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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 Uryen 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

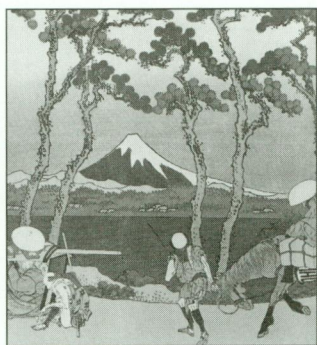
is produced by Dharmacharinis, that is, women members of the WBO. It is firstly a magazine for women (and interested men) involved with the FWBO, for Friends, mitras, **, and Order members. It is also published with the desire to share the experience we are gaining as women practising the Buddhist teachings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



**Katsushika Hokusai
Hodogaya**

LOTUS REALM
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members of
the Western Buddhist
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their friends. It appears
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KULAPRABHA has been the women's mitra convenor in Scotland for nearly eight years, a mother for nearly twenty and a wife for twenty-five. She thought all that was good reason to stop being such a sensible Scotswoman and to go off travelling round the world for six months this year.



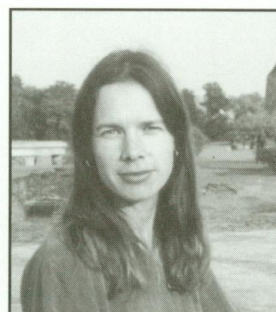
VAJRAPUSHPA spends a lot of her time talking and listening. Amongst other things, she is the mother of two teenaged daughters, and a psychotherapist. She is also very fond of silence.

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VIDYASURI is a member of the Taraloka Support Team, where she has worked as Bookings Secretary for the past three years. However, next year she will be leaving Taraloka and embarking on the next stage of her journey - destination as yet unknown.

VIMALACHITTA was in her first year at Art School when she learnt to meditate and went on her first retreat - and that pretty well clinched it. She has lived in women's communities, worked in Right Livelihood businesses, was full-time meditation teacher for six years and is now women's mitra convenor at the London Buddhist Centre.



There is a lot of coming and going ...

AT TARALOKA: PEOPLE ARRIVING FOR A RETREAT and then, after a week - or two - leaving again, changed. I catch glimpses of them going off for walks. By the middle of the week, the pace is often slower. But sometimes I see people stomping through the fields, wrestling with demons.

Sometimes the atmosphere of the retreat seems to waft in at my bedroom window and I am aware that something special, even a little magical is taking place: the transformation of consciousness.

Going on retreat is a bit like a pilgrimage. You leave behind home, work, college, leave behind the people who know you (or think they do), and set off for - what?

Something propels us to go off into the unknown - in search of something that will illumine our lives with greater meaning, and it is this subtle sense of moving towards something precious that we don't yet know, but dimly intuit, that keeps us going through the difficulties and obstacles we inevitably encounter whether we are on retreat or on pilgrimage.

But, some may ask, can we really afford pilgrimages and retreats these days when there are so many other important things to do - and so much suffering in the world? Isn't pilgrimage really a bit of a luxury for the idle few? Pilgrimages to foreign parts - why bother when you can see it all on TV and read up about it at almost no cost and with no trouble at all on the Internet?

Maybe it's a luxury, an optional extra for the idle rich, but I rather doubt it. People seem to need to go on pilgrimage. Before he died the Buddha, too, made provision for his future followers to go on pilgrimage. The four great sites associated with his birth, his Enlightenment, his first teaching and his final passing away have been for hundreds of generations the focus for the deepening of faith and the expression of devotion to the discoverer of the Buddhist Way.

You might wish to argue that what our lives should be about is discovering real meaning, finding real understanding, developing genuine compassion for life, for all that lives, and while a retreat may be helpful, why

spend all that time and money travelling to distant places to see a few tumble-down walls or a collapsing spire?

But in answer we might say that our outer activities are always in some way the expression of some deeply-felt myth (which particular myth exerts its influence over us at any particular time is one of those mysteries of life which it is, perhaps, our job to discover) and that the myth of the journey, the myth of pilgrimage needs to be acted out, to be lived out in full, at least from time to time. When people go off on pilgrimage, if it is a real pilgrimage, they always come back changed.

Kalyanaprabha □

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The Pilgrims

are Crossing the Land

Vidyasuri

'The moon and sun are eternal travellers. Even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat, or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home. From the earliest times there have always been some who perished along the road. Still I have always been drawn by windblown clouds into dreams of a lifetime of wandering...' Basho¹

THE MYTH OF THE traveller, the wanderer, the pilgrim, has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. As a child I read countless books of adventures and journeys, of heroic lives and deeds, of struggles between the forces of good and evil. I wanted to be on a noble quest, to live my life alongside companions who shared my ideals. I wanted to know the freedom of the traveller and the pilgrim's sense of meaning.

At the age of twenty-seven, I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. In the days prior to my ordination, I realised that my childhood dream had come true. I was committing my life to the highest ideal that I knew; I was taking my place in a long and noble lineage; I was becoming a member a living spiritual community; and I was setting out on the adventure of a lifetime.

The day before my private ordination ceremony I wrote,

'What is this mysterious and extraordinary journey I have embarked upon? I do not know, I do not understand, but it is the journey I have always wanted. I do not know where it leads or what I will encounter along the way, but it is the journey I have spent this lifetime seeking. Now finally I have found the path. I am a traveller and I stride out into the unknown. Nameless, not yet knowing what form I will take, I go forth to seek the deathless.'

The form that I took, the name that I was

given in my private ordination ceremony, was Vidyasuri: heroine of intuitive knowledge and aesthetic appreciation. As a new being I stepped out into the world, with the words of Shantideva accompanying me like a mantra:

Today my birth is fruitful. My human life is justified. Today I am born into the family of the Buddha. Now I am the Buddha's [daughter].²

My whole life is a pilgrimage, a journey with meaning. And others too are on a pilgrimage. We are all, as human beings, on a journey. But whichever path we choose through life, we cannot escape the human predicament; we cannot avoid the ultimate realities of old age, sickness and death. I look out into the ocean of humanity and I see lives rising and falling, coming into being and passing away. I look back on human history and I gaze forward into our future. The waves are ceaseless; the suffering is endless. It is for this reason that I follow in the footsteps of the Buddha. It is his teaching alone that has answered for me the existential questions of humanity. His is the Path that I follow, and the journey will not be over until I can say, in the words of *The Dhammapada*:

'The traveller has reached the end of the journey! In the freedom of the Infinite he is free from all sorrows, the fetters that bound him are thrown away, and the burning fever of life is no more'.³

Seeing my life is a pilgrimage, there is nothing that I meet along that way that does not have significance. In the words of Dharmachari Anagarika Suvajra:

'A pilgrimage is a journey into a world of myth. Events which have seemed to be shut away behind the closed doors along time's corridor become as alive and as fresh as if they had happened yester-

day. To the pilgrim, a shape, a noise, an unexpected meeting, can be charged with significance, becoming a symbol of something 'beyond us, yet ourselves'. One dwells more intensely on how one acts within one's environment, and on the effect of that environment upon oneself.'⁴

I live my life within a mythic context and through that context I travel many worlds. It does not matter if I cannot take the physical steps or make the actual journey. If the realm of the imagination is alive, any destination is possible. If I dwell within a mythic context I am able to see the world from a different perspective. The limitations of time and space diminish, and I take my place in a mythic lineage which cannot be located in this way.

In my life I seek truth; I seek beauty; and I seek freedom. I look into the past, the present and the future, and I see countless human beings seeking likewise, in their many different ways: monks, wanderers, pilgrims, artists, philosophers, of all traditions. I simply see humanity, striving to make sense of the universe and the human predicament. The more clearly I can see the human condition in this way, as it really is, the more deeply I can appreciate my interconnectedness with other human beings. The joys, the struggles and the sorrows I experience are simply part of the road we all travel.

We do not have to be a 17th-century Puritan to recognise the landscape of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The Hill of Difficulty, the Doubting Castle and the Valley of Humiliation are simply some of the places we may encounter as we seek to move closer to our spiritual ideals; and from time to time we will get a glimpse of the Delectable Mountains. It is likely too that we would recognise some of Christian's companions and acquaintances that accompany him on his journey, Ignorance, Envy and Faithful among them. Alongside Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, we enter 'on that deep and rugged road', descending first into the Inferno before we can begin the ascent through Purgatory and into Paradise. Though the medieval landscape of the journey may at times seem alien, we can nonetheless recognise this pilgrimage as a journey from darkness to light; an ascent from the darkest depths to the most sublime heights of consciousness. Our lives as human beings differ greatly, but the more deeply we appreciate our common struggles and shared aspirations, and the more clearly we reflect on our universal human predicament, the closer we

step to penetrating Reality itself.

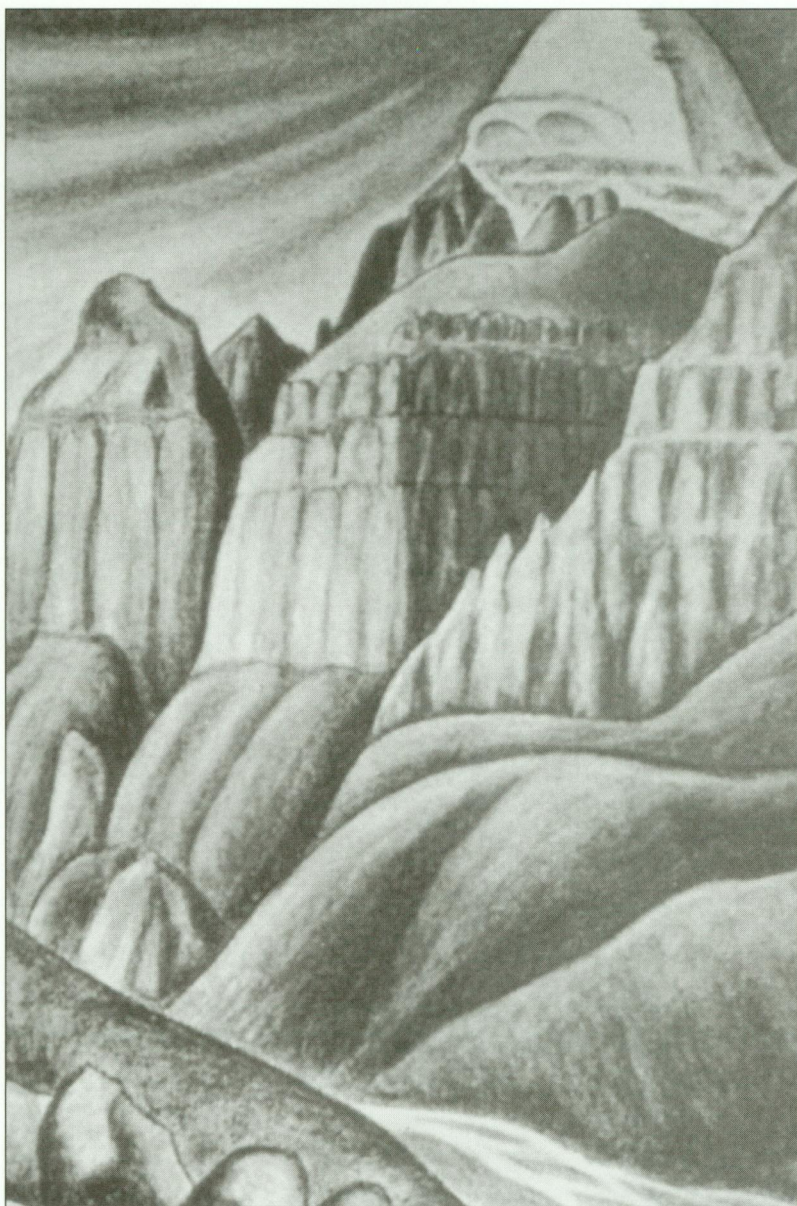
My life is a journey and within that journey there are many roads that I travel. I do not know if I will ever make the pilgrimage to northern India and Nepal, to visit the four great pilgrimage sites of the Buddha's life that he himself named shortly before his Parinirvana. But whether or not I undertake that pilgrimage, I have made and will make many others. A pilgrimage is a journey with meaning. I make these journeys all the time, and I witness others making them too. We revisit places we have once lived; we journey to see people and places that have in some way influenced our life. The journey need not be a long and arduous one. It is simply a journey with significance, a journey with layers of meaning that may be apparent to no one but the traveller themselves.

Almost eighteen months ago, I underwent a major operation at a nearby orthopaedic hospital. A year later I returned to the hospital on pilgrimage. To an outside observer I was simply a young woman walking along the

**'Now finally
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the path.
I am a
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I go forth to
seek the
deathless.'**



Delectable Mountains



'Thunderstorm over
Mount Kailas'
(Lama Govinda)

main hospital corridor. They could not know the meaning of the steps I took down that corridor: the place where I had been wheeled so many times on my hospital bed and in a wheelchair; and where I had made my first, slow, painful journey on crutches to the hospital coffee shop. They could not know that there was a time when I wondered if I would ever be able to walk these steps again. My walk along that corridor was laden with significance; it was an occasion I had to mark for myself; it was a ritual, and a pilgrimage.

During the five weeks that I spent on the hospital ward last year, my predominant experience was one of a deep interconnectedness with those around me. My surgeon had, with my permission, broken my pelvis in three places; and in doing so, had wrought an irrevocable change to my body and my life. The nursing staff tended me, night and day, with kindness and care. Upon them I was dependent for the most basic of my physical needs.

With the other patients I was deeply and existentially connected as we shared, hour to hour, our pain, our frequent laughter and our desire for well-being. For four of those five weeks I did not move from my bed. Yet in those weeks I travelled one of the most difficult, beautiful and profound journeys I have yet made. I offer you a small glimpse of those weeks and the humanity I shared.

'In the bed opposite me lies an old lady, confused, angry and afraid. She has had her knee replaced but she does not seem to know this. She does not even know she is in hospital. She thinks she is at home and is concerned that she must get out of bed to cook dinner for her husband and son. She repeatedly takes off the oxygen mask that is so crucial to her well-being. The doctor thinks she might have had a mild heart attack after the operation. Certainly her mind has been adversely affected by the anaesthetic and the drugs. Across the ward she stares at me, her gaze hard and unwavering. Somewhat unnerved, I look back, and think of Avalokitesvara. To see with those eyes... We look at each other, Ivy and I, and I begin to imagine that I am looking in a mirror. I am not seeing a separate person but simply myself as an old woman. I look into the mirror and this is the image, the reality, that I see. Allowing that reality to touch my heart, my heart opens. I am not separate from this old woman, but connected - deeply and existentially connected through the human predicament that we share.'

It is experiences of shared humanity and understanding such as these that are among the most precious of my life. One incident from a solitary retreat stands out in my mind. I was staying in a caravan near an estuary on the Welsh coast. Each day I made a journey to the water's edge. On the way I walked past a cottage, and some days there was an elderly man tending the very beautiful and well-kept garden. One day he was standing by the wall as I passed. We greeted each other, simply and warmly, with a mutual recognition of each other's delight in the loveliness of the day. It was a brief but beautiful moment in my life, when I felt I had really seen, and been seen by, another human being. We were, in the words of the Liverpool poet Brian Patten, *'briefly lit by one another's light'*⁵. It is such moments that make my pilgrimage through life worthwhile, and I know that the path I tread is right.

It is a little paradoxical perhaps, that I have had some of my most profound experiences of human interconnectedness when on solitary retreat. Yet this is a time when I am

able to step free of roles and expectations, and experience myself simply as a human being. I am just one of life's pilgrims. I can step out of my daily context, step free of time and space, and see my life and the lives of others for what they really are: 'the tiny splash of a raindrop, a thing of beauty, that disappears even as it comes into being'⁶. To regard our human situation with clarity and honesty allows us to step beyond our narrow world into an entirely different dimension of being. This is the experience Lama Anagarika Govinda communicates in *The Way of the White Clouds*:

*'On our way to the sacred mountain Li Gotami and I felt ourselves merely as a link in the eternal chain of pilgrims, who since times immemorial travelled the lonely and perilous paths of an untamed mountain world and the limitless spaces of the Tibetan highland. The only thing that appeared significant to us, was our taking part in that supra-personal experience which surpassed by far all individual thoughts and feelings and raised it to a new level of awareness.'*⁷

The journeys we make are many and sometimes we may not even be conscious of why we make them. We can experience an inexplicable urge to make a particular journey, to visit a particular place, without fully comprehending the reason. The English artist Paul Osborne, who documented his overland journey from Mount Athos to Tibet in paintings, explains his pilgrimage thus:

*'I was irresistibly drawn to the journey overland to the East, not only to see what was on the other side of the horizon, but to trace a line back to something in our roots, a road of discovery, with an inner sense as much as an outer.'*⁸ Similarly, the scholar Andrew Harvey writes of his chance meeting with a young Frenchman in a Delhi travel agency who told him, 'You must go to Ladakh. It will change your life as it has changed mine.' Three years later, after grappling with both his fascination for and fear of Ladakh, that 'land of the high mountain passes' was to become, for Harvey, 'a pass into awareness of another reality.'⁹ Dare we accept the challenge of our journey?

As pilgrims in life we must journey ever onwards, and though we may not always be aware of it, the landscape around us, and indeed, we the pilgrim, are constantly changing. *'Fare forward, travellers!'* says T.S. Eliot, *'not escaping from the past / Into different lives, or into any future; You are not the same people who left that station / Or who will arrive at any*

*terminus.'*¹⁰ The truth of impermanence is ever ready to reveal itself to the traveller. At times on our journey we will choose to go forth from friends and family, to leave that which is familiar and beloved, and to step out into unknown territory. Basho, in his *Narrow Road to the Interior*, evokes this going forth with characteristic poignancy.

*'Very early on the twenty-seventh morning of the third moon, under a predawn haze, transparent moon still visible, Mount Fuji just a shadow, I set out under the cherry blossoms of Ueno and Yanaka. When would I see them again? A few old friends had gathered in the night and followed along far enough to see me off from the boat. Getting off at Senju, I felt three thousand miles rushing through my heart, the whole world only a dream. I saw it through farewell tears.'*¹¹

There is no standing still in the journey of the spiritual life. If we do not move forward, we move backwards.

The *Dhammapada* tells us that, *'Those who have high thoughts are ever striving: they are not happy to remain in the same place. Like swans that leave their lake and rise into the air, they leave their home for a higher home.'*¹¹

To lead the spiritual life, to move with purpose on our pilgrimage, we must know where it is we want to go. We must at least have a sense of direction, to have had a glimpse of the vision we are seeking to move towards. Dante, in *La Vita Nuova*, writes of the 'pilgrim spirit' nearing 'its goal of longing'. If we are to persevere in our pilgrimage, if we are not to lose our sense of direction as the worldly winds blow around us, we must long for our goal, we must desire deeply to move towards our vision. We must, in the words of the *Suvarnabhasottama Puja*, be 'constantly ablaze with the fire of longing'.



Photo: Helen Ellis

'I was irresistibly drawn to the journey overland to the East, not only to see what was on the other side of the horizon, but to trace a line back to something in our roots, a road of discovery, with an inner sense as much as an outer.'

If the steps I make do not take me into deeper connection and understanding with my fellow human beings, then I have strayed from my path. I have a longing. I long to live my life in service to humanity; I long to live my life in service to the Dharma; I long, to quote George Bernard Shaw, 'to be thoroughly used up when I die'. At my ordination, the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara, became my yidam. He is the vision of my longing. He is the Lord of Compassion; he is the Lord Who Looks Down; he is the Lord who can never look away. His Compassion can never be separated from his Perfect Wisdom. His eyes are the most beautiful the world has ever seen. Under his clear and compassionate gaze, I journey onwards.

None is the Same as Another

*None is the same as another,
O none is the same.*

*That none is the same as another is a matter for crying
since never again will you see
that one, once gone.*

*In their brown hoods
the pilgrims are crossing the land
and many will look the same
but all are different*

*and their ideas fly to them
on accidental winds
perching awhile in their minds
from different valleys.*

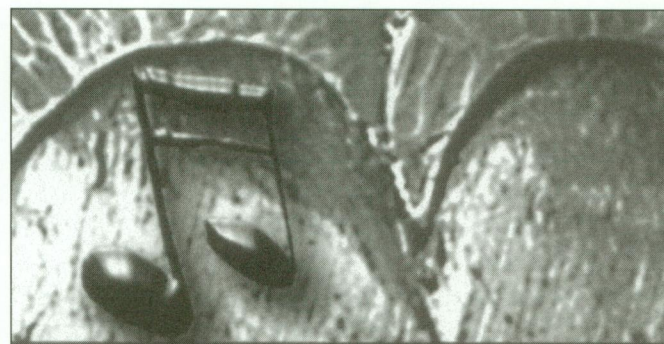
*None is the same as another,
O none is the same.*

*And that none is the same is not
a matter for crying.*

*Stranger, I take your hand,
O changing stranger.¹³*

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Seeking the *Invisible*

Vidyadevi

'Life's splendour forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come.'

Franz Kafka

WE ARE AN UNLIKELY bunch of pilgrims. Look at us now. Here we are in the Leh police department, in the Himalayan region of Ladakh, hanging out in the corridor outside the superintendent's office. Inside, Saramati is trying to prove that we do in fact have special dispensation - from the Ambassador in Delhi no less (courtesy of a contact of Tiffany's Mom) - for visa extensions. Every time the fax comes through - and more often than not it doesn't (apparently the whole of Leh has only twelve external phone lines) - the crucial instruction is blurred. We have been here for hours, waiting for electronic justice to be done. It's like *The Pilgrim's Progress* written by Kafka.

In the corridor Ann is asleep; Tiff is journaling, as usual. I have succumbed to the card game going on by the window (I learned 'hearts' quite early on in the trip); Kalin, always a spirited cardplayer, is hitting Brad and cursing him at the top of her Montana voice (he is always lucky at cards). Trevor, never less than elegant, is decorously leaning out of the window, smoking. Every now and then someone on police business finds a path through the chaotic sprawl of our group at its most uninhibited.

Eventually Saramati emerges, smiling wryly. The superintendent has found a way around the situation. His deputy, as it happens, having been security man this afternoon for a Japanese delegation (here to see the Dalai Lama), is rather tipsy. So it is the deputy who will assume responsibility for our visas; if there is any blame later, he will get it, and yet his action will be understandable in the circumstances. Everyone is

happy - even the deputy (who has become somewhat enamoured of Brooke, the princess of our group).

As we - finally - leave, above the city with its palace and its chortens, in the clouds above the mountains, a vertical rainbow hangs, like a messenger from the realm of truth. So much of our journey has been like this: absurd, ridiculous complications - waiting, waiting - and then, bursting through, a glimpse of something that reminds us why we're here.

Why are we here? The group is of students from the University of Montana; Saramati is their professor; I am the program co-ordinator. We have been studying Buddhism and society, in Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and, now, Ladakh. Some of us think of ourselves as Buddhists, some definitely not, some aren't sure.

But this has definitely been a pilgrimage. The word originally meant 'wandering through the land'; our wandering has been by bus, train, and plane mostly. Our early bus journeys were enlivened by cries of 'Check this out!' from all sides, and Dharma-rap from Neal; lately we have opted for silently watching the landscape passing, each to his or her own Walkman, as our need for 'space' has grown, although we have also grown more or less cheerfully accustomed to adapting to whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

Our wandering has been with purpose; perhaps that will do as a working definition of pilgrimage. Most of us are at a crossroads in our life - maybe one always is. Of course, the astonishing otherness of every aspect of life here, down to the most trivial everyday reality, has kept our senses perpetually on the alert. But our awareness of our inner lives - memories of the past, insight into the present, vision and fears for the future - has been just as acute; the journey is within as well as, perhaps more than, without.

So much of our journey has been like this: absurd, ridiculous complications - waiting, waiting - and then, bursting through, a glimpse of something that reminds us why we're here.



*Just when you seem to yourself
nothing but a flimsy web
of questions, you are given
the questions of others to hold
in the emptiness of your hands ...*

Denise Levertov, *A Gift*

**... being
young and
American, they
are extremely
unconstrained
- by any idea
that they have
already found
what they are
looking for.**

We have visited ancient sites, studied texts, heard visiting speakers. Everywhere we have tried to understand Buddhism as both a sociological and a spiritual phenomenon. We have been 'participant-observers', entering as fully as we could into whatever has been going on, from a Perahera in Sri Lanka, with its elephants, dancers, drummers, and monks, to the throng of thousands of Ladakhis gathered to hear the Dalai Lama speak. We have been on retreat - in the Sri Lankan jungle, in a teak forest in central India, on the edge of the Kathmandu valley, in the cold and lovely desertland of Ladakh.

And as we have grappled with our responses to all we have experienced, we have discussed what education essentially is, aside from, deeper than, the exigencies of assignments and grades. What I have found especially refreshing about my fellow travellers is that they are not constrained - in fact, being young and American, they are extremely unconstrained - by any idea that they have already found what they are looking for.

What am I looking for? I am an ordained Buddhist. Doesn't that suggest that I have left at least the basic questions behind? It may; but I have not. I began this journey wondering whether I was dead or alive, a Dharma practitioner or a well-practised fake. What authentic response to Buddhism, that most sublime ideal, could I find in myself? And anyway, is Buddhism alive in the world, or just an exotic museum exhibit? What does it mean to be a Western Buddhist? - and does the Buddhism of other cultures offer clues or red herrings?

It seems to me that to be a Buddhist is to keep asking these questions. But for some of those we have met, Dharma practice is synonymous with apparently unquestioning devotion. Some members of our group have felt suspicious of the devotions we have witnessed, especially those in which we have participated; ingrained in many of us is a deep dread of the inauthentic. On other occasions, though, we have been profoundly moved - I won't forget Jesse's description of the tears of an old monk sitting by the image of the Parinirvana Buddha at Kusinagara.

We are well equipped for this investigation, and not just because of our academic background. Brad once said, 'I'm from a consumer culture; I ought to be good at this sort of thing.' That's a good, if surprising, metaphor: being a practised shopper does give one a sense of what is of real value. And - crucially - we really do want to know; at some level our lives depend on it. But any answers to our questions must be provisional. However strong our impressions of a place, person, or event, how can we know how typical our experience was, or how it was affected by our presence? If a group of students followed me around in Birmingham to see how Buddhists behave, what would they see? And would I behave typically under such scrutiny? Of course, there are other questions that come with my role in the group. When will we get there? Is it safe to eat this? Where are we staying? It was Kim who found the most ingeniously unanswerable questions, my favourite being the Zen-like 'How can you tell if you've got non-itchy mosquito bites?'

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

TS Eliot, *Little Gidding*

Back in England, I am remembering a point Ben made in a presentation on pilgrimage: that in Western traditions people went on pilgrimage on behalf of those in their community who could not go, the idea being that they would bring something back for the benefit of those who had stayed behind. In our different ways, we will surely all have brought back - and will be trying to communicate - a sense of being changed by our experience; and perhaps we have made resolutions to sustain those changes in the life to come. But what has brought about this transformation?

I know I have been changed by the sheer fact of having been where we have been: standing in the very place where the Buddha spent his last hours, telling - for our group - the story of those last hours as though I was Ananda, the Buddha's companion, weeping a little myself as

I told how Ananda wept there; learning to chant the Mangala Sutta in the Jeta Grove, where the Buddha first taught it; discussing the role of women in Buddhism in Vaishali, where women first joined the Buddha's Order.

I have sometimes wondered, though, what makes a sacred place sacred. What difference does it make that this is where a certain event 'really happened'? A lot, according to Buddhist tradition: the Buddha strongly urged his followers to visit those same holy places that we still visit today. Sometimes, though, it's hard to contact much sense of significance in the holiest of places, beset as they can be by those with distinctly unholy motives, while somewhere quite anonymous can bring forth a sense of wonder. It was a great honour to get special permission to enter the inner sanctum of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy (security has been tight there since the bombing), but it was even more special to stand on the Vulture's Peak, where the Buddha is said to have spent so much time, feeling the freedom of having no focus of spiritual attention - no temple, only the most insignificant of shrines, just the wide landscape before me, more or less as it would have looked to the Buddha; nowhere to bow, but a sense of the sacredness of everywhere.

Even more transformative than sacred places, perhaps, have been our meetings with remarkable people. We have met so many whose heroic commitment to their practice is clear proof of the aliveness of the Dharma; the Buddhist community in Nagpur who met us at the station with roses; the Thai upasikas building a huge meditation centre at Shravasti; Dr Lam, the Vietnamese monk who managed to build a guesthouse for pilgrims in a cobra-infested swamp in Lumbini; Ani Palmo, the nun who is reforming Dharma practice for women in Ladakh; and the Dalai Lama.

We met him at the very end of our journey - further evidence, if any were needed, of the serendipity that attended us. With a combination of irrepressible humour and ocean-like depth he answered our somewhat forthright questions. Is he vegetarian? It is definitely best to be vegetarian, he said, although he himself - for health reasons - still eats some meat. How much does he meditate? Four hours a day. But what I remember with most delight is looking round our circle and seeing how each of us - however cynical, homesick, or moody we might sometimes be - could only smile.

So we met remarkable people. What I came to feel more and more was that we were remarkable people. Just as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are memorable not for the place of pilgrimage but for the pilgrims, the experiences that seem to have gone deeper than anything more obviously 'spiritual' are those associated with my fellow pilgrims. I remember Ann and I talking

beneath our mosquito nets in a crumbling dak bungalow - long abandoned by the British but inhabited by more mosquitoes than we had ever seen - in Vaishali; Ben and Phil, dyed head to foot in green, pink and gold during the Hindu festival of Holi; Kalin, in a hot pink sari and a woolly hat, standing on the back of the jeep in front as we wound our way through the Indus valley in western Ladakh; Izzy, his bright blue shirt clear in the sunshine as he sat on the roof of the Imambara at Lucknow; reflectively eating samosas with Caleb as we watched bodies burning at the funeral ghats at Pashupatinath; reading Rilke with Trevor and Brad in the Tibetan cafe; Karla describing how, from some instinct, she offered her empty hands to some beggar girls and, full of a compassion she had never felt before, walked with them down the city street; Ben, our first real invalid, on the railway station at Madras, shielded by our baggage, swathed in our shawls, with Ann, unperturbed by the surrounding chaos, giving him some reiki healing. Thinking of moments like these, I feel so much: amusement, pleasure, gratitude - and intense sadness, because that time, that life, is over.

But, of course, life is going on - for now, anyway - and I do feel more alive, more real - and confident that I have brought something back that is infinitely worth having, although, because it is invisible, it's hard to say exactly what it is. Saramati once asked us, 'What are we doing apart from collecting experiences?' Good question. What we have brought back, I suppose - apart from the gifts we bargained so hard to acquire, a lot of photos and diary entries, and a bunch of email addresses (which represent the possibility of sustaining the friendships so firmly forged) - is what we took with us; ourselves - but changed in ways we may appreciate best at some future time, when we look back from wherever our choice at this crossroads has taken us. □

**Just as
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Tales are
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pilgrimage
but for the
pilgrims, the
experiences
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deeper than
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'spiritual'
are those
associated
with my fellow
pilgrims.**

Meeting the Dalai Lama

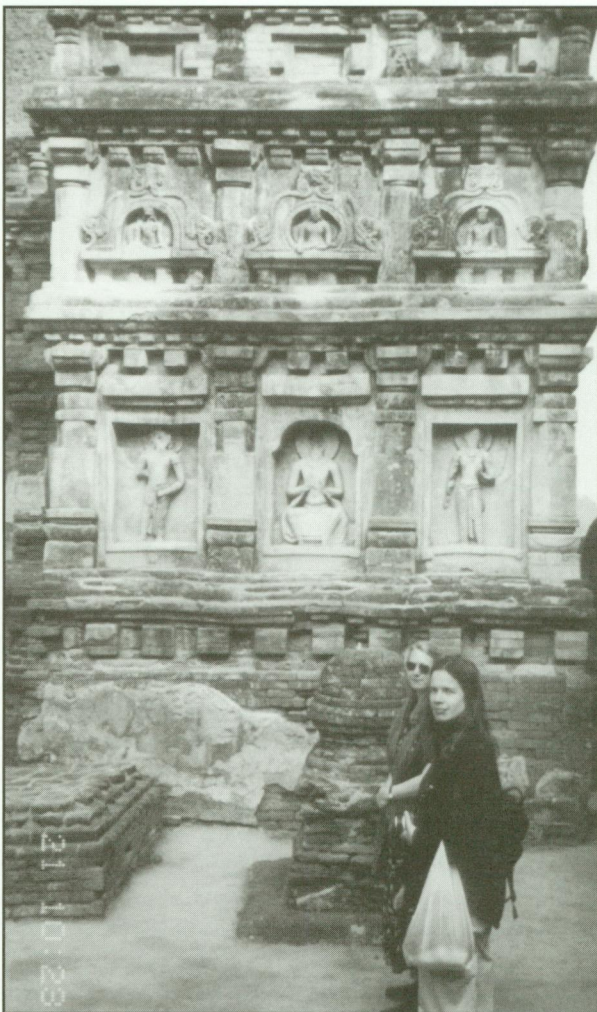


In the Footsteps of the Buddha

Vimalachitta

'WELCOME TO INDIA!' A fragrant garland of fresh marigolds was placed across my aching shoulders as I stood excited, tired and bewildered amidst the night-time bustle and noise of Delhi Airport. With the urgent shrieking of parakeets and high-voltage banter of the crowds around us, my friend, who was here to welcome us, seemed like a pool of calm. The next moment I was in a dilapidated yet elegant Embassy taxi hurtling towards the heart of Delhi - and our hotel.

In front of the ruins at
Nalanda



It was only during my first meditation - in a dim and poky hotel room with my eight companions - that my purpose for being in India really came home to me. I was here to visit places of significance in the Buddha's life with a group of fellow Buddhist women. Together we would follow in his footsteps. It was to be a spiritual journey - as much an exploration of my own heart as an adventure in such a different culture.

A couple of days later I was in Bodhgaya, where the Buddha had gained enlight-

enment. Bodhgaya is like a mandala: the Bodhi tree and towering Mahabodi temple at the centre, surrounded by concentric circles of walkways, and enclosed by a cool grey stone wall. The whole area is studded with stupas, shrines, gardens and trees. Around this core cluster shops, guest houses, temples, stalls and Tibetan tent villages - a whole Buddhist world, a Buddhist island in the poor rural land of Bihar.

Of all the places we visited, it was the energy of Bodhgaya that had the greatest impact on me. Around the tree and temple flows an endless stream of circumambulating pilgrims from every Buddhist country, the traditional yellow, maroon, grey and black robes mingling easily with the faded blue denim of the western pilgrims. Tibetan monks prostrate in every available corner of the grounds, people huddle together in groups to perform puja, solitary meditators sit in patches of shade, and the low hum of mantras resonates through the air. Although this vibrant place of devotion was hardly ever quiet, I did find silence in moments of inner tranquillity and in the intense feeling of reverence that surrounds the base of the Bodhi tree itself.

We sat and meditated one day around the iron-black roots and trunk of this majestic tree and although many people came and went as we sat, there was a tangible stillness, something beautiful pervaded the atmosphere. I felt a wordless awe at the mystery of what the Buddha had actually experienced here. As I opened my eyes I watched a yellow robed monk lift his arms and tenderly hold the tree trunk like a loved-one, then mindfully bow and touch it with his head, remaining there for a few moments, before stepping away and carrying on with his circumambulations. It was a beautiful and simple act of devotion which has stayed with me ever since, as if my heart rather than my eyes took in the image of that moment which left its imprint there.

Another day I found myself basking in the clear quiet atmosphere of Vulture's peak.

For the Mahayana school of Buddhism, this mountain-top dwelling-place of the Buddha is sometimes the starting point for a cosmic, magical Sutra. But it was the real, historical, flesh-and-bone Buddha who fascinated me here. The Enlightened man, with the planet Earth's dust on his feet, who had sat on these rocks, and seen this view I was now enjoying, who had engaged with real people, had taught here, had lived here! The physical fact of the Buddha's existence impressed and inspired me far more than the most complex metaphysical teachings and he seemed more beautiful to my imagination than the most exquisite of bejewelled, delicate, perfectly-formed Bodhisattva images.

All that wisdom, all that spiritual beauty and radiance in the simple form of a human being. In my mind's eye I saw his robed figure in the distance, sitting among these grey unyielding rocks - and that sense of awe tugged at the limits of my heart.

Amongst the impressive ruins of the Buddhist University of Nalanda I contemplated the fragility of conditions conducive for practising the Buddha's Dharma. Those impenetrably thick walls must have seemed indestructible to the students who came there to study in bygone ages, and Buddhism must have seemed so firmly established in the culture. And yet at the end of the twelfth century Nalanda was destroyed and Buddhism wiped out of India. It was a sobering reflection.

At Sarnath, the place where the Buddha gave his first teaching, we performed a puja surrounded by an audience of fascinated picnicking locals! The confident words of a passing tour guide floated into my meditation:

'Of course the Buddha was just a social reformer who they insisted on making into a spiritual teacher!'

I tried not to let my argumentative mind distract me for too long!

On so many occasions what enabled me to connect with the significance of a place was ritual, meditation and that incredible human faculty - imagination. I often found that I would arrive tired and scattered, seeing with a superficial 'tourist' gaze - but when we practised in these places and ritually marked out their meaning, I would start to see with different eyes. I was able to re-witness the significance of what had taken place there two and a half thousand years ago. What these places represented could not be pinned down by time - their essential meaning - that the potential to develop awareness, understanding and love is a human legacy - is to be lived out in the practice of every Buddhist today. I was reminded of the words in the

Threefold Puja which I had often recited:



Parinirvana Buddha at Kusinara

*'The Buddha was born as we are born,
What the Buddha overcame we too can overcome,
What the Buddha attained we too can attain.'*

There was a sadness in the group on reaching Kusinara as we realised that this place marked the end of the story we had been following. Like some of the Buddha's disciples, we, too, had not really accepted that the laws of impermanence applied even to him; his teaching was beyond time, but his body, like ours, was not. If we did not want to let him go, how must it have been for his disciples to have lost their blessed and beloved teacher? Many had wept at the thought that the 'eye of the world' was to leave them. A Parinirvana Puja at the site where the Buddha's cremation had taken place helped us to open our hearts to his final teaching: all things are impermanent.

Every few days the nine of us had sat down together and listened as each one communicated something of her experience. This 'reporting in' had been an essential part of the pilgrimage. It had helped to keep us aware of the effect the journey was having on us. Now, sitting in a Delhi roof-top cafe, we reported in for the last time, struggling to put into words what the pilgrimage had meant to us. Each person had been strongly touched by the experience. We had shared so much together and tears were shed as we sang together a devotional song in Pali to mark the end of this wonderful journey, this Pilgrimage:

*N'atthi me saranam annam,
Buddho me saranam veram,
Etena sacca-vajjena,
hotu me jayamangalam.
(No other refuge than the Buddha,
refuge supreme, is there for me,
Oh, by the virtue of this truth,
may grace abound and victory!)*

**I watched a
yellow robed
monk lift his
arms and
tenderly hold
the tree trunk
like a loved-
one, then mind-
fully bow and
touch it with his
head, remaining
there for a few
moments,
before stepping
away and
carrying on
with his
circumambula-
tions.**

Glimpses of a Chinese Pilgrimage

Kalyanaprabha

THE TRAIN FROM Hong Kong to Hangzhou takes twenty-six hours. Hangzhou is the capital of the eastern province of Zhejiang. Back in the thirteenth century Marco Polo described Hangzhou as one of the greatest cities of the world. These days it is just another large Chinese city. But we had no reason to dally, for we were bound elsewhere. We were pilgrims en route to Tien Tai.

Tien Tai! How mysterious and alluring the name! There the great master Chih-I (or Zhi Yi) had lived and taught for twenty-two years during the sixth century Sui dynasty. It was Chih-I's text, *Dhyana for Beginners*, that Sangharakshita had used back in the 1970's as a basis for explaining to his own disciples, the first Order members, aspects of the theory and practice of meditation.



My own interest had been aroused by Chih-I's achievement as a synthesiser of Buddhist tradition. He had lived at a time when a great mass of Buddhist texts had been pouring into China from India and other neighbouring countries. With their different emphases and expositions of the Dharma, people found themselves in

a state of confusion and uncertainty about the Buddhist teaching and its practice. It had been Chih-I, with his remarkable intelligence and erudition - but most of all his very deep understanding of the essence of the Dharma - who had been able to systematise and classify it all, resolving apparent contradictions - to the satisfaction even of Chinese scholars, and to the benefit of many Dharma practitioners. During his lifetime he taught and inspired many disciples, becoming the founder of a new Buddhist school, the Tientai school, the first Chinese school of Buddhism. There was something about Chih-I's work that sometimes reminded me of the FWBO and its attempt to establish a truly western form of Buddhism by drawing on the many forms of Eastern Buddhist tradition. It was, therefore, with some excitement that I found myself en route to Tien Tai.

Guoqing monastery was founded by Chih-I, and still stands on that ancient site surrounded by woody hills. How clear the air! How green the slopes! How sweet the calling of the birds and the rushing water that sweeps along its rocky bed! But was it sweet to find oneself a pilgrim in that Holy Place?

The present buildings were constructed towards the end of the eighteenth century. What fate had befallen them during the Cultural Revolution we did not learn. We did learn that restoration had begun in the 1980's, the work being carried out to a very high standard indeed - contrary to so much of what we had seen elsewhere in China. There were fourteen fine temples, many courtyards and walkways, and guest quarters for up to two hundred guests. The buildings stood on different levels, the characteristic curved roofs lending them an elegance and grace that was most appealing. Ancient trees stood in the courtyards - one gnarled old plum was said to be as old as the Tientai school itself. The temples were astonishing for their great altars behind which sat or stood enormous Buddha figures, golden, shining, resplendent. One temple housed the awe-

inspiring figures of the Four Great Kings. In another I discovered the eighty-eight Lohans or Arahants, larger than life, lacquered and gilded, each with a different expression and posture - for all the world like a great gathering of the Arya Sangha.

Guoqing was a busy place: there were grey- and brown-robed monks, resident workers who cooked, cleaned and so on, (plus, in some cases, their families,) and the guests. During our stay the guests consisted of a large group of mainly elderly women from a town on the coast. They attended the devotional services conducted by the monks, ate the excellent food with great gusto, and chattered nineteen-to-the-dozen! Nor were the rates cheap. It was a costly business being a pilgrim - at least if you were Chinese.

Guoqing monastery belongs to the Chinese government and it was the government that paid the 'wages' of the monks who lived there. I wondered about the relationship between the government and the monastery. Through Lin, who could translate, I asked our helpful guest mistress about it. 'When we talk, they listen,' was her brief reply. And that, evidently, was that!

On the wall of one of the walkways hung several sheets of paper displaying edicts of the local provincial government. 'Everyone should be free to believe in Buddhism', it stated. This came as a surprise to me. However, an important distinction was to be noted: Buddhism was about your personal beliefs and thinking, and was not the same thing as the ordering of the state which, of course, was the prerogative of the government.

Our stay at Guoqing had me pondering many times as to whether those around me were, in fact, practising the Dharma or not. No doubt the monks were performing rituals (often for the benefit of the paying guests.) Apparently they meditated and studied. They shaved their heads. They wore the robes. But were they as individuals Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha? Were they in touch in some way - through their teachers, through their own deeper realisations - with the Transcendental force of the Dharma? I did not know.

Despite its many associations with Buddhist history, despite the presence of the embalmed body of Chih-I himself, I felt few spiritual stirrings in my own heart during our stay at Guoqing. Was it lack of imagination or even lack of knowledge and understanding that left me unresponsive to a place associated with so much spiritual tradition? Was it due to being a westerner, a woman, with whom the friendly monks could not easily engage more deeply? Was it even that I had spent two days sick in bed in our dark, damp little room that had left me less sensitive than I should have been? Or was it that the familiar and precious spirit of our own Movement which I somehow expected to re-



South Peak Monastery, Wu Tai Shan

discover here I could not find? I felt more keenly than perhaps I had ever done my great good fortune in having come across the Dharma in a form I could recognise and respond to.

* * *

Many adventures later, we arrived in the little township of Wu Tai Shan. It cost each of us 50Y to enter the Wu Tai Shan district - an exorbitant fee. But then - every penny is needed. Wu Tai Shan, that mountainous region for centuries a place of pilgrimage and practice, holy to the great Bodhisattva Manjushri, is today being developed - as a prime tourist attraction. Its many monasteries - most, presumably, destroyed during the madness of the Cultural Revolution - are now being renovated and re-housed with monks and nuns, and opened up as places of cultural interest to those Chinese who can afford to include a little tourism in their budgets.

We met two nuns on the bus who took us to their nunnery. The head nun eyed us with a mixture of friendliness and suspicion. Might we stay, we wondered? No. Yes, perhaps. Then no, definitely, no. They had already been in trouble for having 'foreigners' to stay. But yes, alright, we could attend a puja there the following night.

* * *

The next morning it was snowing. Helen and I decided to go exploring. We headed for one of the several hills that rose sharply up, its peak seeming to float above the village, crowned by one of the many monasteries. Steep stone steps wound their way upwards, and a cheerful passer-by warned us to take care for the falling snow made them slippery underfoot.

The approach to the monastery was marked by a large stone stupa of traditional form. We stopped and, setting down the rucksack in the settling snow, circumambulated the stupa chanting the Manjusri mantra. After our troubles of the night before, the stupa seemed to stand strong and solid like the unshakeable Dharma in the

I marvelled at the thought of the labour of those first builders who had brought the stones up the steep slopes to build this temple of practice on the high peak.

midst of confusion.

Moved and uplifted by our little ritual, we made our way in cheerful mood to the monastery. Up a flight of stairs, through a great gate decorated with dragons and lotuses, we found the buildings, obviously once left to decay, now being restored - again to a very high standard. Shrine halls in the midst of renovation, lacquered statues waiting to take up their place on altars not yet built. The courtyard was deserted but for one old monk who took little notice of us. An atmosphere of great stillness and peace prevailed and I marvelled at the thought of the labour of those first builders who had brought the stones up the steep slopes to build this temple of practice on the high peak.

Ascending the hill behind the monastery, we sat for a while with the snow falling silently around us. Noises from the village came floating up, hammerings, bangings, car horns tooting, voices of men and women, children chanting their lessons. But the sounds seemed less to disturb the stillness than to be absorbed by it. It was as if the space around us was full of devas, or as if the centuries of practice had left a vibrancy that was still somehow abundantly in the atmosphere.

* * *

That evening it was Lin who was my companion as we made our way back to the nunnery, hoping for a more relaxed reception. We need not have worried. The young English-speaking nun who had introduced herself to us the day before as 'Jennifer' took us under her wing. We lined up with the other nuns in long rows - for all the world like school girls lining up for morning assembly - and followed them in to their large shrine hall with its great white jade Buddha presiding on the main shrine. It was a long and most uplifting puja based on a Pure Land liturgy, chanted (from memory) by over a hundred nuns, standing in neat rows with their brown robes and shaven heads.

'But is it really possible for you to enter into the Buddhist world?' Jennifer asked afterwards as we sat in the office of the Head Nun and sipped Chinese tea. Although we had tried to explain we were Buddhists, and that I was an ordained Buddhist myself, like many others she could not comprehend that a westerner could be a

practising Buddhist. As for being ordained: well, where was my robe? The radical nature of Sangharakshita's decision to create an Order that was neither monastic nor lay came home to me with renewed force. My young friend, however, was becoming interested. What were our rules, she wanted to know. (The nuns of course had many rules.) What? Our Order had no rules? Only precepts that one tried to put into practice in any situation? Now that did interest her! Could I write them down please, and would we like to write to her? But if we did write, then please, in English.

* * *

Oh yes indeed, it was certainly possible for us to enter into the Buddhist world. For when, a few days later, Helen and I found ourselves not far from the Mongolian border standing in a cool cave before a mighty figure of the Buddha cut from the sheer rock face, did we not recognise that sublime majesty, that unique combination of infinite tenderness, penetrating awareness, and unstoppable energy which are the universally recognised attributes of the Enlightened Mind? I felt like throwing myself in the dust at His feet.

There in the Yungang caves, I felt our common connection with those Buddhists of old who had hewn out the caves, and devoted their lives and their skills to making the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear in the living rock. But I also knew that we caught only a faint echo of their practice. Since then dynasties had come and gone, dynasties which promoted the Dharma, and those that persecuted the Buddha's followers. The Dharma had flourished and weakened

and flourished again, most recently succumbing to the dark forces of communism. No doubt here and there were men and women who were still in touch with the Dharma's true spirit, who courageously kept up its practice. But as with my mind's eye I looked back over the thousands of miles through which we had travelled, I could not help realising how rare that must be. Our own great good fortune was impressed upon me again and the desire to dedicate my own life more fully to the practice of the Dharma in the company of friends, in the hope it would bring some good to the world.



Around the world in 180 Days

Kulaprabha



I'VE BEEN TRAVELLING. I left in January with a World Traveller plane ticket in my pocket. I went with Padmavati, a friend of nearly twenty years standing. Her younger daughter was born just three months before my daughter. These birth dates are relevant because Padmavati and I used to go off on holidays together with our kids and it was during one of those breaks that we made a resolution to go travelling together when they were off our hands - or as much off our hands as can be reasonably expected for nineteen year olds. Perhaps at the time it was rather a whimsical idea - we were sitting on a beach in Norfolk and the said daughters, then about three years old, had just been encouraged and had agreed to go off and build their own sand castle without any maternal help. One small step for daughters, one small release for their mothers!

About eighteen months ago we realised that the opportunity to fulfil that resolution was fast approaching. Did we have the money to go? the time? did we still want to? Yes to all of those questions - and there I was, taking off from Glasgow airport early one frosty morning. A couple of hours later I was watching London disappear from view as we headed for southern India and thirty degrees centigrade. I remember wondering why on earth I was doing this. Why not have a six month sabbatical in one place?

Would I ever see London or Scotland again? A flood of sentiment and an acute sense of belonging to the landscape below nearly had me in tears. Why on earth did I want to see kangaroos *in situ*!

So what have those six months been? a sight-seeing jamboree? a twentieth century equivalent to 'le grand tour de L'Europe'? a chance to visit old friends in faraway places? time out and away from family and job? a test of endurance? (after all it's a bit different carrying around a rucksack aged forty-nine than it was a few decades ago aged nineteen!) a deeper experience of friendship? an opportunity to let go of the security of familiar things, people and places? a time to reflect about where my life is going? and where I want it to go? a pilgrimage?

What is a pilgrimage? One thesaurus gives synonyms of journey, tour, travel, excursion, jaunt, junket and trip. Interesting isn't it? Not a word about religious quest, search for meaning, devotion, or places of spiritual significance. Another dictionary suggests wanderer, sojourner and one who journeys, usually a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion. The root of the word is from peregrinum, the Latin word for stranger, with the further meaning of 'across or through the land'.

Six months travelling through the world was definitely a pilgrimage in the sense of journeying as a stranger across the land. It was also a pilgrimage in the religious sense of travelling to sacred places. The first stage of our journey was through the Indian sub-continent - from Cape Cormorin in the south to Gangtok in Sikkim. There we travelled to places of spiritual significance to Buddhists, but Hindus seemed very pleased to show us round their temples too, offering us the chance to gain merit and giving us a mark on our forehead to validate our devotion. Some of the very old Hindu temples seemed to be places with a touch of chthonic mystery to them. If they have a parallel in my European background, it is with the stone circles and burial long-barrows, thousands of years

What have those six months been? a sight-seeing jamboree? a twentieth century equivalent to 'le grand tour de L'Europe'? a chance to visit old friends in faraway places? time out and away from family and job? a test of endurance? a time to reflect about where my life is going? and where I want it to go? a pilgrimage?

old, that are strung out from the Western Isles of Scotland in the north to Spain and Portugal in the south. These remnants of old European religious practice took many years to construct. It must have been a similarly huge task to create those old Hindu temples and, as with Medieval European cathedrals and monasteries, no doubt generations and whole families of craftsmen spent their working lives on that task.

The Buddhist caves at Ellora and Ajanta in Maharashtra are similar feats of faith, devotion and hard work. I wonder if ordination as a monk at Ajanta meant being given a hammer and chisel along with the more traditional robe and bowl! The beauty of the paintings and sculpture in those caves took my breath away. More significant still was the sense of gratitude and devotion that arose in me - not just gratitude for all the hard work and commitment of those monks, but a renewed and deepened grat-

Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim



itude and devotion of my own, directed towards the same spiritual truths that had inspired them. I felt the same kind of resonance at Sarnath and Nalanda, at the Vulture's Peak and the Bamboo Grove of Rajgir and at Bodhgaya, although I had hard to work harder at it in Bodhgaya as I didn't like the noise and tourist bustle of the place. Further north in Bengal and Sikkim, pilgrimage became more of an experience rooted in the present rather than in echoes from the past. There I enjoyed the feeling of fellowship with the Buddhist practice that was part of daily life in those places - signified by prayer flags in gardens, the victory banner, parasol and other eight auspicious signs carved or painted on to homes and schools, monks and the occasional nun walking through the streets, mantras traced on stone walls, young boys with their monk's robes tucked up out of the way as they raced around a monastery courtyard between lessons or peered over my shoulder pointing at photographs of their monastery in my guide book.

In some of the places I visited I was definitely a pilgrim. I was responding to a place and its history from an appreciation based on my own spiritual experience and aspirations. My inner environment was aligned with my outer one - my emotions, understanding and volition were finding outward equivalents in these remnants of the expression of inspiration and practice from centuries before. I was able to delve more deeply into my 'faith-follower, aspect - where my appreciation of beauty, of lineage, of convictions held by generations of practitioners, all coalesce to enrich my own personal links with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Two other factors were also very present and probably essential for all this irruption of faith in me.

One was my own happiness, contentment and even a sense of familiarity at being in India - notwithstanding the very great differences from European life and culture. At times I hardly even felt myself a stranger there. The other factor which aroused deeper feelings of faith was my awareness of suffering. In India life is very public. Joy and curiosity, excitement and discussion are there to be seen and engaged with very immediately. But suffering, too, is very visible and at times very shocking. Stuck in a noisy, exhaust-filled traffic-jam in Madras, I could see women washing their three-year-old daughters outside cardboard and corrugated iron huts just a few feetaway from me. Standing on a railway platform at 4am waiting for the Rajghani express to hasten me away from Patna, I watched the flutterings of a thin grey blanket lying not far from my feet, flutterings that came from the shallow breathing of whoever was hunched up beneath, trying to get a few moments more sleep before another day's existence began. A crutch lay beside him. For a few

moments our two lives existed and breathed close to each other, both human, but so, so different in their unfolding. I could get out of Patna any time, out and away on a train where a clean bed was provided and my meals and drinks were brought to me. Not a very probable option for the fluttering body under that blanket. An awareness of the need to keep open the doors of the Dharma grew in me with an urgency fuelled by a much keener appreciation of the weight of suffering that exists in the world.

I'm often asked what my impressions were of the different cultures I came across, and the different people. But my most heartfelt impression is of sameness, a sameness of human experience and conditions that belie all the apparent differences. Of course those differences exist - but underneath them I kept seeing glimpses of a more universal human condition - a paler and less defined outline seen through my eyes of what the Buddha revealed at Sarnath in his first teaching -

*this being, that becomes
from the arising of this, that arises
this not being, that does not become
from the cessation of this, that ceases*

This sameness that I became aware of can be a basis for a deeper sympathy and understanding between me and other human beings. I realised a world tour can be a pilgrimage whether the pilgrim visits any 'sacred' places or not, if the pilgrim can discover the universality of joy, suffering, and impermanence and maintain some equanimity, loving kindness and aspiration to practice in the midst of all that. People also ask me what my favourite place was, but I don't really have one. What I do have is a vivid impression of abundant life and a deep sense of what a beautiful planet I live on, and what an extraordinary web of existence I am part of.

In this way think the sense of being on pilgrimage was always there. I gladly immersed myself in all the beauty and wonder that arose in the midst of new landscapes. I became aware of how much I align myself by a sun which is in the south at midday - persisting in that view even when I knew very well that it had changed to being in the north!

I looked in amazement at new constellations in the night sky and a new moon that was the 'wrong' way round. In the immensity of the red desert heart of Australia, the experience of beauty took on a particular poignancy because of the fragility of the delicate ecological balance - great tracts of that land have been damaged by animals it never evolved to sustain.

As I travelled through Australia, New Zealand and America, I spent time with friends in the Order, knowing that they respond as I do to Sangharakshita's vision for establishing the Dharma in the West. I realised just how few of



Ayers Rock,
Australia

them there are to put that vision into effect. It threw up a challenge to me to work out exactly what my relationship actually is to these Order members in far flung parts of the globe. On a personal level many of them are my friends, but the challenge is to understand more clearly what my connection is on the more mythic level of shared commitment and vision for our Order. I don't know what the answer is yet - maybe it's no more than keeping them in mind or understanding that there is more to collective Order meditation practices than may meet my eye. I myself asking whether my momentum would hold up in a much smaller and more isolated sangha than the one I am part of here in the UK - one with just as much call for sustained effort, harmony and commitment.

How will the Dharma evolve in different Western countries? Will the desert expanses of Australia or the volcanic plateaux of New Zealand be places that can help Buddhists contemplate and gain insight into the ever-changing and interrelated nature of existence? will the icons and symbols of American society help or hinder the spread of the Dharma in the USA? and how do Americans gain the ability to see the face of their own cultural conditioning clearly enough to be able to stay true to the teaching of the Buddha? and how do I do that with my own cultural conditioning?

Which brings me full circle doesn't it? Literally. What I am left with are questions and reflections that arose in response to sights and sounds and people in many places, sacred and not so sacred, but they are questions which apply as much to me and as much to Britain as to anywhere else. Sameness again. I don't have the answers only the questions. I also have a conviction that I need to honour my questions and reflections and not let them sink out of the forefront of my life - which is maybe all a good pilgrim should have. Otherwise one might think that the pilgrimage could come to an end.

1999 Order Convention



EVERY SECOND YEAR THE

Western Buddhist Order gathers together - in ever larger numbers - for an international convention. The theme this year was A Celebration of the Order, which was celebrated throughout the convention's three parts: the women's convention, the combined convention and the men's convention.

For the fourth time Wymondham College in Norfolk, UK, was the venue - once an army base, now a boarding school. The large gymnasium was transformed into a shrine room, its walls swathed in blue cloth so that one felt oneself

amidst 'the clear blue sky.' The central piece was a golden stupa featuring the Buddhas of the four quarters on each side. It was created by artist Chintamani and a team in London.

The women's convention was led by Srimala, one of the three women Public Preceptors. Talks were given on the Spirit of the Order (by Padmasuri), The Kalyana Mitra Yoga (by Vidyadevi) and Confession as a Path to Transcendental Insight (by Sanghadevi.)

As well as talks, there were study groups, looking at a number of texts, mainly from the Pali Canon on the theme of sangha, harmony in the sangha, confession and forgiveness. The programme also included several hours of meditation and ritual each day. Among the 'special events' was an afternoon with our Dhamma sisters from India, five of whom were able to attend this convention, three for the first time. During the hot afternoons there was swimming, dancing and singing - as well as walks and talks with friends old and new.

For the first time for some years, Sangharakshita was present throughout the women's convention, inviting the various chapters of Order members to join him for lunch or supper, meeting with many people individually; and one afternoon giving a poetry reading - poems humorous and devotional, moving and perceptive, a handful chosen from the many he has written over the years.

Some 140 or so Dharmacharinis

(out of over 190 world-wide) were able to attend at least part of the convention. Numbers swelled considerably with the arrival of the Dharmacharis for the combined convention. Whilst the theme of celebrating the Order continued, the mood changed as, with a talk from Sangharakshita, we found ourselves on the second evening 'Looking Ahead - a little way,' - a timely, in some ways sobering, and yet encouraging talk. The following evening there was a celebration to mark Sangharakshita's forthcoming birthday, an opportunity to express something of the gratitude that members of the Order feel towards him for having created the Order and taught the Dharma and for many, especially in the early days of the Order, becoming a personal friend. Songs were sung, music played, poetry recited, a dance performed, and moving eulogies and expressions of gratitude kept everyone up far later than had been intended. The puja on the final evening brought together in one great act of devotion perhaps the greatest number of Order members ever, and was for me a particularly moving and uplifting occasion - living proof that despite very real difficulties, it is possible for people to come together on the basis of that which they hold most precious and find a deeply-felt common unity amidst so much diversity - part of the precious spirit of the Order.

Kalyanaprabha



L-R: Anjali, Mokshini, Jnanacandra, Dhammadinna

Ordinations

TWO MORE WOMEN JOINED the Western Buddhist Order in a public ordination ceremony held at the end of a Going for Refuge retreat at Tiratanaloka Retreat Centre in July. The private ordination ceremonies had been conducted the previous evening by Anjali and Dhammadinna respectively during which the two ordinands were given their new names: Mokshini (striving after liberation) and Jnanacandra (moon of wisdom).

The public ceremony was conducted by Public Preceptor Dhammadinna and was attended not only by those on the retreat but

also by close friends of the two ordinands. It was a particularly happy occasion as those present witnessed each one committing herself to following the Buddha's path to Enlightenment in spiritual fellowship with others.

Coincidentally both women are German. Jnanacandra made the journey to Tiratanaloka from Essen. Mokshini has lived in England for many years and is based in Brighton. Both have small children and were therefore unable to attend the longer Tuscany retreat which is taking place as this issue of *Lotus Realm* goes to press.

Tiratanaloka Stupa

THE CARVED RED SANDSTONE rises up from a grassy mound. From the retreat centre I can read part of the inscription carved around the base and painted in gold leaf: "Radiate Love".

The stupa contains some of the ashes of Dhardo Rimpoché, teacher and friend of Sangharakshita, and regarded by many as a Bodhisattva. Dhardo Rimpoché died in 1988 in Kalimpong. After his funeral some of his ashes were brought back to the West. One portion had already been enshrined in a stupa at Padmaloka men's retreat Centre and another portion at Sudarshanaloka Retreat Centre in New Zealand. A third portion was, at Sangharakshita's request, to be enshrined here at Tiratanaloka, the women's Ordination Retreat Centre in Wales.

Rod Drew was the sculptor. He had already created the stupa at Padmaloka. The landscaping was taken on by Ingrid Lever. We found many people were not only willing but happy to give money, time and energy to the project. The vision of the stupa captured people's imagination as the life and person of Dhardo Rimpoché had captured their hearts.

While Rod was carving the stone, and Chintamani was making the gold plated finial for the top of the stupa, we prepared the site with a series of rituals. One of these was based on a traditional ritual for 'pacifying the site', which lasts for seven days. A second ritual was carried out to 'stabilise' the site, during which a vajra was buried upright in the ground at the centre point of



the foundations. During another ritual, offerings which had been sent from all around the world were placed in the stupa's base. Among these was a beautiful hand-made book inscribed with Dharma verses and messages of gratitude to Dhardo Rimpoché.

The day of the stupa dedication, 27th June 1999, was the largest gathering to date at Tiratanaloka. Before leading a sevenfold puja, Sangharakshita, who came to Tiratanaloka to lead the ceremony, spoke about the significance of the occasion: it was significant not just for Tiratanaloka but for the whole Movement, and it was an especially significant, even poignant occasion for him to be involved in the

enshrinement of a portion of the ashes of his teacher and friend. The form he had chosen for the stupa was the pratiharya or 'miracle', form - because the greatest miracle is when somebody changes their way of life, when they make a decisive transition from worldly to spiritual life, and this is what happens when one is ordained. Tiratanaloka exists to enable women to work this miracle. He also added, "One could say that you have now Dhardo Rimpoché there...witnessing people's Going for Refuge, witnessing the performance of that miracle of transformation of life that takes place when someone Goes for Refuge to the Three Jewels."

Maitreyi

Nottingham Choristers

The Nottingham Buddhist Centre's re-formed women's choir gave its first performance earlier this year during a Cultural Evening at Wesak. The performance was repeated a few weeks later on the occasion of a visit from Sangharakshita.

The music was a poem of Thich Nhat Hanh arranged and set to music by Dorry Lake, the choir's conductor. The autumn season has now got under way with around eleven enthusiastic members.

Chris Handsworth



New Video on Motherhood



HOW DOES THE contemporary woman resolve such questions as whether or not to have a child, whether to live with the father of her children and how to deal with the tension between her own spiritual needs and the needs of her children? How do modern women

who are practising Buddhists deal with these issues?

In a new video, eleven women, all members of the Western Buddhist Order, communicate a wide range of perspectives in describing how they have sought to integrate motherhood and family life with their practice of Buddhism. Nine of the women are mothers, between them engaging in a wide range of different lifestyles. Two others have gone through a process of deep questioning before arriving at the decision not to have children.

Released in August by Clear Vision, 'Buddhist Women Speak on Motherhood' is a new departure from their current range of education resource packs, talks and newsreels. It was produced and directed by Vidyamala, part of a big-

ger project which Vidyamala undertook in 1996 to document the women's wing of the FWBO. Vidyamala, who has a background in film-making, has a strong desire to see women's practice of Buddhism recorded. 'Through history women's practice of Buddhism hasn't been well documented. I want to make sure that what we are doing now is on record, so that future women will benefit.'

The next project will look at the establishment of facilities enabling women to deepen their practice of Buddhism within the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the process of ordination of women into the Western Buddhist Order.

Kalyacitta

Buddhahfield for Women



HELD OUTSIDE IN NATURAL surroundings, Buddhahfield retreats use large tents for shrine and kitchen, and retreatants sleep in their own tents or benders. Being more closely in touch with nature, being affected by the weather, has a very positive effect on meditation practice and engagement with the Dharma. One

can be more aware of the principles of impermanence and conditionality.

This year there have been two Buddhahfield retreats for women. I joined in the second one which was held outside Monmouth, in a field surrounded by woods and overlooking the Wye valley. Led by Varabhadri, 19 women participated in the retreat, evoking Tara in ritual and meditation and taking part in the basic tasks of living - collecting wood and water, building fires and cooking.

Kalyacitta

To find out more about Buddhahfield retreats, phone: 0181-677 9564 or 0468 200 797

Tipu's Tiger

IN A SMALL CITY in the mountains of western Montana, the state's first and only Indian restaurant, Tipu's Tiger, has been open for two years and has enjoyed quite a lot of success. A committed team of men had developed after the first year around the vision and leadership of Buddhapalita and later Amara - although there were also two peripheral women on the team: Sharon, a chef from Vancouver, and myself

- I did book-keeping and some management.

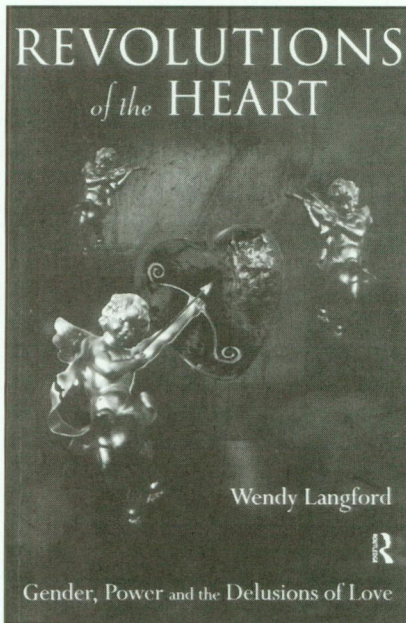
Early in 1999 premises became available near the original restaurant which provided a much larger kitchen and a really interesting new space. The team leapt at the opportunity and in May opened the second restaurant, Tipu's. This second location plus the two committed women gave us the opportunity to develop a women's team.

Originally we envisioned the new location being run by the women but it soon became apparent that it was more suited to the larger men's team. So after the re-modelling and re-opening of the original space into a fine dining restaurant, a women's

team coalesced around Sharon and myself, and another woman, Ann. The restaurant is now running successfully and the team is working together harmoniously, providing an atmosphere of challenge and friendship for four Buddhist women as well as several who are not necessarily Buddhists but who are interested and sympathetic to our way of working. At last, a lovely balance of two teams and a surprising amount of harmony between the men's team at Tipu's and the women at Tipu's Tiger. Right Livelihood seems firmly established in western Montana. Of all places! The land of cattle ranches and 'cowboys and Indians'!

Varada

Not so Happy Ever After



.....

Revolutions of the Heart
Gender, Power and the
Delusions of Love
 Wendy Langford
 Routledge 1999
 pp168
 £14.99

In her search for the truth about romantic love, Wendy Langford investigates aspects of psychoanalytic and feminist thinking, the dynamics of gender, the dialectics of power, and listens to the stories of fifteen women of differing ages and backgrounds whom she has interviewed for the study. The reader may know from the outset that this story of contemporary love is not going to have a very happy ending but the unravelling of the process of falling in and out of love - sad, tragic and sobering as it is - reveals some important truths about ourselves and becomes surprisingly gripping.

At the end of her search, with the delusions exposed - including the modern day version, the new 'democratic love' based on equality - Langford doesn't offer us definite conclusions; significantly the last sentence in the book is a question. With its range of theoretical and personal perspectives, *Revolutions of the Heart* requires careful reading, but it may well be a more satisfying option than a diet of romantic fiction, followed - in the midst of

love's disappointments - by the self-help books of the How to Mend a Broken Heart variety.

While 'love' remains a mystery, it has become staggeringly overloaded: it is expected to give us emotional and sexual fulfilment, a sense of identity, both emotional freedom and security; it is an act of rebelliousness and resistance to power and control, a spiritual experience, a path to freedom - although, 'what kind of freedom can be realised through a contract where, in exchange for the conditions which allow each to 'be themselves', each must approximate the other's unconscious fantasy of perfection?' (p153) No wonder love is best kept as a mystery.

In developing her critical perspective on love, Langford takes psychoanalysis as her starting point: our yearning for perfect love is 'underwritten by older, deeper narratives of which the individual may not be even dimly aware'. Being in love becomes very seductive for a woman who thus feels happy, attractive, competent and independent and, at the same time, powerfully affirmed by 'father' whose attention she has been seeking all her life. For a man, the seductiveness lies in finding - at last - a 'mummy' who is strong, independent and self-reliant and who is so wonderfully pleased and delighted with him and everything he does.

The revolution really does take place. It is a revolution that liberates both sexes, albeit only temporarily, from their normal gender identifications. Women 'in love' experience themselves as confident and able to 'do anything', embracing fully the resistance to their adult feminine identity and the restrictions of passivity, dependency and submissiveness that often accompany it. Men, too, undergo 'romantic transformations' which allow them to break through the constraints and limitations of their gender conditioning: they become gentle, sensitive, attentive and more communicative.

The inevitable consequence of this ill-planned revolution is the counter-revolution in which both sexes 'revert to type' and reach for their old gender identifications. Women, in their bitter disappoint-

ment, experience their partners as becoming emotionally withdrawn and distant; the rejecting and 'frustrating' father all over again; men, in their bewilderment, discover that the 'bad Mummy' still exists after all, the irrational, over-emotional woman who makes impossible demands on him. Langford describes and analyses the revolution and its failure in much detail and with great empathy and, even though she focuses on the woman's side of the story, her empathy extends to both sexes. In fact, it is both sad and disturbing to read about the aftermath of the revolution, the desperate solution which both parties find in 'maternalisation': the woman becomes 'everybody's Mummy', no longer able to be an individual in her own right and yet carrying a lot of maternal power and responsibility in the relationship - power of a dubious kind, undermining both to her and to him.

Combining the aspect of individual unconscious fantasies and expectations with an investigation of the dynamics of power in relationships allows Langford to cover all the aspects - or so it seems anyway - of where and how love goes wrong. The book raises many questions - not least the obvious one (dare I even mention it after reading the book!): is it ever possible for men and women to work with the gender differences in such a way as to be able to establish more 'transparent' and mutually satisfying relationships with one another? Men are the silent half in this study and, ironically, one could ask whether it is now their turn to articulate their experiences as 'the other sex'?

Finally, it might be fruitful for all to contemplate the question with which the book closes: 'If we loosen our attachments and begin to see love for what it is, we cannot but face a crisis of faith for if not love, what then would we place our hearts upon?'

The demystification of love is hardly big news for practising Buddhists - we know the theory, at least. Langford brings clarity, sensitivity and empathy to the continuing exploration of these complex issues.

Vajrapushpa

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