

LOTUS REALM

a new voice for buddhist women



Buddhism and
BUSYNESS

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The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) is one among many Buddhist movements seeking to establish Buddhism as a genuine path for modern people to follow. It was established in 1967 by Urgyen Sangharakshita, an Englishman who lived for many years in India, where he studied, meditated and worked for the good of Buddhism. There he came into contact with accomplished teachers from all the main Buddhist traditions.

In setting up the FWBO*, Sangharakshita wanted to establish a new Buddhist movement that responded to contemporary needs, whilst keeping faithful to the ancient and unchanging essence of the Buddha's 'Dharma' or spiritual vision.

The Western Buddhist Order (WBO) is at the heart of the FWBO, and includes men and women of many different nationalities who are committed to following the Buddhist path in fellowship with one another.

A radical aspect of the WBO is that it goes beyond the age-old monk-lay divide, recognising that it is commitment to the realisation of Enlightenment that is the crucial aspect of ordination. Lifestyle - whether 'monastic' or as a 'householder' - is secondary. The WBO is also radical in that there is no distinction between the ordinations of men and women. In participating in the work of the Order, women can - and do - hold the same responsibilities as men, including the responsibility for ordaining other women.

Members of the WBO work together with others to run public Buddhist Centres. Some run rural retreat Centres; others are full-time artists; whilst others (especially in India) are engaged in social projects. Some work in team-based Right Livelihood businesses; and many work in a whole variety of 'ordinary' jobs. Some live in single-sex residential communi-

ties, a radical alternative to family life. Others live with partners and children, bringing Buddhist values into their homes.

The Lotus

is a universal symbol of spiritual growth and development. The realm of the Lotus is a realm where spiritual values are supreme. It is this realm that members of the WBO seek to bring into being.

Lotus Realm

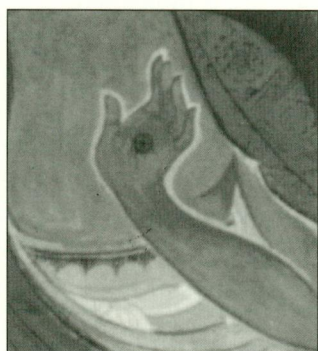
is produced by Dharmacharinis, that is, women members of the WBO. It is firstly a magazine for women (and interested men) involved with the FWBO, for Friends, mitras, **, and Order members. It is also published with the desire to share the experience we are gaining as women practising the Buddhist teachings under modern conditions with women Buddhists from other traditions, as well as interested women (and men) everywhere.

** In India the FWBO is referred to as TBMSG, an acronym which translates something like 'the Community of Helpers of the Buddhist Order of the Three Worlds'.*

*** A mitra is someone who has declared their intention of following their spiritual path within the context of the FWBO.*

For Buddhist Women

Lotus Realm is produced by and mainly for women out of the recognition that men and women have a somewhat different experience of and approach to life - even to spiritual life. At the same time we recognise that men and women - especially men and women following a spiritual path - have far more in common. We hope therefore that the struggles, aspirations and inspirations which inform these articles will be of universal interest, and will stimulate and sometimes inspire both men and women, Buddhist and non-Buddhist.



Painting by Cintamani

LOTUS REALM is produced by women members of the Western Buddhist Order and their friends. It appears twice a year in May and November

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Busyness is a sign of our times...

BUSYNESS IS A SIGN of our times. Of course, even in the Buddha's time kings and statesmen often departed with the stock phrase, 'I am busy and have much to do...' (No doubt civic responsibilities will make you busy in any time and place.) But these days, it seems, almost everybody is 'busy'.

I rather suspect we are busy because we are anxious. But then perhaps that is not surprising. We are said to be living in the age of anxiety - another sign of our times. We dare not stop to think too much about what it all means. After all, God is long since dead. And we no longer believe - as perhaps our forebears did - that science is going to provide all the answers to ultimate questions. We 'keep busy' to give ourselves the impression that we know what we are doing and why. Afraid, we ignore the deeper questions about the meaning and value of our lives, our work, and our relationships. We clutch at the transient straws that society dangles before us - the enticements to strive for a successful career, a life of comfort, and the promise of ultimate fulfilment in a Romeo and Juliet love affair that is going to last for ever.

But what if we call ourselves Buddhist? We say that we find meaning and purpose in striving to grow and develop towards Enlightenment, in going forth from worldly comforts, in creating the network of friendships that is sangha, and so on. Yet it is not uncommon for Order members, mitras and Friends involved in the FWBO to complain of being 'too busy'. What do we mean when we say this? And why do we find ourselves 'too busy' when our practice of the Dharma could be expected to give us a sense of meaning and purpose and to counteract anxiety? And when surely the Dharma leads to tranquillity, calm and peace?

In his *Bodhicaryavatara*, Santideva gives voice to the Bodhisattva's ardent desire to alleviate the suffering of all. He does not seem to consider that being 'the doctor and ..the nurse/For all sick beings in the world until everyone is healed' might keep him rather busy! Nor does he seem concerned by the apparent contradiction when, in a later chapter, he argues the absolute necessity of 'the excellences of solitude' to meditate undistractedly.¹ A Bodhisattva, it seems, must both meditate in solitude and dedicate himself - or herself - to doing all he can to alleviating suffering in any way.

Here is one of those great paradoxes of life, or at least, of spiritual life - the need for solitude to develop and nurture our inner lives. If we do not meditate, how will we uncover to ourselves the deeper nature of our

own minds, and how transform them? If we do not reflect on our experience, how will we come to see how things really are? And yet the world is full of suffering. There is so much to be done, whether in practical terms, or in making the Dharma available to others. Many of my friends struggle on the horns of this dilemma, wholeheartedly giving themselves to some project in which they truly believe; and then losing touch with their inner lives, finding themselves becoming dry and uninspired. Or conversely withdrawing into solitude and losing touch with the world and its needs and so losing touch with a sense of urgency in leading a spiritual life.

The symbol for the Western Buddhist Order is the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara who reaches out to all living beings, whilst holding to his heart the wish-fulfilling gem, the Bodhicitta.² As for each individual, so for the spiritual health of the Order as a whole, there must be both the movement of withdrawal and the reaching out into the world. The delicate skein of friendships that makes up the Order is the medium for the influence of one life-style upon another to permeate the Order and to regulate imbalances that might otherwise occur whilst we are still striving on the path that leads towards the arising of the Bodhicitta. When the Bodhicitta arises, of course, the pulls of 'inner' and 'outer' are transcended.

The nature of the mind of the busy Bodhisattva is reflected in a beautiful verse from the *Ratnagotravibhaga*:

Like a fire his mind constantly blazes up into works for others:

At the same time he always remains merged in the calm of the [meditative] trances and formless attainments.³

Here, then, it seems, is the ultimate answer to the problem of 'busyness.'

Kalyanaprabha □

Notes:

1. Santideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, transl. Stephen Batchelor, 1979, Ch. III v.8 & Ch. VIII v. 89
2. The 'Bodhicitta' is translated as the 'Will to Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings' and it is upon the arising of this Transcendental quality in the mind of a human being that they can be truly called a Bodhisattva.
3. Quoted in Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, p393

Apology

The editor offers sincere apologies to Naseem Khan who was the author of the review of *Fatima's Scarf* published in the last issue of Lotus Realm. (Naseem's name disappeared from the article in a late stage of production.)

Contributors



Padmasri trained and worked as a secretary before taking up a post as a teacher in 1970. Her varied career has included teaching gypsies, setting up playgroups and toy libraries, working with second-language learners and training teachers. It was whilst living in Lancashire in the 1980's that she came into contact with the Dharma. In 1995 she gave up teaching and moved to Manchester to develop the education work for the Clear Vision Trust. She was ordained in 1996 and became the Director of Clear Vision in 1998. She has two grown-up children and two step-children, and recently became a grandmother.

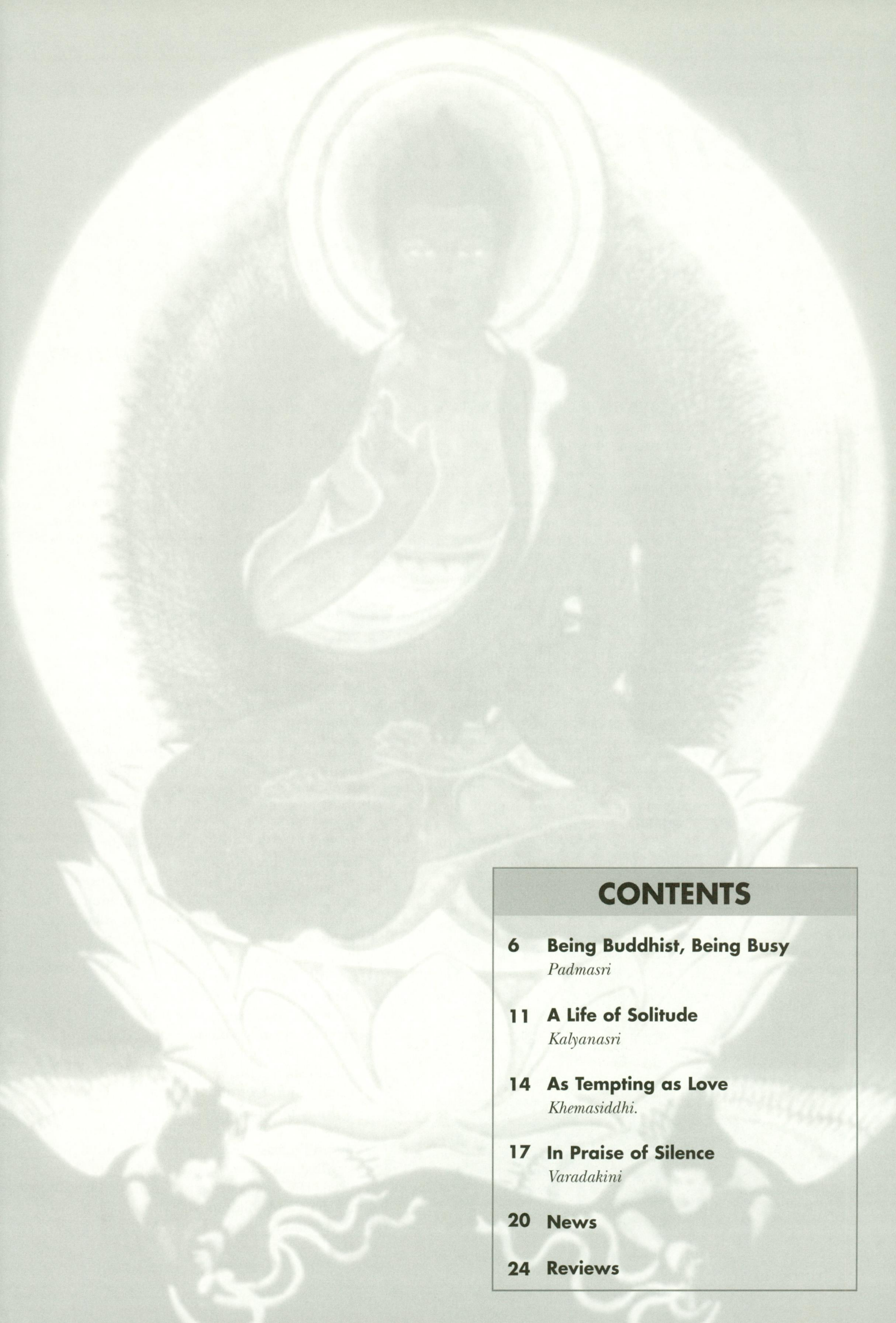
Kalyanasri went to art school for a year before moving to London in the mid-sixties. Having taken various jobs in libraries and shops, she married and had two children. She left London for the Norfolk countryside in 1972. She and her husband separated and she became involved in the FWBO. Since then she has involved herself in many aspects of work for the FWBO in Norwich, as well as working on the Buddhist publication, Mitrata. In 1997, after her children had left home, she moved to Wales for an extended period of solitude.



Khemasiddhi had an academic education culminating in an Oxford degree and qualification as a solicitor. After this she turned her back on professional life and started on a spiritual quest which led eventually to the FWBO. She has married, had three children and a succession of part-time jobs. In recent years she has written poetry and gained a diploma in art and design. She was ordained in 1995.

Varadakini was born in France in 1949. During her twenties and thirties she travelled all over the world. She was a barmaid in Australia, managed hotels in Africa, was a lady of leisure in the Bahamas, a croupière in London and ran a successful health clinic in Hong Kong. She came across the Dharma in London in 1986 and was ordained in 1993. After a period of living and working at Taraloka Retreat Centre, she moved to Cambridge and worked for Windhorse Trading. She then decided to move back to her native country to establish the FWBO there. She is now resident in Paris where she runs classes and courses on meditation and Buddhism for all.





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Being Buddhist

BEING BUSY

Padmasri

'THE DEVIL WILL FIND some evil for idle hands to do,' was one of my grandmother's favourite maxims. As a little girl I learned this lesson well. Encouraged by the exhortations of my teachers and parents, I was rarely idle, and grew up well fitted to take my part in a society where to be busy is good, to be very busy is better, and to constantly rush around madly, proves what an important and indispensable person you are. Clutching onto the overhead rail of the 8.15 a.m. tram as it hurries its crush of commuters towards Manchester's busy city centre, I wonder what my grandmother would have made of my practice of meditation, starting each morning sitting completely 'idle' for up to fifty minutes at a time!

I work for the Clear Vision Trust, a team-based right livelihood business based at the Manchester Buddhist Centre. For most of my fellow commuters heading for the city on the early morning tram, work is probably just a job. For me it's much more than that. It's an integral part of my practice as a Buddhist, an expression of my commitment to the Three Jewels and of my aspiration to gain

Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Clear Vision was set up in 1985 by Mokshapriya who was inspired by the idea of developing the medium of video in the FWBO. In particular he was keen to see the creation of archive material of Sangharakshita and the Movement he had founded, of which there was very little at that time. At first Clear Vision was mainly concerned with making videos of talks and lectures given by Sangharakshita and other senior members of the Western Buddhist Order, as well as one or two documentary videos. A photographic archive was set up; and in due course the popular Newsreels began, which bring together twice a year the most newsworthy items and main developments in the FWBO/TBMSG. Later the project expanded, producing cards and posters of Buddhist images for sale around the world.

One of the most exciting developments came in 1994 when, due to changes in British law, a new Religious Education syllabus was being developed by local education authorities in England and Wales. For many teachers it was the first time they had been required to teach about Buddhism. They often knew little about it, and regarded it as difficult to teach. As a teacher myself, I knew how hard it was to do justice to a subject if one didn't have good support material. Clearly what was needed were new resources geared to the new curriculum. A video would be ideal!

This need for suitable resources to teach Buddhism was the launching pad for the Clear Vision Education project. We began with the production of an educational video for school-children aged 7-11, which introduced the basic teachings of the Buddha in a way that was interesting and relevant to children. The video pack was a great success with teachers and children alike. It won a national award and to date we have sold 1,000 copies.



Following on the success of the first video, we have gone on to produce others, for both older and younger children. We are currently working on our fourth which is for pupils aged 14-16+ years.

I became involved in the Education project because of my background in education. I became a teacher in my early twenties because I wanted to 'change the world', and believed that education was the way to do it. That desire was always an important aspect of my work, so it was a source of great delight to me when an opportunity arose where I could use my professional experience to help bring children and their teachers into contact with the Dharma. What better thing could I do if I wished to help?

As will now be apparent, Clear Vision is not just any old business. Its purpose is to communicate the Dharma as well as possible and what it means to lead a Buddhist life. It is also something more than a business in the usual sense in that we are a team-based right livelihood. There are two teams, a men's and a women's team each with its own areas of specialisation but also working closely together in several aspects of our work. Part of my role as Clear Vision's Director means I try to keep in mind not only my own specific areas of work, but in a general way the work of all members of the teams, encouraging people's creativity and input in a way that will enhance their spiritual growth, satisfaction in their work, and capacity to contribute to the common project.

A Busy Life

The calls of my work, coupled with my involvement in the large and thriving sangha associated with the Manchester Buddhist Centre, means that I lead a 'busy' life. Even apart from my work for Clear Vision, there are classes to run and events to attend, people to phone and people to see, reports to write, retreats to organise; and of course there are the ordinary things of life: laundry and letters, seeing friends and family, essential reading to keep up with and the new film I shouldn't miss. The list of necessary, worthwhile or interesting activities is seemingly endless! There are never quite enough hours in the day to do everything I need, or want, to do. Sometimes I find myself dogged by a continual sense of rush, and labour under the illusion that if I could just get *these* things out of the way, *then* I could relax. But as soon as that list is ticked off, another, even longer one takes its place!

One thing I have come to learn is that if I continue living like this for too long, after a



Clear Vision Team

while I begin to feel stretched very thin, as if there is just not enough of me to go round. I have a sense of living on the surface of life, of having to skate with increasing speed over thin ice, and am beset by a niggling feeling of sadness or loss. I begin to wonder where are the qualities of stillness, simplicity and contentment which I aspire to develop? Where is my practice of mindfulness? And where are the opportunities for quiet contemplation that I experience on retreat, and which I know are integral to the leading of a genuine spiritual life. Is this sense of driven busyness inevitable, even for a Buddhist, if we decide to live out our spiritual commitment within the hub of modern life?

Long before I met the Dharma and became a Buddhist, I was a busy person. I had a family of four, my career as a teacher, as well as numerous other interests such as jogging, windsurfing, and an allotment! Being busy was something with which I was familiar. Once I became a Buddhist, of course my life began to change. It became simpler as my priorities altered and I let go of many of the things I used to do. But nevertheless, I was still busy. 'Busyness' and how to work with it has been a theme for me since the earliest days of becoming involved in the FWBO.

Taking a closer look

I leave the city and go off on a solitary retreat. Now, at last, there are no appointments to keep, no deadlines to meet, no meetings to attend. There is no need to hurry, there is nothing I have to be busy with. I have left all that behind. I soon discover that, despite having abandoned my busy routine, when I sit to meditate in the welcome

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quiet and solitude, the excitement, the sense of busyness, of compulsive activity are still present in my mind

A retreat, particularly a solitary retreat, creates a space, a pause, and makes it possible to step back from one's usual life and take a closer look. Free from familiar surroundings and routines, I have an opportunity to become more aware of the habits and views that drive me and to ask myself, what is going on?

Taking a good look at myself, I see how, like a hand fitting into a glove, my current lifestyle 'fits' deep, unconscious tendencies which throughout my life have made me habitually act in certain ways. Although my motives have changed - at least my conscious motives - for leading a busy life, there is something driving me that has an old, familiar ring. The solitary retreat provides me with the space to do a little investigation. What is it that drives this busyness?

Investigating the causes

According to the Dharma, the unenlightened mind is driven by three 'poisonous fluxes', the *asravas*. Sangharakshita describes them as 'the natural biases of the mind, the deep-rooted tendency of the mind towards conditioned existence rather than towards that which is Unconditioned, towards unreality rather than towards Reality. There are three *asravas*: the bias or inclination of the mind towards sensuous experience; the bias towards a separate, ego-centred personality; and the bias towards spiritual ignorance, that is, ignorance of Reality.'¹

Until Enlightenment is attained, these biases are always part of our experience. They are underpinned by the fundamental wrong views through which we perceive the world and out of which we act. Precisely because most of the time they condition our experience of the world, it is difficult to see how they drive us. If we can become aware of their influence and begin to see through them, we can work to weaken their hold.

Desire for sensuous experience

Some of my busyness is fuelled by this craving for sense experience. Being busy means my senses are being endlessly stimulated: sounds, sights, smells, ideas, thoughts, a continuous stream of sensation. Although I may complain bitterly at times, I have to admit that in some ways I enjoy it and can find myself reaching out into the phenomenal world in search of more.

It has been said that we reach out for sense experience as a way of avoiding our

own inner emptiness. To guard against this I need to make sure I find quiet time to be on my own on a regular basis. I need to spend some time just 'being' not doing anything 'useful'.

Being busy can be a displacement activity. Often people use being busy as a way of avoiding having to experience and confront feelings and emotions they find difficult. In flight from some glimpse of 'dukkha' we frantically absorb ourselves in tasks hoping that we can somehow escape. When we do this we are using activity as a false refuge.

Of course I am not suggesting that activity is automatically a form of escapism and therefore always unhelpful. Activity, particularly altruistic activity, where we seek to go beyond our own tight, self-absorbed world, can be very helpful in changing unskilful mental states into skilful ones. What we need to learn is to recognise when we are being busy as a way of trying to escape from our experience of ourselves, from a feeling of inner emptiness or from something more directly painful.

Desire for conditioned existence

We all have a craving for existence, that is, for what we experience as a separate, ego-centred existence. This is the fundamental wrong view about the nature of reality that causes us so much grief. Not only do we conduct our lives as if it were true, we also use every method available to us to bolster up and reinforce this view! Being over-busy can be one of the ways we do it. Often we get our sense of ourselves, our value and worth from what we do. We over-identify with our role and fall into the trap of thinking that is who we are. We allow it to define us - and limit us. We may be made painfully aware of this if we become ill and cannot do all the 'useful' things we had done previously, or maybe, for some reason, a role which lent us a sense of identity changes or comes to an end: after many years of being a mother, the children leave home, or one loses one's job, or retires, or a partner leaves or dies and we find we have lost the sense of worth and value that the role lent us and that we are no longer sure of who we are.

The Dilemma

What are we to do, those of us who find ourselves - whether by choice or circumstance - leading a busy life whilst trying to maintain our spiritual practice?

I want to see Clear Vision thrive. I want to see children and teachers coming into contact with the Dharma through its work. I want to see Sangharashita's life and teaching preserved for future generations, images of the

Buddha made available through the distribution of our cards and so on. I also want to see more and more people in Manchester coming into contact with the Dharma through our activities at the Buddhist Centre. I want to see our local sangha and my own particular friendships flourishing. To do all this well means my life will continue to be busy. At the same time, I have committed myself to trying to gain Insight into the Way Things Are.

Sometimes people question whether it is possible to lead a 'real' spiritual life in the city. They even think that to gain Insight you inevitably have to give up your work - however valuable it might be - to go and live away from it all, perhaps at a retreat centre or in some secluded place where you can meditate all day!

I have never thought that myself. I am quite sure it is possible to lead a real spiritual life whilst working in the city, and that work as right livelihood can provide the challenges and conditions one needs to transform oneself. Thinking we can't practice effectively because of leading a full life can be a subtle form of laziness. It can be a way of avoiding taking stock and making the effort to build a lifestyle that supports our practice of the Dharma. To practise the Dharma means that we work on our mental states, we make effort to produce skilful mental states, to bring into being positive, wholesome mental states that will support the arising of Insight. To practise the Dharma means developing our awareness of and sensitivity to others, it means expressing our care and concern for them in very concrete ways.

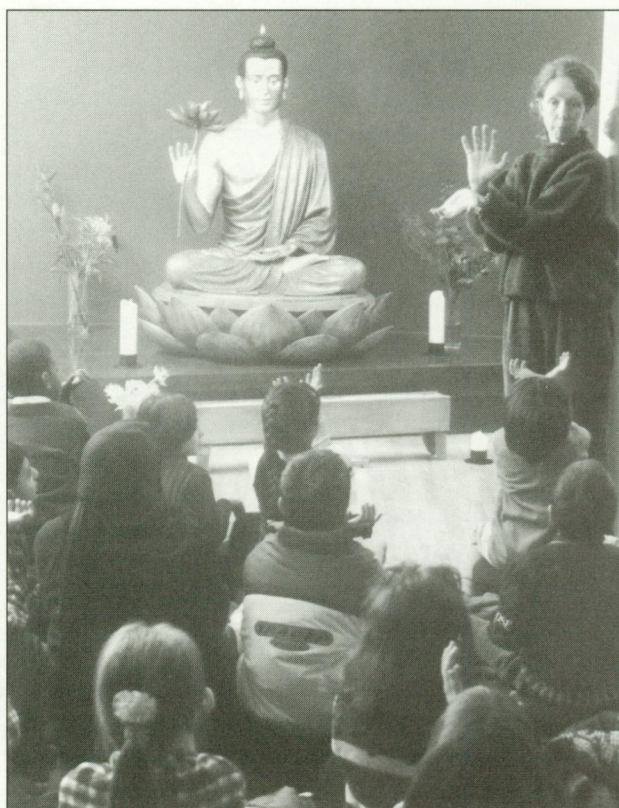
sGampopa, the eleventh century Tibetan monk and teacher says, 'Gross laziness is addiction to such evil and unwholesome practices as subduing enemies and hoarding money.'²

Sangharakshita comments, 'Being lazy really means being busy doing something that is not conducive to skilful mental states: one's busyness actually prevents one from being aware of what one might otherwise be engaging in.....To overcome laziness we need to be able to distinguish that which is worthwhile from that which is less so.'³

The real dilemma is about developing the inner qualities of stillness and calm in a situation which does not immediately foster them. It is about developing greater depth, a stronger sense of connection with the mythic dimension of life which is the deeper inspiration behind our work. In the end it is about developing a connection with the Transcendental in the very midst of the mundane.

It is up to each busy Buddhist to find a way to work creatively with the tensions that arise when you practise the Dharma whilst leading a full and active life. Here are a few suggestions and reflections of my own that I have found helpful as I have tried to deepen my practice in my work at

Clear Vision and around the Manchester Buddhist Centre.



School children visit
The Manchester Buddhist
Centre

Being Responsible

Like many people, I have a lot of responsibilities. An aspect of those responsibilities is recognising that my actions have consequences, not only for myself, but for those around me. If I do not take care of myself and become ill or over-tired, I will not be able to carry out the things I am committed to and will let people down. If I do not make sure I have some time 'to myself' I will become unhappy and resentful. If I neglect to make time for my personal practice of meditation, study and reflection, I will lack depth, become dry and uninspired, falling prey to





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persistently negative states of mind. Looking at my life and work from this bigger perspective, I can see that the most important thing is that I continue to grow and develop.

A Personal Precept

In working with myself when I am in the midst of the day's activities, I have found perhaps my most effective strategy has been to take on the simple personal precept, 'Don't Rush!' Just because I have a lot to do, doesn't mean I have to be in a hurry all the while. The determination not to rush affects all areas of my life, often with far-reaching effects. I realise that, if I'm realistic, there actually isn't enough time to 'fit in' everything I want to do. Confronted with this, I am forced to become clearer about what my priorities are. I have to keep in mind the bigger perspective of my life, its direction, inspiration, and the things I truly value. This helps me not to get bogged down in detail. Not rushing also means doing one thing at a time and completing one activity before moving on to the next. In a busy office like Clear Vision's, with its constant telephone calls and other interruptions, this requires me to practise both mindfulness and continuity of purpose. It means simple things like not breaking off to talk to the person who has just come into the room until I have finished the conversation I am already having. It is not always easy. Yet I can feel my efforts to practise this precept help me become less scattered, and counter the greedy desire for the excitement and stimulation of a new activity even before I have completed the last.

Practising in this way steadies the pace of my life and encourages me to live more in the moment, to cultivate contentment and an openness to the beauty in life and people, instead of being closed and driven. It enables me to become more aware of people, to appreciate them in a kind and sensitive way.

A Regular Meditation Practice

In a busy life, making time for a regular meditation practice is vital. Perhaps more than anywhere else it is here that we are able to make contact with ourselves most deeply and nourish ourselves. I make sure I meditate regularly, usually before I go to work, before the day gathers pace. It is not always easy. There are times, perhaps when I am more than usually busy, when I find myself distracted and scattered in meditation. At such times I can become discouraged. But I know that regardless of how the practice might seem to be going, it is important to keep making effort. Regular meditation is like a steady heart beat keeping faith with the true direction of my life.

Refreshment from Retreats

One of the things my kalyana mitras (spiritual friends) have always insisted on is the importance of planning in regular retreats. I try now to disperse my retreats at regular intervals throughout the year so that I never go too long without the refreshing influence of a period of deeper practice and reflection. Particularly important for me are solitary retreats. Here, in the quiet and stillness I can let go of all my 'roles' and just 'be'. Sitting by the still pool of my inspiration, I deepen my connection with what ultimately I most value, seeking to allow its influence to permeate me more and more until, eventually, like the beneficial work of the Bodhisattva, my work and activity becomes simply the natural expression in the world of my Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

□

Notes:

1. Sangharakshita, *Who is the Buddha?* Windhorse, Birmingham 1994, p37
2. sGampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, transl. H. V. Guenther, Shambhala, 1986
3. Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, p103

A Solitary Life

Kalyanasri

I HAD NO PLAN of what I would do once I started living alone for the second time in my life. The first time I had been a twenty-two year old, living in London, single, with a job. This time I'm fifty-two. I've been a practising Buddhist and a single parent for nearly 22 years. I was ordained in 1986.

My life had been a full and busy one, bringing up two children and involved with several different areas of FWBO life. I often felt I was being pulled in many different directions at once. I was a mother and householder. I was a Mitra Convenor, taking care of the spiritual needs of the women who came along to the Norwich Buddhist Centre. I was sub-editor to a Buddhist publication, a council member for FWBO Norwich, and a part-time shop-worker in a right livelihood business - to name some of my areas of responsibility. Fulfilling all my commitments often seemed a juggling act with my time and emotions.

Five years ago I decided, in consultation with my friends, to have a break after both my children had left home. I wanted a period of solitude to reassess my spiritual life, and to bring to it greater depth and continuity. And so I find myself today living alone in a cottage in Wales.

As I said, I had no plans. I hadn't come here to write a book or to paint pictures. I just wanted to experience myself alone, to have time to meditate, to study the Dharma, to read, reflect and go for walks and to see who I was in the context of leading a simple life.

Being Present

Initially I found it very difficult to stop. I felt driven. I found it difficult to settle into a different mode, one of 'being' rather than 'doing'. I still had the 'ticking off a list' mentality, which meant I was hardly ever in the present but wanted to be on to the next activity before finishing the last. This has been - and is - one of my main areas in working on myself during this time of solitude: to learn to be in the moment and not to wish my life

away. It is not that this is new to me. It is something I have tried to practice, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, within a busy lifestyle. What was new was seeing the extent to which 'being driven' was so habitual. I realised that being 'busy', in the negative sense of rushing around, getting things done and out of the way and moving on to the next thing, was an attitude of mind. Virtually all lives are active. We have to do things just to keep ourselves alive, let alone following higher pursuits. It is how we do them that is important. It doesn't mean not planning anything. Even living here without responsibilities I decide what I want to do each day,



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but it means to do each activity wholeheartedly and with awareness. This is still something I am striving for. Being an effective Buddhist doesn't mean one has to be busy in the usual sense. One can lead a meaningful life that is not rushing around, working on one's own mental and emotional states, engaging with whatever one is doing and doing it wholeheartedly. It means being 'present' as much as possible in whatever activity one is following.

Who Am I?

A question that I had to ask myself - one I found quite difficult at first - was, 'Who am I if I'm not being useful?' I realised how much I identified myself with what I did. Not having a 'use', not having specific jobs or responsibilities knocked my self-view. Before I had been a full-time mother. I worked in a right livelihood business. I led a study group. That was what I did so - at least to some extent - that was who I was. This sense of identity being derived from what one does is reinforced by other people as they always ask, "What do you do?" Reflecting on this during my new-found solitude, I realised that I had needed to be useful to feel 'alright' about myself. Being here and living alone I have had to learn to find confidence in myself as someone 'just living my life'. Nevertheless, when asked what I do, it isn't an answer that people like to hear, and I still experience myself feeling uncomfortable about not having a specific answer to give them.

Inner Contentment

For myself, however, the experience of 'being nobody' is turning out to be a positive one. I am now much less dependent on externals for an inner sense of contentment and worth. I appreciate and value the little things in my experience more: the beauty of the light on a tree, an owl perched just outside my window at dusk, or a piece of beautiful music. I am better able to 'kiss the joy as it flies'.

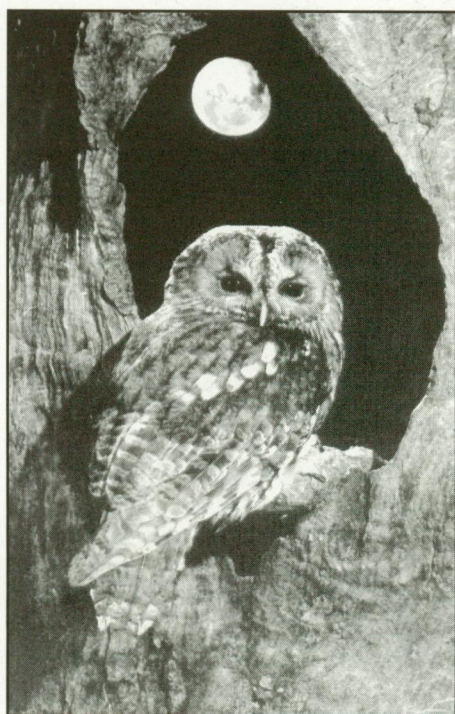
Accepting Things as They Are

Another aspect of living in the moment is learning to accept whatever life throws up - learning to live nearer to Reality. Life brings both pleasure and

pain and it is in our attitude to both that we can work to become more creative. So often I find myself 'fighting' how things actually are, whether it be another grey, wet day, or that something has just broken and I wish it hadn't. Something has just broken and it is wet and there is nothing I can do about it. Wishing things were different pulls one away from the present and prevents one living fully in the moment with whatever is actually there. I experience myself as freer and bigger and I experience the world as clear and more transparent when I stop trying to manipulate conditioned existence to get it on my own terms rather than seeing it as it is. This moulding and manipulation happens on very subtle levels and I need constant vigilance to stop myself doing it. If I can't yet penetrate into the true nature of conditioned existence, I can at least accept what actually is in my experience of the world. This is, at least, a start.

The Other Dimension

One of the guiding inspirations in my spiritual life has been the Bodhisatta Ideal - striving to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. I deeply believe that if I work on my own mental states, transforming negative ones into positive ones, that it has a positive effect, an impact, on the world. But at present I hardly see other beings, apart from squirrels, birds and sheep, people at the local shops, or occasionally a visiting friend. Can I still have an effect when I am living alone? Ultimately, from the viewpoint of an Enlightened being, the subject/object, self and other dichotomies are transcended. Each of us is interconnected with each other. There is no absolute division. From my viewpoint, as an unenlightened human being, I believe very strongly that all my actions, whether physical or mental, have some effect on others, even if it might be quite a subtle one. If I have an attitude of kindness and caring towards others that will have a positive effect whether I meet people in person or whether I don't. I believe, as the Mahayana Scriptures state, that all phenomena are interpenetrating, so that I have an effect on others just by being alive. So if I am a positive human being with an attitude of caring, generosity and love, that effect will be positive rather than negative. I believe I have the responsibility to be just such a human being. This belief, even if there isn't really proof from an unenlightened point of view, at least has the effect of giving my own personal practice a much wider perspective. This idea of interpenetration and interconnectedness is



beautifully shown in Blake's vision of:
*... the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower;
Infinity in the palm of one's hand
And eternity in an hour.*

Working with the Mind

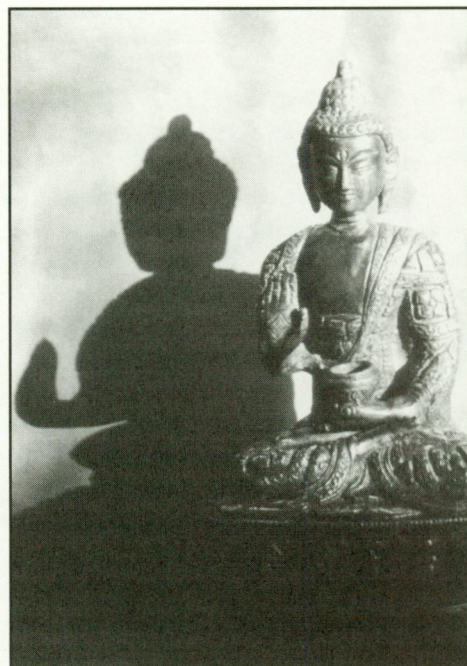
Faced every moment with the comings and goings of my own mind, I have experienced myself working on my mental states harder than I have ever done before. I am made more aware of their transitory nature because I have to 'own' those states in a way I haven't done consistently before. I have no-one here who is 'making' me feel things, no-one I can blame, however subtly. So faced with the stark truth of negative mental states arising in my mind, I know it is only me that can do anything about them, and I have more confidence that I can transform them. I have times when I'm doubting myself, times that I'm confident, times when I'm feeling anxious, when I'm contented and happy, when I'm self-pitying, despondent or joyful. I can spot and identify these states of mind more quickly as they ebb and flow because I don't have so many external stimuli. They are just the workings of my own mind.

There is one particular tendency, one inveterate propensity of mine the seeing of which has helped the jigsaw of my being fall into place, so to speak. This tendency is one of lacking self-confidence and to some extent lacking in a sense of self-worth and it seems to be very deeply rooted. I have seen more clearly how this affects and influences my response to life and therefore my actions or lack of them. Identifying this tendency is helping me work more creatively with turning around those negative mental states associated with it. I am applying myself much more strongly to the metta bhavana practice (the development of loving kindness) and to my visualisation practice, that of Amoghasiddhi. One of Amoghasiddhi's qualities that has become important to me is that of 'unobstructed or infallible success'. He has no 'ego' sense that prevents him from acting skilfully. He is not limited by any sense of 'I'. He has no internal obstacles that prevent him from being free to act appropriately. By reflecting on him, I want to bring that quality of freedom, symbolised by the air element, into my life, into my being, instead of being so restricted, so limited by my self-doubting mind. I am trying to think more about my strengths and how I can manifest them more and more. In short I am applying the Four Great Efforts to my mental life more consistently than ever before.

What About My Friends?

Before I came here I wondered whether I would want to write and receive letters and whether I would encourage my friends to visit me or not. In the end, after an initial three months of fairly strict solitude, I did both. My friendships have always been very important to me and I wondered how best I could be loyal to my friendships and continue to be a friend, whilst spending the majority of my time alone for this period of my life. I have always taken seriously the Buddha's assertion to Ananda that 'friendship is the whole of the spiritual life'. How could I manifest this whilst living alone? I decided to keep up a regular correspondence with my circle of friends. I try and 'listen' to them, without judging them harshly, I try to develop sympathy with them and their particular circumstances, and to write truthfully about what I think and feel about things. I have treated letter writing as a spiritual practice. I have also tried to reply fairly promptly, at least within a fortnight of receiving a letter. In this way, I have tried to become a friend, and to continue to deepen my relationships with people, even though I haven't been physically present. I have also kept my friends in mind so that there is a continuity of relationship between us. This has been aided by having a notice-board by my desk which is full of photographs which I look at daily. This has meant that when some of my friends have visited me, I haven't experienced a lack of continuity with them at all. Although I have felt lonely at times, I haven't felt isolated from the sangha, and friendship continues to be a big part of my life.

Overall, my time here has been one of deepening my commitment to the Three Jewels, of learning more about myself, my patterns and ways of behaving, and having a deepening sense of 'being' and I hope that when I return to working full-time in the FWBO, I will keep some of the sense of spaciousness and freedom that I have experienced whilst living alone in Wales. Living more in the moment and not denying my immediate experience should go a long way to making that happen.



Amoghasiddhi

A question that I had to ask myself - one I found quite difficult at first - was, 'Who am I if I'm not being useful?' I realised how much I identified myself with what I did. Not having a 'use', not having specific jobs or responsibilities knocked my self-view.

As Tempting as Love

Khemasiddhi

I AM GRABBING A few moments to write - the deadline is fast approaching. It is 5.20 on a Monday afternoon, term-time. All three of the children are back home and I have given them tea. Middle Son has gone out again to a karate class. I have just called Sony about his defective PlayStation and been asked rather complicated questions, so I shall have to call again later, son at my side. Daughter has brought home a clutch of letters from school requiring money, signatures, diary consultation. I am starting to think about supper, three different versions of the same dish to suit everyone's tastes. The meal needs to be early so I can get Eldest Son to his guitar lesson for 6.30, but some kept warm for Middle Son who will return while we are out. There are dirty dishes, telephone calls, homework

help needed, packed lunches to make for tomorrow...Oh, and this article to write...

That is a brief snapshot of a particular kind of busyness I can get into. I think of it as 'objective busyness' - there just is a lot that needs attending to at a particular time. There are four aspects to my life that can precipitate objective busyness: (1) being a single mother - with very little help - to three children aged ten to fifteen; (2) looking after our home and its contents; (3) having a job to support (1) and (2) - I work as the administrator at a lively family centre; (4) being an Order member associated with a public Buddhist Centre. I do my best to make sure I do not get overloaded by any of these, but it is in the nature of things and beings to make demands as and when they will, and often these seem to cluster together. Sometimes life just is busy, in this sense.

However, I am also vulnerable to what I think of as 'subjective busyness'. This has gathered pace in our society through the '80's and '90's, and has now reached epidemic proportions. Typical symptoms are the buzz we get from having full diaries, bulging bulletin boards, a stream of messages on our answering machines, rushing about even when we are not late, taking on a new project just when there is a chance to ease up. Although it may be exacerbated by outside circumstances, it is a state which we largely bring upon ourselves. This kind of busyness can be very pleasurable, at least for a while. It is like being in love - we feel energised, desirable, in demand - and as such it is addictive.

Even when it edges into overload and ceases to be pleasurable, we keep up the pace because our whole identity and way of life can



get bound up with it. I was talking not long ago to a woman with a pressurised job which she does not enjoy very much. I asked her why she did not apply for something easier since she does not need a high income. She replied that she was worried that if her pace of life did not match her husband's, their marriage might collapse. Clearly she felt the success of their relationship depended on this mutual busy identity. At a recent parents' evening at my sons' school, the headmaster was introducing the board of governors. He described them all as very busy people, adding, 'and if they weren't we wouldn't want them anyway.'

So our society attaches a value to being busy. It is equated with being accomplished, in demand, successful. To have time on our hands can seem like a symptom of failure.

Looking around for something on which to pin the blame for this attitude, it is easy to settle on the Protestant work ethic, fuelled by the industrial and technological revolutions that have set the pace of our lives. The apotheosis of frenzied activity lies in Silicon Valley where work pressure has earned it the unenviable title of the United States' 'time deprivation capital'.

While the effect of the work ethic has undoubtedly been colossal and insidious, we can also reflect on what it is within ourselves that should make us want a whirlwind existence. To do so is like taking apart a nest of Russian dolls. On the outside is the initial pleasure. If we break that open we find self-esteem; then personal identity. Deeper within lies the fear of boredom, of having to face up to what we might be like without the protection of ceaseless activity. As Sogyal Rinpoche says, 'We make our lives so hectic that we eliminate the slightest risk of looking into ourselves.'

But at the heart of busyness lies ignorance. Not only do we not understand the way things really are, we are also frightened of allowing ourselves to settle into a state of mind where we might begin to see, and so we scuttle about in the endless distractions that a busy life affords. We do not take apart the last little doll because we do not want to find that inside, there is nothing.

As a working mother, I am in a lot of contact with colleagues and parents who are very busy people. Linked to that, in many cases, is, undoubtedly, their success and affluence, and I cannot deny that I am sometimes tempted. I, too, want some of that. I would like the satisfaction of doing a more high-powered job. I would like to buy my children more of the things they want. Even though I know these

are passing pleasures, the lure is very strong.

And yet...I know from past experience of professional work, high income and the surrounding lifestyle that the euphoria of busyness very easily tips over into feeling dull, drained and brittle.

Even as a mother with a relatively undemanding job, the pressures can swamp me at times. There are all the mental lists of things to be done or bought; school events, the stream of children's friends passing through, all the driving about; the intensive bearing in mind of these three beings with their needs and aspirations. There is keeping in touch with what is going on in the world and with technology. There is the lack of opportunity to go on retreat, the sheer relentlessness of it all. Unless I am careful, I sink into states of mind I do not want to be in. I grow irritable with others because they seem like yet more demands upon me. I use my busyness as an excuse, a barrier to hold them at bay. And to look at my mind as I attempt to meditate and see only an unstoppable torrent of trivia is agony.

But how to avoid all this? Busyness can be tackled on both its objective and subjective fronts. In dealing with what comes at me from 'out there', I have found some of the basic techniques of time management useful, despite the missionary fervour in which they are wrapped. One of the leading exponents in the field is Stephen Covey. He tells the 'big rocks' anecdote. In a time-management seminar, the instructor fills a gallon jar first with some rocks, then gravel and sand. At each stage, he asked the audience if the jar is yet full. As he finally pours in some water, he



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Buddha
downwards,
to bring those
glimpses
deeper and
deeper into
my life.**

asks them what they think the point of the exercise is. Someone replies that it is to show that you can always fit more into your life.

'No,' he said, 'that's not the point. The point is this: if you hadn't put the big rocks in first, would you ever have gotten any of them in?'²

I have found it helpful to decide what are the 'big rocks', the priority areas of my life and to make sure there is time for each of these. And undoubtedly the most important of these for me is solitude, to make sure that I set aside regular time to reflect, meditate, read, write, make things, daydream. Then amongst this and my other priorities, everything else either does or doesn't find a place. This way I achieve an element of satisfaction and harmony in my life. I am well aware that my desire for solitude jeopardises worldly flourishing, a degree of which I need to support my family. The tension between the two is constant, and doubtless the balance between the two will shift as my financial needs fluctuate.

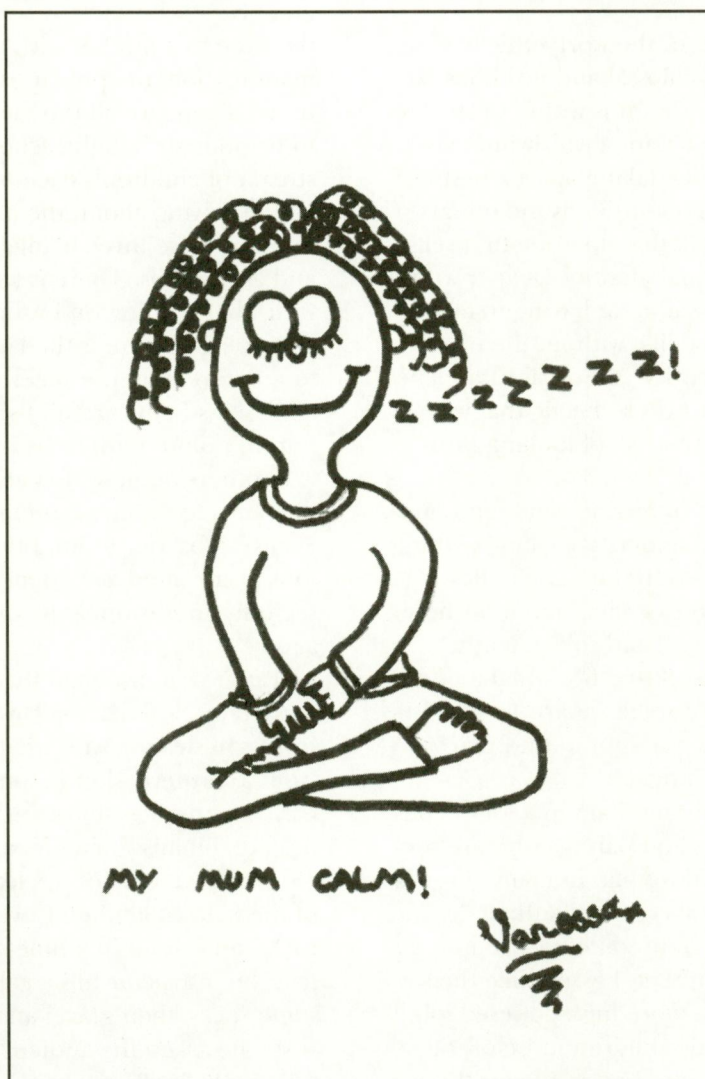
Not to be busy, I think you have to deeply want not to be. And I deeply do not want to be busy because I have been inspired by glimpses of utter stillness, and by the teachings of the great dharmic practitioners, from the Buddha downwards, to bring those glimpses deeper and deeper into my life. At the heart of my practice lies the cultivation of awareness, whether it is of the fall of light across objects about me as I write, or of the Bodhisattva figure I visualise in meditation. By extending awareness, I can come to understand the complexity and flow of conditions about me, spread out into

them and away from myself. There is a freedom in recognising how little I understand and how little in my life I can control which I find is energising in a very different way from busyness and puts into perspective 'busy me', running around, trying to organise my world.

If I can keep practising and increasing my awareness at home with my family and in my work, I can be confident in them as contexts for my liberation. Then I can be wholehearted about what I am doing, and busyness will not be an issue. □

Notes:

1. Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rider 1992
2. Stephen R. Covey and A. Roger Merrill, *First Things First*, Simon & Schuster 1994



In Praise of Silence

Varadakini

MUCH EMPHASIS IS PLACED on verbal communication in the FWBO. It is not unusual for someone living in a residential community, and working in a team-based right livelihood business, to find themselves doing a lot of talking. The working day often begins with reporting-in to the team. Each person says a little about how they are and anything that may be on their mind. It is a way of 'tuning-in' with others, bringing the team together. This might be followed by a business meeting - sometimes preceded by a short reporting-in with the others present at the meeting. Lunch breaks can be spent in intense discussion with a friend. In the evening there might be another reporting-in about one's life to fellow community members or another evening at a chapter meeting of local Order members.

Undoubtedly much good comes from these verbal exchanges. I suppose they have proliferated in the FWBO to facilitate what is central to it: friendship. Friendship is the essence of sangha or spiritual community. Members of the FWBO are trying to develop the breadth and depth of communication which is so dear to Sangharakshita's heart.

My impression, however, is that the verbal is overrated at the expense of other forms of communication. Because of its sheer quantity, speech becomes a hindrance to deeper communication. When speech does not issue forth from the silence of awareness, when it is not guided by awareness, when it does not lead back to awareness, speech conduces to agitation, to frothiness of mind. It becomes increasingly tiring and superficial.

Speech is a movement and therefore a noise of the mind. Too much of it and it

becomes yet another contribution to the general clatter and agitation of modern life. Instead of genuine communication which is based in mutual awareness, there is merely an exchange of views and information.

This kind of conversation can become a habit. Habits are hard to challenge. They have grown up because they worked, up to a point, so we cling to them and are unwilling to replace them with more creative responses. We lose our perspective and critical judgment and our habits become 'what we do and who we are.' We forget - or never learn - that

there are other ways to communicate, to form friendships, to create sangha.

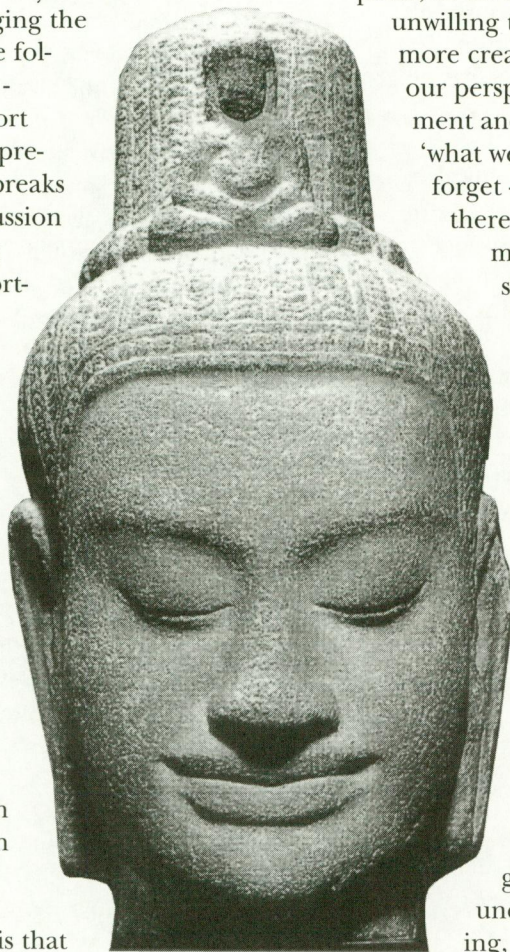
There are other ways for human beings to intimately mingle in a mutual effort towards self-transcendence.

There are the ways of silence: of meditation, of awareness, of stillness and love, of generosity, of shared tasks, of ritual. Out of a quiet and spacious mind, intuition and imagination blossom into an understanding of others that does not depend on words. The generous heart, bent on understanding and forgiving, eager to dwell on others' good qualities, has no need

to go into the whys and wherefores of someone's deeds. Washing the dishes with a friend, receptive and aware, I shall tell her how I am with every stroke of the scourer, and I shall hear her anxiety or calm as she piles up the plates.

The Buddha (and many another great Master) taught and exemplified the virtue of silence, reminding us that for speech to be meaningful, it should be well-guarded and rare.

One cannot help thinking that speech, which is so precious and so wonderful, so expressive and such a treasure, should be something exceptional. At least it should be something, like eating, that you do occasionally, after thought and preparation.'



A Song in Praise of Silence

Following in the steps of the Wise Ones (though I may travel far behind) I shall attempt to sing the praises of silence that I may foster growth in myself and others, encouraging the dharmic use of speech, the pursuit of deeper meditation, and a life steeped in meaning.

Om Muni Muni Maha Muni Shakyamuni Svaha

I bow to you Shakyamuni, Great Silent One whose mantra four times proclaims silence, whose face reveals the utter peace of silence, who, 'from the night of Enlightenment till the night of the Parinirvana...has not uttered even a word.'²

'That the unintelligent declare words to be identical with meaning, is due to their ignorance as to the self-nature of words. They do not know, Mahamati, that words are subject to birth and death, whereas meaning is not...Mahamati, the meaning is alone with itself and is the cause of Nirvana. Words are bound up with discrimination and are the carrier of transmigration.'

And yet, throughout your life you taught unstintingly, without niggardliness or aloofness: your speech had the lightness of voidness and the weight of compassion. When words are uttered with awareness of the insubstantial, fleeting, inconceivable nature of all phenomena, they have no other purpose than the welfare of beings. You did not need to speak for your own benefit. Your speech was but skilful means, purified of the unceasing noise of the self-centred mind.

There can be silence in words, but not many can utter them.

Oh how I long to be steeped in that non-dual mind that spontaneously responds like an echo, like the plucked string of a harpsichord to the faintest call or touch of living beings.

Ah! Great Silence, Thunderous Silence, which is the sound of the vajra, the diamond thunderbolt of Reality, vibrant Silence flowing in calming and purifying waves from the presence of the Wise Ones.

In Search of Silence

But where, O Silence, will we find you in the course of our daily lives?

We meet you in the absorption of meditation when thoughts vanish and we no longer find ourselves separated by the labels and subtitles we so readily impose on our experience. Sounds from without cease to interfere with the flow of awareness. The noise of chattering thoughts has stilled but - O wonder! - there is no absence, no lack, no sense of fear. We are met and enfolded by a silence full of possibilities. Ah the innocence, the playfulness, the freedom of discovering other ways of knowing.

We meet you, O Silence, in the contemplation of great art.

We discover your power in the quietness of retreat, when day after day the programme is simply 'silence'. Far from retreating into a small inner world, we begin to vibrate within you with the life of all. We find our life is woven into the lives of others. We realise we have come to know one another, friendships have grown without us knowing anything 'about' each other.

You, Silence, teach us the simplicity, the reliability, of knowledge that is based in the affinity, the solidarity between all forms of life. You guide us below the superficial crust of words, into the worlds of intuition and imagination where mere cleverness and talent do not reign supreme; where manipulation and deception are powerless, where we are at the same time naked, receptive - and potent.

Those are blessed moments, and if I sing your praises today, if I invoke you like a bereft lover, it is because I long to be with you always.

The Victory of Silence

There are times when I cannot find you, my love.

Look at me now - words, breath and broccoli are
competing for space in my mouth.
Thoughts shoot up and swirl.
Unknown emotions grip my throat.
My feet twitch.
I mindlessly toy with the food on my plate.

Stop talking!

Panic!
What am I to do?
I recoil protectively into self-centredness.

What am I to do?
Silence is not on the menu!
I find some very good reasons to carry on speaking.

Yet I do not want to lose you, O Friend, O Silence.
I want to reach out, accompanied by you, reach out to
that person there, across the table.

I stop in the uncomfortable gap of the unfamiliar.
Then I remember:

Awareness!
Awareness of swirling thoughts.
Awareness of emotions that grip my throat.
My feet are no longer twitching!
My fork is at rest on my plate!
There is a little sigh of release.

In the food before me I see the touches of many lives.
For a brief moment, like a caress, I rest my gaze on my
companion's face.
For an instant we meet, resting in the ease of aware-
ness.
No need to speak.

Imcomparable Silence

O Silence, you are rest: rest from the squandering of
energy; rest from the fearful flight ahead of ourselves.

Deeds which emerge from you are kind.

You are cooling nectar to the suffering that rages in the
heart.

You are the happy-ending of words which do not breed
intoxication and fear.
Instead they take us beyond all views.

Words which emerge from you are clear and spacious,
full of meaning and purpose.
They glisten.
Like a smile, they make no noise.
They disturb not Peace.

Words steeped in silence become 'shabda', the spiritual
sound, weaving themselves into mantras, symbols of
higher truths, discourses of Reality.

You, O Silence, are meditation's best friend.
You are the voice of Enlightenment itself reaching us
like a faint whisper in moments of clear awareness; or
rolling like deafening thunder through beginningless
space silencing the crazy stream of meaningless babble.

*For when the senses and the sensual mind
Are laid asleep, and self itself suspended,
And naught is left to strive for or to seek,
Then, to the inmost spirit, thrice refined,
Thrice pure, before the trance sublime has ended,
With voice of thunder, will the Silence speak.⁴*

Notes:

1. Sangharakshita, *Vision and Transformation*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1990, p76
2. *Lankavatara Sutra*, transl. D. T. Suzuki, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1983, p123/4
3. *ibid*, p166/7 & 169
4. 'The Voice of Silence' from Sangharakshita, *Collected Poems*, Windhorse 1995, p205

Ordinations at *Il Convento*



Jutika at Il Convento

This year's ordination retreat for women joining the Western Buddhist Order took place at Il Convento di Batignano, an ancient Tuscan monastery - famous in the FWBO as the venue (on the occasion of a men's ordination retreat in 1983) for two seminal papers by Sangharakshita on the Imagination and the Imaginal faculty.

It was my first visit to Italy. I spent a couple of days in Rome exploring the cultural delights before meeting up with three others who were making the same journey. Even though we didn't know one another, I became aware of a subtle bond forming between us as we shared our anticipation and excitement about what was to come.

My first impression of Il

Convento was of walking into the ruins of an old church. Then I spotted Anjali, who would become my private preceptor. She was sitting at a table with another friend, surrounded by vivid blue walls and above them a domed ceiling. Seeing the familiar faces in such an unfamiliar setting quite threw me - but they quickly came to my rescue with a mug of tea!

Arriving to the quiet of Il Convento was a shock after the noisy energy of Rome, and it took me a few days to slow down and get into the pace of the retreat. During the time leading up to our ordinations, we studied The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, in which Sangharakshita explores the theme of ethics, going into each of the ten ethical precepts which are the fundamental practice of members of the Western Buddhist Order. As well as studying the text, we practised confession, acknowledging to ourselves and our friends ways in which we had fallen short and broken the precepts at any point in our lives. I really appreciated the opportunity to let go of things I regretted doing in the past. We also did a lot of ritual, making shrines both outside and inside the building. The place lent itself very naturally to ritual. There was the round shape of the well at the centre of the courtyard surrounded by the cloisters, which we walked around, sometimes in silence, or accompanied by drumming. At night we did ritual by candlelight with the huge dome of the sky overhead.

As the retreat went on, we

had a few days focusing on the elements: earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness which make up the cosmos. A friend had given me a book of Seamus Heaney's poetry which I read nearly every day and his poems seemed to tie in with my reflections on the elements, especially earth and water. Here is a snippet from my notebook written about that time:

*poetry for breakfast
a black crypt for dancing
and drumming
a sun bath
such a place
such a time
such happiness
dawn
rose-colored
emerging
the thin wisp of the new moon
suspended
one star
the black shape of the tree
the shepherdess's bell
the waking bell
walking to meditation
red brick tiles
my feet touching
embracing*

My room faced east. As usual I struggled to get up to meditate; but sometimes the dawn was so beautiful, my mind would clear and I felt full of delight and wonder. Having warmer weather and being in such a beautiful place, it was much easier to let go and sense the vastness of space.

As the retreat progressed, we had long periods of silence and meditation. I didn't always find it easy, as I was thrown back on



Il Convento - courtyard

myself, on my own mind and its limiting tendencies - especially wanting approval and fearing disapproval. I found this humiliating as I thought I had worked through that kind of thing! In the end I just had to accept that that was what was going on. It gave me a very tangible experience of what I was taking on in getting ordained: I was committing myself to working with anything that limits or prevents me from living more in line with Reality.

The ordinations took place in the middle of the retreat. A verse from Shantideva's

Bodhicharyavatara kept coming into my mind around that time:

*Today my life has borne fruit;
Having well obtained this human
existence,
I've been born in the family of
Buddha
And now am one of Buddha's Sons.*

It was a very precious time. I remember it as a time of great intensity and clarity. It had taken me a number of years and a lot of work to get myself to the point where I could wholeheartedly say, yes! This is what I want to do with my life: I want to take the Buddha as my guide and live out his teachings in the context of the Western Buddhist Order.

Jutika
Manchester, UK

IT WAS AUTUMN. Tuscany was green and subject to abrupt changes of weather. The sun shone, the wind blew ferociously and there were magnificent storms. The light and colours were unparalleled. There were cypresses and olive trees; and nights thick with stars.

Throughout the ordination retreat words from a song kept coming to mind: 'The silver of the Greek olive, The Persian flame of the cypress ...' It seemed as if the entire history of the Mediterranean accompanied me

through the cloisters.

The stones of that convent are made of the same clay as my childhood. How was it that I was about to do something so unpredictable in my otherwise predictable life? There I was, surrounded by English speakers, feeling that someone or something was watching me from above, from those dark and starry skies - was it Tara? and there I was, so calm, so comfortable, so at home ...

At home? How so? When everything around me was completely new! Calm? How can I say that when I had spent days and days in tears, without sleeping! Comfortable? But what about the itchiness that I felt all over my body, that would disappear and then reappear?

And yet there, in that little room that I fancied was a cave, when Dhammadinna recited, in my own language - the language of my mother and of Cervantes - those most beautiful lines which expressed my deepest aspirations, then - yes, then, I felt at home.

Saddhakara
Valencia, Spain



New Dharmacharini's with Preceptors and organising team.

Taraloka: Into the Future



TARALOKA HAS CHANGED SO

much that it is hard to recognise it as the same place it was even five years ago. The general atmosphere has been one of expansion. Four years ago we finished the conversion of the retreat centre barns, creating our 'New Wing' with its solitary retreat suite (accessible for wheelchair users), small bedrooms and an art room. Then, just last year we were able to build on a utility room and porch, thus completing the retreat centre very beautifully. It's great to have been able to convert such spacious barns and the effect is almost like having a purpose-built retreat facility - perhaps the nearest we've come to it yet in the FWBO in Britain. Not only this, but Taraloka had by now completed payments on our initial mortgage and thus we were able to fund a substantial extension to the old farmhouse where those of us in the community live.

But the expansion I'm talking about has not just been in the realm of buildings, considerable though that has been. The reason the house was extended was because the community itself was due to expand. It grew from 9 to 12 women during 1998. This

team'. The seven-woman support team, led by Saddhanandi, has been clarifying its working structures and gradually taking on more and more of the day-to-day work and responsibility for the running of the retreat centre over the last two years. Their work 'supports' members of the retreat team to spend the majority of their time either on retreat or in work associated with retreats - such as training, developing the retreat programme or deepening personal study and meditation.

This is a really great step forward for women's retreats and Taraloka! It's the first time in our Movement that a team of women has been supported full-time to focus purely on meditation, study and the development of retreats! The retreat team initially consisted of Ratnasuri and myself. We have both lived at Taraloka for over 12 years. Then Vajragita joined us eighteen months ago from Amsterdam, having spent many years establishing the FWBO in Holland. Last year were joined by Kalyananprabha (from Manchester) and Sarvabhadri (from West London), both very experienced Dharmacharinis and ex-Mitra-Convenors, thus completing the team. Recently, however,

expansion was necessitated by the creation of the 'Taraloka retreat team'. We had been building up to creating a retreat team for some time, preparing the way with the creation of a 'support

Ratnasuri decided the retreat team could manage without her, and announced her retirement from organisational activities as from April 1st - her 76th birthday.

This has left the four of us to carry on the work and I think we all feel the very great potential that our team has, as well as the great privilege of being able to be part of it. In some recent meetings several inspiring ideas have arisen for the development of retreats at Taraloka over the next few years - so watch that space!

We've always been a community with an international flavour and at one point last year our members came from four continents! In October we were delighted to welcome Dharmacharini Alokasri who came to join us for two years from the Pune Centre in India. Alokasri is the first Indian Dharmacharini to come to live and work in a European FWBO Centre.

A happy and memorable day in March was when Sangharakshita came to visit Taraloka and catch up with all the new work. After being shown round, he had lunch with the Community and spent time with the Order members in the afternoon.

A few weeks later was a specially joyful occasion when one of the mitras from our support team was ordained here at Taraloka. Due to her health, Helen Batty was unable to attend the retreat at Tuscany. Sad though that was, it meant that many of her friends as well as the Taraloka community had the opportunity of witnessing her public ordination which took place on April 8th and was attended by more than 100 people. In the midst of much rejoicing, Vidyasuri joined the Western Buddhist Order.

Dayanandi

Changing Scene in Nottingham

IN JANUARY THIS YEAR, with immense warmth, we celebrated the birth of our first six women mitras. On that same evening, with jubilation, we greeted the news that Sobhana had decided to move to Nottingham to work with the women's sangha at the Buddhist Centre.

It was Spring 1994 when Dharmachari Abhayakirti moved to

Nottingham to initiate FWBO activities here. Within a few years there was a growing sangha: several Dharmacharis (men Order members), regular, well-attended classes, male mitras, a men's community, and even a men's right livelihood business whose profits supported the purchase of a spacious and beautiful Centre.

There was also a determined and

sparky women's group, which started meeting during that first year. I remember there was a great sense of energy and excitement right from the start. Initially we just ate and chatted together, and then, tentatively, we began exploring the Dharma and its impact on our lives.

Conditions were by no means bad for us women, but without a

Dharmacharini (a woman Order member) we lacked led Dharma study, ongoing personal contact with members of the Order, and the possibility of becoming mitras. It was sometimes painful watching the men forging forward, or welcoming new women into a situation which they often perceived as discriminating against them.

Taraloka was tremendously important. It was our main means of contact with the women's wing of the movement, enabling us to learn from the Dharmacharinis who were leading retreats, and giving us the opportunity to meet women from other Centres. Whenever someone returned from retreat, there was a real hunger to hear what they had experienced.

I think these past years we have witnessed the truth of how good effort, in time, bears fruit. As we reached out, the Order came to meet us. In January 1996, Srivati, a Dharmacharini from London, promised to spend three weekends a year with us. She made so much difference - getting to know us personally, guiding our efforts, improving our communication with the men Order members, connecting us with the wider women's wing of the movement and so on. Then Abhayakirti started a women's study class and encouraged us in our efforts to entice Dharmacharinis here. Several, and in

particular Parami, came and spent time with us. Such visits were greatly valued, as was the growing sense we had of being held in the awareness of the women's wing of the Order, and that solutions were being sought so that we could become mitras.

Eventually it happened! Firstly Sinhadevi offered to come fortnightly from Birmingham to lead study, and befriend us, thus making it possible for six women to become mitras. Then Sobhana, seeking a new situation in which to live and focus her energies, came for a seven-week visit. The impact of these two women was immediate. Now there were study groups, there was a Going for Refuge group for women who had asked for ordination, a pre-mitra group for those wanting to become mitras, and generally a better situation for women who now had on-going access to personal contact with a Dharmacharini. This last seemed extraordinary! To be able to pick up the phone and make a date just like that! I am beginning to have a sense of developing personal



Sobhana with women from the Nottingham Centre

friendships with women whose being is pervaded with the Dharma. I find it very integrating, very transformative.

We can't yet know the effect that having a full-time Dharmacharini here will have. Sobhana's arrival has come at a dynamic time. I know it will give the women's sangha the opportunity both to expand, and to deepen our practice. I am most grateful to all those who have given us their help and support - and I rejoice in all our efforts too!

Dorothy Lake

Family Newsletter

Jataka began when some of those coming along to our parents' group at the North London Buddhist Centre began wondering what else might be going on for parents in the FWBO. It transpired we were not the only group meeting together regularly. At many Centres parents were linking up and exploring ways of applying their practice more fully to their lives. Inspired by their enthusiasm, I decided to start up a newsletter.

It wasn't only that I wanted to encourage a bit of 'networking'. I also wanted to see a forum set up where issues could be explored that are especially pertinent to parents who are practising the Dharma. I was coming across important issues in my own life and realised I would value discussing them with others.

I came across the FWBO two years ago when my daughter, Amy, was 15 months old. My experience of motherhood has been a positive one. It continually provides me with opportunities for self-transformation, and

through it I've grown spiritually in many ways. When I first came into contact with the Dharma, I found the ideas about developing ethical behaviour, mindfulness, loving kindness and positive mental states confirmed the personal aspirations I had already. However, as my familiarity with the Dharma grew, I found myself deeply challenged by its radical nature and the issues I am dealing with have become more complex. I discovered a number of dilemmas I needed to address, especially some that related to being a mother.

Here is one dilemma: the Dharma recommends renunciation as the way to grow spiritually. The monastic life is traditionally seen to be an ideal life for those seeking 'liberation'. There is in that an inherent critique of much of my current lifestyle, including living in a family context. I have wanted to know how I could benefit from this critique and in what ways I could integrate my commitment to my child with my increasing desire to live by Buddhist principles. How can I develop an

orientation of renunciation, of non-attachment, especially in my relationship with my daughter, with whom there is such a powerful attachment; and in what ways can I realistically change my living conditions?

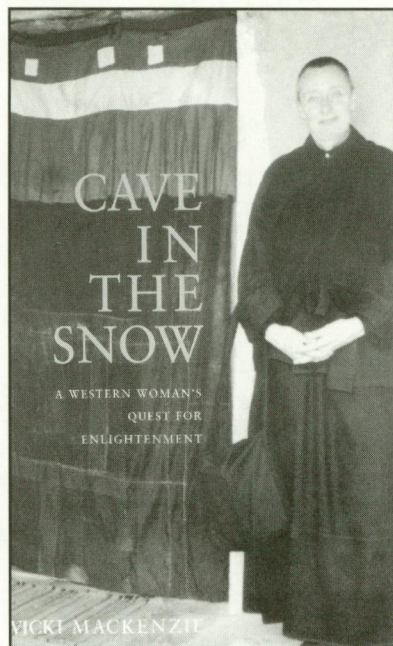
Another question is what alternatives can we come up with to the nuclear family that can work both for us as Dharma practitioners, and for our children? I sent out questions on these and other issues to a number of Order members who have children. Several have written responses which will be printed in the next edition of *Jataka*.

Jataka Newsletter: Issue No. 2 will be available at FWBO Centre bookshops from April 1999.

Enquiries or written contributions for future editions to:

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Single-minded Dedication



Cave in the Snow
A Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment
 Vicki Mackenzie
 Bloomsbury 1998
 £16.99 pp208

THE BOOK HAS A beautiful cover, picturing Tenzin Palmo in maroon-and-red Tibetan robes beside a hanging of rich red and blue. With her good-natured face and direct look, she is the western woman of the title, although surprisingly, her name does not appear on the book's cover.

Vicki Mackenzie is well known as a journalist working for daily and Sunday broadsheets, including *The Observer* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and as the author of *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama* and *Reborn in the West: The Reincarnation Masters*. She first met Tenzin Palmo in Italy about ten years ago. Tenzin Palmo had just emerged from a twelve-year solitary retreat. A few months later Ms Mackenzie read an interview in which Tenzin Palmo made the following statement:

'I have made a vow to attain Enlightenment in the female form - no matter how many lifetimes it takes.' Excited by what she read, Vicki Mackenzie invited Tenzin Palmo to tell her story - to which she reluctantly agreed 'on the grounds that it would inspire other women.'

The book is the story of Tenzin Palmo's life: her poor but happy childhood in East London as Diane Perry; her mother's spiritualist interests that helped her realise that there were different

dimensions of consciousness; her quest for a path to perfection and her discovery, at the age of eighteen, that she was a Buddhist. She also 'realised' that she belonged to the Kargyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism, and decided that she needed to find her guru. In the meantime, however, all was not straight forward, for, as she explains, 'On the one side I was this frivolous, fun-loving young woman and on the other I was serious and 'spiritual'.'

The description of how she finally goes East, finds her guru, turns down three proposals of marriage and becomes a nun at the age of twenty-one, makes for fascinating reading. She was only the second western woman to become a Tibetan Buddhist nun. (The first was Frieda Bedi, an Englishwoman married to an Indian who worked for the Tibetan refugees - a fascinating character in her own right.)

The middle portion of the book gives a detailed account of her spiritual endeavours. The first six years were miserable as the only woman in a monastery of one hundred monks. She experienced intense frustration at not being given the teachings the men received. It was this frustration that prompted her to make her vow to attain Enlightenment in female form.

After a further six years in another monastery, and wanting to intensify her practice still more, she moved to a cave in the Himalayas situated 13,200 feet above sea-level which became her home for twelve years. The account of this period is the heart of the book, demonstrating her extraordinary determination and single-mindedness when facing the severest physical conditions, including an avalanche which buried her cave and forced her to contemplate her death. The last three years were completely solitary during which she meditated twelve hours a day.

When she emerged, she decided to return to the West and her cultural roots and settled initially in Assisi, Italy. She quickly became known as a speaker, and was invited to give lectures on Buddhism all over Italy and beyond. At the first Western Buddhist conference in Dharamsala in 1993, she spoke passionately on behalf of women Dharma practitioners, and proceeded to help set up a conference for Western nuns in Bodhgaya. This led on to her vision to build a nunnery for the women of her own order, the Drukpa Kargyu School.

Her vision for the nunnery is that it become 'a place of female spiritual excellence', where a core of nuns would practise intensely. Beside it would be an inter-

national retreat centre where women would be taught to meditate by the nuns. Her plans received the blessing of the spiritual heads of her monastery and she started on a world-wide fund-raising tour. The remainder of the book outlines some of Tenzin Palmo's teachings as she travelled to different parts of the Western world. She demonstrates clarity, common sense and inspiration, encouraging women whatever their situations may be.

As I read the book I could not help wishing that Tenzin Palmo herself had written it. Much of what is quoted from her is measured, based on the teachings of the Dharma and her own experience of practising. Vicki Mackenzie's style I found at times rather unpalatable, particularly in the first few chapters. Her response to Tenzin Palmo's vow to achieve Enlightenment in the form of a woman reads as follows:

'Now, at two minutes before the millennium, it seemed that the last wave of female emancipation was poised to begin. If it happened it would also be the greatest. The ultimate women's liberation was surely a female Buddha, an omniscient being.' (p7)

This rather sensationalised expression, combined with feminist overtones that have nothing to do with Buddhism, is an off-putting feature throughout the book.

Nevertheless, I am grateful to the author for writing the biography, thus allowing me a glimpse of a remarkable Buddhist woman's life. Perhaps the style - which might be more appropriate to the popular press - will make this book, and consequently fundamental Buddhist principles, accessible to more women.

Although I may question Tenzin Palmo on her use of some apparently feminist language, I found aspects of her attitude to being a woman refreshing. She has very little truck with hormones as the cause of difficult mental states!

'I think that all this talk about menopause and PMT is just making an issue of it. Besides, I've noticed that men are often more moody than women. All humans fluctuate in their moods, that doesn't mean you have to cling to it.'

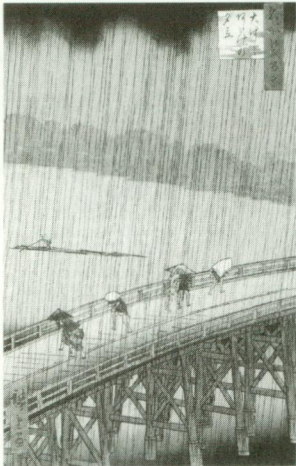
Tenzin Palmo demonstrates many of the qualities we need to practise the Dharma, whether we are women or men: courage, determination, single-mindedness, faith and equanimity. Because of these, I think the book will be an inspiration to others.

Sarvabhadri □

On the Bridge

People on a Bridge

WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA



PEOPLE ON A BRIDGE

NOBEL PRIZE WINNER 1996

People on a Bridge Wisława Szymborska

Introduced and translated
by Adam Czerniawski
Forest Books, London, 1996.
£7.95 pp71

WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA'S POEMS

WERE published for the first time in Finnish - my native language - in September last year. I know little about Polish culture, but like many Finns, I have been fascinated by Krzysztof Kieslowski's films. To me his work captures something essential about what it is to be European at this moment in history. And now here was a woman artist, whose art form is more familiar to me - and less accessible. Hers is poetry defying loss of life by translator's hand.

Poetry has been a very important art form in Poland, especially during the Communist rule (which finally collapsed in 1989.) During the Communist regime, poets wrote and distributed their writings at great risk - even to their lives, a desperate response to an officially-commanded hypocrisy or silence. Stanisław Barańczak, himself a dissident poet who emigrated to America, writes in his introduction to an anthology of modern Polish poetry: 'If poetry can sometimes be visualised as a stick poked in History's wheel, it is, by definition, a stick never sturdy enough actually to stop or even to slow down its relentless movement, thus

genuinely "spoiling" the pleasure History takes in crushing nations and individual lives. And yet, if there was any country during the past twenty years where poets were able to "spoil cannibals' fun" at least to some extent, it was precisely Poland.'

Wisława Szymborska, who was born in 1923, has published nine volumes of poems starting with *That's Why We Are Alive* in 1952. She studied Polish literature and sociology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. From 1953-1981 she worked on the Kraków literary weekly *Zycie Literackie* as poetry editor and columnist and also translated French poetry. After ten years of silence, *People on the Bridge* came out in 1986 and *The End and the Beginning* in 1993.

Szymborska has had a reputation as one of the leading poets in her own country for a long time. In 1996 she became known the world over when she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Poetry. The Swedish Academy described her work as 'expressing with ironic accuracy historical and biological connections in human reality'. Receiving the prize, she said in her speech, among other things, 'I appreciate very much these two little words: don't know. They are small words which have strong wings.'

Wisława Szymborska's poems sparkle with manly wit and knowledge, but they also express feminine sensitivity and strong emotion, as well as an almost childlike curiosity and wonder at life's phenomena. To me she is a real-life 'wise-old-woman', someone who has lived fully through an intense period of European history but who has a vision wider than Europe, wider, even than the earth. She is a woman who has had a long, rich and demanding life and who has been able to integrate her experiences into expression that is widely acknowledged and admired.

Sridevi □

Note:

1. *Spoiling Cannibals' Fun*, *Polish Poetry of the Last Two Decades of Communist Rule*, edited and translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1991.

A strange planet with its strange people
They yield to time but don't recognise it.
They have ways of expressing their protest
They make pictures, like this one for instance:

At first glance, nothing special.
You see water
You see a shore.
You see a boat sailing laboriously upstream.
You see a bridge over the water and people on the bridge.
The people are visibly quickening their step,
because a downpour has just started lashing sharply from a dark cloud.

The point is that nothing happens next.
The cloud doesn't change its colour or shape.
The rain neither intensifies nor stops.
The boat sails on motionless.
The people on the bridge run just where they were a moment ago.
It's difficult to avoid remarking here: this isn't by any means an innocent picture.
Here time has been stopped.
Its laws have been ignored.
It's been denied influence on developing events.
It's been insulted and spurned.

Thanks to a rebel,
a certain Hiroshige Utagawa
(a being which as it happens has long since and quite properly passed away)
time stumbled and fell.

Maybe this was a whim of no significance, a freak covering just a pair of galaxies, but we should perhaps add the following:

Here it's considered proper to regard this little picture highly, admire it and thrill to it from age to age.

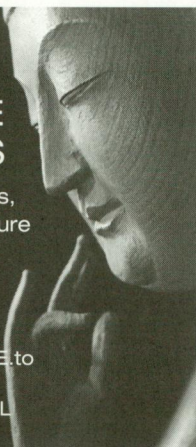
For some this isn't enough.
They even hear the pouring rain, they feel the cool drops on necks and shoulders,
they look at the bridge and the people as if they saw themselves there in the self-same never-finished run along an endless road eternally to be travelled
and believe in their impudence that things are really thus.

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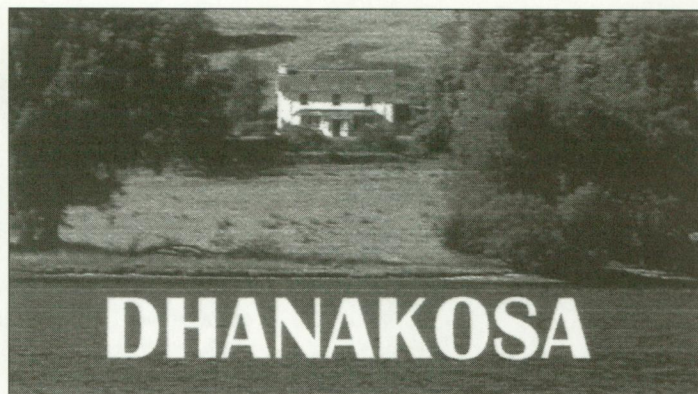
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June

11-18 Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

18-25 Hillwalking & Meditation

July

2-9 Women's Walking Retreat

9-16 Reflexology & Meditation

16-23 Summer Open Retreat

23-30 Creating the Freedom to Choose

30-6 Aug Tai Chi & Meditation

August

13-20 Hillwalking & Meditation

20-27 Astanga Yoga & Meditation

27-3 Sept Writing and Meditation

September

3-10 Shiatsu & Meditation

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17-24 Hillwalking & Meditation

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