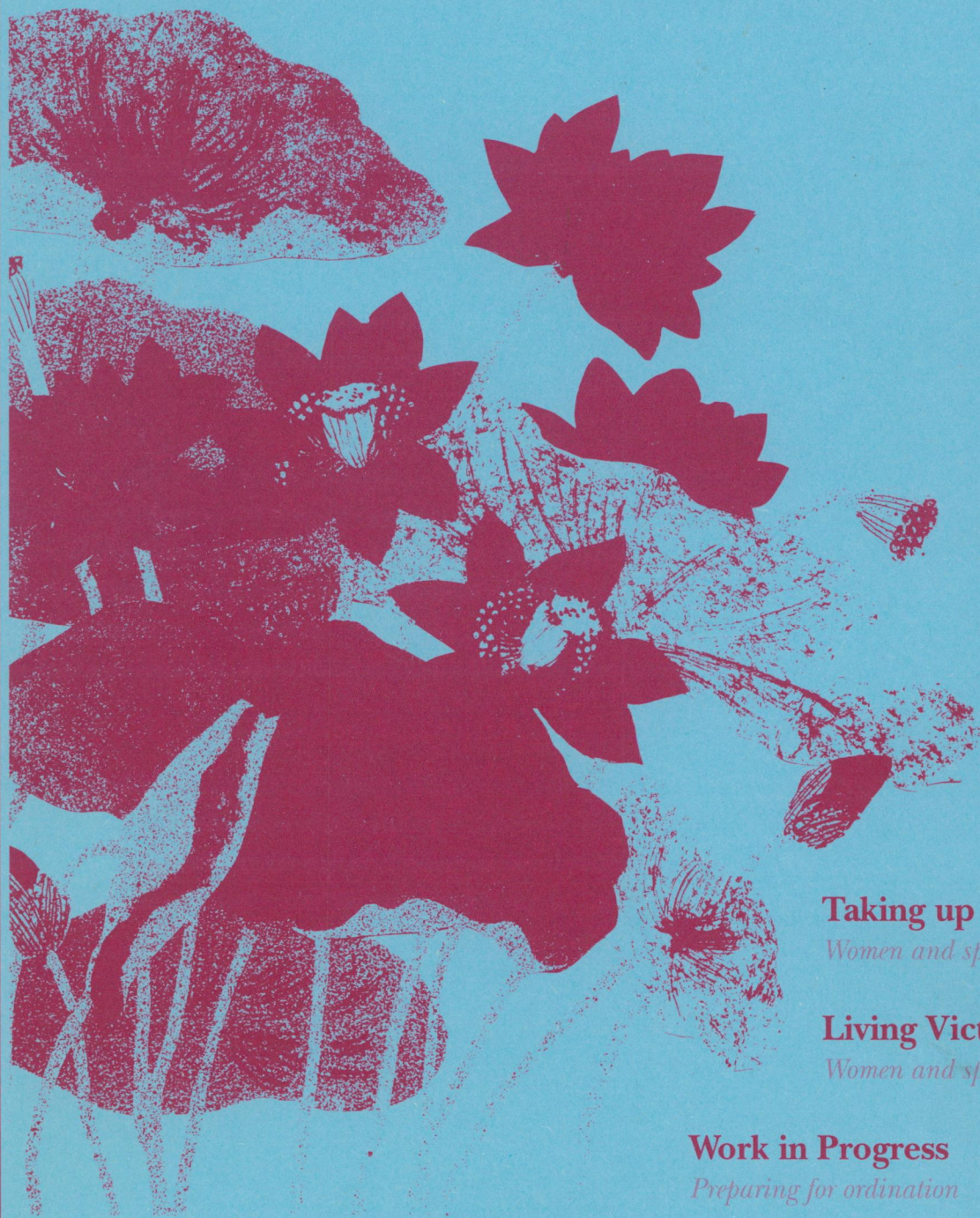


Women and Spiritual Life

Summer 1995 Issue 1 £2 US \$3.50

Lotus Realm

A new voice for Buddhist women



Taking up the Challenge
Women and spiritual life

Living Victory
Women and spiritual life in India

Work in Progress
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The Freedom Habit's Hot-house
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NEWS ITEMS TO Viryaprabha, 192 The Hornbeams,
Harlow, Essex CM20 1PL, UK
Deadline for next issue: 25th September

POETRY SUBMISSIONS TO Varabhadri,
London Buddhist Centre, 51 Roman Road,
London E2 0HU, UK

ADVERTIZING

Full Page £50; half page £30;
quarter page £18; eighth page £10

Booking deadline for next issue: 1st October 1995

Contact the *Lotus Realm* office at the Manchester Buddhist
Centre address (see below)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

(including postage and handling costs):

Outside the US: One issue: UK and EC: £2.50
Elsewhere: £3

Three issues: UK and EC: £7 Elsewhere: £8

Cheques or money orders in £ sterling only should be
made payable to 'Lotus Realm' and sent to:
Lotus Realm, Manchester Buddhist Centre,
16/20 Turner Street, Manchester M4 1DZ, UK
Tel: 0161-881 5842

US subscriptions: Three issues \$12 One issue: \$4

Checks payable to 'San Francisco Buddhist Center'
Send to: Lisa Cullen, San Francisco Buddhist Center,
39 Bartlett St, San Francisco, CA 94110

LOTUS REALM *A New Voice for Buddhist Women*

Just as in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses some lotuses
grow in the water, some rest on the water's surface and
some come right up out of the water...

So the ancient texts describe the Buddha's vision of
humanity – individuals struggling to grow beyond the
circumstances of their births towards that complete
unfoldment which is Enlightenment.

A symbol of spiritual growth and development, the
image of the lotus is known throughout Buddhist
tradition. We think not only of the Buddha's great vision
after his Enlightenment, but of Mahapajapati Gotami
joyfully taking up the eight 'rules of training' 'like a wreath
of blue lotus'; and we are reminded of the many
Bodhisattva figures of the Mahayana tradition, young,
beautiful, bedecked with jewels and seated on lotus
thrones.

The realm of the lotus is the realm where spiritual
values reign supreme: where all the circumstances of life,
both individual and collective, conduce to spiritual
development. Buddhist tradition depicts such a realm in a
mythical way in its descriptions of the archetypal Pure
Land, Sukhavati.

In 1967 Sangharakshita founded a new Buddhist
Movement, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
(FWBO or TBMSG as it is known in India). At its heart is
the Western Buddhist Order, a spiritual community of
men and women committed to furthering their own and
others' spiritual development through traditional
practices of meditation, devotion, study and the
development of spiritual friendship, within the context of
a germinal New Society which the Movement seeks to
bring into being. Order members, Mitras (those wishing to
further their involvement with the Movement and the
Order) and Friends (those who participate in any way in
the activities of the FWBO) often live together in
residential men's or women's communities; work together
in team-based Right Livelihood businesses and co-operate
together to run rural retreat Centres and city-based
Buddhist Centres where people can come into contact with
the Dharma. Some of those involved in the movement are
concerned with the development of the arts; whilst others
– especially in India – are involved in social work projects.

In living out Buddhist values in the midst of
contemporary society, members of the Western Buddhist
Order and their Friends hope not only to bring about
radical change within themselves, but also to effect a
change in contemporary life through their efforts to bring
into being a 'lotus realm'.

Since the time of the Buddha women have Gone for
Refuge to the Three Jewels, living a life committed to the
practice of the Dharma. However, their numbers have
been few (in comparison to men) and records of their
lives and realizations even fewer.

The technological and other changes in the modern
world have made it more possible than ever before for
women to take up the challenge of spiritual life.
Dharmacharinis, women members of the Western
Buddhist Order, who have participated fully with their
Dharma-brothers in pioneering this new Buddhist
Movement, have gained considerable experience in the
leading of the spiritual life under modern conditions. It is
this experience which they hope to share through the
pages of this magazine – for the benefit and interest of all
who may choose to read it.

Changes and new developments ...

Changes and new developments usually grow out of previous achievements, accumulated confidence and experience giving rise to a new strength. Changes – both in the life of an individual and in the life of collective endeavours – often take place at particular intervals following, it is to be hoped, an upward moving cycle.

The first-ever magazine produced by women in the FWBO was published in 1976. It was called *Dakini* – a modest few pages, gestetnered and stapled together, containing unedited articles, poems, stories and book reviews. It reflected the concerns, aspirations and breakthroughs of the women who were pursuing their spiritual lives within the FWBO.

Ten years later, in 1986, a team of women relaunched *Dakini*. The new magazine was to be of broader interest. During the course of its fourteen issues the readership of the magazine grew to include Buddhists (and non-Buddhists) from outside the FWBO and the magazine became more focused on exploring themes that are important to women practising the Dharma in contemporary society.

Now we are relaunching the magazine once more, this time with a new name: *Lotus Realm*. The lotus is a symbol of spiritual growth and development recognized by Buddhists everywhere. It reminds us of the potential for spiritual unfoldment which is present in all living beings, whatever their background, race, caste, class, or gender.

As we take the magazine into its next phase of development, we find ourselves dealing with issues facing women practitioners of the Dharma that are complex, interesting, even fascinating – and, no doubt, controversial!

If it is true, as Sangharakshita says, that 'emancipation from the group occurs via the intellect, via the development of independent thinking', it is important that we cultivate clarity, and develop a dharmic perspective – on our thoughts, feelings and experiences, and to our identification of ourselves as 'women'.

The relationship between the emotions and the intellect is an interesting area of women's conditioning – and spiritual development. In her book, *In a Different Voice*¹, Carol Gilligan discusses some of the differences in moral development in men and women. Women – for whom intimacy and identity are often initially fused, and for whom empathy and caring are part of their definition of self – need to develop clarity and self-awareness so that their relationships can change from 'a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic interdependence.'

The famous historical nun Dhammadinna answered all the questions put to her by her former husband Visakkha with confidence and wisdom, 'like a knife cutting a lotus stalk.' She had reached that maturity of thought and emotion which the Buddhist

tradition calls Wisdom: having reflected for years on the Buddha's teachings and having dwelt consistently in the realms of undiluted joy and happiness, she had become a True Individual. □

Vajrapushpa

¹ Harvard University Press, 1993

WOMEN and SPIRITUAL LIFE

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TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

women and spiritual life

by KALYANAPRABHA



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Realm, and a member

of the editorial board

of the Western

Buddhist Review.

IN JULY 1848, in the wake of the various freedom movements in Europe sparked off by the French Revolution, the first ever Women's Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls in the state of New York. A 'Declaration of Sentiments' was drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, its opening cadence echoing that of the American Constitution: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal...

The notion that there is or should be equality, whether between the sexes or between other human groupings or individuals, has become a bedrock of modern Western society. It has led to the belief that everyone should be free to pursue their own happiness, and the belief that all should have an equal share in political power – liberating beliefs which have resulted in positive moves such as the abolition of slavery and the move to universal suffrage characteristic of Western democracies.

But the Buddhist position flies in the face of the particular application of this belief declared in Stanton's 'self-evident truth'. Men and women, according to Buddhism, are not equal; traditionally it has been seen as something of a disadvantage to be born a woman. In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, for example, we find Ruciraketu, that great Bodhisattva, praying 'May all women constantly become men, strong, heroic, intelligent and learned...' 'Sexist!' resounds the cry from millions of modern men and women. 'Surely a later interpolation by misogynist monks' suggest others. What are we, as Buddhists – as women Buddhists – to think?

As with anything presented as the Buddha's teaching, we need to look at the various scriptural references to the drawbacks of being born a woman with intelligent receptivity. We should not accept the idea uncritically, because not everything that comes down to us with the stamp of tradition is certain to be the word of the Buddha. But neither should we reject it out of hand because it offends our personal viewpoint or ideology. The important thing is to try to discern and then Go for Refuge to the truth. After all, being a Buddhist means being willing to seek out and act upon the truth, however difficult or uncomfortable that may sometimes be. As women

Buddhists we need to develop a much more vigorous attitude to the gender debate, asking ourselves 'Where does the truth lie?', not, as I think we sometimes do, 'How does this idea make me feel?'

The hierarchy of existence

The basic Buddhist position is to see existence not in terms of equality but in terms of hierarchy: a hierarchy of being in which all occupy a lower or higher place according to the degree of consciousness they manifest. First there is animal consciousness or sense-consciousness. Then there is self-consciousness, which is unique to human beings: a human being, a truly human being, is aware, and aware that he is aware. Beyond that is transcendental consciousness, the consciousness of all those who have entered the stream that leads to Enlightenment; and finally there is the absolute consciousness of a Buddha. An appreciation of this hierarchy is fundamental to an understanding of spiritual life from a Buddhist point of view.

The model of a hierarchy of consciousness gives us, I think, a clearer picture of spiritual life than some popular ideas of psychological development which speak for instance in terms of 'attaining wholeness' or 'experiencing oneness with all that lives'. Such expressions can in fact only describe the highest levels of consciousness but 'attaining wholeness', for example, may be read as referring to a loss or submergence of individuality, and fails to take into account the tremendous effort needed to break through to higher levels of consciousness. Because, of course, we can all ascend this hierarchy. It is not fixed, indeed, according to the Buddhist vision, all beings have an innate desire to transcend themselves and ascend it.

The path of the higher evolution

As human beings we come into the world dominated to a greater or lesser extent by our lower consciousness – that consciousness which is caught up in what Sangharakshita has called the lower evolution or, to use more traditional terms, the *kamaloka*. For a Buddhist the meaning of life is to be

found in abandoning the pulls of the lower evolution, which can never truly satisfy the human spirit, and setting out on the path of the Higher Evolution – the evolution of consciousness in the direction of Enlightenment.

Women and the higher evolution

According to Sangharakshita's exposition of traditional Buddhism, women – biologically speaking – tend to be more dominated than men by the pulls of the lower evolutionary forces. The effect of this is to make it more difficult for women – that is, for us – to break free and commit ourselves to the spiritual path. Once we have done this, however, and as we begin to progress on the path, our 'disadvantage' gradually diminishes.

Many women (and men) argue against there being a biologically determined difference between men and women. For my own part, having worked intensively with women, with men, and with men and women together, I find that my personal experience confirms the traditional Buddhist view – that men and women are, so to speak, 'wired up' differently. Their primary concerns and tendencies are (generally speaking) different, and these psychological and behavioural differences are a reflection, or rather a consequence, of the biological specialization of being male or female – although of course there is a tremendous range between individual men and women. Such differences seem to go beyond the undoubtedly strong effects of 'socialization' and upbringing.

So the argument runs that women are more dominated than men by the pulls of the lower evolution, by their biological nature. This manifests on the biological level in the monthly cycle of menstruation, and in the long period of pregnancy and nursing which follows on from (hetero-)sexual activity. It also manifests on the psychological level, in such tendencies as greater passivity, and greater interest in things domestic and relational – the finding of partners, the setting up of secure nests, and the creation of family circles.

To embark upon the spiritual life demands vigour, confidence, and a degree of heroism. Men, tending to have

more drive and vigour than women, and a stronger urge to explore new territory, have an advantage when it comes to taking up the spiritual life, since it is these masculine qualities that enable one to begin the demanding task of developing one's own consciousness. It is true that spiritual life demands receptivity as well, but this does not necessarily make it advantageous to be a woman. Biological femaleness in itself does not by any means guarantee a greater potential for spiritual receptivity. Indeed, spiritual receptivity demands a degree of individuality and confidence that many women have yet to bring into being.

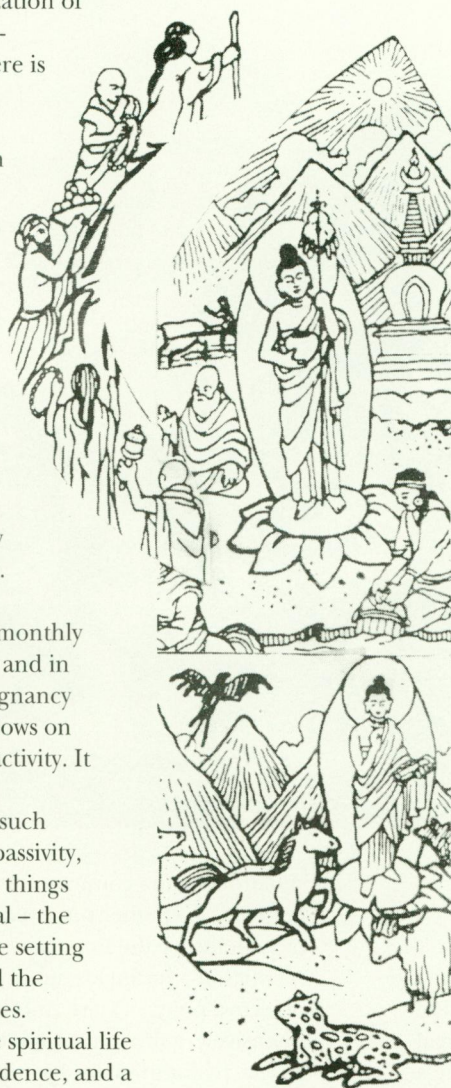
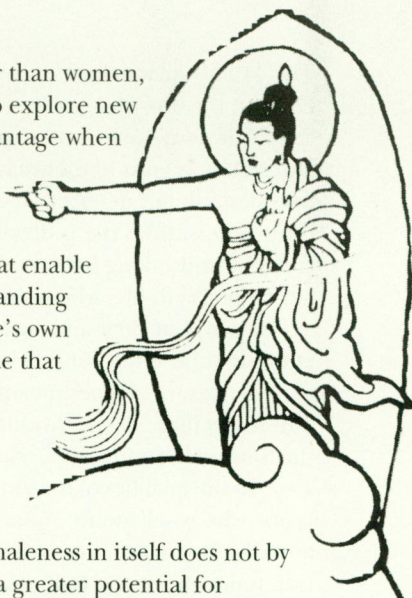
Many of these assertions, I know, go against the grain. But we need to keep in mind the basic question: are they true? We need to look to our own experience with an open mind, and remain open to the viewpoint of those whom we know to have greater understanding than ourselves.

Responding to the challenge

Some women find it discouraging even to contemplate the idea that to be born female is a disadvantage when it comes to taking up the spiritual life. Some feel that even if it's true, they would rather not know. But let's not bury our heads in the sand. We are not frail Victorian heroines needing protection from the hard truths of life lest we swoon away. Why should we feel discouraged? There are many things that make it difficult to lead the spiritual life, from physical disability to political instability. If we find our situation good in many ways, let's seize the opportunity to step out on the path of the Higher Evolution. We just need to recognize the obstacles that stand in our way and learn how to overcome them. And they can be overcome. The Buddha made it quite clear that women are able to gain Enlightenment – and indeed women in his own day and afterwards did so.

Discerning a clear goal

If we think of ourselves as following a spiritual path, this implies that we are trying to reach a goal – and for Buddhists, of course, that goal is Enlightenment. But Enlightenment can seem very far off; most of us need a nearer, more easily discernible goal to aim for. This we can find in Sangharakshita's idea of the True Individual.



The True Individual par excellence is the Stream-entrant, the one who has broken the three fetters of fixed self-view, doubt, and dependence on rules and rituals as ends in themselves. In

Sangharakshita's description of the breaking of the three fetters, the True Individual is one who is not ruled by unthinking habit but is creative in his or her response to life; who is not vague, confused, and woolly, but clear and consistent in thought and emotion; who is not superficial, but sees or experiences the deeper meaning of things.

In his lecture 'The Individual, the Group, and the SpiritualCommunity'¹, Sangharakshita lists some of the qualities of the individual. An individual is one who is self-aware – aware of what he is doing and why, aware of his own motivations, aware of his own uniqueness, and at the same time aware that he is 'one of numerous foci of universal consciousness'. An individual is independent, not emotionally dependent on others in a neurotic or immature way. He is not a victim of unconscious urges. He is happy to be alone. He is able to think his own thoughts and does not mind differing from others – although he doesn't make a point of being different either. The individual is sensitive to

Without individuals or those aspiring to develop true individuality we are left with what Sangharakshita refers to as 'the group'.

Developing objectivity

My experience suggests that to develop greater individuality, many women need to make a particular effort to overcome a preoccupation with – even a submersion in – subjective emotional experience, and to develop an interest in and commitment to the objective content of the situations they encounter. It is easy to get caught in the tiring and uncreative trap of endlessly describing our mental and emotional states without making much effort to evaluate them – to judge whether they are skilful or unskilful, to be developed or to be eradicated. This is something we in the FWBO need to watch out for, with our emphasis on communication and 'reporting in'. We need to make sure that our communication really is communication, not an excuse to indulge our weakness for self-preoccupation.

One can make the transition from subjective self-preoccupation to clear and energetic objectivity by, for example, engaging intensively in one's work

The call of the higher evolution



others, sympathetic, intelligent, creative, and objective.

As women we can gain a great deal from dwelling on the qualities of the true individual, which make tangible the more immediate goal of spiritual life. For one thing, we will only be able to create real Sangha on the basis of true individuality, since a Sangha is by definition a community of individuals.

situation. In the context of work, meeting objective demands – whether the needs of customers, clients or patients, or the financial or technological realities of a business – enforces a move to a more objective point of view. Another way is to study intensively, gaining through thought and reflection a capacity for greater objectivity in one's responses to life's experiences.

Denouncing the demon of domesticity

One of the greatest pitfalls for women, it seems to me, is to fall into the trap – or the many traps – laid by the demon of domesticity. Even in women's communities the homemaking urge and taking care of creature comforts can predominate; preoccupation with food and health can become a topic of endless interest; and the desire to create a cosy family circle can sap the vitality of those aspiring to break free from it. Some women, fearing the pull of these things, live in rebellious reaction against them, avoiding other women or looking down on them for exhibiting those weaknesses from which they themselves are not yet free.

Some avoid facing up to these tendencies in themselves by keeping company with men. But sooner or later, if we are serious about developing true individuality, we must not only face up to but transform and transcend these limitations.

So how do we set about doing this? We can transform the nesting instinct by developing our aesthetic sense, bringing beauty into our living environment as a way of raising our own and others' states of mind. A preoccupation with food and health can become a vigorous determination to provide good conditions for our spiritual growth. As we widen our interests and concerns, perhaps taking

a greater part in public life as a way of spreading the values of the Dharma, our conversations will have the vitality and inspiration of a real interest in the world beyond our own personal sphere. And we should simply let go of the desire to create the family circle, fostering instead the aspiration to encourage the development of individuality in ourselves and others.

We live in exciting times. The freedoms enjoyed by Western women are unparalleled in human history. In many countries of the world the possibilities for practising the Dharma are greater than they have ever been before. The need for true individuals to work together for the good is very great. How can we allow ourselves to be discouraged by the thought that we may have to make extra effort (compared to our brothers) to bring our individuality into being? Let us throw off womanly weakness and trepidation, and commit ourselves to the heroic task of the Higher Evolution. ▣

¹ *The Individual, the Group and the Community*, Dharmachakra Tapes

For an in-depth exploration of the themes of this article, look out for Subhuti's new book *Women, Men, and Angels* – to be published shortly by Windhorse Publications.



*The journal of the western buddhist order,
reflecting the teachings of Buddhism as practised in FWBO*

the western buddhist review

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Published by VAJRAKUTA Buddhist study centre
£5.99 p+p 60p UK, 90p overseas. Available from Windhorse Publications,
Unit 1-316, The Custard Factory, Gibb St, Birmingham B9 4AA, UK



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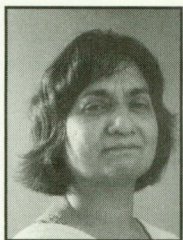
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Living Victory

women and spiritual life in India

by PUNYAVATI and VIJAYA



Punyavati
grew up in
Kenya. At 19
she moved to
England. She
now spends six
months a year
working for
TBMSG in India.

MAHARASHTRA, a large state in western India, has been at the centre of the social, cultural and religious changes that are taking place amongst the ex-untouchable people of India. The TBMSG began its activities in 1978 and with its Dharma activities, as well as its medical, social and educational projects, has been able to play an important part in this remarkable and peaceful revolution. Today the TBMSG is growing rapidly not only in Maharashtra, but in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, and Madhya Pradesh.

Dr Ambedkar and the new Buddhists

It all began with the concerted, tireless and devoted efforts of one man: Dr Ambedkar. He was born an untouchable himself and experienced the terrible degradation of the caste system that denied education, wealth, shelter and employment to those born into the lowest ranks of Hindu society. As an untouchable he could not so much as drink water from a communal well, nor take water – even if it was offered – from a person of higher caste.

Dr Ambedkar devoted his life to fighting the caste system which kept millions of untouchables in social, economic, educational, political and spiritual deprivation. In order to free his people, he looked for a new religion. He saw the true function of religion as the uplift of the individual. For that purpose it should teach the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. It should show a social conscience, actively involving itself with struggles for social justice. In seeking a way out of the slavery of untouchability, Dr Ambedkar turned to Buddhism. In 1956 he formally took the refuges and precepts, embracing the teaching of the Buddha. Hundreds of thousands of his followers did likewise.

Sangharakshita and the new Buddhists

Sangharakshita knew Dr Ambedkar personally and played an important part in the mass conversion movement he started. After the great man's premature death, just seven weeks after the mass conversion movement had begun, Sangharakshita travelled around the different states exhorting the newly converted Buddhists to continue the work that Dr Ambedkar had started. He gave them hope, inspiration and guidance to follow their spiritual path.

The Uplift of Women

Dr Ambedkar wholeheartedly supported the uplift of women. He measured the progress of a community against the degree of progress achieved by the women. He encouraged young women not to get married too early. He encouraged girls who married to see themselves as their husband's friend



Punyavati giving a public talk at Wardha

and equal, refusing to be his slave, which was a common attitude on the part of many men. In this way he encouraged mutual understanding and respect in the marriage relationship. This was particularly revolutionary advice in a society like India's. He urged women not to have too many children, and to give each child a better start in life than their parents had. He also urged women to confront their feelings of inferiority and to educate themselves, developing talents and skills.

The Women of TBMSG

Many of the new Buddhists involved in TBMSG come from large families, in slum areas. They live in tiny dwellings often with just one room. For the women, the day begins early at 5 am. Their duties involve cooking, getting the children off to school, fetching water from the communal tap, washing and cleaning, shopping at the bazaar and so on. Lacking modern gadgets, their work takes up most of the day. In the rural areas some women work up to eight hours a day in the fields for a wage of 15-20 rupees (about 30p). In the towns some women sell fruit and vegetables on the street or work as cleaners. Others,

with some education, work as receptionists or clerks – but it is not easy to find a good job.

Despite their full lives, these women still find time to meditate and attend their local vihara for Dharma study, lectures and devotional activities. Their resilience and patience in keeping up their practice in adverse conditions, their determination and confidence shines through in their constant efforts to break through their past conditioning. The Dharma has given them a clear direction in life, a spiritual vision to leave the past behind in a growing awareness of their own potentiality and individuality. These qualities are reflected in the life of one of our Order members, Vijaya, whose name means ‘victory’.

VIJAYA, LADY OF VICTORY

I was born on 23rd September 1968 in Nagpur in Maharashtra in a large slum area. I had six brothers and sisters. Two brothers and one sister were older than me. One brother and one sister were younger. My father worked in the clothes mill. He did not have much education but he taught himself to read and write, and he encouraged his children to study.

We were poor and had to buy second-hand books for our studies. My father often had difficulties in providing the books or getting other equipment we needed for school. Despite the poverty, the atmosphere in the family was happy and often, after the evening meal, we would sit around together talking for four or five hours.

My parents did have some strong, traditional Indian conditioning: they favoured my brothers more than their daughters. Sometimes I wished I was a boy. I experienced many restrictions because I was a girl. I did not have much freedom of movement. I used to think about these restraints and felt that I did not want to give in to the pressures as other women did. An Indian woman’s life is strange! After her birth she lives with her father, after marriage with her husband, and in old age with her sons. I wondered where her independence lay. I wanted to be independent and to discover my own individuality.

On my way to school each day I used to see a statue of the Queen of Jansi in the bazaar square. Every time I saw this statue it had a strong effect on me. I did not understand at first why I was so drawn to it. I would stand staring at it for a long time. The Queen was riding a horse and held the reins in one hand and a sword in the other. There was a smile of victory on her face. She had fought many battles and now sat on the horse, triumphant. I was inspired by that figure and felt I wanted to do something with my life but I did not know what. I did not want to fight, but I wanted to do something. I knew I needed to concentrate first on my education to develop skills. Perhaps then I could become a welfare worker to help others in society.

When I was eighteen, my father suggested that I should get married. I was unhappy with the suggestion. I felt I was still too young. My elder



**Vijaya grew up
in India. She
works full-time
for TBMSG.**

**Cooking on retreat
at Bor Dharan**



**Puja at Bor Dharan
Retreat Centre**



brother intervened and suggested I should be allowed to continue my education. My father did not have enough money to pay for my education but I was able to get a scholarship and in that way to continue my studies.

One day my brother went on a retreat with TBMSG. He came back very enthusiastic about what he had learned. He was inspired by the Dharma. I too became inspired and wanted to find out more so I attended my first retreat in 1989. This was my first contact with the Buddhist movement.

Soon after this retreat my father became very ill and died in April 1989. I was very upset by his death. Our material circumstances became very poor as my father had supported all of us. My brother gave up his studies to find a job so he could support us. We all had to help one another. I realized the significance of my education and applied myself more seriously to my studies so that I could improve my life in the future.

Then suddenly in June 1990 my younger brother died. The cause of his death was unknown. I was in a state of deep shock. I was distraught, and became quite depressed. My elder brother was very kind and supportive. I started to meditate with him. Uptil then I had only meditated occasionally, but now I began meditating regularly and soon my mental state began to change and improve. I started to study the Dharma, taking refuge in it, and I attended retreats and devotional activities.

On 4th August 1991 my elder brother was ordained and became a Dharmachari. I was inspired and deeply moved by the ceremony. Buddhism had given me clarity and stability through my own struggles to find my identity and to come to terms with the loss of my father and younger brother. Witnessing the ordination of my brother, I realized I had at last found a path to follow – a spiritual path with a spiritual goal. I asked to become a Mitra. My Mitra ceremony took place on 21st November 1991.

After that I became more and more involved in the activities of TBMSG. I met up regularly with other women and in 1992 I helped to found our first women's community, 'Shakyaditha', in Pune. Over the next year I undertook some training so that I could work in social projects. I also studied the Dharma, and deepened my friendships with other women. At this time I married Dharmachari Amoghasiddhi, but I continued my work as a supervisor of playgroups and nursery schools. We were both supportive of each other in our efforts to follow a spiritual path and in our work. My marriage did not prevent me doing this.

On 30th January 1994 I was ordained as a Dharmacharini. I was happy indeed to make this commitment. I knew it was the most important day of my life.

Soon after the ordination I became pregnant, and was very happy about it. Unfortunately the baby was still-born at seven months. I was in a state of shock and became depressed. I could not sleep at night. I could not understand why this had happened to me. After a while I realized I could not carry on living in such a miserable state so I started to concentrate once more on my spiritual life, meditating daily and turning more towards the Dharma. I realized that I had to let the past go and look to the future. I realized that there will be suffering in life and that I need to be strong to confront it. I realized there were other women around me with similar experiences of death or deprivation and they needed support too.

I am now doing what I can to help women by helping to run retreats, meeting up with them individually to build up friendships, and working with them on social projects. I am happy with my life, and hope I may continue with my work long into the future. □

TBMSG – Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Gana

WORK IN PROGRESS

preparing for ordination

by **DHAMMADINNA**

Do women have different spiritual needs to men? Do they need to follow a different spiritual path? Are there different criteria for men and women who wish to join the Western Buddhist Order? These are some of the questions that have been put to me over the years. To answer the last question first, the Western Buddhist Order includes both men and women. There is one ordination with both men and women who take the same ten precepts. The same criteria apply to men and women as to whether they are ready to be ordained. There is no discrimination, either positive or negative.

However, although there are no differences in the criteria for assessing someone's readiness for ordination, and the men's and women's training processes are broadly similar, we have to recognize that men and women are different biologically and psychologically. Some of the issues which have to be faced and obstacles which have to be overcome in order to be ready for ordination are therefore different for men and women.

Levels of Going for Refuge

It is impossible to talk about ordination without mentioning Going for Refuge or commitment to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Sangharakshita founded the Western Buddhist Order on the basis of the centrality of Going for Refuge and subsequently delineated different levels of Going for Refuge: provisional, effective, Real and Absolute.

Provisional Going for Refuge covers a wide spectrum of experience. It includes all those who are involved in Buddhist activities out of a genuine devotion to the Dharma but who have not yet made a specific commitment to it. In the FWBO this includes Friends, Mitras, and Mitras who have asked for ordination. This level of Going for Refuge can, with effort, develop into effective Going for Refuge which is synonymous with ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. Real Going for Refuge coincides with the arising of Insight and Absolute Going for Refuge with Buddhahood itself.

Preparation for ordination involves helping those who have asked for ordination to deepen their provisional Going for Refuge so that it becomes effective. This transition is crucial in the spiritual life of the individual. Effective Going for Refuge is

equivalent to what we call commitment: an ability to place the Three Jewels in the centre of one's life and to live from this experience as fully as possible. This commitment takes priority over all other responsibilities and activities.

The 'ordination process' and the ordination Team

To recognize whether or not a person is effectively Going for Refuge, you need to know them well, both in some depth and over a period of time. The ordination team is developing a series of retreats to which women who have asked for ordination are invited. Here they can get to know the ordination team, and we can get to know them! Our retreats are based on themes such as 'What is the Order?', 'Going for Refuge', 'The Ten Precepts', 'Spiritual Friendship' and 'The Transcendental Principle.' The study and discussion, as well as the various meditation and devotional practices that make up the retreat help those who attend to clarify their understanding of the Dharma and its practice and so to become clearer how they need to work on themselves and change in order to become ready for ordination.

Members of the ordination team ascertain that women requesting ordination want to join the Order for spiritual reasons, and their request is not based on a desire for acceptance, approval or status. We also need to see that an inner commitment is expressed in an ethical life; that the person can deal with internal and external difficulties creatively; and that they have sufficient emotional positivity and psychological integration to enable them to sustain their commitment under most conditions. We want to know they have a capacity for friendship and co-operation, as well as receptivity to spiritual friends and teachers. They need to understand and assent to the principles of the Order and the wider Movement. They need to have a good Dharma knowledge and be able to apply this knowledge in everyday life. Finally, they need to have an effective meditation practice.

We also want to see that the transition from provisional Going for Refuge to effective Going for Refuge, from devotion to the Ideal to a commitment to pursuing it, is reflected in a greater individuality and independence. We would expect



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ordination team
which helps
women prepare
for ordination
into the Western
Buddhist Order.**

practice of the Dharma to have loosened involvement in and dependence on career, family life, and sexual relationships. Someone whose Going for Refuge was effective could be expected to have 'gone forth' to some extent from these activities so that they no longer had a central place in their lives. Commitment to the Three Jewels supposes a freedom for unlimited commitment – and a letting go of anything which might hold one back.

Issues and Obstacles

Issues and obstacles women may need to deal with on their journey to ordination include lack of self-confidence and an associated inability to take

risks, step out, stand out and speak out. This may also involve a tendency to avoid 'rocking the boat' and to collude with one another in maintaining emotional security. Women often incline to conformity and feel a need for security both in personal relationships and in objective situations such as work. Women can tend to be overwhelmed by their emotions which can obscure their clarity and purpose. For many women there is also the issue of whether or not to have a child.

1. Self-Doubt and Developing Confidence

Lack of confidence ranges from a mild holding-back to a deep-seated self-doubt which sabotages efforts to grow. It is often associated with a deep sense of unworthiness, low self-esteem and harsh self-criticism. This condition may be obvious from the beginning, or it may manifest only when a woman is making progress and spiritual momentum is building up. At a crucial moment she can seem to 'lose ground', slow down and even get completely distracted.

Lack of self-confidence, self-doubt and similar conditions may have any number of sources, including specific family conditioning and the influence of society in general. On the whole women have not been encouraged to explore new territory, whether mundane or spiritual, and those of us who do so often experience great fear as we try to break what seem to be strong internal taboos.

A text we sometimes study on retreat is Milarepa's *Song of Self-Examination* which he sung to Rechngma and her four companions when they came to him seeking his teaching¹. He asks them various

questions which we can paraphrase and apply to our own lives and circumstances. Women asking for ordination need to be able to answer 'yes' to these questions.

2. Conformity and Taking Risks

The tendency to conformity and a sense of lack of confidence can be compounded by other women rather than challenged by them. In other words, women tend to collude with each other. A healthy competitiveness and challenge is often absent from their relationships. I have heard women say they would like to see women as leaders but their response to that actuality is to feel jealous rather than to rejoice in the person's merits and to try and emulate them.

A general fear among women of taking risks can hold back a woman who wants to step out if she discusses her plans with friends and peers. I noticed this recently when someone I know wanted to take on a position of responsibility. The response of her friends rather than encouraging and discussing objective pros and cons was to express concern. Would it be too much? Should she be careful? In the end she did not step forward. Everyone's caution conspired to hold her back.

It may be this is a socially conditioned response. As little girls we have not, perhaps, been encouraged to be outgoing and to take risks. In his book, *Men and Women -How Different Are They?*², John Nicholson puts forward some evidence to suggest that teachers behave differently in the way they encourage children to respond to their own mistakes. If a boy gets the wrong answer he is apparently encouraged to try new approaches until he succeeds, so that initial failure is seen as a challenge, something to be overcome. A girl is more likely to be told not to worry and is less likely to be encouraged to try again. In this way she learns that success and failure are beyond her control.

Camille Paglia suggests that there are other reasons, apart from conditioned lack of self-confidence, which mean that women do not stand out. She suggests we can be at the mercy of our hormones!

*Biologically, the male is impelled toward restless movement; his moral danger is brutishness. Biologically, the female is impelled toward waiting, expectancy; her moral danger is stasis. Androgen agitates; oestrogen tranquilizes.*³

This well-known quotation at least demands reflection.

If we have a tendency to conformity, complacency, security, or stasis, for whatever reason, we need to take steps to counteract it. Whatever the cause of our lack of self-confidence, whether it is due to social conditioning or the effects of our hormones, we need to take steps both individually and collectively to overcome it if we wish to progress spiritually. We need to take risks, to step out, to stand out, and to encourage other women to do likewise. We need to give both encouragement and challenge. We certainly need to break free from the collusive attitudes which seek to over-protect ourselves and others.



Have I got the stamina and strength to follow through my aspirations?

If necessary can I stand alone?

Can I live a simple life?

Can I accept that nothing is fixed and secure in the spiritual life?

3. Resolving the Baby Question

One of the experiences which affects most women in their twenties or thirties is the desire to have a child. Although the whole process of conception, pregnancy and birth immerse one in preoccupations which have little to do with spiritual life, the responsibilities that come with motherhood itself are not an obstacle to entering the Order and progressing spiritually. There are many examples of women Order members who manage not only to bring up their children but to keep up their own spiritual practice and take up spiritual responsibilities. However, it has to be said that having children does take up time and energy. It is often not easy to find time to meditate, go on retreat, spend time with spiritual friends and so on when there are also children to look after. Women asking for ordination need to take this into account.

It is often not so much having a child which is an obstacle (although it may slow down one's progress) as the conflict which prevents one from coming to a decision as to whether to have one or not. If energy is divided it is obviously harder to engage wholeheartedly in meditation, or to summon up the momentum in one's practice which is needed to help one make one's Going for Refuge effective. Women have to think through this question and make a conscious decision one way or the other – and take responsibility for their decision.

4. Working with Emotionality

Being overwhelmed by emotions causes women to lose perspective. It is important that we learn how to work with our emotionality and to understand it. Studying the Dharma and clarifying our thinking about such issues from a dharmic point of view enables us to work on ourselves effectively.

5. Independence and Individuality

How can we develop independence and individuality? Engaging in a regular meditation practice, both alone and with others, enables us to know ourselves more deeply and become more individual. Dharma study and discussion helps us to clarify our thinking. If we understand the teaching of Conditioned Co-production, we will understand that we ourselves determine our being, whether for good or ill. This encourages us to take responsibility for ourselves. Friendship reflects us back to ourselves as others see us, as well as providing mutual challenge and encouragement. Creative, ethical work, especially with others, stimulates energy, potency and confidence.

Sometimes women who have become involved in a spiritual movement such as the FWBO discover they have come to depend on its structures inappropriately for a sense of safety and security. They may then need to take time away in order to find a truer independence. Only then can they engage with others on a genuinely co-operative basis. Developing the capacity to stand alone is one of the reasons why substantial solitary retreats are so beneficial.

Over the last decades many western women have

been encouraged to be independent in a worldly sense: to have a career, buy their own house, and be financially independent. Once such women turn to meditation, however, they sometimes realize their independence and confidence does not go very deep. A house, career, position and status are false refuges and cannot provide lasting security. But, often hard won, they can be difficult to give up. Joining with other women in a residential community or to undertake some collective project such as a Right Livelihood venture can help develop a more authentic individuality.

In an article of this length I can only touch upon some of the obstacles many women have to face in order to become ready for ordination, and to mention some ways they may be overcome. For any individual there will be particular issues to deal with. There is a wide variety of backgrounds – nationality, race and age – amongst the increasing numbers of women asking for ordination. Each one will need to engage with Dharma practice and face the issues that reveal themselves through it – and to discuss them openly with spiritual friends.

The women's ordination team and the retreats they run provide a focus for women asking for ordination. Members of the team are senior Order members with many years of experience of practising the Dharma within the context of the WBO and FWBO. We have had to face and overcome many obstacles ourselves and can provide



friendship, guidance and example for other women in the Movement.

These days more and more women are turning to the Dharma, and more are seeking ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. The more Dharmacharinis there are, the greater will be the opportunities, facilities and experience to encourage – and challenge – others to join us. □

¹ 'Challenge from a Clever Maiden' in *Songs of Milarepa*, transl. Garma C.C. Chang, Shambhala, 1989

² John Nicholson, *Men and Women – How Different Are They?*, OUP

³ Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art and American Culture*, Penguin, 1992, p108

Tea break for the women's building team at the new Manchester Buddhist Centre

THE FREEDOM HABIT'S HOT-HOUSE

the practice of community living

by MAITREYI



**Maitreyi is part
of the Bodywise
team which runs
an alternative
health-centre
associated with
the London
Buddhist Centre.**

HOW CAN WE SPEAK (or sing) of putting an end to war if we can't even live together with other people in friendship or at least mutual tolerance

This question was a catalyst for the lifestyle choices I made in the late 60's and 70's. No doubt I was strongly influenced by the ethos of the times – in the West this period was a melting pot of exploration and experimentation. But I was also motivated by what seemed to be a personal imperative to put my ideals into practice. I had an intuitive sense that communal living situations held a key to personal growth and that to some extent this lay in finding an alternative to the nuclear family. I threw myself wholeheartedly into a number of 'alternatives': a hippy commune in Ireland, an artistic collective in France, and feminist households in London. I experienced the excitement of each situation as it came into being and evolved; and suffered the disappointment as each in turn disintegrated, sometimes dramatically, even explosively, sometimes just melting away.

It was only when I encountered Buddhism in the form of the FWBO that I had my first taste of a spiritual community and began to understand what it had to offer. I have now lived in FWBO women's communities for fifteen years. I think it has probably contributed to my development as an individual more than any other single aspect of my life.

The crucial difference between a true spiritual community and other collective or communal living situations is that its members come together through a commitment to a common spiritual ideal which provides a focus. Those living in the community can then relate through this highest common factor which they share rather than getting bogged down in the lowest common denominator of subjective pre-occupations or being dominated by the personality of a particular individual. For a Buddhist this common ideal is the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and the desire to Go for Refuge ever more deeply to these Three Jewels.

How then does community living help women in the FWBO to Go for Refuge more deeply? The answer lies, I think, in three ingredients which on

one level are matter-of-fact and on another are magical because of their transformative effect. These ingredients are: other people, the single-sex principle and the on-going intensity of community life.

Other People

Spiritual life is lived in relation to other people. The popular notion of spiritual life with its image of the single, silent meditator at peace with himself and the world overlooks this fact. We do need periods of solitude from time to time when we can intensify our meditation practice and have time to reflect on our experience more deeply. But overall, most of the time, we will be in contact, in communication, working alongside other people. It is these everyday relations with others that is the working ground for our practice, particularly our practice of ethics which provides the basis for our meditation practice.

Living together with other women who are committed to the same ideals intensifies this working ground: the community becomes a crucible in which our everyday actions and communications can be purified and transformed.

Actions have consequences. This, the most fundamental and important teaching of Buddhism is something that we all acknowledge but often forget. Living in a community it is difficult to overlook the effects of our actions. If I speak harshly to someone in the evening, I will meet them again the following day and unless I have been able to apologize, the shadow of my unskillful speech will lie between us. If there is an unresolved conflict between two community members, it will be apparent whenever the community comes together. If I have what seems to be a 'good' *metta bhavana* meditation practice in the morning and then find myself feeling immediate hostility towards the first community member I meet in the kitchen (this was, for a period, a regular occurrence!) then I know there is work to be done!

In this way, living intimately with other people continually puts our practice of meditation and ethics to the test, shows up where we are deluding ourselves, where we have become complacent, where we need to work and to change.

The Single-sex Principle

Within the FWBO almost all the communities are single-sex, that is either men's or women's communities, occasionally including children. This means that we are brought into more intense and intimate contact with a number of other women, perhaps more so than we have ever been before in our lives. Single-sex situations help and encourage us towards developing our full potential as human beings. In mixed situations, certain characteristics, qualities, tend to be carried by one gender rather than the other. As women in these situations we may lack the incentive, the necessity even, to develop the more 'masculine' qualities ourselves.

By creating a situation which does not give rise to this kind of gender polarization, we can become more and more ourselves, freed up from any gender stereotypes of how we should be. At the same time we can become more aware of the effect that our biological, psychological and social conditioning as women has on us. We can begin to uncover what is and what is not beneficial in our make-up to our efforts to grow spiritually. With increasing clarity and understanding, we can reflect each other back



On-going Intensity

The third magical and transforming ingredient is the on-going intensity and intimacy of community living. In a community you can't help but 'come out' as you really are, come out with more and more of yourself. You'll come out with joy, enthusiasm, metta, and with sadness, hostility and, at times, despair. You'll come out with your views and prejudices and your insights. This is the ground in which real friendship and communication blossoms because the superficial level of self-image and 'presenting' ourselves can no longer subsist. Any inauthenticity becomes evident to us in this crucible: our shadow, our taboo areas are thrown up into the light.

Our connexions with each other progress from the level of likes and dislikes to a far more substantial basis of friendship, affection and mutual encouragement. But it is important to realize that conflict will be an inevitable part of this process of deepening friendship. Sooner or later our desires, our points of view, will clash. Sangharakshita has said that 'honest collision is better than dishonest collusion'¹ and I think this is something that we need to take to heart. Often there is a fear that

conflict will result in rejection or withdrawal, even the end of friendship. Such fears cause us to maintain a surface pleasantness, an apparent harmony which is stultifying to the life and energy of the community. Both the fear of conflict and the outburst of conflict and reactions to it have been the cause for some communities ending prematurely because of a lack of understanding of the process at work. A fear of rocking the boat, causes a community to atrophy. A lack of resilience in dealing with conflict results in people leaving rather than the community moving to a new level of mutual understanding and respect.

It is important that we do not avoid or withdraw from this conflict. If our reactivity remains covert it will become pernicious in the form of resentment and hostility. If we hold back from entering into the arena of conflict we will miss out on an important part of what the community has to offer: the opportunity to see what lies beneath the reactivity, and with it, the opportunity for ourselves and others to change. One of the ways in which I have changed through living in a community is that I have learnt to take more responsibility for my own part in a conflict. I have learnt the importance of confession, of being able to apologize, of letting go of false pride and obstinacy. My experience of my own community is that we have grown more emotionally robust, both individually and collectively through dealing with conflict.

So if communities have all these benefits to offer, why don't more women take the leap? Why don't more women Go Forth from home into community life? I think one of the main reasons is a false view of equating independence with freedom.

In her famous address to the students of Girton College in 1929, Virginia Woolf strongly encouraged a spirit of independence which she saw as consisting in having £500 a year and 'a room of our own' with 'the habit of freedom'. At the time it was probably true that gaining financial and domestic independence were important steps towards a life of their own for many women. But two generations later I think we have begun to confuse that independence with freedom. Having got a job, a house, a place of her own, a woman imagines that she is liberated and in control of her life. She may then be blind to the potential of community living which can in fact bring about the joy of a greater freedom than is possible in our isolated lives of supposed 'security'.

What freedom really consists in is 'chitta vimoksha' – the liberation of the heart where there are no barriers between oneself and other people. In choosing to live in a community we are choosing neither dependence nor independence but interdependence. We are choosing to take down our barriers, to let ourselves be seen, and to see others on deeper and deeper levels with the 'vital mutual responsiveness' in communication which such freedom brings. We are choosing to Go for Refuge more and more wholeheartedly to the spiritual community, the Sangha Jewel. □

¹. Sangharakshita, *Peace is a Fire*, Windhorse 1995, p79

a strong spiritual practice

by CHITTAPRABHA

AS A CHILD AND TEENAGER I was intrigued by precognitive and other experiences which seemed to defy the usual concepts of time and space. These experiences set me off on my search to discover the truth. At that time I was living in South Africa. Responding to the country's political difficulties, I felt the urge to change things. As a student studying science, I searched for answers to my questions. I went on to study psychology, graduating in 1972. During that time I experimented with meditation and read *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* – but I was unable to find anybody who could help me in my search.

Two years later I was in New Zealand on my first Buddhist retreat. Encountering the Dharma I felt I had found what I had been looking for all my life. The retreat was led by Sangharakshita and I was struck by the fact that here was somebody who was speaking out of his own experience. Although I knew it would not be easy, I had a sense that to embrace and take up the practice of the Dharma was the real purpose of my life.

During the early years of practising as a Buddhist I felt the disadvantages of being a mother. There were often pulls between my desire to meditate and go away on retreat, and the needs of my growing children. However, I discovered that this apparent

conflict was a good means of overcoming complacency: for several years I had to meditate at 5 am, or forego my practice due to the demands of my daily life. Having to get up early, I discovered a special beauty and magic at day-break. My meditation practice enriched my life and enabled me to enjoy my children, bringing an awareness into my life that previously had not been there.

Having spent most of my Buddhist life as a mother and school teacher, I have had comparatively little time for more intensive meditation and reflection. During my time as a school teacher I found my knowledge of the Dharma was the basis for my inspiration in my work and enabled me to teach in a way that was both creative and meaningful. I took occasional 'time out' from my ordinary life to meditate in the Australian bush, staying in quite primitive conditions close to nature. In this way I was able to open my heart to an experience of beauty, stillness and joy, in which the pulls of 'personal needs' faded away.

I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order in 1989, immediately after which I began teaching meditation and leading retreats. I found this deeply satisfying. It increases my own faith to see people responding to the Dharma so wholeheartedly,



Chittaprabha
is Chairman of
the Sydney
Buddhist Centre.



**Australian
Outback**

transforming their lives through applying a few simple teachings.

Not long after my ordination I became Chairman of the Sydney Centre. I took on the position without knowing very much about what would be required of me. I was working part-time, supporting my youngest daughter, and relatively inexperienced as an Order member. The one thing I was sure about was my commitment to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha!

As Chairman I have had to learn a lot. One thing is maintaining an overview of the situation, with an understanding of the past and a vision for the future. In the running of our Centre, I need to ensure that the Dharma is taught as clearly and accurately as possible, and in a way that is accessible to the people who attend our classes. Another part of the vision is to see the activities that we organize at the Centre not simply as ends in themselves, but also as a means to work together co-operatively, being prepared to allow our interactions with others to radically transform ourselves.

But what does a Chairman do? There is a good deal of 'behind the scenes' work. Part of that is keeping in touch with the wider picture of the Order and Movement around the world. I co-ordinate visits from experienced Order members from overseas – these visits are quite a boost to the local Sangha. Another area for development is trying to create a more supportive situation so that those people in Sydney who have asked for Ordination can prepare themselves sufficiently to join the Order.

During the four years that I have been Chairman the situation has changed enormously. Four years ago I was often the only Order member teaching at

classes, and the classes themselves were held in rented premises. Now we have four Dharmacharis and three Dharmacharinis working in various activities associated with the Sydney Centre. We have our own premises in the city where we hold classes, meditate, perform puja together and so on. We have also purchased our own retreat Centre and established a men's Community and a large women's Community. The FWBO is growing on this side of the world!

I have found that the practical tasks of running a Centre often mean even less time for my own meditation practice than before! But – to my surprise – despite less time spent on activities such as meditation which I find spiritually nourishing, the task of trying to be an effective Chairman has itself helped me to change. Working with others to run a Centre is a strong spiritual practice: seeing the effects we have on one another, I have become aware just how important it is to help each other to grow spiritually. The focus shifts, it seems, from a concern just with one's own development to an awareness of others as well.

The teachings of Buddhism as presented by Sangharakshita have been the most useful and wonderful gift I have ever been given. In trying to put them into practice I am challenged. They stir in me the desire to communicate to others the riches and beauty of the Buddha's message. I feel fortunate to be part of that network of friendships which is the Western Buddhist Order which has given me a context in which to practice. Over the years I have been given so much help without which I would not have made much progress. For that I feel an unfailing gratitude which will last, I am sure, until I die – and perhaps even beyond. □

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Sapling Tree in Germany

by JAYACHITTA

FWBO ACTIVITIES WERE STARTED in Germany twelve years ago, but it is only in the last three years that there has been a 'chapter' of Dharmacharinis (women Order members) here. Gunavati was the first to arrive. (She has now left for England.) A year later Jayaprabha moved from Cambridge, Kulanandi from Taraloka retreat centre and I arrived from East London where I had been working for the past nine years in the Cherry Orchard restaurant.

I think it is true to say that we had little idea about the size of the adventure we were embarking on. During those first weeks and months I came to realize how immensely supportive the conditions had been around the London Buddhist Centre. I had simply taken the structures which supported my life and practice for granted. Now we had to find out for ourselves how to set up those conditions in a different environment. There was much we could draw on from the experience of the movement in Britain. The basic structures of city-based Dharma Centres, country retreat Centres, residential single-sex communities and so on were the same. But there was also much we had to think out for ourselves.

For instance, we have had to develop a new language with which to communicate the Dharma – in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense. Although I am German, all my own Dharma study has been in English. Now I was having to learn how to communicate my understanding in German. But even more than that, our communication of the Dharma has to be in a way that is relevant to the culture and history of German people.

As we sought ways of going ahead with our work of establishing a women's wing of the Sangha here, I found myself faced with many fundamental questions that had not occurred to me before. What is the best way to start up a community? What structures should a community be based around? How can we cultivate the pioneering spirit that we need while at the same time fostering a spirit of warmth and care?

Faced with questions such as these, and with the responsibility of planning, executing, and assessing the success of all the women's and some mixed activities held in Germany, it became obvious that the extent to which we as Order members could really co-operate and work together would be a decisive factor in building the women's wing of the Movement in Germany.

Over the years we have made a good deal of progress. Harmony, trust and understanding between us has deepened. As a result of making

considerable efforts and going through some difficult times, we have come to know each other to a greater depth than we probably would have done in a larger situation. Once a month we get together with Dharmacharinis from Holland for our 'international Order weekend.' The opportunity of meeting with others who are living and working in a situation similar to our own is often rich, nourishing and important to us all.

The work we have put into building up our Chapter is reflected in the growth and vitality of the women's wing of the Sangha. Women are coming together regularly to study the Dharma. There is a whole range of retreats on offer to women,

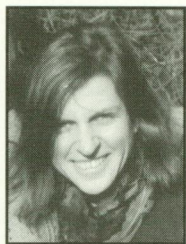
mostly held at our beautiful retreat centre, Kühnude: retreats for newcomers, for Friends, and for Mitras – intensive meditation retreats, study retreats and so on. Sometimes Dharmacharinis visit from Britain to lead or support the retreats which we greatly value. In co-operation with the Dutch Dharmacharinis we offer regular events for women who have asked for ordination. At present there are fourteen such women in Germany.

An important lesson I have learnt is that there cannot be a separation between personal practice and

outward activity. Our practice has to have both breadth and depth if we are to be an effective nucleus for the developing women's wing of the FWBO Sangha in Germany. It isn't enough to put on an event and, for example, talk about the beauty of friendship if we cannot live out those ideals in our daily lives. This, of course, is true for all members of the Western Buddhist Order. But if you are working amongst a large number of Order members, you can always count on there being someone around exemplifying those ideals if you are not up to scratch yourself. Here it is just the three of us working to establish a Sangha in conjunction with our Dharma brothers. It is up to us to bring our ideals, our dreams, our vision, our hopes and our down-to-earth planning together. We have to draw on all our qualities if we want to make a success of this venture. Through a deepening understanding of Going for Refuge, and through a deepening of our own practice we are able to provide the conditions for women to develop their confidence and strengthen their practice of the Dharma.

This year a particularly beautiful blossom will unfold on the sapling tree of our growing Sangha: our first woman Mitra will be ordained. I look forward to many other women taking that step over the coming years. □

Hier in Deutschland finden wir, daß wir eine neue Sprache entwickeln müssen, um den Dharma zu vermitteln – eine wörtliche als auch bildliche. Ich habe den Dharma in Englisch gelernt, aber lehren muß ich ihn in Deutsch. Und das muß ich in einer Weise tun, die für die Menschen dieses Landes, mit seiner besonderen Geschichte und Kultur, bedeutsam ist.



Jayachitta
works for the
Essen Buddhist
Centre, helping
to establish the
FWBO – in
particular the
women's wing
– in Germany.



Cultural Crossings

by **PARAMACHITTA**

I HAVE MADE some major cultural crossings in my life – first as a child when my family brought me to England from India; and more recently when I left England to live and work as an Order member here in Spain.

I have no actual memories of India, but I grew up with those of my family. The difference between life within and outside the home presented me sometimes with a conflict, a clash of cultures. I was between two worlds, I didn't really belong to the Indian group – I voluntarily rejected many of the cultural norms of Indian society and felt myself distant and unfamiliar with others – but nor could I feel I belonged to the English. My overriding

experience was one of rootlessness, which was a mixed blessing. I felt free of many of the ties that could have bound me to my cultural origins; but at the same time I felt the need for an identity that belonging to a group defined by race or culture would have given me.

Racism was a fact of life during my childhood and teenage years and it was all too easy to react either with anger – sometimes even violence, or to feel a victim. For a large part of my life, political activism gave me a channel for that energy. It was sometimes fuelled by hatred and vengeance, but it was also motivated by the desire to change the world for the better.

For this reason, Sangharakshita's teaching on 'the group and the individual' gave me my greatest inspiration and also my greatest challenge. I believed that politics in the form of community or social action was important. I was therefore both infuriated and excited when I heard Sangharakshita's lectures on creating the New Society. I was infuriated because I myself was an anti-racist, feminist trade-unionist member of various groups and I was hearing 'the group' coming under attack. Groups, I felt, were necessary. Like Sangharakshita, I too believed that people were able to achieve things together that they could not do alone. To do that, I thought, they needed a

group to belong to. It was through my involvement with political and other groups that I had been able to regain my self-respect.

But I was not just infuriated. I was also excited by Sangharakshita's ideas. I knew that my horizons were limited. I could not work solely in contexts where polarization and reaction were what joined people as they did in the groups to which I belonged. Moreover, however good people's intentions (and I have worked with some very kind and aware people) their perspective was always limited. Too much importance was given to short-term gain. Hearing the Dharma gave me a new perspective. It made sense of the suffering and injustice in the world.

I moved to Spain as a direct result of my commitment to Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels in the context of the Western Buddhist Order. Many of the themes of my life have been clarified in the transition. One of the most important has been to do with leaving home or 'going forth'. The inspiration of the Buddha's life, and Sangharakshita's emphasis on becoming an individual has enabled me to physically leave almost everything that I had built for myself in England. I feel I have gone forth, not just from material security, but also from the search for home. I am still a 'foreigner' but in a very much more positive sense.

Of course I now face all sorts of other challenges, not least of which has been learning to communicate in another language. I have had to learn to be more fearless in communication so that I could make new friends. I have also come to appreciate more fully the friendships that I already have, and the need to keep faith with them. Away from the vibrant atmosphere of the London Buddhist Centre where I lived and worked for many years, I am deeply aware of the importance of favourable conditions for maintaining my practice of the Dharma.

We are here planting seeds for the New Society to flourish in Spain. I sometimes think how it must have been for my family arriving in another country where the climate is different, the language is different, the system is different, where you have to start from scratch, building a life, earning a living, adapting to a new culture. They didn't have the Dharma, which is the constant focus of my life, an integrating and inspiring force. I feel very fortunate that at the age of 40 I have been able to go forth in this way. □



Paramachitta

**lives and
works in**

Valencia where

she is helping

to establish

the first public

FWBO Centre in

Spain.

WAY TO FREEDOM

by LISA CULLEN



**Lisa, a mitra,
lives and works
in San Francisco.**

THE FIRST TIME I sat on the floor and tried to concentrate on my breathing, I was with about ten other people in a tiny room on the ninth floor of a hotel. I had been travelling rather aimlessly for several months and had arrived in Kathmandu, the Himalayan shopping mall of spirituality. I could have stayed in a Zen monastery, or chanted with a Tibetan lama whose lips perpetually moved and whose eyes were fixed on the ceiling. I ended up at an FWBO meditation class, trying to concentrate on my breath. The people teaching the class seemed sensible – and somehow also familiar. When I talked to them I felt their calm and kindness, and thought: I want to be like that.

When I came back to San Francisco in 1981, my life had gained breadth. I had had my first spiritual experiences. I now meditated. I even believed in magic. One's experience of living can indeed be very large. A lot of western people discover that in India.

But it was much easier to be a Buddhist in Asia. Buddhism is just so natural there. *I* was the foreign thing. But here in America, I find when I am chanting for example, it suddenly strikes me as such an odd thing to do. I am acutely aware of how (at least parts of me!) are thoroughly Western, in fact thoroughly Californian, and even thoroughly Christian.

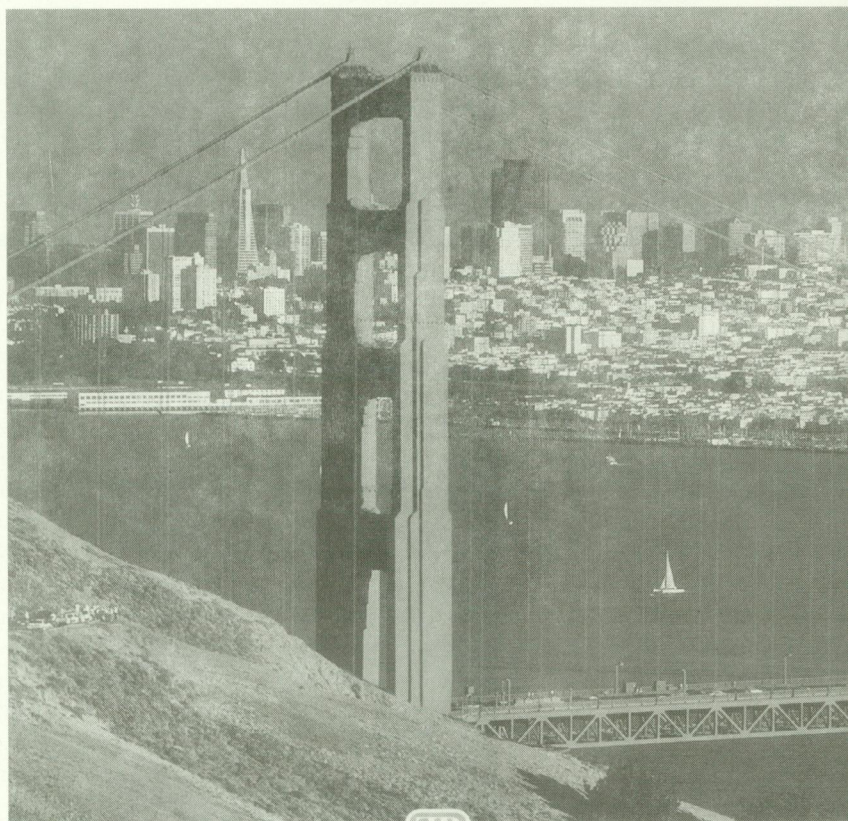
The further I go in my Buddhist practice, the more I become aware of the unfathomable depth of my Christian conditioning. The self-loathing and guilt I continue to discover never ceases to surprise me. It is so excruciatingly painful, and probably the biggest obstacle to my spiritual development.

Another big challenge I am trying to face is a feeling I sometimes get of being in jail. It makes me want to break out and run away, and not to be pinned down. This is why I work by contract, why I have travelled alot, why I have been divorced twice, why sometimes when I meditate, it's all I can do not to spring up off the cushion, like a jack-in-the-box.

Sometimes I perceive Buddhism to be the cause of it. Sometimes I think it must be someone doing it to me. Sometimes its a place, or a job, which seem to hem me in. In the end, however, I come to the same conclusion – its really something in myself, I want to get away from myself.

Many people come to San Francisco to get away from something. At the very least to get away from the feeling that they are odd. Here it doesn't matter what you are, how bizarre your sex life is, or where you come from.

Ten years ago, I left a conservative suburb near Los Angeles and arrived in San Francisco, looking for a way to be free – free from the chains of my conditioning, free from the lives lived by the people who are afraid. Moving here prepared me for my trip to Asia, where I was looking for another kind of freedom, or way to freedom. The journey I am making now is of a different sort: I sit down and close my eyes, and the country is both dark and bright, a vast inner world awaiting exploration – and transformation. □



San Francisco

DELIGHTING IN A NEW WAY OF BEING

by **SIAN MARIAN**

PRACTISING THE DHARMA has changed many aspects of my life, not least my relationships, including my relationship with my daughter, Aissetou. In particular the practice of metta or loving kindness and the speech precepts have helped me change. I once made a commitment to confess to a friend every time I used harsh speech. This made a lasting difference. It is now fairly rare for me to use harsh speech. If I am a bit sharp in speaking to my daughter I always apologize straight away – and she does to me – an effect which I hadn't anticipated!

My relationship with Aissetou and indeed my life in general changed considerably when I started to work more-or-less full-time for Windhorse Trading nearly two years ago. In Windhorse we work to the principle of 'give what you can and take what you need.' This is probably the first time in my life that I have found my needs are being met to a sufficient degree. As a result I find I can give more to others, including my daughter. It has been dawning on me recently that I cannot really practice the Dharma on my own. I need the help of others. I need opportunities to give to others when I can try to be of service. Trying to be a friend to others helps me to change and go beyond myself. Through my daily work in the Windhorse accounts office I find the subtle transforming effect of simply being with other women who are also trying to practise mindfulness, kindness and generosity.

Perhaps one of the most delightful and challenging aspects of my work is that it forces me to become objective. I used to work as a practitioner of Shiatsu massage. I found I didn't really know whether my treatment worked or not. In the office it is quite clear whether or not I have been successful. Either the money comes in or it doesn't! Work acts as a consistent and neutral mirror reflecting back to me my mental states. It's obvious that if I get irritated when the phone rings, it's not the fault of the phone! Our office has been named Abhirati, the realm of Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East who has the mirror-like wisdom.

The working situation gives us the opportunity for taking responsibility for our actions. If I leave a task undone or only partially done, this may lead to mistakes being made later on. We may lose custom or lose money in some other way, which in turn means we make less money to give away (one of our aims as a Right Livelihood venture is to generate dana, money for giving.) On the other hand, if I do a job as well as I possibly can with an attitude of striving for excellence, it sets up a momentum or an atmosphere which benefits everyone on the team.

Another way in which we have to take responsibility is in maintaining a positive state of mind. In an environment like ours where we are all in the same room all day and where we are not in direct verbal communication very often, this is very important.

Then there is taking responsibility for how we communicate. If we do not communicate in a direct, open and honest way, and there is unspoken criticism or resentment, 'charges' build up in the atmosphere making it an unpleasant environment in which to work.

Finally there is the simple matter of taking responsibility for doing whatever needs doing – whether someone needs a cup of tea, a window needs shutting, or someone else's telephone needs answering.

Work provides opportunities for learning new skills. I have found learning the skills I need to do my job has helped build my confidence. Equally important has been learning new skills in communication – and even new ways of being! I am learning to relate to people, and simply just to be, in a more relaxed, trusting and happy fashion! □



Sian, a Mitra,

lives in

Cambridge

where she works

for Windhorse

Trading, the

FWBO's largest

right livelihood

business.



Windhorse accounts team

NEWS

THE SANGHARAKSHITA APPEAL *an update*

by ANN ASHLEY

This update is to clarify some of the issues and questions that have arisen around the setting up of the Preceptors' College. People often ask, Why is it called a 'college'? Why are so many men involved? Why is Sangharakshita handing on his responsibilities – and what are they? Why has he appointed several people and not a single successor? Why should I give to it – what has it got to do with me?

The Appeal was launched in August 1994. Its aim was to raise enough money to provide a complex of communities and facilities in Birmingham, UK, where the Public Preceptors will live and work with an advisory Council.

It is called the 'Sangharakshita Appeal' because the Preceptor's College is Sangharakshita's idea – it is a working out of his vision for the future. However, the appeal focuses more on his disciples than on Sangharakshita himself. This shift in emphasis is of great significance. It is easy to forget, amidst the fund-raising and search for property that this appeal is about the future of a living spiritual tradition.

We are used to having Sangharakshita at the helm. For nearly thirty years he has inspired and guided what he once called 'a new kind of Buddhist movement', one that offers people in the modern world an effective way to develop spiritually. Sangharakshita is proposing a new and radical development for the movement – and he wants it to happen now, while he is still on hand to give advice. He has devoted a large part of his life to

us, and he is now asking us to free him of his remaining responsibilities so that he can devote his time to writing.



Sangharakshita

The College comprises the three men Public Preceptors, Sona, Subhuti and Suvajra, and two of the three current women Public Preceptors, Shrimala and Sanghadevi. The responsibility of ordaining someone into the Western Buddhist Order rests with the Public Preceptors. This is a weighty responsibility since the decision to ordain someone not only affects the course of that individual's spiritual life, but also the character of the Order itself.

The College will be helped by an advisory Council, senior Order members who have been asked by Sangharakshita to help the College

in their task of overseeing the spiritual well-being of the entire Order and Movement.

At the present time the Council consists entirely of Dharmacharis, that is men Order members. All of them have worked within a wide sphere for the Movement and Order and have done so for many years. They include FWBO Centre presidents, the overall Mitra Convenor, the overall Chapter Convenor, and authors of important Dharma books. The Council constitutes a body of individuals who are willing and able to be spiritual guardians of the FWBO/WBO. The Council is not a fixed body of people and more women will become involved once they are ready and able to take on this responsibility.

Sangharakshita wants the College and Council to live together, or be near neighbours, so that they can develop the harmony that comes from familiarity and friendship. According to the dictionary, 'college' means not only an institution of higher education, but also 'an organized body of persons with specific rights and duties' – (for Buddhists of course it is a matter of duties and not rights). The word comes from a Latin root denoting 'a band of associates.' Spiritual friendship is a key aspect of Sangharakshita's teaching of the Dharma, and by placing it as an ideal at the heart of the FWBO and WBO, rather than appointing a single successor, the movement will thrive not as a mere institution, but as a dynamic spiritual movement for the benefit of generations to come. □

Tiratanaloka

Retreat Centre for women who have asked for ordination

Report from ANJALI

Anjali is a member of the women's ordination team

The ordination team moved into Aberclydach House, near Brecon in Wales, in the last week of October 1994 and within three weeks we were running the first Going for Refuge retreat to be held there. Those three weeks were filled with activity – local tradesmen made minor building alterations, reinstating all the light fittings and doing some plumbing repairs. Silaprabha (who has joined us as retreat centre manager) worked with an enthusiastic team of women to paint and decorate the shrine room, make up furniture, stuff meditation cushions and stock the kitchen. The final touch was carpet laying – in fact, the shrine room carpet was only fitted by 9 pm on the night of the first retreat – just in time for the dedication ceremony!

Our first Winter in residence showed up the need for some immediate repairs to the building fabric. We found there were leaks in the conservatory roof and in all three chimneys – it can certainly rain in Wales! The work done should stand us in good stead for some years to come.

In January and February the community spent four weeks together without running any retreats. We had meetings to discuss business, set up systems for running the retreat centre and explored our work as spiritual practice. We inspired one another with our visions for the future – both for the development of the buildings and the development of the retreats as part of the Ordination process for women. It was a time when we could get to know one another more deeply through a variety of activities including Dharma study and a special ritual puja to mark Samata becoming Chairman of FWBO (Sarana), the charity under whose auspices the retreat centre operates. We also decided on a name for the centre – *Tiratanaloka* – the realm of

beings associated with the Three Jewels.

At the end of this period we held a coffee evening for invited neighbours and enjoyed meeting them and answering their questions. We have allayed their fears that they might have a noisy, disruptive cult on their doorsteps!

Tiratanaloka the realm of beings associated with the Three Jewels

In February the FWBO Liaison Office organized a press day at *Tiratanaloka*, which fifteen media people attended. The resulting radio, TV and newspaper coverage was generally very good. Sangharakshita, accompanied by Kovida, came to visit us for a weekend at the end of March. He was pleased with the property, and looked forward to returning in due course when we have built a stupa dedicated to Dharmo Rimpoché, when he will preside over a ceremony to install some of Dharmo's ashes.

Sangharakshita also kindly donated our fledgling library a full set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. This year we have allocated a small budget as a first step towards building a good Dharma library. Please feel free to donate any spare Dharma books.

We have received other gifts for our shrine room – a brass standing Tara rupa from Ratnaprabha, a painting of Vajrasattva by Chintamani, and from Achalabodhi a beautifully turned wooden stupa made from olive ash in which the ashes of Dharmo Rimpoché are temporarily being held.

To date we have held seven

retreats here. Retreatants have been very pleased with – and indeed proud of *Tiratanaloka*. They have begun to imbue the atmosphere with the dedication of their practice and have delighted in the beautiful countryside surrounding us. The remaining retreats in the 1995 programme are nearly all fully booked. This isn't surprising as



Shrine at Tiratanaloka

more women are requesting ordination every month. To make full use of the facility here, we need to expand the ordination team and run more retreats. To this end we plan to build an extension in early 1996 to house two extra community members. Mokshanandi, who joined the community in April, will be overseeing this building project.

In June the first ordination retreat at *Tiratanaloka* will take place. Twenty women are to be ordained – the largest number of women to be ordained at one time so far in the history of the Order! □

TARALOKA

the next phase of development

Report from DAYANANDI

Dayanandi is Chairman of Taraloka Buddhist Retreat Centre for Women



Barn conversion

Taraloka's barns are undergoing their next phase of conversion. This is the biggest development we have had for some time in which we are converting the remaining sections of barn into facilities for retreats. The project has given us another 164 square metres of space, providing the retreat centre with a series of extra rooms. These can be used flexibly to extend and improve the existing facility or to provide a self-contained mini-retreat centre for small retreats of six to eight women. A separate suite of rooms can also be booked for women who would like to come for a solitary retreat in the supportive atmosphere of Taraloka.

The barn conversion includes

three single and two double bedrooms (one of which is en-suite with a bathroom equipped for use by the disabled); a shrine room which will house a small library of Dharma books; a study/art room; showers, toilets and a small kitchen/dining room. The design (by Erica Light, a Mitra from the London Buddhist Centre, and myself) makes good use of the space and includes two new porches to give separate access to the two new rooms.

We hired a firm of professional builders to do most of the work this time. This enabled Taraloka to carry on with its usual programme.

By mid-March the work was

finished except for decorations, re-pointing and some woodwork. This will be done by teams of women over a four-week period in July.

During my eight years at Taraloka I have seen our retreats becoming more inspiring and helpful to the women who attend them. The barn conversion will enable us to expand our already wide range of retreats for women at every level of experience (and none) in the practice of meditation and Buddhism. Taraloka continues to be a focus of spiritual practice for women in the FWBO through its Dharma study retreats, and retreats for meditation, reflection, devotion and ritual.

Women's Community in Sydney

Report from MEGHA

Megha, a native of Australia, lived and worked for many years around the London Buddhist Centre. She now lives in Sydney.

Coogee is a busy sea-side suburb



Women's community at Coogee l to r: Sue Johnson, Sue Fitzsimmons, Al Mann, Caroline Ralston, Vajrashuri, Megha

of Sydney, and it's here we've set up our women's community. So how did it come about? For many years women involved with FWBO Sydney have lived together in varying combinations and for different lengths of time but these arrangements were never called

communities. In 1992 some women started talking about how one day when they were free to, they would like to live in a community.

We started meeting regularly to discuss what it would mean to live together – where we would live, the type of property we wanted and so on.

At this time there were other developments at the Sydney Centre. We were considering purchasing a rural retreat centre, and we needed to find new premises for our public centre in the city. We became quite attuned to the property market! In early 1994 we purchased a retreat centre in the Blue Mountains. Then the Coogee property came to our attention. It was an old neglected boarding house comprising six flats. It was large enough to house both a community and to accommodate the Buddhist Centre. There were many discussions – what was our limit going to be at the auction, who was going to live there and when, how much could each person contribute financially, whether or not the location was a good one for the

Sydney Centre and so on. It was a challenging time! Now here we are – a six-member women's community. We can see the beach from our dining table and at night we can hear the revellers from the car-park opposite! From here one can walk along the beach for miles.

Our community includes people who don't go out to work who spend some of their time at home to study the Dharma. Some are of mature age. Both of these help to give the community a more stable basis. We knew it would be important for the community to work together on a project. Fundraising and doing repairs on the building have provided this opportunity.

Purchasing both a retreat centre and a public centre-cum-community in the space of a year is something we had not expected! But we grasped the opportunities that came our way and have found that both places are gradually attracting people – and are very much appreciated for what they offer those who want to hear and practise the Dharma. □

Two Years in India

Report from ALISON HARPER

Alison is a Scottish Mitra from the London Buddhist Centre, and a painter.

In July 1993 I left London for India, a two-year Commonwealth scholarship in one hand, and *The India Guide* in the other. I was off to Baroda in Gujerat to study Fine Art at the University there. I had few ideas about what India would be like – just a few impressions from stories told by friends and from the film *Salaam Bombay* which I saw two days before I left.

Arriving in Bombay I was overwhelmed: the heat, the sights,

children in immaculately white cotton uniforms emerging from mud huts; women in brightly coloured saris, picking their way delicately around the brown monsoon puddles.

The Faculty of Fine Art at Baroda is situated in a large, leafy compound with a fishpond in the middle, surrounded by various red

brick buildings and an old wooden bungalow from the days of the 'raj'. The grounds are full of sculptures including a 20 foot statue of Ghandi in rough concrete. It is brimming with plant and wildlife – bright green parrots, monkeys, water buffalo and cows. Apparently there are crocodiles and snakes in the jungle beyond the buildings – but I haven't investigated this for myself!

Another scholar and I found a place to live in a flat in an ex-untouchable area of Baroda. Our road is fairly narrow with an haphazard array of houses, huts and shacks. In the morning and after 4pm the street is filled with children playing cricket, women doing

their washing and chatting, and young men huddled in groups playing cards and board games. At night older men sit under the banyan tree by the chai (tea) stall. There is the stench of burning tyres,



Artist at work

the sound of dogs barking and the local ironworks letting off its siren every hour or so.

During my first year here I travelled alot and managed to do a pilgrimage to the ancient Buddhist sites. One of the reasons I came was to follow the journey of the Buddha in ancient times and to relive some of the Buddhist stories through seeing the places where the Buddha had lived. I also came here to work as an artist full-time. During my second year I have concentrated more on my work which has been very rewarding. The second year has also been tougher as there was heavy flooding in Baroda followed by the plague scare. For a while my normal routine became a distant and pleasant memory, and life became something both uncertain and fragile.

At times I have found life hard. Faced with the challenge of trying to comprehend and adapt to a social code so different to my own, I have felt rather weary and isolated – the common experience of being a 'foreigner'. But being an outsider can jolt you into new perspectives, and break down your fixed view of what is normal, acceptable and desirable. I have found the people amongst whom I live extremely helpful and friendly – in fact their warmth, generosity and hospitality have often rendered me speechless! □



Baroda

the smells were unlike anything I had ever experienced. At first you cannot help but be deeply affected by the poverty here. And the contrasts: new highways next to tightly packed slums; school-

Yours Truly

800 Years of Women's Letters edited by Olga Kenyon (Foreword by P.D.James)
Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 298pp, £9.99 paperback

A BOOK REVIEW BY PADMASHURI

This informative book is a compilation by Olga Kenyon, herself a Buddhist, of women's letters from the twelfth century to the present day. It is set out in eleven topical sections including 'friendship', 'love and passion', 'work', 'travel', 'political skills.'

These are correspondences – amounting on occasion to works of art – written by women to friends and family, to colleagues, lovers or those they admire. We are given a very brief background to the writers, and each letter is set in a context. There are letters of admonishment juxtaposed with letters of sympathy and support. Many letters touch on deeply personal issues and I found myself moved by some of the heartfelt communication.

Olga Kenyon's choice includes a wide variety of both style and content from the polite and gentle to the bold and outspoken, from the florid to the witty and ironic. There are letters imbued with deep emotion, or business letters and letters such as that of a governess who describes the minutiae of her daily life, what they all have in common is expression – the expression of women living out their lives within the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

Included in the anthology are a few letters from Buddhist women practitioners past and present, but by and large the letters stem from the hands of the famous, or at least the well-known. Naturally they are the writings of the educated and therefore, with notable exceptions, are not representative of a cross-section of society. However, the letters do illustrate the changing lives of women over the centuries with contributions from Hildegard of

Bingen, Queen Elizabeth 1st, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Fry, Dorothy Wordsworth, Queen Victoria, Alexandra David-Neel, Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf.

Some letters give a glimpse of religious and political attitudes of the day. A letter from Queen Elizabeth shows her complaining to Henry 4th of France who, although a Protestant, is planning to convert to Catholicism in order to gain the loyalty of leading French families.

'My God!' she writes. *'Is it possible that worldly considerations can so erase the fear of God which threatens us? Can we in reason expect any good result from an act so impious? He who has supported and preserved you through the years, can you imagine that he will forsake you in time of your greatest need? Ah! 'tis dangerous to do evil, even for a good end. I hope that you will return to your senses. In the meantime I shall not cease to put you foremost in my prayers, that the hands of Esau do not snatch away the blessing of Jacob.'*

Centuries later we find Freya Stark writing to her mother about heroic explorations and adventures. She travelled in Persia in the 1930's. A century earlier George Eliot had been exploring her inner world and wrote to a friend:

"Cupid listens to no entreaties; we must deal with him as an enemy, either boldly parry his shafts or flee."

The anthology includes some letters written in times of hardship. The Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva writes in 1919 of having no flour or bread, while *'under my writing desk there are about twelve pounds of potatoes which is all that is left from food 'lent' by my neighbours.'*

There is a moving moment

when death is nearing and a backward glance reveals, *'you observe justly there is no happiness without an alloy, nor indeed any misfortune without some mixture of consolation, if our passions permitted us to perceive it. But alas! we are too imperfect to see on all sides; our wisest reflections (if the word wise may be given to humanity) are tainted by our hopes and fears; we all indulge views almost as extravagant as those of Phaeton, and are angry when we do not succeed in projects that are above the reach of mortality.'* (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to her brother in 1761)

A Buddhist nun travelling round India in 1990 recounts to friends, *'I'm just happy to be back in India. I don't really know why I love it, it's a total affront to my western conditioning – our slightly uptight, neurotic, prepackaged, tidy and neat and usually subliminally negative approach to life...I realise how, on some imperceptible level, I find it a strain to live within the Western psyche, where somehow we've forgotten to be what we are, possibly through so much emphasis on individuality which always gives the result of isolation.'*

What does *800 Years of Women's Letters* tell us of women and the way they have lived their lives? And what is the value of this anthology for women Buddhists today?

The glimpses we gain of the people whose letters appear in the book show us that by no means all women have conformed to stereotypical female roles. Many have lived courageous and independent lives engaged in a wide variety of activity, and with a wide range of thought. Though perhaps few had a truly spiritual vision, the courage, determination and pioneering spirit shown by some can inspire us in our own efforts as Dharma-farers. □

JUNE

4-11	Listening to the Silence	Mitras
13-23	Brahma Viharas Level 1	Mitras
23-25	Learning to Think	Mitras
25- 2	The Nature of Existence: Study	Mitras

JULY

3- 9	Illuminating the Dharma	Friends/Mitras
15-16	OPEN week-end (non residential)	All welcome

AUGUST

10-17	The Endlessly Fascinating Cry: study	Mitras
19-26	The Lotus of Compassion: Summer retreat	Friends/Mitras
26- 2	Summer Intensive Meditation	Friends/Mitras

SEPTEMBER

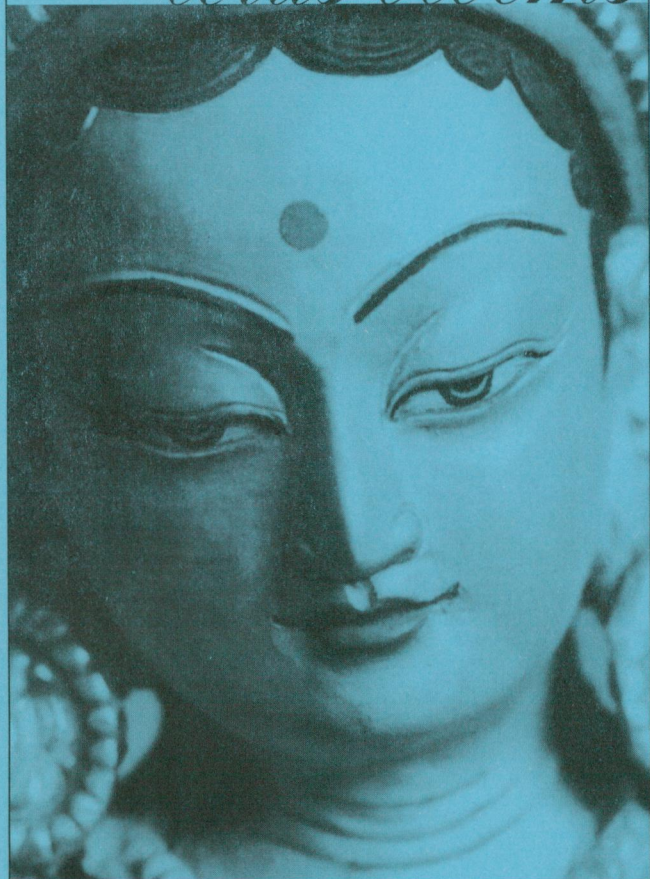
3- 8	Essentials of Meditation	Friends
8-10	Meditation Workshop	Newcomers
11-17	Towards becoming a Mitra	Pre-Mitras
17-24	Women and Communication	Friends/Mitras
26- 3 Oct	The Lotus Born: Sutra week	Mitras

SOLITARIES & Small retreats

Semi-solitary facilities available from September onwards, as well as facilities for letting for small retreats (up to 8 people) now that the renovation of our barns has been completed.

Full details of our retreat programme from The Secretary,
TaraLoka, Cornhill Farm, Bettisfield, Whitchurch,
Shropshire SY13 2LD. Tel: 0948 710646

The *lotus blooms*



june

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

july

1 - 8	Yoga, meditation & Massage
8 - 21**	Open retreat

august

8 - 13	Families retreat
13 - 20	Women's retreat

september

8 - 15	Visual Arts retreat
15 - 22*	Working retreat.
22 - 29*	Hill-walking & Meditation
29 - 6*	Alexander Technique

october

6 - 13	Open retreat
16 - 20	Families retreat
20 - 27*	Yoga & Meditation

november

10 - 12	Women's retreat
17 - 19	Edinburgh Sangha retreat
24 - 1*	Writing and Drama retreat

december

8 - 15*	Yoga & Meditation
30 - 6	Women's Winter retreat

ghanakosa

Dhanakosa the FWO's Scottish retreat centre. It is luxuriously equipped with and the setting is breathtaking, overlooking the sparkling waters of Loch Voil and surrounded by highland mountains and forests, yet it is only 1½ hours drive from Glasgow or Edinburgh. Discover ideal conditions for retreat in the Scottish Highlands. For a copy of our programme or to book please contact Glasgow Buddhist Centre, 329 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3HW Telephone 041 333-0524

*It may be possible to come for the weekend only of these retreats

**It is possible to book for either the first or second week or the full fortnight

On working retreats our rates are waived, but we welcome donations to cover the cost of food, about £2.50/day



LOTUS REALM REPRESENTATIVES AT FWBO CENTRES

BRITAIN

- LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 51 Roman Road, London E2 0HU: Victoria Rosario
- BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 135 Salisbury Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 8LA: Penny Brown
- BRIGHTON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 15 Park Crescent Place, Brighton BN2 3HF: Annie McAuley
- BRISTOL BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 9 Cromwell Road, St. Andrews, Bristol BS6 5HD: Anna Matthews
- CAMBRIDGE BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 25 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8EG: Brenda Kent
- CROYDON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 96-98 High Street, Croydon, Surrey CR0 1ND: Marlene Heap
- EDINBURGH BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 55A Grange Road, Edinburgh, EH9 1TX: Linda Goodman
- GLASGOW BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 329 Sauciehall Street, Glasgow G2 3HW: Irene Begg
- LANCASHIRE BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 78-80 King William Street, Blackburn, Lancs, BB1 7DT: Kay Birtwistle
- LEEDS BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 9 Heddon Place, Meanwood, Leeds LS6 4EL: Patience Walker
- LIVERPOOL MEDITATION CENTRE**, 37 Hope Street, Liverpool L1 9EA: Penny Morris
- MANCHESTER BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 16/20 Turner Street, Manchester M4 1DZ: Siobhan Healy
- NORTH LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, St Mark's Studio, 12 Chillingworth Road, London N7 8QJ: Mije Hartmann
- NORWICH BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 41a All Saints Green, Norwich NR1 3LY: Mollie Hamling
- FWBO OXFORD**, c/o 186 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1UE: Helen Gilbert
- FWBO SHEFFIELD**, c/o 354 Crookesmoor Road, Sheffield S10 1BH: Linda Thomas
- WEST LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 94 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2 5PL: Catherine Treasure
- TARALOKA WOMEN'S RETREAT CENTRE**, Cornhill Farm, Bettisfield, nr. Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 2LV: Margaret Radcliffe

EUROPE

- FWBO IRELAND**, 23 South Frederick Street, Dublin 2, Ireland: Anne McMahon
- CENTRO BUDISTA DE VALENCIA**, Calle Ciscar 5, pta 3, 46005 Valencia, Spain: Paramachitta
- FWBO GERMANY**, Buddhistisches Zentrum Essen, Herkulesstr. 13, 45127 Essen, Germany: Andrea Brandenburger
- HELSINGIN BUDDHALAINEN KESKUS**, PL 288, SF-00121, Helsinki 12, Finland: Marke Hankama
- FWBO NETHERLANDS**, PO Box 1559, 3500 BN Utrecht, Netherlands: Khemasiri
- VASTERLANDSKA BUDDHISTORDENS VANNER**, Sodermannagatan 58, S-116 65 Stockholm, Sweden: Lisbet Hvarfner

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

- AUCKLAND BUDDHIST CENTRE**, PO Box 68-453, Newton, Auckland, New Zealand: Averil Hunt
- WELLINGTON BUDDHIST CENTRE**, PO Box 12-311, Wellington North, New Zealand: Varadevi
- MELBOURNE BUDDHIST CENTRE**, 34 Bishop Street, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia: to be appointed
- SYDNEY BUDDHIST CENTRE**, PO Box 725, Coogee, NSW 2034, Australia: Caroline Ralston

USA

- ARYALOKA RETREAT CENTER**, Heartwood Circle, Newmarket, New Hampshire 03857, USA: Marilyn Coakley
- FWBO SEATTLE**, 2410 E. Interlaken Blvd, Seattle, WA 98112, USA: Sandra Roulette
- SAN FRANCISCO BUDDHIST CENTER**: 39 Bartlett Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, USA: Lisa Cullen

INDIA

- TBMSG (INDIAN CENTRES)**, c/o Dhammachakra Pravartan Mahavihar, Raja Harishchandra Road, Dapodi, Poona 411012, India