

golden drum

# ritual life

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Cover

*Naked.* Sculpture by  
Dharmachari Sahaja  
Photograph  
Dharmachari Aparajita

Right

Work on the new  
Manchester Buddhist centre



1	Editorial	
2	Inside Out	Vidyamala unveils the ritual dimension
4	A Sacred Interior	Priyavadita transforms a warehouse into a Pure Land
6	Welding to Wisdom	Nagapriya meets the sculptor Sahaja
10	Are You Being Served?	Varadakini extols the virtues of ritual service
14	Book Reviews	<i>Enlightened Beings, Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes, The Green Buddha</i>
18	News	Activities and events around the FWBO
22	Outlook	The FWBO and other Buddhist teachers
28	Comment	Sudhira asks: metta or machine guns?
29	Obituary	Has the Golden Drum stopped beating?



Ritual is symbolic action. Symbolic action reveals heightened significance, it takes place within a 'mythic context'. This will do as a working definition. For the Western Buddhist Order, this context is Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels or, more mythically, the Bodhisattva ideal: the ideal of universal Enlightenment. This ideal is exemplified by the figure of the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara and, in principle, the activity of each member of the Order invokes the reality of this sublime being. The lives of Order members are manifestations of the presence of Avalokiteshvara, their spiritual progress consists in revealing, through their action, this mythic context more and more completely.

In presenting an issue of *Golden Drum* on the subject of ritual, it might have seemed obvious to look at devotion (puja), mantra, or Buddhist liturgy. A very coherent and sensible set of articles could have been commissioned exploring the major themes and symbols with which liturgical ritual is concerned. However, I have not chosen this course; not through any love of contrariness but because I wanted to emphasize the fact that ritual is not something that has a place in formal religious observances only. It is not something that takes place only in churches, mosques, and shrine-rooms. Ritual is a way of living, a context within which one's actions possess heightened significance.

Further, ritual is something that must be *done*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the ritual process from a theoretical point of view. It is a practical thing. What ritual is, and means, will best emerge through learning from the examples of individuals living their lives in a ritual context. This is what the articles in this issue reveal. They show a glimpse of the irresistibly inviting mythic ocean that each of us can begin to dip into when we enter more creative, expansive states of awareness.

Spiritual life may be understood as a process of discerning significance in everything that happens to us and making every conscious act that we undertake one of significance. On the surface, a ritual life may not look very different from the most mundane, humdrum, kind of life that you might imagine. Its activities might be the same: working as a shop assistant or a builder, for example. However, the ritualist sees a deeper, more nourishing, even cosmic significance underlying his or her actions. He or she sees those actions as imbued with meaning.

To understand life in this way requires the activation of a special faculty, called by Sangharakshita the imaginal faculty. In more traditional terms, this faculty is *shraddha* (faith). Fully developed, this faculty is equivalent to *prajna* (wisdom):

'Imagination in the highest sense apprehends shunyata or truth in the highest sense, through the medium of form – that is to say beauty in the highest sense. It apprehends truth and beauty together.'

We can understand then that the ritualization of our action can be a path to Enlightenment – rather, the discernment of the

inherently ritual nature of our activity is integral to spiritual development.

The imaginal faculty is the eye of angels, its function is to spiritualize experience and so understand it symbolically. It sees the world of public reality, of external events and images, as an objective analogue of inner spiritual processes. It uses the material of the outer senses to map out the interior domain and so, through the manipulation of that external material, the internal can be reorganized. Thus a correspondence is revealed connecting the outer and inner worlds, the macrocosm and the microcosm. So fixing up a neglected warehouse becomes building the Pure Land, cleaning items on the shop shelf an expression of devotion to the Buddhas, welding scrap metal the subjugation of forces hostile to spiritual progress. For the spiritual imagination, all forms become epiphanies, revealing the ultimate meaning of the universe, all sounds the mantric incantations of the Buddhas.

It is important to recognize that this revelation of deeper significance within one's experience is not a matter of 'pretending' something but of acknowledging a deeper dimension of what actually *is* the case but, because of the poverty of one's imagination, has previously remained hidden.

It is as though we had chosen to live in a very small cell, in complete darkness, with little or no room to move. This is our life as we ordinarily know it. However, unknown to us, or dimly perceived, is a world outside the cell, a vast dimension within which the cell has definite, though strictly limited, significance. This dimension expands, like a translucent blue sky, in every direction without end. Within it fabulous leviathans range, celestial maidens dance, and creaking floorboards sing the melody of impermanence. This is also our life. But this is our life spiritualized by the imaginal faculty where our unremarkable-struggle-to-make-ends-meet assumes cosmic importance, where we understand that the surface of our life is the mundane echo of a vivid and potent spiritual adventure.

The articles in this issue can be understood as windows on this imaginal domain, through which its supernal light may begin to dapple our dank cells and by which we may contemplate its splendour and, through familiarity with it, begin to dwell in this enlarged domain ourselves.

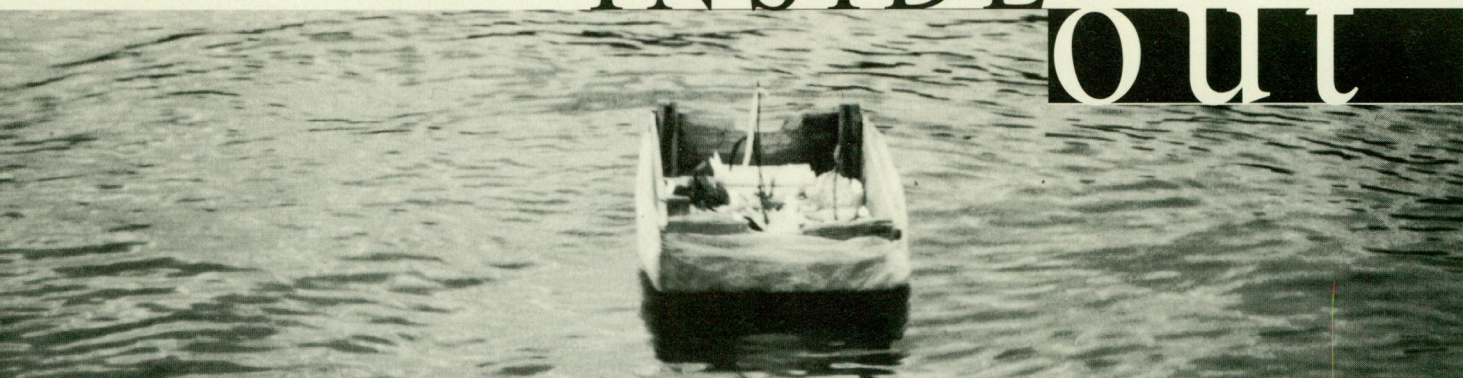
We can understand the unfoldment of spiritual life as the increasing ritualization of every aspect of our conduct: body, speech, and mind, to the point when every action becomes a sacramental gesture (*mudra*), every word a magical invocation of the ideal of Enlightenment (*mantra*), and every thought the expression of an overwhelming urge to bring about universal awakening (*bodhichitta*).

**Nagapriya**

\* Quoted in Sangharakshita: *A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*, Subhuti, Windhorse 1994, p.281.



# INSIDE Out



*'Ritual is the means of acting out the mythic symbolic dimension, bringing it into the present, into the real.'*\*\*

A sense of the mythic dimension is crucial if we are to experience our spiritual lives as vital and alive, performing ritual is a direct means through which to connect deeply with that region that eludes a one-sidedly rational orientation. Ritual is action that is imbued with, and communicates, meaning and higher values. In a Buddhist context, it is any action of body, speech, or mind that generates positive emotion, that points towards the ideal of Enlightenment, and that engages all of ourselves, the heights and the depths, in the mythic quest towards realizing the goal.

To explore this more fully, I will borrow a model from a sixteenth century Italian writer, Baldassare Castiglione, concerning performance.\*\* The principles translate very well into what we aspire to when 'performing' Buddhist ritual, since ritual is a form of drama, one in which we give form to our innermost longings and ideals, and express them through appropriate and meaningful actions.

The first principle is *decoro*. This is the outward appearance of the ritual; the form it takes and the techniques employed. It is a quality that can be developed, practised, refined, and mastered. It requires qualities such as duty and dedication. In a ritual, such as the tea ceremony, *decoro* is the performing of the ceremony with great beauty and sensitivity, with attention to detail, making sure that those conducting the ceremony know the order of events and are able to convey the appropriate aesthetic sensibility. However, the form is not enough on its own, otherwise we could fall prey to the third of the Ten Fetters: 'grasping ethical rules and religious observances as ends in themselves'.

In Buddhist ritual, it is crucial to keep the intention behind the action in clear focus. Formal ritual is definitely not an end in itself. Buddhist ritual has a clearly defined rational foundation based on ethical principles, the actions performed must be skilfully motivated. Sometimes people fear ritual, seeing it as devoid of reason. However, in authentic 'rational ritual' one knows what one is doing, why

one is doing it, what the form of the ritual means, and the state of consciousness one is trying to evoke through performing it. Ritual should in fact lead to enhanced mental clarity.

Castiglione's second principle is *sprezzatura*. This quality guards against the rigid formalism that *decoro* alone could give rise to. *Sprezzatura* can be translated as: 'A lightning-like energy which carries courage, boldness, even rashness and excitement. It is a delighting in the moment, a love of improvisation. It is constantly fresh.' This quality is crucial. It is a willingness to hold the form lightly and to incorporate the surprises that ritual inevitably includes with a dignity and grace. It is a delicate balancing act between controlling the form of the ritual, creating a safe space for the participants, and letting go into the magic of the moment. Some of my most breathtaking ritual moments have involved watching the unforeseen dramatic element unfold in ways I could never have predicted. I once sent a floating shrine out into the ocean. As soon as it began its journey out to sea I was captivated by the elegant vision of this strange and mysterious candle-lit craft – far more beautiful and evocative than I had expected.

Similarly, on the day of my private ordination I wrote out my old name and offered it to the river in the context of a going forth ritual. As the days passed, I returned to it and observed the gradual process of dissolution that took place. This created a living image for the inner process I experienced in abandoning my old identity and added a depth and intensity to that process that could not have been possible using the rational faculties alone.

In these ways, the enactment of rituals can deposit symbolic imagery in our imagination which then enters and informs a more archetypal dimension of ourselves, the implications of which reverberate through time.

Ritual helps us to integrate our depths into our conscious attitudes. In ritual the inner world is actualized and given form. One reveals an inner experience through action (making offerings, performing puja, prostrating) and this externalization in turn

enriches one's inner awareness. In this way ritual becomes a potent tool in the task of achieving congruency and harmony between one's inner experience and outer expression. The quality of *sprezzatura* is essential to all this, as we need to have courage and spontaneity, imbued with feeling, for this interplay between our inner and outer worlds to be authentic.

Holding *decoro* and *sprezzatura* in balance, we enter into an alchemical crucible of symbol and myth that can be startling in its intensity. The non-rational, intuitive side of us is called out into the light – often despite cynicism and doubt – and suddenly we find ourselves in touch with depths we barely knew existed.

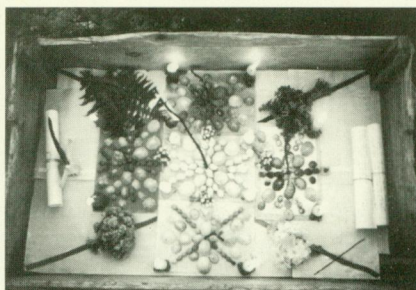
This brings us to Castiglione's third principle: *grazia*. He describes this as: 'A quality from the Divine, uncontainable, without limit, belonging to no one.' In Buddhist terms, this is the irruption of the transcendental dimension into the ritual process. Although we may only get a 'glimpse of a glimpse' we must cherish these visionary and magical moments when they arise, for they are vital prefigurations of a transformed attitude to life. The most useful way I can understand the principle of *grazia* is to bear in mind that all Buddhist ritual is performed in the service of change. Sangharakshita has said that if we could reduce all the Buddhist teachings to just one meaningful word, that word would be impermanence. Ritual is a powerful way to sense this. Ultimately, it is a tool for 'seeing things as they really are' and for living in harmony with that truth. In the course of a ritual, especially one conducted outdoors, the world becomes a living and vibrant place, not just intellectually but experientially. In this way, the ritual can help us to overcome fixed views and the attendant ossification of self and world. Rituals involving fire and water are especially evocative in this respect because they pulse with movement and change. I have performed rituals between the tides to emphasize this symbolism, making offerings expressive of an aspect of my own transformation that have then been proffered to the forces of impermanence – the gentlest of waves comes in and suddenly my offering is



Left: Floating shrine. Below & Right: Box shrines

transformed into something new. A death and rebirth happens before my eyes, I have a moment of mourning and feel my attachment but then another wave comes, and then another, and I begin to let go a little more into change. Suddenly I feel myself as a thread woven into the patterns of change in nature. The ordinary and extraordinary begin to merge and the world becomes richly symbolic rather than hard-edged and utilitarian. In such ways the imaginal faculty can be awakened and our experience of the world transformed and enriched.

Another way I have explored ritual is by making implements, or tools, of transformation. These have included ritual boxes, staffs, and a 'bardo necklace' to wear at the time of my ordination to remind me to stay awake to the deeper significance of that event. I have found the boxes particularly powerful because inside them I have consciously created a sacred, symbolic space for ritual to take place. They are containers of space, repositories for dreams, places of stillness. They are secret, mysterious, and alchemical whilst closed, transforming the offerings ritually placed inside, and they are open, expansive, and joyful when opened out. Our relationship to such 'implements' will be determined by our prevailing concerns and values since the meanings and significances we ascribe to our experiences are mediated through these. So, viewed sceptically, these are small wooden boxes filled with meaningless bits and pieces; viewed from the perspective of myth they



are symbols for the constant transformation that goes on in our depths.

I have a friend who made a ritual box for the kitchen knife so she would be reminded that cooking can be a spiritual practice of mindfulness and aesthetics each time she went to remove the knife from its 'shrine'. A simple ritual like this can be a powerful way to imbue one's life with richness and meaning, bridging the archetypal depths and the everyday. It is useful to consider these implements as 'faith tools'. Each time they are looked at or 'used' they serve as a reminder of the inspiration that led to their conception. As such they act as triggers, touchstones, and they nourish faith simply by the fact that they exist at all. They are like depth charges; they are buried treasure revealed.

Rituals can echo Dharmic symbols, for example, the lotus and the vajra. Vajric rituals are directed and have a sense of linear, dynamic, aspirational energy. They have a strong sense of beginning, middle, and end; for example, offering a prostration. The power of such a ritual lies in wholeheartedly engaging with the performance of the action, bearing in mind its underlying symbolism. Lotus rituals are more concerned with surrendering control. One sets up the conditions, the form of the ritual, and then becomes a witness to an unfolding drama that one cannot control or direct through ego or will. Examples of this kind of ritual will include those involving water and fire. At their best, these rituals can help one to experience the intense beauty of impermanence, rather than being frightened by it. Of course many rituals involve both aspects – dynamism and receptivity – and perhaps the most effective rituals harmonize the two.

Although I firmly believe in the value of

solitary ritual, ritual is at its most powerful when practised collectively. It then becomes a form of communication through which there is a possibility for the collective 'whole' to become far greater than the sum of its parts and a strong spiritual atmosphere engendered. The Sevenfold Puja is a good example of a collective ritual that can lead us all the way to an experience of the transcendental dimension: there is *decoro*, the form of the puja through the successive moods of the verses; *sprezzatura*, manifesting as emotional engagement and a willingness to perform each puja as if for the first time, with spontaneity and freshness; then, in dependence on the conditions created by those two principles, there is the possibility for the bodhichitta to arise, for the collective practice of puja to rise to another dimension altogether, for there to be an experience of *grazia*. In this way, a ritual such as the puja can become a powerful 'Jacob's Ladder' between mundane and transcendental experience.

Ultimately, our whole lives can be imbued with ritual and unveil a mythic dimension. It is possible to experience the world as magical and alive and to have our spiritual aspirations woven into the thread of our daily activities in a profoundly beautiful way. This is the ritual life. It is not far away. It is here – shimmering in the midst of that which seems ordinary but which when seen with angels' eyes is full of wonder.

Born in New Zealand, Vidyamala is now based in Sheffield, England. She was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order in 1995 and is involved in developing art and ritual courses and retreats in the FWBO.

\*Subhuti, *The Mythic Context*, Padmaloka Books.

\*\*See Anthony Rooley, *Performance*, Element Books







**Priyavadita** unfolds an alchemical approach to building a Buddhist centre

# A SACRED INTERIOR

**Northern quarter, Manchester:** Dirt, smog, hustle, noise, pubs, clubs, pigeons, shopping-malls, litter, winos, pimps, office workers, rent boys, curry houses....

Within this sprawling corpse of urban decay an obscure, forgotten warehouse transubstantiates. Brickwork sandblasted and repointed. Slates replaced. Rotten timbers renewed.

Wall rebuilt. Windows stripped, repainted, repaired. The insides gutted. Old fittings ripped out. The basic shell exposed, made good. New walls and ceilings built. Lighting and heating installed. Up on the fourth floor, before the neon signs advertising the Arndale shopping centre, a seven-man Buddhist community is already resident. *Right Livelihood* offices emerge. Study rooms, library, health centre, shrine-rooms – all will soon take shape. When the transfiguration is complete the rotting warehouse will have become a Pure Land: a thriving Buddhist centre, the focal point of the FWBO in Manchester.

Look closer; see with the eye of the imagination. What is really going on? I see war: a warrior band struggling with the forces of decay, disease, ugliness, striving to establish a refuge deep in enemy territory in the tumult of battle.

I see alchemists locked in hidden dark laboratories, philosopher magicians manipulating their experiments: observing, adjusting, regulating. In undertaking a transformation of the material plane, transmuting base metal into gold, they induce a corresponding sublimation of the base natures of their own souls.

I see purification, the clearing away of adventitious taints and defilements, the revelation and actualization of innate potential. I am reminded of the lotus in the mire which grows up to open to the liberating vastness of a blue sky.

I even see Bodhisattvas delighting in their play, rearranging some scruffy corner of this rose-apple island into a mandala of great beauty, breathtaking to behold.

The principle at work is that of correspondence; between mundane, day to day changes occurring in the physical structure of the building and deeper, more archetypally significant themes. One could elaborate many such themes and arrange them into a rough hierarchy. At the top, the most universal principle: Buddhahood, the ideal of human Enlightenment. Perfection possible to attain which as yet is quite beyond our experience. This manifests on progressively lower levels through experiences and forms that reflect its inexhaustible richness in ever greater particularity and decreasing completeness. At the bottom are the everyday occurrences of the building project.

Of what practical relevance is all this? I am involved in a building project. When it is finished we will have converted a disused warehouse into a Buddhist centre: a visible bearer of higher ideals in a barbarian land. Through it many people will make contact with, be touched, influenced, even transformed by, the Dharma. In the meantime there are deadlines to meet, problems to solve, materials to find, finances to deal with. In short, a lot of hard work. The apparent problem with a building project like this is that it requires a lot of hard work over a relatively long period of time and if one is not careful that is *all* it becomes. Is this the best way to build a Buddhist centre? First, let us ask: what is the purpose of a Buddhist centre? This should yield some ideas about the best way to approach building one.





A Buddhist centre proclaims the ideal of Buddhahood to the world. It is a hand, many hands, of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, reaching out to all those who are trapped in this burning world of greed, hatred, and delusion. It is a hook of his compassion cast on to the sea of living beings, a field of virtue which nourishes all beings to spiritual fruition. It provides conditions which stimulate beings to go for Refuge to the Three Jewels more and more deeply. In the ideal Buddhist centre every aspect, every facet, will contribute towards this. All the activities, classes, festivals, study groups, the people involved, the layout, design, materials used, the way it is constructed – everything will contribute. The ideal Buddhist centre is a Pure Land, a realm in which all conduces to Enlightenment, where everything is a reminder of the Three Jewels, a spur to realization – where every loose floorboard creaks the song of impermanence. This is what we need to build. Sangharakshita wrote: ‘Some pure Buddha fields come into existence as a result of the collective karma of divine and human beings of more than average spirituality; others are willed into existence by a particular Bodhisattva.’

In the absence of a Bodhisattva capable of single-handedly establishing a Pure Land in Manchester those of us working on the building must create it through the collective weight of our skilful actions. So is it enough just to get our heads down and work? No. This approach is rooted in a distinction between work and Dharma practice that is more apparent than real. Dogen, in his advice to the chief cook at a Zen monastery, recounts a conversation he had with a tenzo (chief cook) of Mount Ayuwang Monastery in China: ‘But why, when you are so old, do you do the hard work of a tenzo? Why do you not spend your time practising zazen or working on koans of former teachers? Is there something special to be gained from working as a tenzo?’

He burst out laughing and remarked: ‘My good friend from abroad! You do not yet understand what practice is all about.’

Converting the warehouse is not just a purely secular and very strenuous activity resulting in a nicely refurbished building. This Buddhist centre will be a Pure Land, a sacred space, a flowering of the collective efforts of those of us striving to practise the Dharma here. To the extent that we contact this ideal and can give expression to it, to that extent will we create the Pure Land. By now it will be obvious that connecting with those deeper correspondences and themes will enrich the experience of the building project and inspire the creation of a more ideal Buddhist centre.

But how can you actually connect? First of all, just do it! In the words of E.M. Forster: ‘Only connect’. By this I mean learn to experience those underlying themes. Do not content yourself (or discontent yourself for that matter) with the most prosaic, material, superficial interpretation of events. Initially, identify the more immediate symbolic correspondences then relate those to deeper and more universal ones. Ultimately allow your mind to be led up to the highest correspondences, to your highest ideals. For example, the fixing of the roof, with all its attendant setbacks and problems, becomes an attempt to establish a protected environment within which transformation may be achieved. You can look for analogous processes unfolding within yourself. So the fitting of the skirting boards to a particularly uneven and complex section of wall demands the same skills, attention, and approach as focusing your distracted or irritable mind upon your breath during formal meditation. In this way, we find ourselves entering more and more fully into a world in which everyday objects and events trigger off a series of reflections bringing our minds up to our highest ideals. Our actions proceeding from that

basis become increasingly expressive of those ideals. Little by little, we draw together the ideal and the real, our seemingly mundane actions – all we see, hear, say – become increasingly informed with meaning and significance. The world in which we live and work becomes increasingly related to the Three Jewels. Laying bricks, we no longer lay bricks, we build the walls of a Pure Land within which all conduces to practice.

At first sight it was a simple task: a tiny hole in the front left-hand corner of the building, a leak in the lead rainwater valley, and the abrupt comment on the surveyor’s report: ‘Some visible signs of dry rot in the timbers in this area’. (Just like a small blemish, the slight tinge of dissatisfaction in an otherwise apparently fulfilling and happy life.) On closer inspection the job began to expand. The little hole was a symptom, the first indication that the whole fabric of the building in that area was infested with rot. Just as through meditation awareness penetrates deeper and deeper into the layers of views, attitudes, and reactions rooted ultimately in the sense of separate selfhood, so we dug deeper and deeper into the rotten roof timbers, crumbling brickwork, infected window frames.

The problem finally unearthed to its full extent, the repairs could begin in earnest, the roof could be set to rights – unsatisfactoriness will never be transcended until we have laid bare the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion.

This imaginative approach to the project can be taken further still. In all the actions of building the new centre we can discern a context of heightened meaning and significance by engaging with those actions as forms of ritual. In a ritual we enact a prescribed drama which plays out as the objective revelation of a spiritual experience or series of experiences. To the extent that we engage with the form of the ritual, we invoke the corresponding spiritual experiences internally. This is how puja works – the verses express spiritual moods, such as worship or rejoicing, and if we are receptive to their content then we can experience their corresponding moods.

The whole course of the building project can be seen as a gigantic, eighteen-month-long puja during which the warehouse, or more accurately successive areas of it, passes through an elaborate series of transformational stages which reveal themselves as the material analogues of spiritual processes taking place in the hearts of the project workers. The initial stripping out: a going forth. Pulling down the old ceilings, facings, and coverings: a process of laying bare and examining – confession. Chipping off plaster and render: purification through consistent skilful action. Discussions with architects and engineers, the drawing up of plans: bringing into relationship the raw material of the building with the ideals set to transform it. The building of the new walls, the installation of services, the decorating: the actualization of the potential of the warehouse in accordance with those ideals.

When I engage with the building in this way, I act out the drama of spiritual life through bricks, mortar, timber, paint, wire. I recapitulate the going forth of Siddhartha from his home in Kapilavastu to his Enlightenment at the Bodhimanda where he became Buddha Shakyamuni.

The culmination of this working puja will be the shrine dedication ceremony, conducted by Urgyen Sangharakshita, the point at which the sacred space will be consecrated and the lotus of our new Manchester Buddhist Centre will blossom from the mud of a dirty, neglected warehouse. At this point, the fruit of all our efforts will become available to anyone wanting find refuge from the storm of existence. This of course will mark the beginning of a new phase, a new puja, but that is another story....



*Priyavallita lives and works in Manchester where he plays a leading role in the development of FWAO activities.*







*N: Why is art work so important to you?*

S: Basically, I decided to educate myself because I had very poor self-esteem. I didn't go through the education system and come out with anything valuable. I came out feeling I was nobody. I wanted to join the human race on a vocabulary level and on an art level. It was not a conscious decision. I wouldn't have classed myself as an artist, and I still feel a bit uncomfortable using the term. But I saw it as a means of expressing something that hadn't been defiled by the conditions of my upbringing.

*What do you think you are expressing?*

Let's forget the art work for a moment. Most of the spaces I inhabited in life prior to that had all been poisoned by lots of negative ideas – I felt a complete non-achiever – but art had not been part of this. Maybe it was as simple as that, or maybe it was just an area that I felt drawn to which was just waiting to come out. It started off as a space to inhabit to allow new things to come out. It might be as

simple as how I'm feeling today. I put myself in the best space where there are the least interruptions so I come to terms with how I'm feeling.

*So the art work and the space in which you do the art work is a space in which you can discover more about yourself and open up to new experiences?*

Yeah, have the potential at least. I never thought I would go to art college when I started smashing my room up and painting on the walls! There came a point when I thought: I am not just doing this to inhabit different spaces, I am doing something that means a lot to me.

*Why do you sculpt?*

I think that sculpture is the most crude, simple, level of art. I find it easy (I don't mean that I have an easy time of it); it is quite malleable and tangible – you can find shapes, destroy shapes. But it's not just sculpting but sculpting in metal – it seems to have got specific for me.

*What is it about metal that appeals so much?*

Well, metal, look – I can heat metal up, I can look at it melting, the structure in it changing. Metal comes from deep in the earth which reminds me of space, the cosmos. I am building things and it takes me right away from the everyday life of others – going to the shops and buying cigarettes.

When I'm working in metal I am tuning in to the cosmos.

*You use a lot of scrap metal. Is that important?*

I prefer to work in scrap metal because I like the idea of things that have been used for other things and have been discarded.

I reuse them and put them in something with meaning. A scrap metal yard is just something other.

People think about the Tibetans, or going to India, and all these 'mystical' places. Well, there are mystical places in England – there are tattoo parlours and scrap metal merchants. You can tune in to things here.

# welding



PHOTO: LOTTE DERRICOURT

SAHAJA HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE WESTERN BUDDHIST ORDER SINCE 1989 AND IS AN ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AT DEAN CLOUGH GALLERIES, HALIFAX. NAGAPRIYA WENT TO SPEAK TO HIM ABOUT HIS WORK. AMIDST THE CHAOS OF SCRAP METAL AND PART-FINISHED SCULPTURES, THEY SAT DOWN TO TALK.



What's the quality of a scrap metal merchant's that makes it mystical?

It has got all this discarded metal which I am 'ordaining' into a higher level. I am going off to these places and initiating the metal.

Looking around your studio, it looks as if it could be the external manifestation of your mind! There are all these bits of scrap metal lying around, that is all the unsorted stuff that needs to be worked on, but there are a few bits that have been worked into something. They have been organized in a meaningful way.

Yeah – I am bringing the inside out and working directly with the outside. People get excited about initiation and think of ritual as if they've got to do ten hour pujas – which I am sure is good – but working and dedicating your life to making sculpture is a ritual too.

In what way is it a ritual?

In spiritual ritual you dedicate and offer up what you are doing to something higher. I make a ritual of trying to do sculpture without getting into negative states whilst encouraging a more positive quality in my life – a ritual towards not giving up no matter how uncomfortable it feels. It is not that I come in here and bow and do all my 'Buddhist things'. Sometimes I do but sometimes I just come in, check my mind out, say hello to the Buddhas, and get on with it. Buddhist ritual has got to have meaning. You've got to be tuned in and honest with yourself and to want to see yourself being put into it, spread out, taken apart, and put together again. People might get inspired doing sevenfold pujas – that is perfectly all right – but Buddhist ritual can be more than that. If you come out with more meaning, feeling much more in touch with who you are, with a greater understanding and love for yourself and other people, then whatever you do is Buddhist ritual.

For me a ritual is an action imbued with some significance. So anybody can weld – people weld cars – but presumably when you are welding there is something more than that going on? There are two elements. There is what I make – I make demon daggers, flowers, I make quite wrathful things. I make things that are creative, stir me up, and have got a lot of meaning. But there is another level which is just me trying to get on with my life, full of all this stuff in my head which I haven't got a clue what to do with. I could

PHOTO: LOTTE DERRICOURT



I am a Buddhist and I want to represent a new tradition of Buddhist iconography that is real.

be welding and I could be feeling really insecure that the weld isn't going to stick. So I get in a worse state but then just catch it and say to myself: 'The weld is going to stick. Relax.' This has got nothing to do with welding. I could be working in a peanut factory.

You've decided that sculpture is the context through which you work out some important spiritual themes. Presumably you see it as an important way to grow and change; otherwise you would do something else?

It is something I have got an urge to do. I feel that I am really in touch with more than me. It is not like I have thought that sculpture is spiritual and therefore I will do it, or sculpture is more spiritual than something like packing peanuts – it's just what I do. When I have not been working, when I have not had enough money to work, I have felt much more doubtful about myself. When I am sculpting I feel more at ease with myself, more comfortable, and prepared to get on with transforming.

We were talking earlier about bits of scrap metal scattered all over the floor and you putting bits of scrap metal together in a pattern – integrating it. No doubt that process goes on internally as well as externally; through sculpture you reorganize your psyche into a more harmonious and significant pattern.

Yes. The whole process of building and making things has that effect.

In that sense the sculpture is ritual for you – if the aim of ritual is to integrate. One of the aims of ritual is to call up forces that are not presently available. Do you think you do that?

Well, in some ways I think I live in a magical world. I like to work at night and I still feel night is really magic. In the middle of the night I might want to grind something, so I turn all the lights off and I grind something in the dark. I get sparks and noise and imagine that I'm somewhere else and that those sparks are me flying off somewhere. When I am welding things I am one-pointed because I am holding these two bits of metal together and welding between them. Either I can feel energy being completely drawn out of my body and put completely into that metal or I can feel part of the metal so I am being welded outwards. It is a bit like making love – you get very close to things.

In your sculpture, I see you. I see really exuberant energy that is very expansive and powerful. Very fiery but very creative.

I suppose if you interact with something for long enough then it is going to look like you. If you are married to someone long enough then they look like you, don't they? So I suppose the same thing happens with sculpture.

A lot of your work has been concerned with making demon daggers. Could you tell me what a demon dagger is?

The basic principle is derived from shamanic ritual. They were originally just tent pegs. So the shaman would have a tent peg – maybe painted blue with a funny face on – that was special. He pinned the ground out, did the ritual, and paid reverence to the local deities – through that the space became safe. Buddhism has used that idea in its own rituals to pin down demons. Your demons are your mental poisons, your obstructions. You pin yourself down to have a good look at yourself, at what you need to transform. You are doing something to the universe, getting in touch with higher energies. A demon dagger is a pin in the ground and out of the pin comes the figure. Demon daggers are like taps, you pin them into the earth or the ground and energy goes through them but it gets purified.

Demon daggers are enlightened things. This is the deity in wrathful form, wrathful because it has got to deal with unrefined and unruly energy – it has to be fierce.



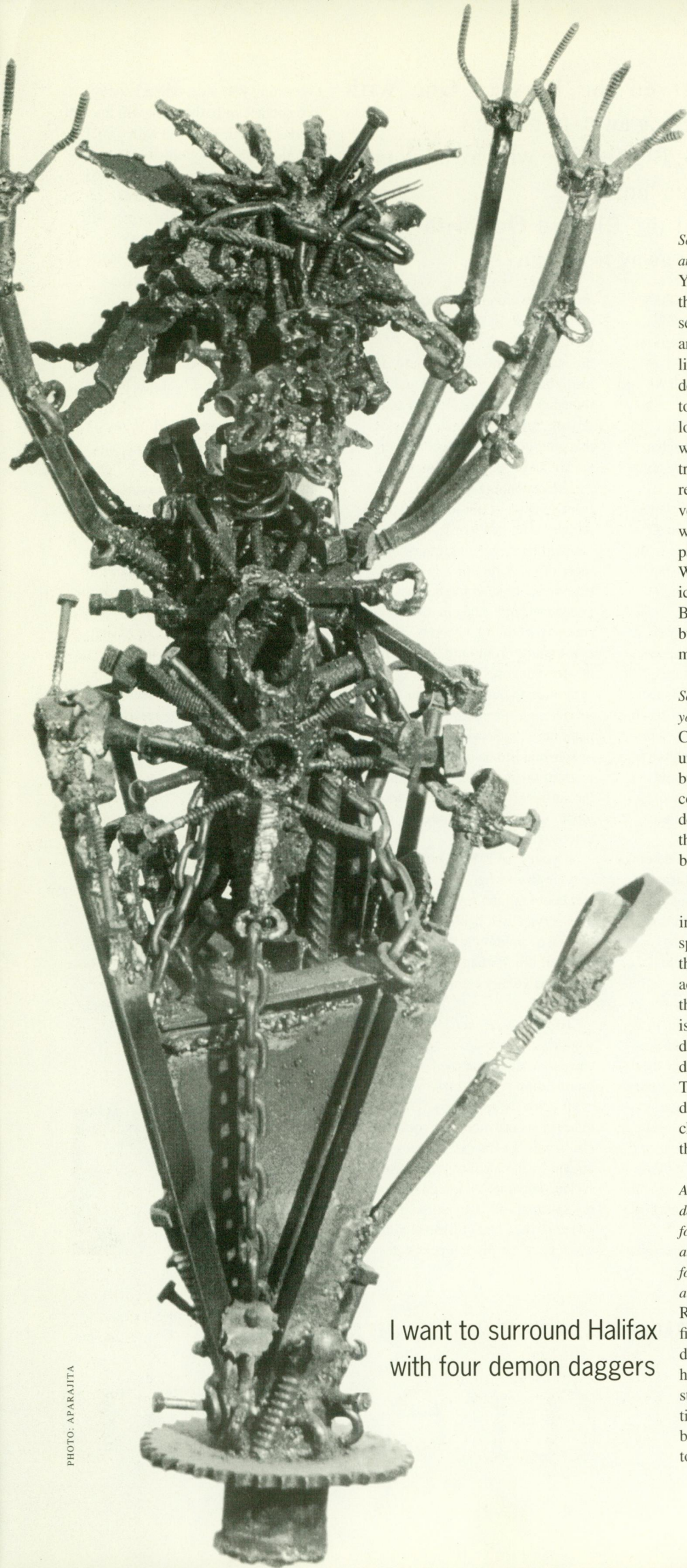


PHOTO: APARAJITA

I want to surround Halifax  
with four demon daggers

*So a demon dagger is essentially pinning down and transforming unenlightened energy?*

Yes. They take on the form of the energy they are dealing with. They make themselves acceptable to the energy that they are dealing with. They don't really look like that (you have got to be wrathful in dealing with demons), they are beautiful too. I want them to represent other ways of looking at things. I am a Buddhist and I want to represent a new, non-wallpaper, tradition of Buddhist iconography that is real. I am from Manchester, I have had a very particular upbringing, I am trying to work with who I am. That has got to be part of what I am making. Also, I am a Western Buddhist representing Buddhist iconography. It is early days for Western Buddhism, and for me as a practising artist, but I do want to represent something that is more real than poster paintings.

*So when you are building a demon dagger, do you feel that you are pinning demons down?*

Completely, yeah. I am making the universe a safer place. I see what I am building as being very important for the cosmos. I want to surround Halifax with demon daggers. I want people to look at them and pick up on the fact that they are being confronted with something other than just what is available – just one-dimensional space which people inhabit. These daggers represent another space and you've just got to look at them – it might not be comfortable. They actually give out something other. I think they give out energy, love, compassion. It is definitely spiritual and from another dimension. A demon dagger is a doorway – all you've got to do is open it. That is what good art should be – a doorway. You've really got to make the choice to be with it and contemplate going through that door.

*Another thing that strikes me about the demon dagger is that it becomes progressively more focused. Your demon daggers seem quite chaotic at the top end and they gradually become more focused towards the point, which again suggests a focusing, an integrating.*

Recently I have been exploring the human figure. I still see these sculptures as demon daggers but the sharp point has gone. I have not needed the point. The dagger as a structure seems to have disappeared for the time being. It is still there, on another level, but it is now a figure. What I have wanted to do is make myself.



‘For twenty-five years I served the Blessed One with loving deeds, like a shadow not going away from him.

For twenty-five years I served the Blessed One with loving words, like a shadow not going away from him.

For twenty-five years I served the Blessed One with loving thoughts, like a shadow not going away from him.’

Thus spoke Ananda, the Buddha’s attendant, when, after the Buddha’s death, he recollected his life serving the Enlightened One.

In all schools of Buddhism we find those who will later become Enlightened serving the Buddha, the spiritual community, their teachers. What is our response when we come across such stories?

Can we not, as intelligent, fairly skilful, human beings living in a post-modern society, dispense with those troublesome and somewhat demeaning preliminaries to the spiritual life?

We meet exemplars of service, at all levels of spiritual unfoldment, again and again in the scriptures. Not only do we read of the lay devotees serving the monks, the monks serving the teachers, the Bodhisattvas serving countless Buddhas for countless *kalpas*, but that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas themselves have no purpose other than to act for the benefit of all beings.

Why have all these spiritual beings been so committed to serve, tried so hard to serve, taken numerous vows to serve, the Buddhas, the Dharma, the Sangha – all beings?

How can service be a spiritual practice? Of course it is not *necessarily* such – it becomes so when our service is undertaken in relation to a higher ideal, when we devote ourself to the service of the Enlightenment principle. It becomes a spiritual practice when we have developed Right Motive; an aspiration to evolve towards Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This requires a clear understanding of ourselves, our goal, and our path.

A clear understanding of ourselves

arises from a realization that we have the *potential* for limitless growth (that there are in us the seeds of breathtaking goodness, beauty, and truth) but we are burdened and impeded; much is in the way of our growth. It is a clear understanding that although we can become perfect, we are, at present, very imperfect.

Understanding of the goal arises from a vision of our ideal which, in Sangharakshita’s words, is ‘something direct and immediate and more of the nature of a spiritual experience than an intellectual understanding’. The emotional counterpart of this vision is faith (*shraddha*). From faith springs the desire to devote ourselves, to surrender, to our ideal. From faith service as a spiritual practice, as a path, unfolds. Service, in the context of spiritual life, is not the donkey work of the ignorant, the penance of the sinful, or the clenched-teeth labour of the down-trodden; it is the activity of the wise.

If your goal is Enlightenment, moving from where you are to better and better, all the way to perfection, then service will become more and more woven into the fabric of your spiritual life. Perhaps it is already there to a greater extent than you realize.

To serve is to act for the benefit of whomever or whatever we have chosen to serve; our own gratification – if we seek gratification at all – is only secondary. To serve is to act in accordance with someone else’s will. To the extent that I am guided by the ideal of Enlightenment, serving becomes an integral aspect of my spiritual life. The more I am aware of the ideal of Enlightenment when I act, the more it permeates

everything I do, everything I come into contact with, the more will my service become suffused with devotion and my actions form rituals. With acts of kindness, of generosity, with ethical behaviour, I serve; through tasks mindfully discharged I serve; with the simple gestures of offering and salutation I serve; with words of praise, with inspired thoughts, with reflections and resolve, with all my efforts to practise, with every step on the path, I serve. When in acts of body, speech, or mind we obey, we follow the best, the highest in us, we engage in ritual service.

I want to devote myself to my ideal because I love and revere it. I love and revere it because it is true, beautiful, and therefore a source of happiness to me. It is said that the Buddha still felt the need to revere after his Enlightenment and that, finding no one above or equal to him, he directed his veneration towards the Dharma, towards the Truth.

As a spiritual practice, or as the natural expression of our insights, ritual service bears little resemblance to service as a calculated deal between two parties; the servile and submissive activity of one who chooses irresponsibility, or the demands forced upon the weak by the strong.

However, how are we to devote ourselves to the ideal of Enlightenment when we do not really know what we are serving? It is essential to find our ideal reflected, manifested, expressed, in something or someone we can relate to. We need a concrete embodiment, a symbol, of our goal so that we may enter into relationship with it. An embodiment of the ideal of Enlightenment is a thing of beauty, it represents

Varadakini at work



ANAGARIKA VARADAKINI ON THE VALUE OF RITUAL SERVICE

are you





The Buddha Amitabha

something greater, truer than us, and as we turn to it we are drawn, inspired, uplifted, nourished, appeased, feel that we receive that which we have desperately needed.

Naturally, when we are given something, when we feel loved, looked after, our response is gratitude, love, generosity; we want to give back. The more consistently this happens, the more trust grows, we begin to feel confident that our ideal will not let us down. It is in this gratitude, this love, this trust, in the appreciation that our ideal is far above us yet that it is possible for us to attain it, that true devotion has its roots. It is from this experience, however dim, however germinal, that the urge to serve grows.

The clearer we are about our goal, the more committed to the realization of it, the easier it becomes to find its symbol and the more consistently will we be able to enter into communication with it.

For members of the Western Buddhist Order, the embodiment of the ideal of Enlightenment is represented by the meditation deity to whom they are introduced by their preceptor during their private ordination. My meditation deity is Amitabha. He does not embody the ideal just vaguely for me; he is who I can – must – become. He is me grown up, free, at my best: Awakened. As I turn to him, contemplate him, meditate and reflect upon him, as I feel the bliss, clarity, vigour,

peace, and warmth I receive from the dimmest perception of his qualities, and as this happens again and again, all I want to do is give myself up to him completely: in body, speech, and mind. This is the most common and natural expression of the arising of faith, evoked so beautifully in the Buddhist scriptures. This wish to surrender myself to Amitabha is an expression of the realization that spiritual ignorance (wrong ‘upside-down’ views) separates me from him whom I love, treasure, revere. At the same time, I know that Amitabha is no other than the best in me. Operating within a dualistic framework of perception, between self and other, faith expresses itself as: ‘I am giving myself over to you.’ However, the act of surrender is undertaken as a means to transcend all distinction between subject and object, between myself and Amitabha. Through serving him, in doing his compassionate bidding, I become him.

The less we cling to the wrong view of duality, the less we act as if dualistic perceptions were absolutely real, the less conflict and fear there will be in becoming even the *slave* of our ideal since it is no other than us at our highest. Having devoted myself to Amitabha, I want to serve him – to do what he wants. Amitabha has no wish other than for me to become Enlightened, to become him, and he wants me to practise to that end.

When I act in remembrance of Amitabha, everything I do becomes a ritual because it is imbued with higher meaning. Service as a spiritual practice becomes ritual because it takes place within the context of the Bodhisattva ideal, where every action, however seemingly insignificant, flourishes as the expression of the spirit of universal compassion. Ritual service functions as a bridge to the transcendental, a way through which we enter into relationship with the Bodhisattva principle and so become a channel for it.

Amitabha is the Buddha of meditation, so I worship him by practising meditation. He is the Buddha of love so I practise *metta*. His colour is red so I paint my room red, dress in red. He transcends desire through discriminating wisdom so I practise discriminating between appropriate and inappropriate objects of desire. His Pure Land is the ‘Happy Land’ so I endeavour to make those who meet me

happy. His element is fire in which I seek to transform all obstacles into factors of Enlightenment. Because his life is dedicated to the service of others, I dedicate my life to the service of others. As I write this article, candles are lit and incense burns on the shrine where he sits; all actions of body, speech, and mind I can offer to him so they must be worthy of him. I can worship Amitabha by offering him the goods I dust in Evolution, the gift shop where I work, salute him in my interactions with other people. With the thought of doing only that which would please him in my heart, my life is unending devotion to Amitabha and every little act is sacred.

However, my practice of service need not be directed only towards a Buddha or Bodhisattva, or the far away goal of Enlightenment. I can serve my teacher, my spiritual friends, a verse from a *sutra*, an ordinary human being – a customer in the shop.

Just as I choose to serve the Buddha, enter into relationship with the best in myself, awakening, developing my potential for the good, the beautiful, the true, I could also choose to serve Mara – all that harms and hinders spiritual growth – make offerings to greed, worship my wrong views, rush around to please my pride and feed my aversion.

The question is not ‘To serve or not to serve?’ but whether to make service a debasing activity or a noble one: a deal or a ritual. The former conduces only to drudgery, prostitution, and the growth of destructive life patterns, the latter to their transcendence, to liberation from the bonds of selfishness. We are all the servants of others – causes, emotions, or views – the art of life is in choosing the right master.

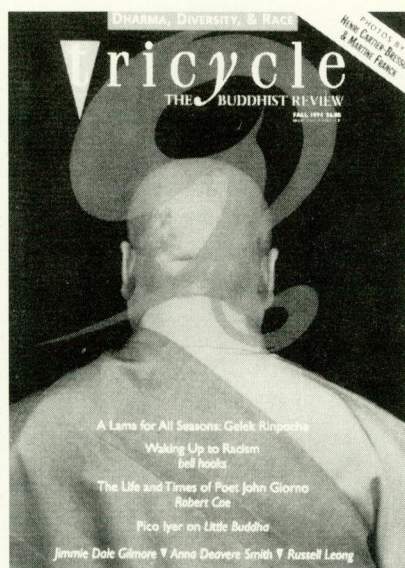
*Anagarika Varadakini was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order in 1993. She works in a Right Livelihood gift shop, Evolution, in Cambridge and is preparing to return France (her country of birth) to establish the FWBO there.*



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W I N D H O R S E **T** R A D I N G



# yellow hat yogins

## Enlightened Beings:

Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition

trans. Janice D. Willis

Wisdom, \$18, paperback

Reviewed by **Virachitta**

The main text of this book is a translation of the life stories of six great tantric meditators from the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism. Their lives span nearly three hundred years from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries, the earliest two were direct disciples of Tsong Khapa himself, who founded the Gelugpa School. For those readers who are reasonably well versed in the Tibetan tradition, this material may be surprising. The Gelugpas are best known for their rigorously logical approach to the Dharma, while these stories (and indeed that of Tsong Khapa – not included here) are more reminiscent of the yogic biographies usually associated with the Nyingmapa and Kagyupa Schools.

The translations are of a type of text known as *namtar* in Tibetan. This is usually translated as ‘biography’, but these are not biographies in the usual sense. One of the most familiar examples of such works is perhaps *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, and indeed they are often called liberation stories) but whereas the text on Padmasambhava’s life runs to two large volumes in the English translation the six stories presented here are no more than a few pages apiece. This genre is rather different from our usual, Western expectations of a biography. Its function is to elucidate the *spiritual* life of the subject not the mundane details.

According to the translator, these biographies serve three functions. First, there is historical information, which is unlikely to be the original purpose in their composition but, unwittingly, these biographies throw a lot of light on an interesting period of Tibetan history during which the Gelugpa (or ‘Yellow Hat’) School achieved political dominance in Tibet. More obviously, these biographies act as an inspiration to successive generations of practitioners and particularly those within their own lineage. Finally, there is an instructional element in the stories told about these yogis, describing in highly symbolical terms their practices and realizations. These teachings are beautifully woven into the biographies. Thus, not only do the yogis meditate on, say, impermanence, they immediately

follow that up by enacting their realization in the choices that they then make in their lives.

Perhaps for the general Buddhist reader, the major reason for reading these texts will be for their inspirational content. They all exemplified in their lives the stages of seeking out the teachings (*shrutamayi-prajna*); reflecting deeply on those teachings and clarifying their understanding in discussion with further teachers (*chintamayi-prajna*); and putting the teachings into practice in their own lives in order to fully realize them (*bhavanamayi-prajna*). After this they all taught widely, as well as having one or two especially close disciples to whom they were able to impart the essence of their realizations.

The flavour of the stories is rather magical. After all, these people are *siddhas* – tantric practitioners who have attained supernatural powers. And, as always in tantric literature, it is very difficult to separate events occurring on the historical plane from more symbolic or even spiritual experiences, which may be taking place in dreams, meditation, or visions. This continual switching between differing planes of experiences undermines our solid, everyday view of the world. An example of this is the mention in several of the stories of a ‘Miraculous Volume’ containing the essential teachings of this lineage, which is received at some highly advanced point in their training. There seems no way to tell whether this volume has any material existence or not. The translator refers to this uncertainty by citing two stories. First, a tale about the First Panchen Lama (whose biography is one of the six) who always kept an empty space on his bookshelf – for this very volume! Second, she refers to information that Pabongkapa was purported to have quoted from it (implying an actual text) in the early part of the present century. The traditional sources simply say that it is kept by the Protectors (i.e. certain meditation deities) and revealed when appropriate. Surely, the function of such literature is to set the spiritual imagination soaring – as well as raising interesting questions about the nature of essential realizations and how these can be preserved for future generations.

The translator is Janice D. Willis, an American professor of religion. As she makes abundantly clear, she is a practising Tibetan Buddhist in the Gelugpa lineage



Above: Buddhism Through American Women’s Eyes. Cover detail

and this allows her to see these texts as it were from the inside. However, her academic background is also evident in the wealth of notes. In fact, the actual life stories themselves account for only 66 pages of the nearly 300 pages in the book. The first 30 pages of the book comprise the introduction, while the bulk of the book is made up of appendices, glossary, index, and the most copious end notes I have ever seen accounting for nearly a third of the book. While I found a fair amount of the material in the notes of interest, the sheer volume of them does seem excessive for a popular book. They also led me to expect an academic, even critical, approach, but in fact they attempt only to clarify the material given as it would be traditionally understood within the Gelugpa School. There is no attempt at any wider contextualization, leaving the readers to do this for themselves.

It is hard to know exactly who this book is intended for. I’m not sure that scholars would find it particularly useful as it does not include the original Tibetan. Although it does give an interestingly different angle on the Gelugpa School, it is hardly essential reading for all Buddhists unless they have a fascination with Tibetan Buddhism in general, and the Gelugpas in particular. Having said that, I enjoyed the liberation stories but personally would have been quite happy to have read them in a much shorter book, rather than having to buy such a large volume of which the core material makes up so small a part.





## from monasticism to motherhood

only just beginning and it is perhaps too soon to say much about it. However, I felt uneasy about attempts to include Christianity in the Buddhist vision and found some chapters, for example the one on Alcoholics Anonymous, unsatisfyingly vague about the connections claimed with Buddhism.

The talks have been very well edited so it is rather jarring when, towards the end of some chapters, there is a sudden change into dialogue format. The 'writer' suddenly becomes a speaker and the intimate impact of the writing is disrupted. But it is at times useful to have access to interchanges between the teachers present on the retreat. In particular, I enjoyed the accounts in the chapter called 'The Monastic Experience'. At first I was inclined to be dismissive of what I perceived as attempts to seek exotic cultural experience rather than authentic Buddhism but as I read on I was increasingly moved and impressed by the efforts the speakers had made and the risks they had taken to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the Dharma.

This chapter gives some thoughtful insights into the usefulness for Western women of 'Eastern' monastic practice: 'going deeper than our usual notions of comfort and safety will allow', 'essentially celibacy has to do with not having preferences'. On the other hand, one contributor questions the relevance of Eastern monasticism for Westerners, asserting that Eastern Buddhism is above all concerned with preserving the past whereas Western Buddhism is about creating the future.

The tendency of several contributors to refer to ordination as synonymous with monasticism suggests that the options for an American woman wishing to commit herself to the Dharma full-time have been very limited. The book has no chapter on Right Livelihood and some contributors even seem to suggest that the choice for women is simply between motherhood and monasticism. No doubt the growing presence of the Western Buddhist Order in America will add to a sense that a wider range of options is available.

I agree with the editor, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, that there is a need for women to articulate their spiritual experience, to act as exemplars for other women, and I welcome this book as a step in that direction. But I do not think, although some contributors clearly do, that it is helpful to see this against a background of

perceived authoritarianism and sexism. It is noticeable that the teaching that 'In essence we are all the same' is popular with several of the book's contributors – one woman going so far as to say 'Buddha is the equalizer' – while any idea of hierarchy is generally dismissed as an unfortunate side-effect of Eastern Buddhism.

As Subhuti has pointed out in the recently published *Women, Men, and Angels*, it is of the very greatest importance for Buddhists that we recognize and accept that we participate in a hierarchy. If we could not acknowledge that the Buddha was superior to us what would motivate us to emulate him? The point is that the hierarchy is not fixed; we can all climb up it, each at our own pace, and there is room for everybody at the top. To make sense of the truth of hierarchy in these egalitarian times, we need to get into focus the distinction between formalistic hierarchy, in which, say, monks are venerated because of their monastic status regardless of their spiritual commitment and spiritual hierarchy, in which we reverence those who are truly worthy of reverence.

It is going to take a long time for the implications of this distinction to take root in such a passionately egalitarian society as America, and *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes* reflects this, but there are signs that the Dharma's influence is beginning to pervade even this area. Eko Susan Noble, for example, is able to say: 'It is customary at women's gatherings to assume that men are largely responsible for the difficulties and inequality women face. But ego and delusion are common to all of us, whether we manifest in a male or a female body.'

At times the book verges on sentimentality – for example in a misty-eyed conversation about children as natural Dharma practitioners – but there are moments when it is very moving. One woman describes her feelings as she held a living human heart in her hands while assisting at an operation and another reminds us that our knowledge of each other is often little more than that which we have of a stranger glimpsed from a swiftly moving train – and yet on the basis of that glimpse we interpret, judge, and misunderstand one another. I would recommend this book for such moments of insight and discovery. I think it will also prove to be a telling snapshot of a particular moment in American Buddhist history.

### **Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes**

edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Snow Lion, £8.95, paperback

Reviewed by **Vidyadevi**

*Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes*, edited from talks given on a retreat for women held in California in 1989, gives a comprehensive taste of the spiritual practice, experience, and concerns of several of America's most experienced women practitioners. The women who spoke on the retreat came from various Buddhist traditions, including Theravada, Japanese Zen, Shingon, Chinese Pure Land, and Tibetan Buddhism. The book's chapters cover a wide range of issues: from 'Buddhist Practice in the Emergency Room' to 'Buddhism and the Twelve Steps' (a vivid personal account of the connections between Buddhism and the philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous) and includes chapters on karma, motherhood, communication, abortion, and monasticism.

Thoughtful and heartfelt spiritual practice and sound Dharma teaching shine through many of the chapters of the book. Ayya Khema's no-nonsense advice on dealing with stress stands out, but many other contributors convey a Dharmic – rather than a merely psychological – perspective on the issues confronting American women, balancing accounts of personal experience with broader considerations of how to integrate Buddhism and American culture. As some contributors make clear, such integration is



## buddhist ecology

### The Green Buddha

by Christopher Titmuss

Insight Books

£11.00, paperback

Reviewed by Guhyapati

Up from the cultural gene pool Christopher Titmuss pushes the stem of a lotus on which sits the hybrid figure of *The Green Buddha*, a figure he hopes can address the problems faced by the environmental movement and the environment itself.

Titmuss is a well known Western Buddhist teacher, who has twice stood for Parliament on behalf of the Green Party and been involved in grassroots environmentalism for many years. His writing is driven by passion and a deep concern to engage with the issues involved, and the book will provide a stimulating and wide-ranging tour of the basics for newcomers to Buddhism and ecology. Titmuss comprehensively lists the ecological problems we face and indicates the broad alternatives in terms of policies and personal actions that can be adopted in response. Tracing webs of conditionality from the global to the personal level, he provides a survey of the world: from the deranged perpetuation of economic slavery imposed upon the developing world by the International Monetary Fund, through choking clouds of carbon monoxide and road building policies, to the absurdities of personality cult politics. He also competently guides the reader through some good basic Dharma.

Whilst obviously intended as an introductory book it nevertheless contains some challenging insights and points of interest for those more familiar with these concerns. Titmuss is uncompromising in his insistence that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis. Thinking that we can address environmental problems by simply regulating our smokestacks, purchasing eco-friendly brands, and putting the packaging in the recycling bin provided, is a painfully narrow perspective. These efforts, whilst not wrong, are superficial. 'The Buddha challenges the basic capitalist ethic of desire and personal gain as our *raison d'être* ... he also demands that we look into our lives....' To address environmental problems we must tackle the deeply conditioning tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion within ourselves and recognize their inscription in the organization of our societies. Until addressed and transmuted through spiritual practice these tendencies will inevitably lead to suffering for ourselves and for the world we share. The maturation of society depends on the realization within the individual of his or her potential for



spiritual development; there are no short cuts. Yet we cannot afford to despair at the vastness of the difficulties involved.

Importantly, Titmuss points out that in our attempts to respond to ecological problems one of our most depotentiating tendencies is continually to defer responsibility into the future. The rhetoric of Green politics is often concerned to guide our attention towards the catastrophes that lie some years ahead. Titmuss suggests that we re-direct our attention to the present. Information about the future does not impel us to change – to change our lives requires that we discover the motivation within our present experience, it requires that we become mindful of our present dissatisfaction and the consequences of our actions.

Whilst providing a useful and broad introduction written with integrity, the book then flounders by slack repetition. The momentum of the discussion slows down, and it becomes obvious that the vital and dynamic potential of this synergy is not about to be realized within its pages. Buddhism and ecology are often rather clumsily butted up against each other, and in the end Titmuss fails to provide a rigorous critique of the assumptions of environmentalism from a Dharmic perspective. Eventually the book wanders off into some superfluous remarks which do no service whatsoever to the preceding discussion.

The penultimate section contains a clutch of chapters which compare the Buddha with figures from the Western tradition. In the chapter 'Jesus, Son of the

Earth', Titmuss shares with us a point he considers something of a revelation, and of which, he claims, the Buddhist tradition has so far remained ignorant. 'Buddhists have failed to recognize that Maitreya Buddha incarnated into the world 500 years later [than the Buddha Shakyamuni] in Bethlehem. Jesus is Maitreya Buddha.' It is surprising that a person of Titmuss's experience should make such an absurd claim. Not only is the sentimentality of religious universalism a beguiling obscuration of the Dharma's clarity, but this particular claim blatantly disregards simple Buddhist doctrine. In the Buddhist sutras Maitreya is predicted as a Buddha in the full sense of the term. That is, one who discovers full and perfect Enlightenment and teaches the way to Enlightenment in a world-system where the Dharma is not present. Maitreya Buddha will only arise in this world after the dispensation of Shakyamuni Buddha has been utterly lost. So is Titmuss suggesting that the Dharma as taught by Shakyamuni was already lost at the time of Jesus; that as the teaching of Jesus was actually the teaching of Maitreya Buddha, we should now be following Jesus's teachings as the true Dharma? Or is he simply ignoring these doctrinal points in his rush to reconcile Buddhism and Christianity in an undiscerning all-is-oneness? This section also takes a glance at the Buddha's attitude towards women, followed by a comparison of Prince Charles and Prince Siddhartha. It concludes by claiming that Charles's emulation of Siddhartha's going forth 'could become a turning point in the fortunes of Britain with beneficial reverberations for humanity and the Earth.' How did we get here?

It is unfortunate that Titmuss's book ends in such digression. His drawing out of the ecological and social implications of the Buddha's teachings are clear and valuable. Whilst lacking a sufficiently critical perspective on the encounter of Buddhism and ecology, the passion of his concern will communicate to many the seriousness of the ecological problems we face and the real suffering they perpetuate. In places the greenness of the Buddha is more evident as the greenness of immaturity. There is an obvious need for a Buddhist critique of many ecological assumptions. The hybrid is still young, but with the earnest engagement of committed Buddhists as it's life-blood it may be capable of growing to healthy maturity.



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what forgiveness? Who will understand?

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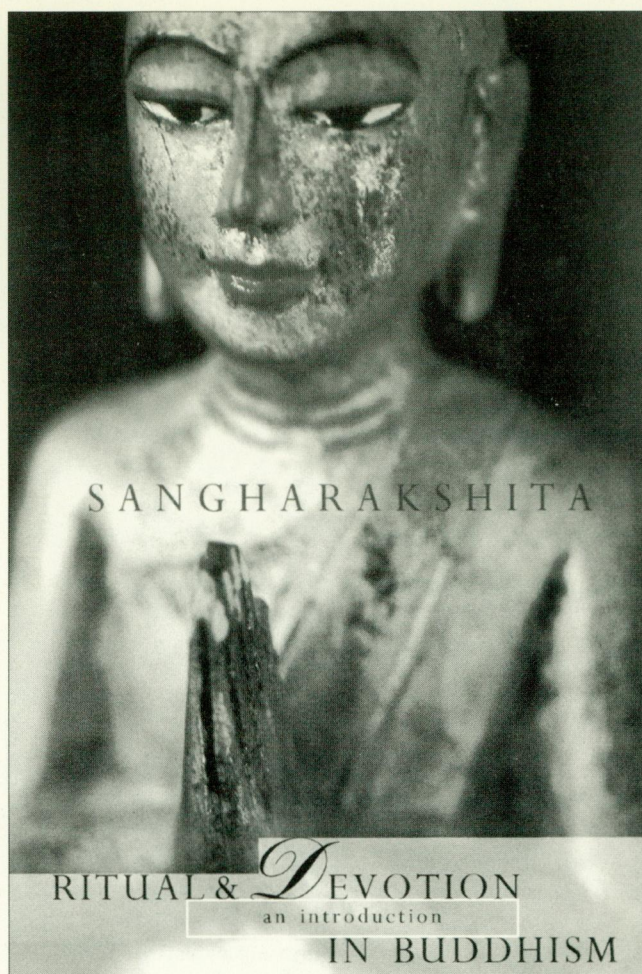
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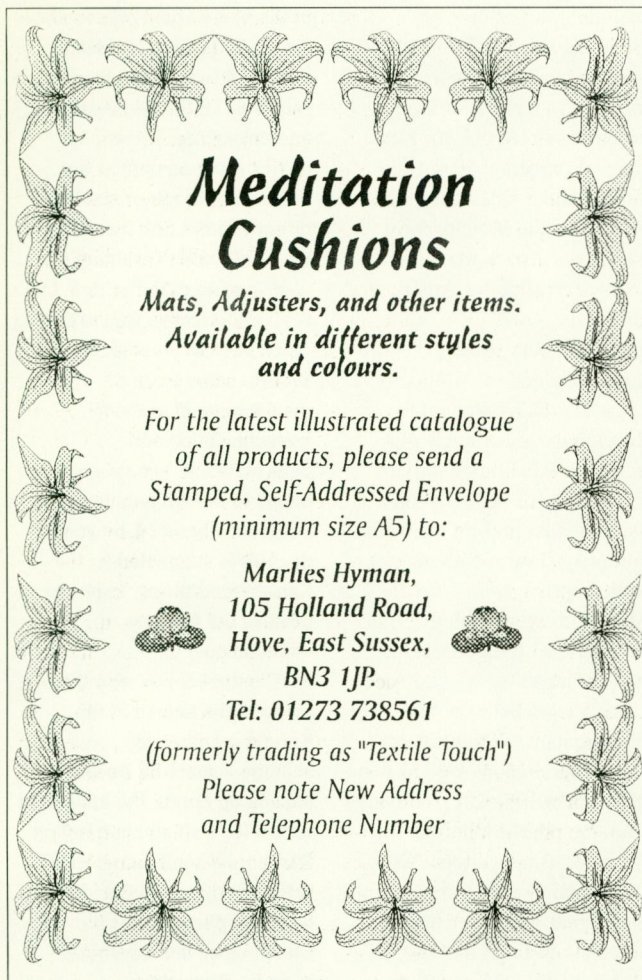
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**hurray! it's r.e.**



When the teacher announces to her class of nineyearolds that it's R.E. today they punch the air saying 'YES!' What can be the cause of such enthusiasm? Teacher Judy Flynn from the Wirral, Cheshire has no doubt. It is the Clear Vision video resource pack *Buddhism for Key Stage*. In fact, Judy herself has become so enthusiastic that she felt impelled to take the floor on a teacher training day on Religious Education to exhort her colleagues to buy the pack for their schools at once!

There is no doubt *Buddhism for Key Stage* has been a hit. It has certainly been a hit with the children, some have even written to the Clear Vision Office:

'Buddhism is my best topic I have ever done in the time I have been in school. I have been in school since I was three years old.' (Ashlea Arnold, aged 9).

The video resource pack is aimed at children aged 7 to 11 and seems to have been the answer to the busy classroom teacher's prayers. The first three programmes in the pack cover the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, while the fourth programme explores

worship and meditation. The 60page teacher's handbook offers background information on each of the 20minute programmes as well as suggested areas for discussion and children's activity sheets. The combination of video and handbook has resulted in a very flexible resource which can be used whether Buddhism is covered systematically or as part of a theme running across different religions.

Clear Vision's approach has coincided with current trends in Religious Education which focus on children's personal experience to enquire into how different faith traditions tackle life's ultimate questions. The pack has been hailed by R.E. inspectors up and down the country as being at the cutting edge of R.E.

Buddhism has been regarded as a particularly difficult religion to teach to children. An unexpected offshoot of the success of the pack has been the development of Clear Vision Inservice Teacher Training days. These days have become a regular part of Clear Vision's work and have also helped establish Clear Vision in the world of publishing a book for infants has been

commissioned by Wayland Publishers. This will be published in December 1996 complete with images from the Clear Vision photographic archive.

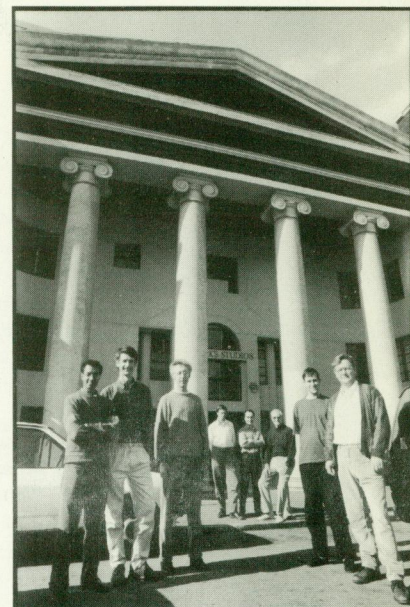
Clear Vision has established links with other educational publishers providing images and also offering advice on manuscripts. In addition, the October issue of *Teaching R.E.*, the most widely read magazine in the field of Religious Education, will focus on Buddhism the leading article is by Meg St.Pierre, one of Clear Vision's Education Development Officers.

The promotion of Clear Vision in the world of education has been undertaken by a women's team which also handles distribution. There are several new projects planned, including: a resource on Buddhist worship (which will include teaching materials and artifacts to make a shrine); a video resource pack for Key Stage 3 (aimed at ages 11 to 14 years); and a redesigned version of the *Buddhism for Key Stage 2* pack to make it more accessible for American children.

There are many other developmental possibilities. Clear Vision's potential to develop its educational and other work is limited only by the number of skilled people available. At present the team comprises four members; Mokshapriya, Nick Gray, Marty Casey, and Meg St.Pierre, with regular help from volunteers.

Clear Vision believes that through its work thousands of school children, as well as their teachers, will have a positive contact with the Dharma. Through its educational work, Clear Vision aims to help Sangharakshita's teaching to percolate through into the wider society; an inspiring thought.

**karuna news**



During the summer, the Karuna Trust ran a successful fund-raising appeal in north London, within striking distance of the new Karuna offices above the North London Buddhist Centre. A team of eight men raised £118,000 in donations and covenants. The appeal proved once again that the Karuna approach of making direct contact with members of the public and presenting a clear outline of the work in India is a very effective way of raising much needed income. The secret seems to be a combination of authentic communication and determination, yet always being happy to accept people's final decision: whether it be yes or no. This is suggested by the Karuna fundraising 'koan': be positive but have no expectations.

The appeal was also the first stage of the launch of the Karuna membership scheme – some 62 people signing up during the appeal. In return for a small contribution Karuna will send members its twice yearly newsletter; full of beautiful photographs by Dhammarati and informative texts by Manjushvara.



## amsterdam

Another FWBO centre has opened, this time in Amsterdam, the capital city of Holland. It is situated in a district called the Jordaan, which is well known to people living in Amsterdam for its cafés, small craft shops, and street markets. It is also very close to the centre of the city, about 15 minutes walk from the central station through a maze of narrow streets and canals lined with houseboats.

There have been FWBO activities in Holland since the late seventies, for many years run single-handedly by Vajragita from her flat in Utrecht. Khemasiri, who is now chairman, returned to Holland in 1991 to join Vajragita in Utrecht. Then in 1993, Gunabhadri moved back to Amsterdam, the city of her birth. More recently Sadara, Kshantivadin, and Varamitra have joined them.

The opening of the new centre comes at the end of a year of rapid change for the *Vrienden van de Westerse Boeddhisten Orde*, as the FWBO is known in Holland. Meditation and Dharma classes started in Amsterdam in the autumn of 1994. In March of this year Vajragita and Khemasiri moved from Utrecht to Amsterdam, forming a women's community with two Mitras – the Order team has doubled in number from three to six.

Sadara writes: 'The response to our meditation courses in Amsterdam was very encouraging and convinced us that we should try to establish ourselves here as soon as we could. The population of Amsterdam is around 700,000 and there are also several large towns and cities within commuting distance – Holland is a very densely populated country – so our centre is within easy reach of well over a million people.'

## order conventions

For more than three weeks in July and August members of the Western Buddhist Order celebrated their biennial international convention at Wymondham College, Norfolk. The theme of the women's, combined, and men's conventions was *kalyana mitrata* – spiritual friendship. This was evoked through the practice of the *kalyana mitra* yoga meditation throughout. Historical Buddhist figures, such as Hakuin, Shantideva, and Tsongkhapa, visualized in the practice, were brought to life through talks and textual study.

On the combined four-day convention, over 330 Order members were present, which is the biggest Order gathering there has been to date. The talks included Subhuti speaking on 'Is there Trust in the Order?' and Ratnaguna on 'Discipleship and the Western Buddhist Order'.

## aryaloka is ten!



Aryaloka, the first FWBO community and centre to be established in the USA, celebrated its tenth anniversary in July. The celebrations looked back at the founding of Aryaloka, with a number of talks bringing to life the struggles and successes of the early sangha: meeting the monthly payments on the quarter-million dollar mortgage fell largely to the determined residential community of five men for the first five years until classes and retreats began to fill. A short

television news item made by a local channel two years after Aryaloka began evoked the mood of those early days.

A huge cake, a replica of the two-domed structure, was cut in the afternoon. The day ended with after-dinner anecdotes from Manjuvajara and Vidyavati. As Manjuvajara heads out across the States selling Windhorse books, he leaves behind a lively sangha and a centre well-established to communicate the teachings and spirit of the Dharma in the north-east of the United States.

Below: Combined Order Convention





## sangharakshita appeal

At the public celebration of Sangharakshita's birthday, in Birmingham on 10 September, Nagabodhi announced that £306,000 had been collected and pledged for the development of the Preceptors College. This is more money than has ever been raised for an FWBO project previously, and it has been done in a very short time. Nagabodhi rejoiced in the efforts and the generosity of all those who had donated money.

However, the appeal target is £400,000. The appeal has therefore been extended until Christmas 1995. The College is no longer asking for pledges, simply for donations. If you have been wavering as to whether to donate some money, or some more money, it is not too late to do it!

## poetry competition

*Urthona* was established in 1992 by members of the FWBO in Cambridge to provide a Buddhist perspective on the arts. The magazine takes as its guiding light *Urthona*, Blake's archetypal spirit of the imagination. Previous issues have looked at Blake's heritage and the art of Keith Grant, as well as presenting news, reviews, and poetry.

The current issue (Autumn '95) looks at 'The Ascent into Beauty', and contains details of *Urthona*'s first poetry competition, to be judged by poet and educationalist Peter Abbs. First prize is £100, second prize £20, and there are five third prizes of a year's subscription to *Urthona*.

The winning poems and a selection of those commended will be published in the Spring edition of *Urthona*. Poems, details, and entry fees should be sent to *Urthona* Poetry Competition, 19 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8EG.

Meanwhile, Subhadramati is looking for poems and stories for a new FWBO anthology. Contact her c/o London Buddhist Centre.

## sangharakshita diary

The main event in Sangharakshita's summer was his seventieth birthday on 26 August. The day itself was spent quietly, and in the evening he attended a performance of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* at the National Theatre. However, there were also two more public celebrations. The first of these was in the course of the Order Convention at Wymondham College in Norfolk while the second, which was an event for the whole FWBO, was held in Birmingham on 9 September. On this occasion 550 people enjoyed a programme featuring a eulogy by Subhuti and a number of musical offerings. These included performances by two choirs, one of which was composed of people from Windhorse Trading while the other drew on people from across the FWBO. There were also a number of recitals by professional musicians from within the FWBO, including a performance of Brahms

*Variations* by pianist David Earle. Light relief was provided by Suzy Slack and Her Amazing Balloons. Sangharakshita arrived at the Order Convention at the start of the combined period (where both men and women were present) at the end of which the birthday celebration was held. The evening's activities also included musical offerings and a eulogy as well as poetry and a short drama. He stayed at Wymondham College until the end of the men's convention and in this time was joined at meal-times by the various Order chapters in turn. He also had a meeting with the Presidents and Public Preceptors. In the course of the summer Sangharakshita had a number of other engagements. On 3 June he attended the women's National Order Weekend at the London Buddhist Centre where he answered questions on a number of topics. On 7 June he attended a recital by David

Earle at the Bishopsgate Institute in London held in aid of the Preceptors College. Later in the month he was interviewed by Ananda and Ambrose Gilson for the next issue of *Urthona* magazine. In July Sangharakshita attended an exhibition of *Masterpieces of Nineteenth Century Italian Painting* at Wren House and on 15 July he left for his annual visit to Guhyaloka where he stayed for two weeks. Finally, on 30 August, he met with Ayya Khema (with whom he has been in regular correspondence for some years) and Ven. Myo Kyo Ni at the Zen Centre in London. In general Sangharakshita saw only a few people in the context of personal interviews over the summer, choosing instead to concentrate on writing his memoirs. He made good progress and is hopeful that the manuscript of the next volume will be completed by the end of the year.



Sangharakshita's Convention birthday cake



## transcriptions unit



Silabhadra

On the recent Order Convention, Silabhadra was called on stage in front of most of the men's wing of the Order for a presentation in appreciation of his work in co-ordinating the transcribing and publishing all of Sangharakshita's seminars, question-and-answer sessions, and most of his lectures. His work means that somewhere between 13 and 18 million words of Sangharakshita's oral teachings are now in printed circulation within the FWBO.

In 1973, Sangharakshita led his first seminar: on Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. In this and subsequent seminars texts were read aloud and Sangharakshita would discuss them with the participants. It is a testament to his foresight that every seminar was tape-recorded. To date over 160 such sessions have been held based on Buddhist topics and texts, works by contemporary writers on Buddhism, and some Western and Eastern literature.

Until 1982 a relatively small

number of these seminars had been transcribed, by various volunteers, but many remained unavailable. Whilst on the Tuscany men's ordination course that year, Cittapala and Silabhadra decided to do something about this. In March 1983 volunteers were enlisted. Typewriters and transcribing machines were bought, and by August of that year there were 120 volunteers all ready to start the task.

The 'Transcriptions Unit' set up office wherever it could be accommodated – Padmaloka, Brighton, West London, then finally East London where, by 1985, it was established in the basement of the London Buddhist Centre with five regular 'staff'. Around this time Sangharakshita was producing the equivalent of 126 tapes per year: giving a total for all his seminars of about 13 million words or 31,200 typed A4 pages!

The problems of keeping up with all the volunteers were large, and as a consequence the project became more specialized; with a core team of about ten committed volunteers. In 1990 the office moved with Silabhadra to Brighton where it remains. Each time the project seemed complete some more 'lost' tapes appeared, but now every seminar that could be transcribed has been.

Silabhadra writes: 'I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who, since 1973, have taped, transcribed, checked, and reproduced this material, and in any other way helped to make it available. Thanks are also due to those who have purchased seminars or helped fund the project in any other way, and, of course, to Sangharakshita.'

## magic and mystery in the scottish highlands

For one week in September Dhanakosha, the FWBO's Scottish retreat centre, was transformed into a vibrant and mysterious mandala through the power of devotional ritual enacted on Dhanakosha's first visual arts retreat.

The mystical landscape around Dhanakosha, filled with towering mountains, dark forests, and deep waters, aided by the atmosphere created by at least ten thousand years of worship in Balquhider Glen, lent itself beautifully to the retreat, helping to make it one of the most special, magical, and transforming retreats that anyone present had ever experienced.

The retreat, led by Srivandana, Bodhipaksa, the newly ordained Vidyamala, and Gina Rumsey of the London Buddhist Arts Centre was primarily a ritual retreat and took for its theme the five Jina Buddhas.

Beginning with a ritual dedication and decoration of

The retreat culminated in a full day of ritual during which participants inhabited a symbolic realm with different times of the day dedicated to each Buddha and a ritual involving mantras and the handing over of symbolic amulets marking the change-over from one Jina to next. At the close of the day, in the context of a beautiful and moving ritual, a floating mandala shrine full of offerings was launched into the twilight Loch Voil, where it burned and sank into the dark waters, symbolically uniting the heights and the depths.

Since everything in a mandala is related to the ideal of human Enlightenment, the art on the retreat was not an end in itself but a means to connect more fully with the qualities of the Enlightened mind. One of the richest elements of the retreat was the making of offerings, which were then cast into the depths of the loch, never to be seen again; a powerful



five trees in the east, south, west, north, and centre of the grounds, Dhanakosha was symbolically transformed into a mandala: a sacred place dedicated to the unfoldment of Enlightenment. Each day was dedicated to invoking the Jinas in turn, with a talk, an exploration of the qualities of that Jina through visual arts, the making of offerings, and a special puja.

enactment of 'letting go'.

Everyone on the retreat was deeply influenced by the potent atmosphere invoked by the ritual. The team had rarely seen a group of people change so quickly or so much in the space of seven days and felt that a very special and magical event had taken place. They intend to build on the success of this retreat by holding a similar event in early 1997.



In his book *Buddhist Saints in India*, Reginald Ray expounds a fascinating conjecture. He suggests that the 'two-tier' model of Buddhism, which divides the Buddhist world into two chief actors, monastics and lay-people, originally came about in response to a pattern that prevailed in non-Buddhist Indian society. Ancient Indian religious life also had two chief actors: the brahmins, a professional religious clergy, and the householders, to whose religious needs they ministered. As Buddhism started to integrate into the mainstream of Indian life the original full-time Buddhist practitioners – forest-dwelling renunciants, untamed men and women of the wilderness – began to give way to the more 'respectable' settled monastics and these, seeking ways to influence contemporary Indian religious life and trying to define their place within it, took upon themselves the role of the Brahminical priesthood and began to fashion a 'respectable', full-time Buddhist clergy ministering to a supportive lay congregation.

This idea is interesting, not least for the light it sheds on a pattern that seems to be emerging as Buddhism begins to integrate itself into the modern West and full-time Buddhist practitioners cast about for the part they should play in making Buddhism available to others in our society. The previously defined Christian roles of priesthood or coenobitical monasticism don't quite fit the bill. In Europe, at least, they lack social cachet and aren't all that influential – we don't see them on television chat shows very much, they don't write best-selling books. Instead, many modern professional Buddhists seem to be turning for their models to disciplines which are altogether more

current. Psychotherapists, academic lecturers, technical trainers – these are some of the respected professionals of our times. They are well-paid, have structured, reliable careers, status, and influence. How very tempting this must seem to experienced Buddhist practitioners looking to play a part in bringing Buddhism to the West. And so a new kind of Buddhist hybrid being is emerging: the professional Western Buddhist Teacher.

These new Buddhist professionals play an important part in a developing, eclectic Buddhist economy. Buddhist centres and retreat centres need to fill their programmes. They depend upon specialist teachers, who fly in for a day, a weekend, or a week, impart their area of speciality, and fly out again. The centres' economies depend upon such transient teachers; the teachers depend on the centres; and the students have to look after themselves – for there is no time in the demanding schedule of a free-lance Western Buddhist teacher's life for the kind of responsibilities which the old teacher—disciple relationship used to imply.

Where does the FWBO stand in all this, and how do we view this emerging trend?

To begin with, we don't subscribe to the kind of hard-edged distinction between teacher and student, professional and client, which the hybrid model described above depends upon. In the FWBO we take our stand on the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and we recognize that the process of Going for Refuge is one which deepens by degrees. People go for Refuge at different levels: beginners go for Refuge 'provisionally', committed Buddhists do so 'effectively', and Aryans (Stream-Entrants or Bodhisattvas) do so 'really'.

We also realize that one of the most important elements in the overall process by which one deepens one's Going for Refuge is that of emulation. This happens through observing, in actual experience, how people whose Going for Refuge is deeper than one's own live their lives. And the best way of seeing this is by getting close to such people and by developing links of spiritual friendship, *kalyana mitrata*, with them. Thus, in the FWBO, we don't speak much of teachers and students. Rather, we prefer to speak of spiritual friends. And for spiritual friendship to be able to effectively transmit the values of Going for Refuge, one of the parties to that friendship must themselves be effectively Going for Refuge.

Thus, in order to teach in the FWBO, you have to be effectively Going for Refuge. Teaching is therefore done, by and large, by Order members because they are the people whom we trust to be effectively Going for Refuge.

We go to great lengths to ensure that the people we admit to the Order are in fact effectively Going for Refuge. We recognize that all of our Friends and Mitras are Going for Refuge – at least provisionally. But the shift from provisional to effective Going for Refuge is a subtle one. It takes training to make the shift and it takes a great deal of effort and acuity to detect it. In most cases one needs to know someone for many years before one can be certain that they are, in fact, effectively Going for Refuge.

We've gone to a great deal of effort to create situations, like our ordination training process, which enable us to have that trust. We would like to extend that trust outside of the Order: we'd be delighted to have friends in the Buddhist

world in whose Going for Refuge we could trust as deeply as we can that of members of the Order. No doubt this will come about in time. But our experience is that it takes a lot of time to form judgements about the extent of someone's Going for Refuge – we'll need to know someone very well indeed before we're happy for them to teach at one of our centres. This is one of the reasons why we value the developing Western Buddhist teachers forums: it's important that we all get to know each other.

But there is more to it than that.

There is a coherence to the teachings, practices, and institutions of any functioning spiritual community. And this is certainly the case with Sangharakshita's exposition of the Dharma. FWBO centres try to do justice to that coherent and effective exposition in their teaching. It forms a system of spiritual discipline in which each aspect works with every other to help the individual to practise more and more deeply. A teacher from another Buddhist tradition, however venerable he or she may be, could not be expected to operate within the FWBO's terms and practices. Teachings from one system of spiritual discipline don't necessarily work well within another system (or only work if they are properly assimilated). One needs to settle down for a time in a single tradition of practice if one is to make very much progress. Thus, for example, one becomes a Mitra in the FWBO only when one has decided that the time has come to make the FWBO one's spiritual 'home'. For this reason we don't invite teachers from other traditions to teach their tradition at our centres.

But this doesn't mean that the FWBO holds itself aloof





Ajita and Danavira

Left: Seven-fold puja at Ajita's funeral service

from the rest of the Buddhist world. There are some tendencies within that world which we feel the need to criticize: we are not happy that tantric initiations are given out to people *en masse*, for example, and we're opposed to the kind of confusing eclecticism which mixes up Buddhism with other traditions (such as Christianity). But we also try to get to know other Buddhists individually. We participate in organizations such as the Network of Buddhist Organizations for the UK and the European Buddhist Union. We stock a wide range of Buddhist literature in our bookshops and we're happy for our Friends, Mitras, and Order members to go to hear lectures by other reputable teachers.

Indeed, the FWBO is one of the signatories to an invitation to the Dalai Lama to come and teach in Britain in 1996. This is a unique occasion, an opportunity for the diffuse British Buddhist community to act in concert in extending a gesture of courtesy and respect to a valiant and worthy man. It is also an occasion where each of the organizations which have signed the invitation will need to learn to take one another's values and priorities into

account as they go about organizing the event. For the event will have a different meaning and relevance for each of them and they will have to be careful not to make undue assumptions.

It takes time and effort to get to know Buddhists from other traditions and to see how their practices work together. Buddhists can only really work together if we resist the temptation to form hasty and premature syntheses and if we learn to relate to one another as spiritual friends, irrespective of ecclesiastical status, reputation, or organizational standing.

The FWBO seeks to base itself firmly on a clear understanding of the Buddhist tradition and to provide the conditions within which people can go for Refuge and the Dharma can flourish.

Emphasizing *kalyana mitrata* as the matrix within which this teaching takes place means that we can create a genuine Sangha. It also means that we can create a context in which Dharma teachings, whatever their provenance, can be discerned not as curiosities, nor as commodities, but as spiritual realities that have to be lived out in relationship with other people.

It was a year ago, just as the previous autumn began dropping from the trees, that Ajita and I sat looking out of his kitchen window and drinking herb tea. It was evening. Softly, a new silence stole between us. He said casually he had not been feeling well all summer. It was nothing serious, probably a virus. We didn't look at each other for a while but when I did look I looked carefully. It was a complex moment; both of us knew he had survived a serious cancer six years before. I tried not to bring it up, not to pull That Word from the back of my mind to the front. I drank my tea, trying to drown it.

Life was suddenly outside the window. The shadows, the clouds reflecting flame, the bouncing birds, traffic, a stranger across the way by his door, unlocking it and going in. All of them, it now seemed, had life to spare, profligate, could waste it, let it fall from them like streams, unworried, like drops of endless time. Ajita said he had been in for tests. He told me it was cancer again. I regret not holding him when he cried. I sat there feeling helpless, platitudinous, evasive. Ajita said he was going to fight. He blazed up.

His final year was not an easy time. He bore it stoically. All through it his partner, Susanna, gave him heroic support. He spent that year in dialogue, in argument, in struggle, a life up against Death.

He will be remembered. I can see him, as when we were young men working together in Glasgow for the FWBO, in his bright red smock with its double vajra sewn on, standing in the middle of a class talking about meditation. He was flesh, blood, and the Dharma. His blue eyes struck you like the sky, his gold hair shone like sunlight. People came close to him to partake of his heart.

His drive, his easy joy, his inspiration, the brightness of his mind, all of it he placed at the service of the Three Jewels. Though it was not a long life (he was 46) it was a life of great quality and a far-reaching one. As long as our Movement is in Scotland he will not be forgotten and hence the ripples of his life shall go on and on and they shall go on. He died a rich man then. His friends stood up and spoke for him when he died in a process of heart. Bless him I say. I sigh now for a brother. We mourn a friend. May the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas hold him in their arms closely. May the Dharma Rain soak him, permeate him, suffuse him with joy.

Danavira





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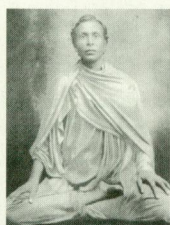
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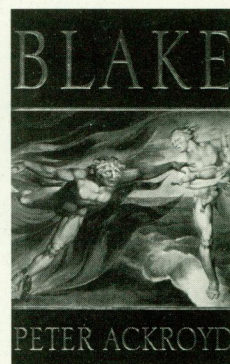
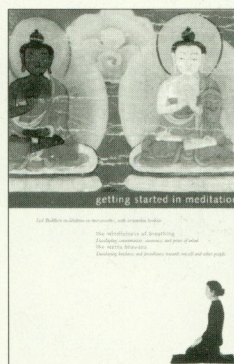
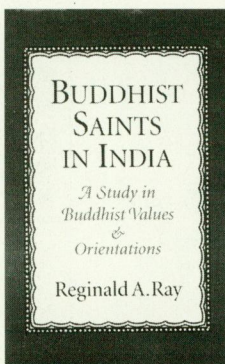
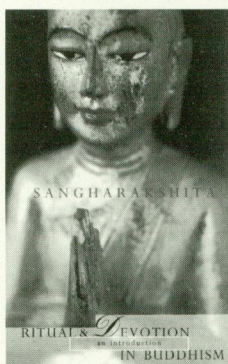
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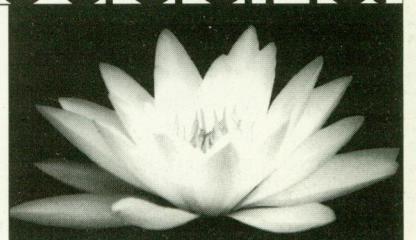
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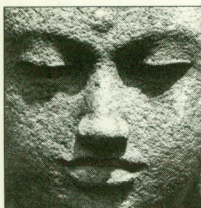


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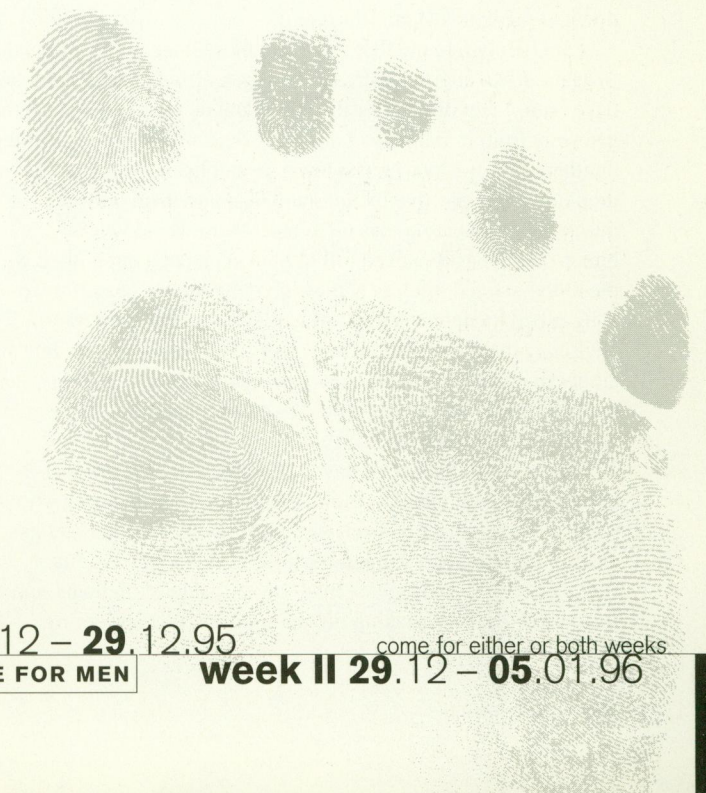
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# metta and machine-guns

This evening on the television news I watched the people of Srebrenica being loaded on to buses: weeping women and children and blank-faced men, forced from their homes, being taken off to an uncertain fate at an uncertain destination. The words 'ethnic cleansing' appear behind the news-reader's head – a term become so familiar that it requires no further elucidation, like 'politics', 'sport' or 'weather'.

An elderly, toothless woman surrounded by soldiers, her thin hands outstretched, cries out in a language I don't understand, but her eyes say 'Help us!' She disappears into the bus and I'm left alone with my feelings. The screen switches back to the studio where a new title has appeared behind the news-reader's head. Suddenly we are in another country. I try to follow the story, trying to get away from the old woman's face, but I can't take it in. My thumb zaps the red button and the screen goes blank. I sit down to meditate: Metta Bhavana.

I am barely into the first stage and those images come crowding in again. I feel angry, frustrated, desperate. I feel disgust for what I have seen. I feel disgust for the world and its suffering. I want to get away from it, but how? I am part of the world, myself. All that out there is in me too. I try to bring myself back to the meditation dredging some positive feelings and beaming them outwards. A multitude of images comes up to meet them. Windowless, bullet-ridden buses packed full of human cattle; a ditch filled with the blood-stained, lifeless bodies of young men; a beautiful woman gang-raped by ugly soldiers. 'May they be happy, may they be well, may they be free from suffering.' The words ring hollow and empty in my head. I try to convince myself that all I can do is send metta. I realize that what I would like to do is get a machine-gun and go and shoot someone!

So reads my diary for a day in July this year. I remember clearly how I felt that day. No doubt I wasn't the only one who wanted to wrench a gun from the hands of a UN soldier and go blazing Rambo-style through the hills around Sarajevo. But a Buddhist? Well, that is what I call myself, at least. Perhaps some would say that I am making life more difficult for myself by

watching TV news at all. Perhaps I should simply tell myself that there will always be suffering somewhere in the world and leave it at that. Just get on with my spiritual life. My tendency, however, is to feel that knowledge of what is happening in the world is inextricably linked with my Buddhist practice.

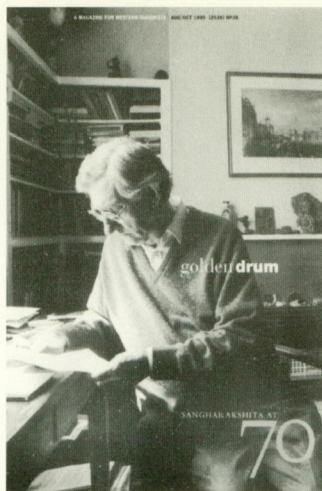
Having some awareness of world events seems to put what I am doing in context and gives them a sense of urgency. There is so much to be done for myself and others and so little time. I find it necessary to call my life into question from time to time, necessary to consider the relative merits of metta and machine-guns. Usually the positive emotions win through. Hatred only leads to hatred; only love leads to love.

But the problem with life is that it is rarely that simple, ethical dilemmas present themselves constantly. For most of us it is just a case of the ants in the kitchen, or the motorist who hurls abuse. Generally it is only in conversation that the more extreme situations arise. You know: 'What would you do if someone attacked your mother?' or, 'What would you have done if you'd had the opportunity to put a bomb under Hitler's chair and save all those people. Impossible to answer, I suppose, until it happens.

But I remember very well, on that day in July, that while I was fantasizing about selectively assassinating a few Serb generals, it suddenly occurred to me that it might actually be a real possibility. I really could, if I made the effort, go to Bosnia and try to do just that. Quickly I dropped the idea, not, I have to admit, because it was unskilful, but because it scared me. To do something like that would need courage, a lot of courage. I realized then that if it would take courage to confront the situation violently then it would also take courage to act ethically.

To engage with the world on the basis of metta is a brave thing to do. To develop metta requires energy and courage in a world such as this. If I really believe that this is how the world can change then I must be prepared to put my life on the line for it. I need to be active, to speak out, to stand up for my ideals and values. Non-violence is the choice of both cowards and heroes. Which, I wonder, am I? **Sudhira**





# farewell **golden drum** welcome **dharma life**

This is the last edition of *Golden Drum*. After a decent pause it will be reborn on FWBO Day 1996 as a new magazine with a new name: *Dharma Life*. *Golden Drum* was itself launched at FWBO Day ten years previously, in 1986, and until recently it has been edited by Nagabodhi. In the last two years he has handed the editing over to a team of people who have taken responsibility for an issue each. In the future I will be the overall editor of *Dharma Life* and assemble a team of people who will work together to produce it.

*Dharma Life* will be a new magazine, and not just *Golden Drum* in a new guise. It will considerably longer, look different with higher production values and have a new editorial policy. *Golden Drum* has kept to a single format throughout its history. Each edition has had a theme and over the years it has been able to devote issues to a variety of traditional Buddhist topics as well as considering how to apply Buddhist principles to living in the modern West. *Dharma Life* will not have a theme. Instead it will be based around articles which have been chosen for their intrinsic merits. I will be looking for the best writing on subjects relevant to the lives of Buddhists practising the Dharma in the West—hence the name. The emphasis will be on sharp writing, clear

thinking, wit and vitality, all from a Buddhist perspective. There will also be a range of features including a biographical piece, a Diary, and an article in each issue exploring a Buddha or Bodhisattva. There will be an expanded book review section, comment on developments in the Buddhist world, and two news features focusing on developments in the fwbo in considerably more depth than the present news stories.

Rather than trying to be the voice-piece of the fwbo, *Dharma Life* will seek to be a Buddhist magazine of broad appeal which grows out of the values of the fwbo and Sangharakshita's perspective on the Buddhist tradition. It needs to address the real experience and interests of people who are experienced Dharma practitioners. And it needs to do so in a way which will appeal to anyone, at whatever level of experience, who take an active interest in Buddhism in the West. *Dharma Life* will therefore include articles and interviews whose scope extends to Buddhism beyond the fwbo. It will look at trends and personalities in the Western Buddhist world as well as political and humanitarian issues facing Buddhists in the East. More ambitiously still the magazine will seek to articulate Buddhist perspectives on other developments in the cultures

which Western Buddhists inhabit. The book review section will expand to encompass non-Buddhist books which have something important to say to Buddhists. And as communication always needs to be two-way there will also be a letters page.

I think that we have the potential to produce, in time, a high-quality magazine which can stand in any company and which taps the energy life-blood of our extraordinary venture: bringing the ancient Buddhist tradition alive in the conditions of the modern world. But this will only be possible with the wholehearted support of people in the fwbo and the readers of *Golden Drum*. In order for the editorial content of *Dharma Life* to reach the highest possible level, it will need the enthusiastic involvement of the best writers and I would like to encourage anyone interested in contributing to present their ideas to me. *Dharma Life* also needs the support of its readers. Before too long I hope that it can become financially independent of fwbo centres, so please do subscribe to the magazine (even if in the past you have bought *Golden Drum* from an fwbo centre) and think about helping in any other way. With enough effort we can make *Dharma Life* a magazine to be proud of.

**Vishvapani**



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