars', a long poem which echoes Rabindranath Tagore's 'Stray Birds', charts the conflict, employing a language whose simplicity is charged with such intensity that one feels that one is undergoing within one's own being the tremendous forces in the poem. The opening verses of 'The Veil of Stars' draw one into the mystery of love.

*The coming of love is mysterious as the flight of a bird
from unknown lands,
Its going mysterious as the unseen tumult of the wind
blowing we know not whither.*

*What is this mystery of love that has opened my heart like
a bud at midnight,
And sends its sweetness crying through the dark like the
voice of one mad with desire?*

As the poem continues it becomes clear that Sangharakshita's love is not requited and that he is only too well aware that it can find no fulfilment. Yet he continues to feel it, more intensely than ever. His love and his awareness of reality grow ever stronger, so that we find, after a verse describing his response to the beautiful presence of the beloved, a verse showing his continued awareness of reality:

*Presses upon me heavier and heavier day by day
The unfathomable mystery of existence.*

The alternation of verses describing his love and those calling him to 'the unfathomable mystery of existence' show that the young Sangharakshita did not want to arrive at a premature or false resolution of the conflict. The conflict between love-desire and Going Forth is not avoided by a conjuring trick of self-deception. It is clear that Sangharakshita does not seek to suppress love-desire and

find himself occupying a sterile bloodless 'reality', but neither does he indulge his love-desire and emptily pontificate on the non-duality of desire and wisdom as many pseudo-Tantrics (of East and West) like to do. Instead we find him grappling with the conflict, seeking a deeper resolution.

Eventually, 'The Veil of Stars' takes us into the world of the Himalayas, as Sangharakshita seeks solace in the hills around his beloved Kalimpong:

*Sitting for hours and hours among the calm, quiet, kind
old hills,
I feel that somewhere behind the veil of things there is
a Friend;
Walking all day upon the soft green hillside grass,
I feel that I have touched with my lips the finger-tips of
Reality.*

As he contemplates the beauty of the Himalayas and learns what nature has to teach, Sangharakshita's desire eventually grows into love and compassion, as 'The Veil of Stars' shows:

*What I thought was my love for you is, now I find, in
reality compassion for all sentient beings.
Thinking to pick up a glow-worm from the grass, lo! I
plucked down a galaxy of stars from the sky.*

*Seeking for glow-worms in the long green grass of the
bank
I have glimpsed the reflection of the stars trembling in the
dark blue depths of the pool.*

*At first I thought that my love for you would bind me to the
earth,
But now I find that it liberates me into the heaven of the
spirit.*

*Desire for anyone flowers into love for someone
And at last bears fruit as compassion for everyone.*

Through his intense spiritual practice, through what we might call the asceticism of love, he was able to Go Forth from limited love-desire to the more expansive Bodhisattva-like emotion of compassion. Lama Anagarika Govinda in his preface to 'The Veil of Stars' sums up the work in the following beautiful lines:

'It is [the] Bodhisattva Ideal that inspires every line of this book and the life of its author. Infinite tenderness for all that lives begins as the love between two human beings, with all their faults and shortcomings, in which desire and possessiveness lead to infinite suffering and disillusionment. But these sufferings themselves are the purifying flame in which the limitations and impurities of that love are consumed, until a greater love emerges from the ordeal.'

Love and compassion – if they are worthy of the name – find expression in deeds. They have to enter into the world of ordinary men and women. The Buddha's own life is an example of such love and compassion. The Buddha did not remain beneath the Bodhi tree, content with his own attainment. He went forth to communicate his message of liberation to others. The Buddha has always been a source of great inspiration to Sangharakshita. Over the years he has written a great number of poems inspired by different aspects of the



Buddha's life and personality.

In 1961 he wrote a poem simply called 'The Buddha'. There is a new 'muscular' quality in the opening lines:

*Lean, strenuous, resolute, He passed His days
Trudging in dust-stained clouts the forest paths;
Stood as a beggar at the beggar's door
For alms, and more than kingly, spoke with kings.
...and as the sun
Shed upon all the beams of truth and peace.
This did He out of love for all that lives.*

The poem goes on to show how later disciples of the Buddha attempted to fix the Buddha in images:

*They carved Him out of sandal, chipped from stone
The Ever-moving, cast in rigid bronze
Him Who was Life itself, and made Him sit,
Hands idly folded, for a thousand years
Immobile in the incensed image-house;
They gilded Him till He was sick with gold.*

The poem continues with a picture of those Buddhist monks who are content to stay in the image-house sleepily droning the Buddha's 'vigorous words', but concludes with an impassioned entreaty to the Buddha to arise and walk the roads of the world, shaking off the slumber that many Buddhists had fallen into, to 'burn as a fire' for all beings.

Apart from presenting a pithy but inspired word-picture of the Buddha, the poem is a critique of the rigidity of many who regard themselves as Buddhists. When Sangharakshita entreats the Buddha to walk the roads of the world, he is really entreating Buddhists to communicate the Dharma to others with the vigour of the Buddha himself.

Sangharakshita himself had certainly been doing that in India, but the poem looks beyond India to the entire world. It is, perhaps, prophetic, for shortly after writing this poem, Sangharakshita left India for Britain. He went forth from practising Buddhism within a traditional framework and began to practise and teach it in the far from traditional West. In the West it was a case of Going Forth from the cultural trappings of Eastern Buddhism and communicating the essential Dharma in a manner suited to the desert, the wasteland of the modern world. The poems of the 1960s and 70s show Sangharakshita exploring the depths of Buddhist experience within the wasteland. He seems to have been deeply inspired, for there is a new voice in his poetry. It has a freshness and spontaneity which at times gives expression to ecstatic vision. This is particularly the case in the poems 'New' and the lengthy 'On Glastonbury Tor'. There is a sense in such poems of Sangharakshita's consciousness flooding across boundaries, leaving behind restriction. As he practises and teaches in the new context of the Western desert, he plumbs the depths of the essential Dharma, and finds new ways of 'translating' it for the inhabitants of the desert. No wonder that on a tour of Italy in the sixties he should have been drawn to the figure of St Jerome – not the St Jerome of church history, but the Jerome as depicted by Renaissance artists who becomes the archetype of the Translator:

ST JEROME IN THE DESERT

*Cavern or shed, in the one-candled gloom
We know not; through the black hole of the door
The desert, where red winds howl evermore:*

*Within, Christ's peace; without, impending doom.
Gigantically crouched in little room,
A lion against his feet upon the floor,
St Jerome sits, the dropping sands before,
The skull beside him where the shadows loom
Blacker and blacker. In a world of sin
The Empire changes hands, the Churches fight
Factious as dogs. By day the old man, stung,
Magnificently answers Augustine,
Then, dredging from the deep, night after night
Translates THE WORD into the vulgar tongue.*

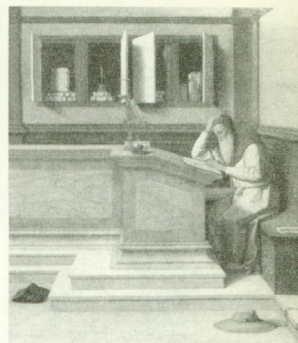
Part of the act of translation was putting aside the traditional vestments of the monk and the artificial barriers that can go with them. To communicate the essential Dharma to the West Sangharakshita found he had to leave behind everything that stood in the way of true, heart-to-heart communication and friendship. 'The Time Has Come', a poem of 1969 dedicated to Chogyam Trungpa Rimpoche, calmly states that it is time for Buddhists to leave behind the trappings of ecclesiastical status in order to come to a more essential meeting with others:

*The time has come
For us to lay aside the masks
Painted hieratic masks
The time has come
For us to hang up the gorgeous costumes in the
greenroom cupboard
To leave the brilliantly lit stage
The applause
And to go home
Through deserted streets
To a quiet room
Up three flights of stairs
And to someone perhaps
With whom we can be
Ourselves*

In the poems that chart Sangharakshita's Going Forth one can detect a double movement. There is a movement away from the samsara, from the world, and yet with every step away Sangharakshita comes closer to a deep identification with others. It is as if he goes forth from the world and then back to it at once. Each step of leaving behind worldly self-seeking attitudes results not in aloofness, but in a greater love. At its highest level this double movement finds expression in the Mahayana notion that shunyata – the voidness – and compassion are 'not-two'. That is where Going Forth ultimately leads. That is what the 'Message of the Bowl' is. It is telling us of emptiness and compassion. A poem of Sangharakshita's of 1950 reveals this ultimate goal:

THE UNSEEN FLOWER

*Compassion is far more than emotion. It is something
which springs
Up in the emptiness which is when you yourself are not
there,
So that you do not know anything about it.
Nobody, in fact, knows anything about it
(If they knew it, it would not be Compassion);
But they can only smell
The scent of the unseen flower
That blooms in the Heart of the Void.*



a book with heart

A Path With Heart

by Jack Kornfield

Rider

£12.99, paperback

Reviewed by Vajaradaka

In this substantial book, Jack Kornfield, one of the leading exponents of 'vipassana' meditation in the United States, comments on a wide range of issues that arise from meditation and Buddhist practice. He starts with some frank autobiographical reflections about his return as a Buddhist monk to the USA from South-east Asia. His anecdotal style is charming in its honesty, letting the reader scrutinize his attitudes and actions with the same wry humour with which he observes himself.

As the book unfolds, he quotes extensively from teachers of diverse spiritual traditions. This seems to reflect a deliberate attempt on his part to be inclusive, both of other religions and of those who are not committed to any particular path. However, he does emphasize the indispensability of a teacher and of wholehearted commitment to a particular path. While making connections between the ways in which different religions approach a similar area of realization, the Buddhist point of view is always there, often expressed in an accessible, inspiring, and sometimes even poetic way.

Characteristic of Kornfield's approach is the inclusion of a section on the *metta bhavana* at the very start of the book. This in itself is notable in a work emanating from the vipassana movement, which has at times seemed to emphasize awareness at the expense of positive emotion. Throughout the book, Kornfield emphasizes the importance of becoming imbued with a 'kind and wise awareness'. He includes a short section on the *brahma viharas* and there are frequent references to the development of these qualities.

It soon becomes clear, too, that the kind of awareness that Kornfield is guiding readers towards is both integrated and experiential, and not the cool, alienated detachment which some vipassana teachers have been criticized for teaching in the past. Indeed, each paragraph that Kornfield writes on awareness is inspiring and rich in meaning. This material would bear frequent re-reading.

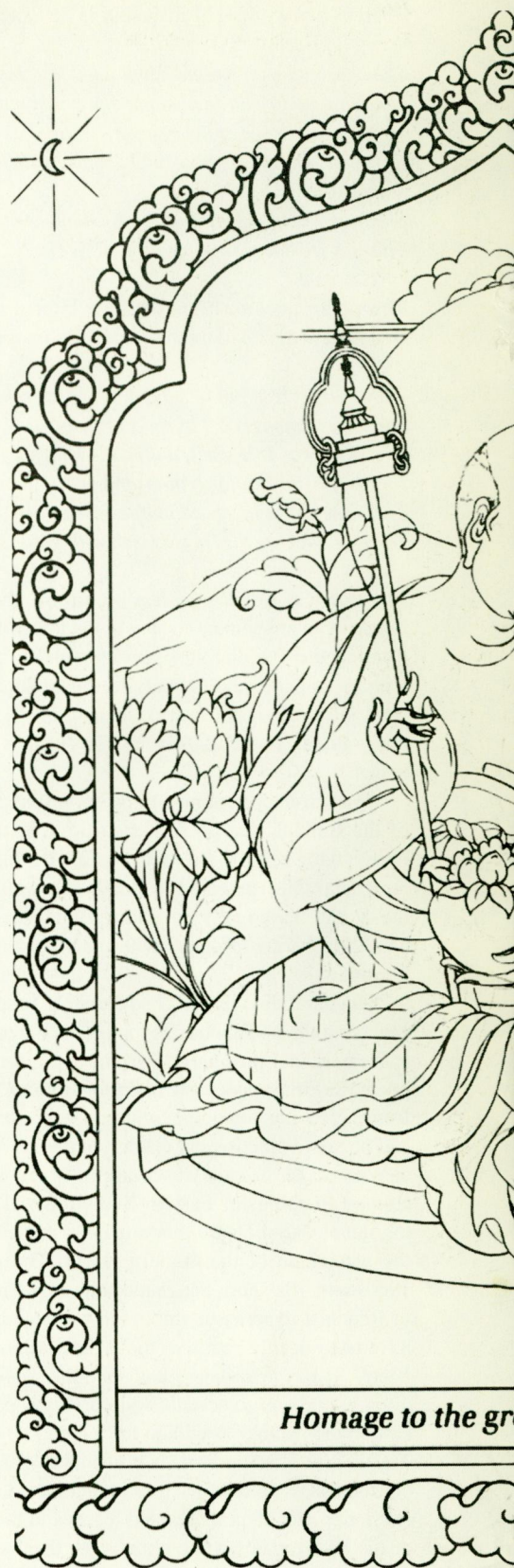
The greater the detail on mindfulness and the development of penetrating awareness – insight – into the nature of things, the more compelling and inspiring Kornfield's writing becomes. His outline of how to practise awareness of unsatisfactoriness and pain with patience

and an open heart is particularly detailed and clear. He emphasizes the importance of being able to recognize those mistakes in one's own behaviour which contribute to one's own suffering. This section also includes an outline of the teaching of karma, which is not only straightforward but also quite humorous in its description of current misuses and misunderstandings of the Buddhist approach.

Though the vipassana approach originally emerged from the Theravada School of Buddhism, Kornfield writes in such a way that Buddhists from other backgrounds will find terms and contexts to which they can relate. The sections on emptiness, for example, are quite lovely – simple and to the point.

At a first reading, the section on guided visualization and healing seemed to have some slight 'new age' overtones of guided fantasy and religious universalism. However, the idea of using the religious archetype of one's choice – the Buddha or Tara for Buddhists, the Virgin Mary or Jesus for Christians – could well be useful for meditators practising regularly within each of these traditions.

It could be argued that some aspects of the section on spiritual life as healing are rather simplistic. Kornfield does not specifically explain what he means by healing, and the kind of language he uses tends to be problem-oriented. On the whole, though, he does manage to avoid the suggestion that one needs to engage in endless exploration of the causes of suffering in a psychoanalytical way. His general message is that by developing a clear perspective on one's suffering through awareness and the development of an imaginative perspective on one's spiritual potential, one can be drawn into a higher state in which healing of both mind and body occur. Later on in the book he devotes a section to the relationship between psychotherapy and overtly spiritual practice, such as meditation. Kornfield is a therapist as well as a meditation teacher, and generally this kind of material is straightforwardly and sensitively written. He states that there are times when even quite experienced practitioners cannot untangle the threads of their confusion and pain just by meditating, because of the tendency to compartmentalize emotions and past experiences. He also observes that even



spiritual teachers cannot always have the experience to direct some people through the labyrinths of their suffering in the way that they need.

A few sections of the book are unsatisfyingly short and confusing. For example, in his treatment of attitudes towards altered states of consciousness, Kornfield brings in the major topic of the

Subhuti

Illustration from Wisdom of the Buddha



Great Arhat Subhūti

Path with steps, and the Path without steps, but does not treat it at sufficient length to do it justice. However, on the whole I would recommend the book. It covers many important fields of spiritual endeavour, and offers compassionate yet bold encouragement to practise the spiritual life, with all the joys and struggles that this inevitably involves.

Untying the knots

Wisdom of the Buddha: The Sandhinirmocana Sutra

Translated by John Powers

Dharma

£17.35, paperback

Reviewed by Sagaramati

The *Sandhinirmocana Sutra* is the earliest of the sutras associated with the Yogacarin School of Buddhism, being the first to expound explicitly Yogacara doctrines. The title means something like 'Freeing the Hidden Meaning' or 'Untying the Knots'. The sutra originated in India during the third or fourth century CE, and was originally composed in Sanskrit, but now exists only in Tibetan and Chinese translations. This new translation from the Tibetan by John Power is the first English translation, and is therefore to be welcomed by those interested in a broader understanding of the Dharma. The book itself is very well presented, with Tibetan text and English translation on facing pages.

As this translation is based on his doctoral thesis, Powers not only makes use of several Tibetan and Chinese editions of the actual sutra, but also consults some five commentaries from the Tibetan canon, other Yogacarin texts and Tibetan exegetical material (both written and oral), as well as the works of Asanga and Vasubandhu, and the commentaries on their works by Sthiramati and Samatisila. When he says that it has been 'a demanding task which has taken many years', one can understand why.

The sutra consists of ten chapters – relatively short for a Mahayana sutra. Apart from the first, each chapter consists of a particular Bodhisattva questioning the Buddha – that is apart from the fourth, where the interlocutor is the shravaka Subhuti. The main claim of the sutra is that it represents the third turning of the wheel of doctrine (*dharmachakra**). The first turning was that of the Buddha at Sarnath, where he is said to have taught the Shravaka vehicle, consisting of the Four Noble Truths, etc. The second turning, 'which is more wondrous', is the teaching on *shunyata* for the Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana, found in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. But, according to this sutra, both these turnings of the wheel of doctrine are 'surpassable, [provide] an opportunity (for refutation), [are] of interpretable meaning [*neyartha**], and [serve] as a basis for dispute'. This third turning is for those 'engaged in all vehicles', and 'does not provide an opportunity (for refutation), is of definitive meaning [*nitārtha**], and does not serve as a basis for dispute' (chapter six). Although

it claims to be a superior teaching, unlike some other Mahayana sutras this one does not disparage the shravakas (or followers of the Hinayana) too much, describing them as 'very knowledgeable sons of the Buddha, with liberated minds, very liberated wisdom, and completely pure ethics', who are 'wholly engaged in the Tathagata's teaching' (chapter one).

Chapters one to four are mainly concerned with 'the ultimate whose character is inexpressible and non-dual'. For example, the traditional method of classifying phenomena as being either 'compounded' (*samskṛta*) or 'uncompounded' (*asamskṛta*) is a form of dualism. Such terms are 'conventional designations' only, merely 'mental constructions' with limited validity. To abide within this dichotomy of 'compounded' and 'uncompounded' gives rise to the disputes and arguments of the childish (*balas*), who 'delight in the elaborations of speech'. The truth is that the ultimate or 'uncompounded' is 'ineffable and devoid of conventions', and in relation to the 'compounded' it 'completely transcends [the notions of] difference and non-difference'. Various analogies are given to illustrate the relationship between the compounded and the ultimate. For example, the relationship between the ultimate and the compounded is likened to that between 'the whiteness of the conch' (ultimate) and 'the conch' (compounded): 'it is not easy to designate the whiteness of a conch as being a character that is different from the conch or as being a character that is not different from it.' Therefore, 'it is not appropriate to designate the character of the compounded and the character of the ultimate as being either characters that are not-different or characters that are different.' As 'the ultimate is distinguished by being the selflessness of compounded things', that 'selflessness' is neither different nor non-different from 'compounded things'. But only by 'cultivating samatha and vipasyana' will 'beings be liberated from the bonds of errant tendencies and the bonds of signs'.

Chapter five introduces a distinctly Yogacarin notion, the 'basis-consciousness' (*alaya vijñāna*), also referred to as the 'appropriating consciousness' (*adāna vijñāna**). It is this 'basis-consciousness' that provides the



Avalokiteshvara

Illustration from Wisdom of the Buddha

karmic continuity between lives as it holds the seeds of past actions which ripen when the conditions are appropriate. It is called the 'appropriating consciousness' because it appropriates a new form or body in a new life. However, Bodhisattvas who are 'in accord with reality' and are 'wise with respect to the ultimate', do not perceive either of these consciousnesses. This 'basis-consciousness' or 'appropriating consciousness', which is 'deep and subtle', is not taught to the childish as they would conceive of it as a 'Self'.

Chapter six brings in another distinctly Yogacarin doctrine, that of the 'three characteristics of phenomena', the 'imputational character' (*parikalpita-lakshana*), the 'other-dependent character' (*paratantra-lakshana*), and the 'thoroughly established character' (*parinispanna-lakshana*). What the sutra seems to be saying here – it is not very clear – is that the 'other-dependent character' is 'simply the dependent origination of phenomena', i.e. *pratitya-samutpada*. The 'imputational character' refers to the 'own being' that we, because of our delusions, impute on to the 'other-dependent character'. What we impute simply does not exist. But when we see that the 'other-dependent character' is without the nature of the 'imputational character', then we see the true 'suchness' of things which is the 'thoroughly established character'. In other words, reality can either be misunderstood, i.e. the 'imputational character', or understood as it really is, i.e. the 'thoroughly established character'.

Chapter seven links these 'three characteristics of phenomena' with three types of 'lack of own-being'. 'Lack of own-being in terms of character' is linked to the 'imputational character' and is

likened to a 'sky flower'; 'lack of own being in terms of production' is linked to the 'other-dependent character' and is likened to a 'magical apparition'; and the 'ultimate lack of own-being' is linked to the 'thoroughly established character' and is likened to 'space', which is 'distinguished by being just the lack of own-being of forms in space and as pervading everywhere'. Here these 'three characteristics of phenomena' seem to represent three distinct levels of understanding, whereas their treatment in the previous chapter suggests only two. Here it is claimed that the Tathagata initially teaches 'doctrines starting with the lack of 'own-being in terms of production' (i.e. *pratitya-samutpada*, etc.) to impure beings so that they will practise good deeds, purify their obstructions, and turn away from compounded phenomena. However, 'because they do not understand, as they are, the two aspects pertaining to lack of own-being in terms of production – lack of own-being in terms of character and ultimate lack of own-being – they do not become wholly adverse towards compounded phenomena.' Therefore: 'The Tathagata further teaches them [i.e. in this sutra] doctrines beginning with lack of own-being in terms of character and ultimate lack of own-being.' In this way they can 'pass beyond the afflictions of actions, and pass beyond the afflictions of birth'. In this way, 'even sentient beings of the Shravaka lineage ... Pratyakabuddha lineage ... Tathagata lineage also attain the establishment and abiding of unsurpassed nirvana. Thus there is a single path of purification for shravakas, Pratyakabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas, and there is a single purification. ... therefore, I have taught that there is a single vehicle.'

Chapter eight deals with the distinction between *samatha* and *vipasyana* (these two

terms are neither translated nor explained) and introduces another distinctly Yogacarin notion, that 'consciousness is fully distinguished by [the fact that its] object of observation is cognition-only' (*vijnapti-matra*). Chapter nine lists and gives accounts of the 'ten Bodhisattva stages' (*bhumis**) and the 'six bases of training for Bodhisattvas' (i.e. the six 'perfections' or *paramitas**). The final chapter is about the nature and qualities of the Tathagatas.

Not knowing any Tibetan, I cannot judge the merits or demerits of the translation, and can only welcome the fact that important sutras such as the *Sandhinirmocana* are now being translated into English. Nevertheless, I would say that the interested reader, even with some understanding of the main concepts of the Yogacara, will find this a difficult text to read, let alone understand. Some passages I found simply confusing and unintelligible, and although I would like to attribute this to the text's profundity I fear the reason lies elsewhere. Some of the terms used seem rather idiosyncratic. For example, what are 'the assistants'; what is meant by 'permanent, permanent time', 'everlasting, everlasting time', and 'former, former time'; what are 'integrated doctrines' and 'unintegrated doctrines'? Such terms are hardly self-evident. The translator, in his notes, does provide comments from various commentators, but these are more of the nature of glosses rather than aids to the understanding of the text. Nevertheless, even though this translation seriously needs an explanatory commentary, as it is the only one available in English I would still recommend this translation to the serious student of the Dharma.

Note: * means that this term is not found in the translation, but has been provided by the reviewer.

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what forgiveness? Who will understand?

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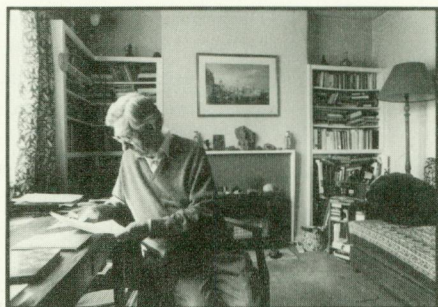
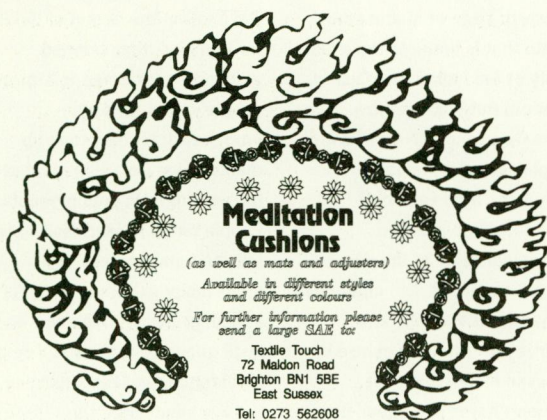
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Nagarjuna



TBMSG (Trailokya Buddha Maha Sahayak Gana) has been given the go-ahead for the biggest project in its history. In March 1995 twelve acres of farmland on the outskirts of Nagpur were bought, and on this land TBMSG plans to create a complex of buildings devoted to Dharmic and social projects. It will be known as the Nagarjuna Vihara and Nagarjuna Institute, after the great second century Buddhist philosopher and sage who has traditionally been associated with Nagpur and from whom, some say, the city takes its name.

At the heart of the complex will be a shrine-room capable of accommodating five hundred people. On big occasions many more would be able to gather on the surrounding land. There will be meeting-rooms, a second meditation hall for two hundred people, plus a reading-room and a library. The focus for visitors will be a reception area including a bookshop, restaurant, and exhibition space. There will be facilities for guests, including a *dharmasala* or visitors' hostel accommodating at least fifty.

As well as providing a focus for Dharmic activities, the Institute will be the headquarters for Bahujan Hitay's social work programmes in the region. Alongside administrative offices will be two large

educational hostels – one for girls and one for boys – and it is possible that Bahujan Hitay will open its first school on the site. If the school goes ahead, the hostels will be built to house between one-hundred-and-fifty and two hundred children each; if not, they will settle for the more modest figure of around eighty children each. The hostels will also house large residential Buddhist communities, many of whose members will be working in the complex while preparing for ordination. A community of thirty women will be a centre for Buddhist women throughout western Maharashtra, and will have its own offices, guest-rooms, and a shrine-room for up to fifty.

Finally, the Institute will be a cultural centre for local Buddhists, providing facilities such as study areas and a student advice centre. Central to these plans is a large meeting hall which will be used for, among other things, karate classes, which are very popular among Nagpur Buddhists.

The plans have not yet been finalized and they will doubtless change as the Institute evolves, but much of the necessary funding has already been pledged by Buddhist friends in Taiwan and the Karuna Trust in the UK. The first phase of the project is scheduled to open in 1997.

Vishvapani

vidharbha region

the future heartland in india

When I paid my first visit to Nagpur in February this year, my guide Asvinash promised to take me to the local regulars' class. It was a special event: Subhuti was giving a talk. 'Will many people be there?' I asked. 'Oh yes,' he replied, 'many will come'. Half an hour after we arrived at the venue a stream of people was still arriving. 'There must be two thousand people here,' I said. 'This is nothing,' said Asvinash. 'When Bhante Sangharakshita came here in 1992, 90,000 people came to one talk and 40,000 to another. This is Nagpur.' I had arrived at what will surely soon be the centre of TBMSG's work in India and the greatest concentration of interest in the FWBO anywhere in the world.

When Lokamitra moved to India in 1978 to start FWBO activities (under the name TBMSG) among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists, he settled in Poona on the western edge of Maharashtra, the state that is home to the great majority of the Indian Buddhist population. But Maharashtra extends far inland across hills and dusty plains and it includes the densely populated region of Vidharbha, which is at the geographical heart of the whole Indian subcontinent. The chief city of Vidharbha is Nagpur, and Nagpur is the historical centre of the revived Indian Buddhist movement. It was in Nagpur that Dr Ambedkar held the conversion ceremony in 1957 for himself and about 400,000 followers. The Nagpur Buddhists have continued to be in the vanguard of the movement Dr Ambedkar initiated. Since TBMSG activities were started there and in other Vidharbha cities several years ago, they have been greeted with a huge response.

To find out more about the encounter between the Vidharbha Buddhists and TBMSG I spoke with Amritasiddhi, who has responsibility for the Movement's social work activities in the region. The ex-Untouchable Mahars of Vidharbha, he explained, have always had a reputation for

dynamism. During the Raj, while most Mahars were still constrained by the Hindu caste system in its most unregenerate aspects, many Vidharbhans served in the British army where they were given positions of trust and responsibility. Dr Ambedkar chose Nagpur for the conversion ceremony because of his faith in the Vidharbhans' ability to put his vision into effect.

Along with a group of friends, two of whom have now been ordained as Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasiddhi, Amritasiddhi grew up within the milieu of the Nagpur Ambedkarite movement. What he saw of the corruption and power-mongering of politicians was enough to convince him that radical politics could not provide a way forward for his community. Then he and his friends encountered a popular youth movement called Samath Sainik Dal (SSD) or 'the Group of Soldiers for Equality', that seemed genuinely concerned to improve people's lives. Led by Amoghasiddhi, they took up teaching karate as an ideal vehicle for working with young people. People came to learn self-defence, but the teachers took the opportunity to convey broader ethical principles. The aim was to instil qualities such as self-respect, confidence, and responsibility. At the weekends they ran 'self-development camps'. They were trying to provide a channel for young people's idealism which would not lead to the dead-ends of much Ambedkarite politics.

The combination of enthusiasm, idealism, and practicality was irresistible, and by 1985 the karate organization the friends had founded had twenty-two branches across



Vishvapani and the Nagpur men's community

Nagpur. But at that point senior figures in the SSD started to take note of the political possibilities that the karate organization's success opened up. They ordered Amritasiddhi and the others to stop teaching karate and use the organization as the basis for organizing a wave of student protests. A split ensued, and the friends left the SSD. Although they continued to teach karate on a smaller scale, they now felt disillusioned with existing organizations, and started looking for alternatives. At that point one of their number, Raju, heard a talk by a Buddhist teacher who was visiting from the nearby city of Wardha. Raju was intrigued, and decided to find out more. The teacher's name was Vimalakirti, and he had moved to Wardha to start TBMSG activities in 1987. He and his colleagues, Manjuvira and Sanghasena, based themselves in a strongly Buddhist locality and threw themselves tirelessly into teaching, encouraging, and exhorting people to put their beliefs into practice. Quite quickly, the whole neighbourhood began to be affected – people now refer to it as a 'TBMSG village'.

When Raju arrived in the locality, which was known as Bhim Nagar, he was very impressed by the friendly, co-operative, and energetic atmosphere. It seemed the embodiment of everything he and his friends had been trying to achieve in Nagpur. Amritasiddhi and the others soon visited Bhim Nagar themselves, and felt a similar response. Vimalakirti introduced them to meditation, to a clear and relevant exposition of Buddhist teachings, and above all to the ideal of sangha as a paradigm for the ideal society. Quite soon all the friends had started to attend classes regularly. A visit to Nagpur by two Western Order members, Mahamati and Padmavajra (who gave eleven talks in the space of a few days), galvanized them further, and they decided to throw themselves fully into the work of TBMSG.



Their remaining karate clubs were transformed into Bahujan Hitay Arts and Sports Centres; they were involved in the construction of the first boys' hostel in Wardha; and Ratnasiddhi became the warden of a hostel in Gorewada. Finally, in 1990, Amritasiddhi, Amoghasiddhi, and Ratnasiddhi were invited to join the ordination training course in Poona, and at the end of the nine-month course they were ordained.

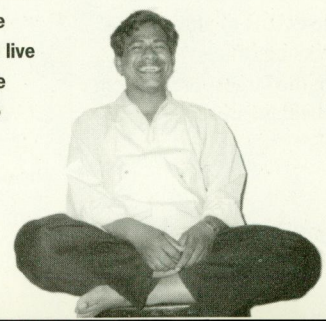
Since their return to Vidharbha, activities throughout the region have grown rapidly. In addition to Wardha, there are now classes and social work activities in the towns of Yeotmal, Pulgaon, and Amaravati, where the regulars' class attracts two hundred people each week. In 1993 the Hsuan Tsang Retreat Centre at Bor Dharan was completed, providing facilities for up to four hundred people at a time. Nagpur has a Buddhist centre, a range of social work projects including two hostels and seven kindergartens, and some small businesses. But another set of figures Amritasiddhi quoted me gave a fuller sense of the scale of what is being undertaken. In Nagpur there are seven Order members, fifty mitras, and one-hundred-and-fifty people who have asked to be mitras, but whom the local Order members do

not feel able to take on. The same picture is repeated across Vidharbha. With the building of the Nagarjuna Institute (see separate article), activities will take a further step forward.

The most remarkable feature of TBMSG in Vidharbha is the vigour and determination of the people involved in its work. But Amritasiddhi feels strongly that the real work is only just beginning. Nagpur is ideally positioned to act as a base from which TBMSG's work can be taken to neighbouring states. And in Nagpur itself there is deep sympathy for TBMSG's objectives and solidarity with its work. Amritasiddhi told me that many of the older inhabitants remember Sangharakshita from his visit to the city during the momentous events of 1957.

Dr Ambedkar died just a few weeks after initiating the conversion movement, and at a mass rally held to mark his death, speaker after speaker approached the microphone, but each was so overwhelmed by grief that they could literally not utter a word. Only Sangharakshita was able to give a speech. 'Dr Ambedkar is not dead,' he said. 'He lives on if he lives in your hearts. And he will live in your hearts if you do not lose faith, if you continue to work to fulfil his vision.'

Vishvapani



fwbo newcastle

Buddhism first hit the news in Newcastle in 1969 when Chogyam Trungpa spent some weeks in Newcastle General Hospital after crashing his car late at night into a joke shop in the city centre.

The presence of Buddhism in the region is now more substantial. There are two monasteries in the adjoining county of Northumberland: the Soto Zen Throssel Hole Priory and Ratnagiri, the retreat centre of the Theravadin Thai Forest monks. However, apart from a brief visit by Sangharakshita to the now defunct Newcastle Buddhist Society in the 1960s, there was no FWBO presence until September 1993. Classes were then started in rented premises in the city centre following the arrival of four Order members: Dharmaghosha, Nandavajra, Narapriya, and Subhadassi. Over the following year the increasing enthusiasm and commitment of members of the local sangha prompted the team to look for a more substantial and permanent site for activities, and Newcastle Buddhist Centre moved into its first permanent premises in May. It now occupies the third floor of a large 1920s building in the heart of the city – looking on to what is regarded by some as the UK's prime shopping area after London's Regent Street.

The new Centre has given the team an opportunity to broaden the number of activities offered. An extensive programme of events is planned for the summer, including a series of non-residential retreats at the Centre forming part of a 'summer school', as well as daytime events to attract the shoppers and office workers who are the largest presence in the immediate area.

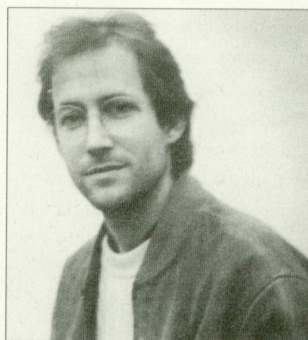
fwbo berlin

Anomarati recently moved to Berlin, which with the fall of the Wall and the subsequent unification of the two Germanies has been the focus for the most significant political events in recent European history.

FWBO activities now take place in Anomarati's spacious flat where twenty mitras and Friends attended the dedication ceremony for the new shrine-room. A regular programme of day retreats, courses, and weekend events has commenced.

In September a month long 'Peace University' will be held in Berlin. The Buddhists of the city have been asked to contribute to this for a few days. Anomarati comments: 'There are about thirty Buddhist groups in Berlin. As a result I have had more contact with Buddhists from other movements than ever before. I hope the Peace University will provide a forum for us to introduce ourselves more widely both to the general public and to other Buddhists in Berlin.'

On a recent gathering with Order members in Germany, Sangharakshita emphasized Berlin's important function as the gateway to Eastern Europe. Judging by the cultural mixture and general vitality of the city, Berlin is set to become an important centre for the practice and teaching of the Dharma in Germany.



Anomarati

new rupa and
shrine-room in germany

Fwbo Germany began its activities in 1983, when Dhammaloka and Dharmapriya began leading retreats in many parts of the country. Gradually their emphasis shifted to building up an urban FWBO centre, and in January 1988 the 'Buddhistisches Zentrum' in Essen, in the industrial Ruhr District, Germany's largest conurbation, opened its doors.

In 1991 Dhammaloka commissioned Chintamani to make a rupa for the Centre: a life-size bronze figure of Amitabha holding a red lotus in his raised right hand, as seen by Sangharakshita in a vision in Virupaksa Cave on Mount Arunachala in his youth in India. (This is described in Sangharakshita's volume of memoirs *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*.)

Bodhimitra, who works at the Centre, saw an opportunity to combine the need for larger facilities with the wish to create a suitable environment for the new figure, and for the last year, with the help of many people from the local sangha, he has been rebuilding parts of the Centre to create a beautiful large shrine-room and other facilities.

On 25 May four days of celebrations and festivities were held to mark the opening of the new facilities. The celebration began with Sangharakshita dedicating the new shrine-room and rupa. Friends, mitras, and Order members came from many parts of Germany, Holland, Britain, and France. There followed a symposium of talks and a slide show. Anomarati gave a talk on 'Sangharakshita the Man' and Sagaramati on 'Sangharakshita the Thinker'.



The main event in Sangharakshita's spring diary was his visit to Essen Buddhist Centre in Germany. Accompanied by Kovida he went through the Channel Tunnel by Eurostar to Brussels and then travelled on via Aachen (where he saw the Cathedral) and Düsseldorf (where he visited the Kunstmuseum) to Essen, where he dedicated the new rupa and inaugurated the refurbished shrine-room on Thursday 25 May. The following day he had a meeting with Dutch Order members, held a press conference for the local media, and conducted Kulanandi's anagarika ceremony. On the Saturday he attended Sagaramati's talk on 'Sangharakshita, the Thinker' which was followed by the launch of the German version of *Vision and Transformation*, published in German as *Sehen Wie Die Dinge Sind*.

While in Germany Sangharakshita also saw people personally, performed a *kalyana mitra* ceremony, and was interviewed by Regine Leisneir for *Lotusblätter*, the magazine of the German Buddhist Union. This was one of three interviews over the spring. In April Sangharakshita was interviewed by Stephen Batchelor for the American Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* on the subject of monasticism, which is the theme of its winter 1995 issue. And in early June Vidyadevi conducted the interview that appears in this issue of *Golden Drum*.

There were a number of other engagements. In March,

Sangharakshita travelled to Padmaloka to attend a farewell function for Arthadarshin, who has left the Order Office where he had been working for a number of years. Also in March he paid his first visit (via the second-hand bookshops of Hay-on-Wye) to Tiratanaloka, the newly opened women's ordination retreat centre in Wales. At Tiratanaloka he talked, both individually and collectively, with members of the ordination team. Sangharakshita also visited the Preceptors College community in Birmingham, paid a visit to Norwich, and answered questions at a women's national Order Weekend.

In May Sangharakshita cut down the number of people he saw in personal interviews. This enabled him to make further progress with his memoirs and to see through the press his *Complete Poems*, as well as an edited version of his lectures on the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*.

1995 is the tenth year since Taraloka's opening. The retreat centre's theme for this year is 'the lotus blooms', and the latest developments – which create more space for retreatants – are very much in line with it. The barn conversion was designed by Dayanandi and Erica Light and provides five bedrooms, a second shrine-room, a study/art room, showers, toilets, and a kitchenette. The new facilities are adapted for use by disabled women. Interior decoration was completed during a working retreat in July.

Dayanandi writes: 'I'd like to thank everyone who has helped us to finance the project. A lot of people giving even a little eventually adds up to a lot – and it is going to make such a difference to what our retreat centre can offer to women in various ways over the years to come.'

'The largest number of women to join the Western Buddhist Order at one time...'

In the last issue we reported that the FWBO now has a retreat centre – Tiratanaloka – dedicated to helping women prepare for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. Affirming this purpose, in June an ordination retreat was held at Tiratanaloka, in the course of which twenty women were ordained – the largest number of women ever to join the Western Buddhist Order at one time.

Samata writes: 'The women ordained range in age from their early thirties to their seventies. They include married women with young children, women who work in Right Livelihood businesses and live in communities, and women who are in full-time professional work such as physiotherapy and clinical psychology. For each of these twenty women, their ordination marks a significant stage in their spiritual lives. The ordination was a moving and joyful occasion.'

Meanwhile, at Guhyaloka in Spain fourteen men were ordained into the Western Buddhist Order, in the course of a four-month retreat.



lesbians' retreat

The first movement-wide retreat for lesbian Order members and mitras was held at Dhanakosha in May. It was led by Sarvabhadri and Sobhana, who have run successful beginners' meditation and Buddhism courses for lesbians in London.

The focus for the week's discussions and reflections was a series of talks: on 'coming



out' and the relationship between a lesbian identity and practising the Dharma; on feminism, gender, and the Dharma; on spiritual friendship; and on working towards *brahmacharya*. This element of the retreat provided a great deal of intellectual stimulus and challenge; the atmosphere in the shrine-room was very concentrated – and the retreat was a lot of fun too.

Many of those attending the retreat weren't sure at first what to expect, but by the end of the week everyone felt that the experiment had been a success worth repeating.

NEWS ERRATUM

It was Sanghashri, not Varashri, who helped to run the day retreat in France that we reported in the last issue. Apologies to both Dharmacharinis.

street farm retrospective

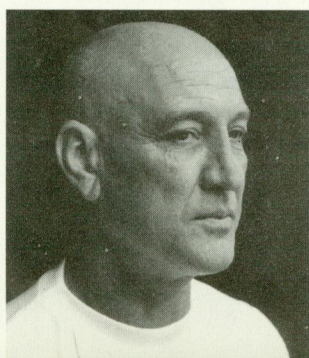
Street Farm in Aslacton, South Norfolk, has been used for FWBO activities since 1977. It was the first full-time retreat centre for women, called Mandarava, complementing the recently opened Padmaloka Retreat Centre for men about twenty miles away at Surlingham.

However, the facilities were not sufficient for the demands of a retreat centre and a search was begun for new premises, which led to the establishment of Taraloka in Shropshire.

Mandarava then reverted to being known as Street Farm and became home to Varaprabha, Dharmamudra, and their children. They were soon joined by Aloka, who moved into two converted railway wagons on the land to pursue his art work. And Street Farm soon found a new role in the FWBO as the venue for day retreats for the newly established Diss group.

At present Dharmamudra and Varaprabha are both leading very active lives. Apart from his sculpture and building work, Dharmamudra is Buddhist chaplain at Blundeston Prison, works with an alcohol and drugs rehabilitation unit in Norwich, and teaches T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Varaprabha leads a mitra study group in Norwich, teaches yoga, makes rupas, and is a book illustrator. Aloka divides his time between Street Farm and Going for Refuge retreats at Padmaloka.

Street Farm can now cater for small residential retreats, using the shrine-room facilities and caravans which are also used for solitary retreat accommodation. And early last year Sthirabuddhi restarted beginners' classes at Street Farm, with the support of Varaprabha and Dharmamudra.



vajrakuta



For many years Vajrakuta, situated in the North Wales countryside just half a mile from Vajraloka, has been a men's community dedicated to private study of the Dharma. It is only recently that it has become an FWBO retreat centre. In the summer of 1992 Kamalashila and a mitra, Michael Peterssen (now ordained as Aryadeva) decided to set Vajrakuta up as the location for a new project – a retreat centre specializing in Dharma study. Since it started in the autumn of 1992, the new project has run study seminars covering a wide range of topics, such as Buddhist texts, Sangharakshita's books and lectures, and Western philosophy.

Towards the end of November last year Kamalashila moved to Birmingham to live and work at Madhyamaloka, where the newly formed Preceptor's College and Council is based. This meant that Vajrakuta needed a new chairman. Fortunately Ratnaguna, who had recently moved to Vajrakuta, was happy to take up the post and lead the project into its next phase of development.

Dharma study at Vajrakuta is not seen primarily as an academic pursuit, but rather as a means of spiritual development aimed ultimately at Insight. In order to bring this about the team at Vajrakuta try to put study into the broader context of other spiritual practice, such as meditation, reflection, ritual, and spiritual friendship. Currently Vajrakuta's programme shows an emphasis on training Order members as mitra study leaders. In the future the study team would like to help people to take the practice of Dharma study further and deeper. The first step in this process is to develop a systematic study course for Order members.

Dharmamudra

the buddhist soldier

Here is the story of a Buddhist soldier in the US Army

Captain Larry Rockwood was a counter-intelligence officer in the US Army and a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. There's a strong case for thinking that any form of military service goes contrary to Buddhist principles, but Rockwood saw the army as 'an opportunity to express compassion in a skilful way'. He had his practice liturgy shrunk to fit on credit-card sized sheets that were laminated so he could carry them in the field. Rockwood believed in the American constitution and he felt he could continue with his two vocations. The army even sent him to college to study Tibetan.

Rockwood commented: 'There are said to be Buddhas in hell and the people in hell consider them part of it. You have to approach sentient beings wherever they are.' In September 1994 Rockwood was sent to one of our hells on earth: he was sent to Haiti with the 10th Mountain Division of the US Army. When Bill Clinton dispatched the US force he declared that their mission was 'stopping brutal atrocities', upholding human rights, and creating a stable environment for the return of democracy. Rockwood believed the orders and believed in the mission, and when he arrived in Port-au-Prince he quickly started to gather reports of what was going on. He heard stories of abduction, torture, and murder. Above all he was deeply concerned about five prisons in Port-au-Prince which were said to be the site of untold atrocities. On 27 September he heard of the horrendous conditions that American soldiers in La Cayes found when they entered a similar prison. 'They pulled people out of this dark dungeon

where they were back-to-back and the skin literally fell off their bodies.'

Rockwood told as many people as possible about the information he was receiving, but he was dismayed by the response. 'I found a really callous indifference. Their attitude was, "So what? We could save a few people from being tortured and killed, but why should that interest me?"' The underlying problem was that the army seemed to have no real belief in the mission it had been given. The experience of the US intervention in Somalia and other recent 'humanitarian' missions had left many soldiers deeply sceptical about their value. Presidential directive or not, why risk your neck when no American interest is being served? On the ground in Haiti, the primary mission was now 'force protection', that is, looking after the interests of the American troops.

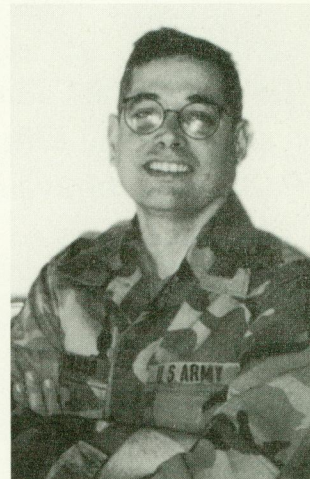
Rockwood comes from a military family going back to the Civil War, and his father had been one of the troops to liberate a concentration camp. A visit to Dachau and reflection on the implications of the holocaust had led him to Buddhism. 'I could not, in the Judaeo-Christian framework, explain the holocaust. The more you study the people who carried it out, the more you realize that you meet these people every day. So the answer isn't some unique diabolical evil. Buddhism states that the roots of it are in everyone. It's hatred, greed, and delusion and not some personification of evil that you find exterior to yourself.'

Rockwood was unable to get anyone to act and he was told 'not to let it get to you so much'. He realized that he had to take matters into his own hands. In the full knowledge that it would destroy his career

he made a formal complaint charging the army command with 'subversion of the President's primary mission intent concerning human rights'. But even this step seemed unlikely to have any effect. He knew international law asserted that it was an offence not to prevent atrocities wherever possible. 'If I really believed that this was criminal negligence, I had to admit that I was part of it now. In a Buddhist sense, this was part of my karma.'

The prison facilities were regarded with universal terror by the Haitian population. If you went in, you probably would not come out. All the same, on the night of 30 September, after a night of soul-searching and meditation, Rockwood decided to go it alone. He scaled the compound wall to avoid having to lie to the guards and caught a lift to the National Penitentiary. He knocked on the door, and when it was opened, he pushed his way in. Rockwood announced to the guards that he was there to do an inspection and demanded to see the facilities immediately. The guards took him on a tour of the cells of the more sanitary parts of the prison, but at one point Rockwood headed down a hallway he was being directed away from. He found an 'infirmary' crowded with emaciated prisoners, many too sick to move, lying on the floor thick with excrement. The guards refused to let him see any more, so he decided to wait. Two hours later a US Military Liaison Officer was dispatched to bring Rockwood home and, reluctantly, he agreed to go.

Back at the compound Rockwood was arrested, flown back to the US under guard, and given a choice between resignation and court-martial. Despite facing the threat of up



to seven years in prison, Rockwood refused to resign. His trial took place in May this year and, as he had expected, Rockwood lost. After the court's sentence was passed, Rockwood read the following statement to human rights representatives and the press:

'My sentence in the court-martial was dismissal (equal to dishonourable discharge) from the service. I am, of course, planning to appeal. Although it may sound strange, I am not entirely relieved by the sentence of no confinement. As a soldier by vocation, I always considered dismissal the most adverse penalty. The sentence is, however, not surprising: it is consistent with my command's desire to conceal their inaction so far as the inspection of Haitian prisons is concerned.

'More important than my career, I am concerned that the US Army is attempting to marginalize the Nuremberg principles in the most subtle and quiet manner possible. Indeed, during the seven-day trial the government side insisted that personal and command responsibility for human rights violations is irrelevant for American military personnel.'

He quoted Gandhi: 'Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it.'

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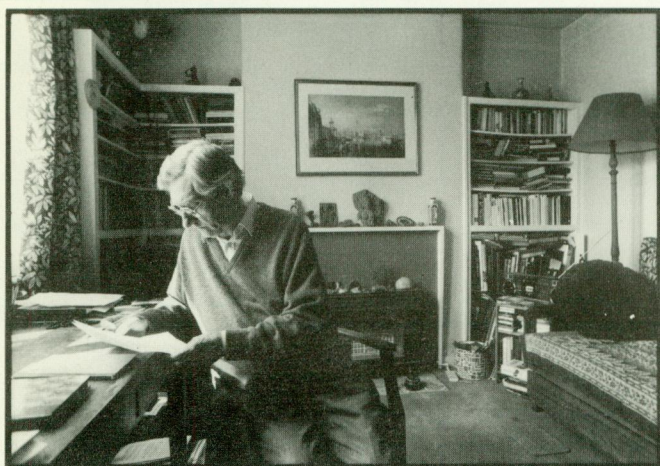
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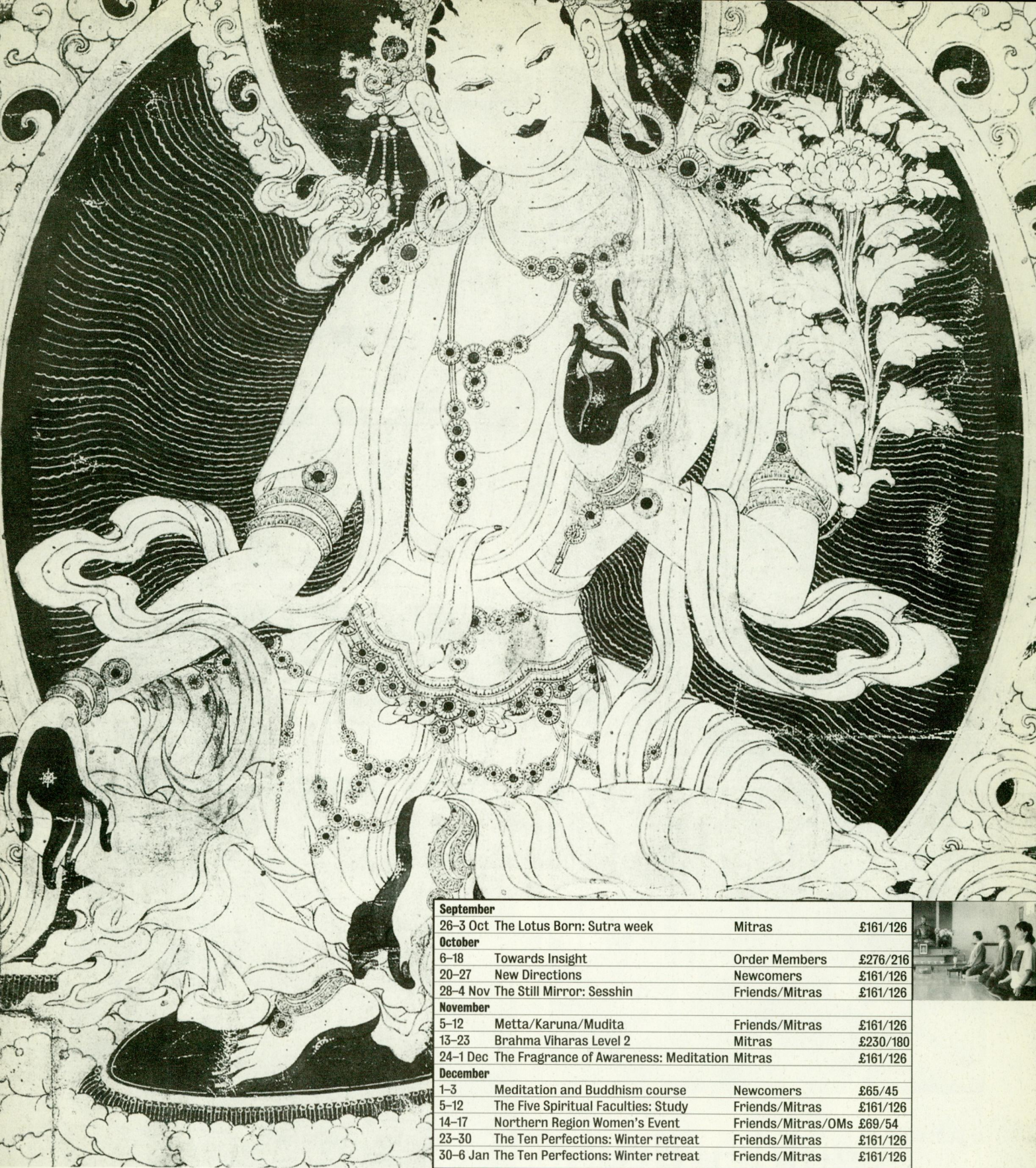
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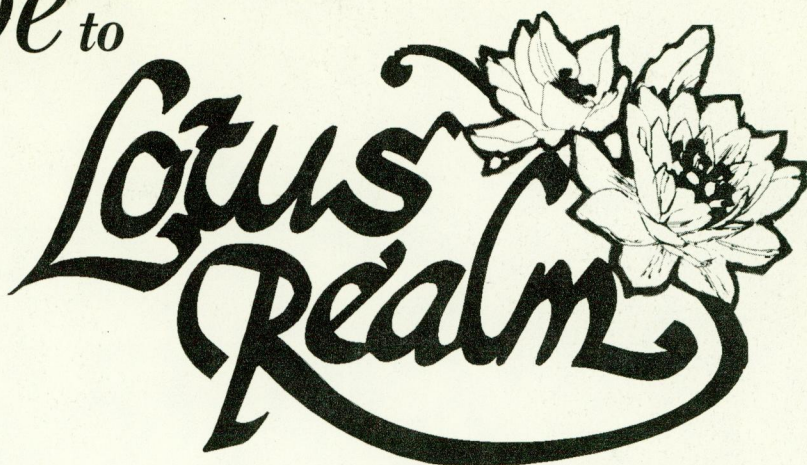
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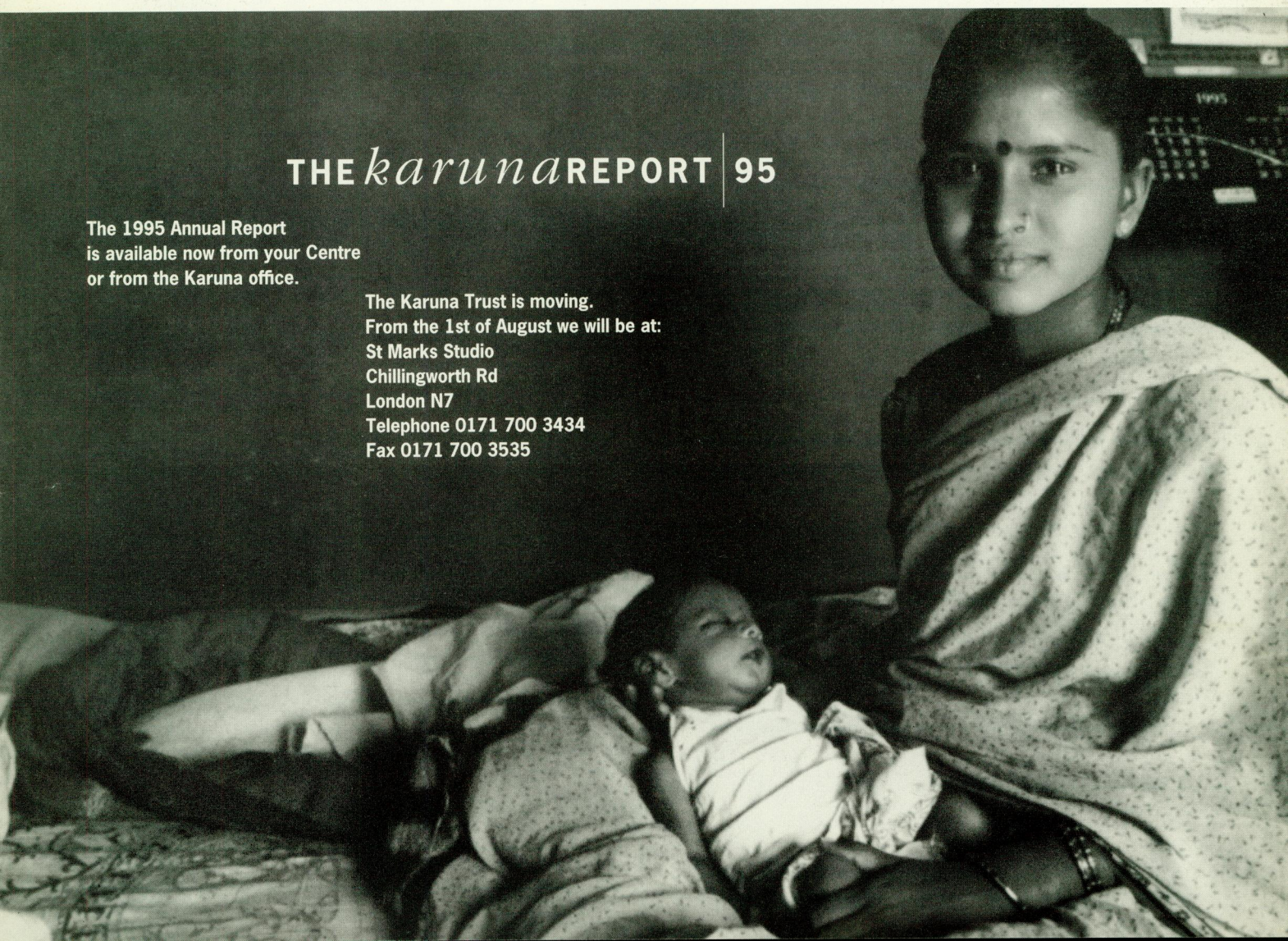
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cold cash or a rich life?

People think about money as much as they think about sex, but they don't talk about it nearly as much. For many of us, it's a secret hoard under the bed, in the bank, or snug in a stock portfolio. Be the hoard small or great, it casts a spell of quiet anxiety. Is it safe from the risks of change in financial markets? Will it wear out with inflation? Will it still protect me from the uncertainties of age and unexpected need? How can I increase it? This is money as something cold and inert, providing for the continuing idea of myself as someone who's rich or poor.

Some time ago I was earning quite a lot of money. But I didn't spend much of it on what I then enjoyed. There could have been fine wine in sun-drenched gardens, things of beauty, meals for friends, gifts, and holidays. Instead there was a mortgage, so prudent—they all said—as private provision for the years ahead, because bricks and mortar have a value that will last for ever. There were pension schemes, untouchable for now, but there to guarantee the person that I might become when old. My money held the promise that I, my status, and my own self view would endure. My view of money hid the present in some other world, far away in the mists of an unknown future. This was a view never questioned, never discussed—not even with my closest friends. Here was a hidden eternalism.

The nihilists who have money simply want to get rid of it, in silly extravagance or in acts of renunciation which put nothing better in its place. Nihilists who don't have money tend to hate it for what it makes possible: the exercise of crass consumer tastes, displays of social power, and gross unfairness. But nihilism embraces poverty without the richness of present contentment in an uncomplicated life. Nihilists see themselves as poor: forever. They too sit on a cold hoard, not of gold but of stones. Both gold and stones feel much the same in the dark mist of views.

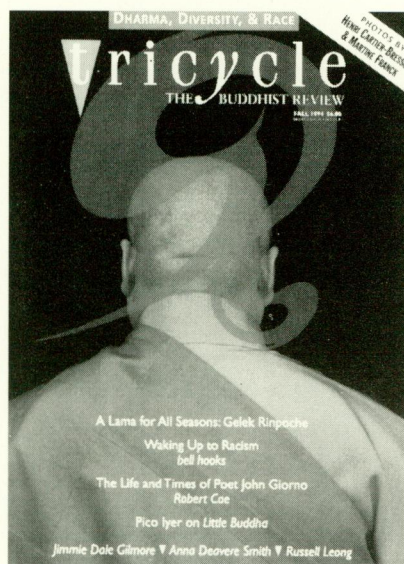
The importance of money is that, however much or little we may have of it, it can give expression to what we value most. Money is energy. If we could only see it like that, it would put

power behind our ethical choices. Even a cold hoard of savings is never inert. Put in the stable, unquestioning anonymity of a bank, money never stops moving. How often do we wonder where our savings go, through how many transactions, to what loans—for what purposes—before we reassert our claim on them? Within the mandala of our lives we may be making choices, giving ethical content to what's important to us. But all too often people leave their money in the mist beyond the mandala, put to uses they would never countenance if they only knew. We diminish our power to choose when we take an abstract view of money as a cold and static hoard.

Spiritual practitioners may have something to learn from mundane entrepreneurs. The great entrepreneurs do not behave like dragons sitting on a hoard of inert gold or stones. Those like Richard Branson never leave their money idle. It is constantly flowing from new sources to new uses, some profit-making, others philanthropic, never stopping: like a flow of unobstructed energy, which touches everything that matters in their lives. Some don't even stop to consider whether they are rich or poor. On paper, their status swings between being rich and being bankrupt. But the monetary reckoning isn't the point. The point is that money is energy, to realize what they most desire.

As Buddhists we are following a spiritual path, and our heart's desire is radically different from what the mundane entrepreneur might seek from life. But for Buddhists, too, money—like any form of energy—is there to empower what we most value and enjoy. As entrepreneurs on the spiritual path we would put our money, with our other energies, into the projects that we really care about, into the activities where our friendships thrive, and into the institutions that we trust. Those living a spiritual life make all of life full and rich with meaning. Money is part of our lives, and our money needs to be transformed from cold material into vital energy as we make our lives complete. Money must be put to work, closest to our heart's desire. **Mahaprabha**

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