

LOTUS REALM

a new voice for Buddhist Women

DANGER!



13

Spring/Summer 2000 £2.50/\$4

Women at Work

A Touch of Magic at Taraloka

The Inconceivable Emancipation 3 - 10 July
Study School for Mitras

Through talks, discussion groups, devotion and ritual, we hope to glimpse for ourselves something of the nature of the Inconceivable Emancipation which is the goal of Buddhist practice.

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Through talks, discussions and meditation we will explore the quality of faith - our heartfelt response to truth and beauty - developing our individual 'song of confidence'.

Led by Sraddhagita and Saddhanandi

Led by Sarvabhadri

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 Ugyen 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.



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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Work is dangerous...

RETURNING TO TARALOKA

AFTER a couple of weeks away, I noticed the car-park was full of cars. I tried to recall which retreat was running. Drawing nearer, I noticed some very smart cars, not to say rather flashy cars - and I knew which retreat it was: a Newcomers' retreat. The joke goes that, unbeknown to their innocent owners, a few years involved with the Dharma will soon see an end to those flashy cars. They are, after all, part of a whole life-style. And practising the Dharma undoubtedly changes your life. The Dharma is dangerous.

Work, too, is dangerous; dangerous because it has an effect. Everything we do moulds us in one direction or another. Physical exertion leaves its mark on the body. Mental exertion leaves its mark on the mind. Sometimes I cannot help but wonder what effect the untold millions of hours of human life that are spent programming computers is having on the collective consciousness of modern humanity. Time will tell.

Work these days is rarely the enjoyable output of energy for a satisfying result. It is common to hear that people are off work due to 'stress'. Others suffer stress because they are without work. Work is dangerous; dangerous because it has an effect.

What we must do as Buddhists is to make that effect a positive one, a creative one, an effect that stands in direct relationship with the Goal of human Enlightenment. We must make sure our work helps us in our efforts to grow and develop as individuals.

Right Livelihood is work that helps the transformation of the individual or, at the very least, does not hinder it. Work that prevents an individual from developing isn't Right Livelihood. As Padmasambhava said to his disciples of all that stood in their way: 'Give it up!' Find an alternative.

The individual exists, of course, within human society and it is part of the duty of a Buddhist to try and transform society so that it becomes conducive to the striving of humankind towards Enlightenment. Thinking about modern society, you might conclude attempting any kind of transformation is a task too daunting, even too ridiculous to contemplate. The currents of greed and violence, of decay and degeneration stream through modern life with very dreadful force. And yet within that stream one can discern eddies and currents that are, like whirlpools, heading down into a different dimension, drawing energy out of the main stream towards something of a higher order.

Whenever Buddhists practice Right Livelihood - whether within an 'ordinary' organisation; or as part of a team of Buddhists working together, they become part of that steady effort to divert the raw energy of unenlightened life in the direction of the Transcendental which, as Buddhist tradition constantly reminds us, alone is capable of bringing succour and freedom to humankind.

Work may be dangerous, but put to the service of the Good, it is a powerful transformative.

Kalyanaprabha



Pioneers O Pioneers!

*I come to you with four gifts.
The first gift is a lotus-flower.
Do you understand?
My second gift is a golden net.
Can you recognize it?
My third gift is a shepherds' round-dance.
Do your feet know how to dance?
My fourth gift is a garden planted in a wilderness.
Could you work there?
I come to you with four gifts.
Dare you accept them?*¹

I don't remember when I first read or heard this poem, but I do remember the feeling it gave me. I was riveted. I felt a trembling around my heart. I nodded my head. I felt that Sangharakshita had looked into me and asked exactly the right question, offered exactly the right gift to a woman in her mid-thirties who, feeling unfulfilled and unhappy, had come to investigate Buddhism.

I didn't understand the lotus-flower, nor recognize the golden net. I am not much of a dancer, literally or metaphorically. But the image of working in a garden planted in a wilderness spoke to me with a mystery and with a challenge that was utterly irresistible. What is it that still sends shivers up my spine when I hear those words - words which have become a guiding light in my life?

I have wondered, over and over, what has driven me to take on what I have, especially when it all seems too much. Why do I often want to start things anew, leave behind what is getting stale or unsatisfactory? Why have I been so restless? Why has the western United States, the Wild West, drawn me away in the middle of my life from everything familiar to start over again? Why am I so engaged by what others deem to be impossible challenges? Am I trying in an odd way to satisfy an appetite for risk or thrill-seeking? Am I still trying to rebuild self-esteem shattered by a destructive relationship? Why do I seem to like being overstretched, on the cutting edge, a big fish in a small pond? Is it a big ego? Is it just plain 'orneriness'? Or is there a very positive quality that makes me reach for the highest shelf even when I put my back out doing it?

Probably the answer is a little bit of 'yes' to all these explanations; but it is the last, the positive quality, that has actually had the most profound effect on my life and kept me on the Path to Enlightenment. And it has begun to purify many of the less than positive qualities. It is what I would call the 'pioneering spirit'.

*In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.*²

The Great Pioneers of America

Ever since I was a little girl, I have been fascinated by stories about pioneers. Growing up near Boston, Massachusetts, every year our school field trips took us to the 'Plimoth Plantation' where, in the early 17th century, the first English settlers to the area made their home. The lives of the women especially fired my imagination. Giving up their homes, families, civilisation, everything familiar and safe, they set sail to an unknown region to 'start over', in order to practice their religion and a way of life that they deemed ethical and right: stepping into the unknown because they had to act in accordance with their beliefs. Creating a garden in the wilderness.



I was raised within an old New England family, descended from the second wave of English settlers, merchants who set out to recreate England in the New World. I was taught that following tradition and conforming to your role in society was the way to be happy. But despite my background, I read everything I could lay my hands on about the pioneers who moved west by way of the Oregon Trail. My favourite movies and TV shows were westerns like *Bonanza*, *Daniel Boone* and *Wagon Train*. My heroines were Susan B. Anthony (a suffragette) and Harriet Tubman (of Underground Railroad fame.) When I found Henry David Thoreau's writings about his experiments at Walden, they influenced me profoundly and I often hitchhiked to Walden Pond to imagine his life there and to enjoy the beauty of the place.

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.*³

At the age of twenty, I discovered the writings of Scott and Helen Nearing.⁴ Scott was an economics professor at Columbia University during the Great Depression (1930's) and was blacklisted for his radical (read 'communist') views of economics. Banned from teaching, he and his wife, Helen, bought some land in Vermont, built a house and developed a self-sufficient lifestyle. He described the division of life into 'bread labor' (i.e.: work to provide food, clothing and shelter), and 'leisure time' to pursue reading, writing, teaching and travel. They developed a lifestyle that was deeply ethical and based in non-violence and non-exploitation, almost entirely independent from the 'cash economy'

that I, too, felt disgusted with but helpless to change. They were the first vegetarians I had ever encountered and their argument for vegetarianism was so convincing I began trying to be one too. Their wilderness was not physical (Vermont ceased being a wilderness in most senses in the 19th century) but social, economic and moral. Reading their words, I was determined that some day I would follow in their footsteps.

However, the status quo turned out to be stronger than my determination to radically alter my lifestyle and, having married a man who was really not fired by their ideas, I continued my college education, divorced and remarried and began a career in bookkeeping, trying to make 'tradition' work. I always lived a bit differently from the average member of American society. I flirted with the remains of the hippie subculture, my second husband being a 'philosopher', a rebellious old hippie and Civil Rights activist. But the radical ideals that had stirred me did not yet find their way into remoulding my life.

Dharma Pioneers

It was when I encountered the infant FWBO in Newmarket, New Hampshire, that I found a home for my ideals and people whose radical views of life's possibilities resonated with my own. Pioneering into the human mind - which is what the Dharma seemed to be about - struck me as a brave and heroic pursuit and I threw myself into it with fervour. I have no doubt that Sangharakshita's poem refers at least in part to planting a garden of mindfulness in the wilderness of one's own mind and working there with the tools of meditation and reflection. But it was also clear to me that our

Buddhist Center, Aryaloka, was itself a 'garden in the wilderness', the wilderness of modern materialistic and apathetic society. Helping to 'save Aryaloka' financially and build a community around it became a cause I could engage with and I felt the challenge forcing me to grow beyond my own small concerns. My friend, Marilyn, and I moved in together, thereby starting the first FWBO women's community in the US. We were also among the first American women to ask for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order.

Heading Out West

But somehow, pioneering in Newmarket, NH wasn't quite enough for me and I began to ache to have adventures. I was in a process of sloughing off the burden of traditional values and roles, questioning the myth that a secure home and family was the highest goal I could aspire to. I was realising that what kept me from living out my ideals was the fear of being bold, of calling attention to myself and of



disappointing my parents. I felt that striking out on a big adventure was exactly what I needed on a mythic level.....so I booked myself a train ticket to Montana, 2,500 miles away, a ticket to the Wild West.

Three days on the train: leaving behind the east coast with its endless roads, houses and trees, passing the ruins of the steel mills at the southern end of Lake Michigan, rolling through Wisconsin where my great grandfather had homesteaded after leaving his home in Norway, endlessly running through the Great Plains where the early pioneers found fertile farmland, paralleling the travels of Lewis and Clark's expedition as well as the deep ruts of the westward-bound Oregon Wagon Trail of the 19th century, I finally saw the tips of the Rocky mountains on the horizon. All day the train approached them and all day they grew larger, more magnificent than any mountains I had ever imagined. We reached them at sunset. It was late August, and they were snow-capped. By midnight I had been dropped off in Whitefish, Montana and was soon sitting in a hot tub on the roof of my hotel. The wilderness was close enough to touch. I was 'home' and I knew it.

It took me years to actually move 'home' and lots of agonising. I tried living in Cambridge, England, at the heart of team-based Right Livelihood business. I loved what people were doing there and I grew from living and working with them. The 'garden' was beautiful but the wilderness felt much too far away. My heart called me from Montana and made the rest of me feel miserable and somehow like an impostor. After celebrating my 40th birthday on solitary retreat in the 'wilds' of Scotland, I realized that I had to answer the call, though I didn't really know why. Leaving everything familiar and 'civilised', the Buddhist society in microcosm in Cambridge, passing through New England and saying farewell to my family and friends and Aryaloka, I moved west and 'home'.

Tipu's Tiger

Starting over again in Montana was made easier by having friends to come to. Saramati and Varasuri had been there when I first visited, establishing the FWBO while raising a family and working hard at their careers. And Buddhapalita, my lover of many years, had moved there six months before me.

I found myself deeply happy to be in the west and though making a living and finding a place to live were difficult, I was sure that I was moving in the right direction. But after one year of living with people who were marginally interested in Buddhism and working on small bookkeeping jobs, I realized that there was yet more pioneering to be done. I managed at last to find



women in the sangha who wanted to live together and helped Buddhapalita, himself a bold and brilliant pioneering spirit, start a business with a few friends that they hoped would grow into a team-based Right Livelihood. We called it Tipu's Tiger.

Tipu's Tiger, the first Indian restaurant in Montana, was a success from the start. There was nothing like it in Missoula nor anywhere closer than Seattle. So, as it grew, the project demanded more and more from anyone who was willing to be involved in it. The energy it demanded and created was inspiring and frightening. At the start I was just intending to be the bookkeeper and otherwise to let Buddhapalita and the other guys get on with it. But fairly soon the situation began to cry out for more people to commit themselves to make it work. Men responded to the pleas, as did I and a few other women; but for most of the time I was the only committed woman on an otherwise male team. This situation reminded me of the plight of so many of the woman pioneers of the 'wild west'. Many more men answered the calls of opportunity in the west than women, and many of the women went west only because of their husbands. There are many stories of women who died of loneliness or who, widowed, found themselves trying to make a farm survive with just a handful of hired hands, in a land made hostile by the broken treaties and aggressive actions of the white settlers toward the native tribes. I felt myself toughening up in response to the rough and tumble of working with idealistic young men. But I imagined something more.

Ordination

It was at this point that I went off to be ordained. I spent six amazing weeks in a monastery on an Italian hilltop - with only women. It was, coincidentally, another

first - the first ordination retreat for women in Tuscany. Sleeping in my tent in the olive grove, circumambulating the cloisters in deep silence, celebrating the richness of our lives together, I felt that this sharing of my life with other women was the only thing my life in Montana lacked. But how could I integrate my dream of women working and living together, pioneering the spiritual life, in our little western town?

Tipu's - Tiger Take Two

The answer came a few months after I returned to Montana. Another property near the original restaurant was available and we needed room to expand. Why not have two restaurants and start up a women's team to run one of them? We already had one female pioneer who had come down from Canada to join us and I had high hopes of finding more. But when it came to running the restaurant with a women's team, we discovered it was very hard to find women willing to throw in their lot with us...with one notable exception. Marjorie, who has lived with me for over two years and who helped me buy the house the women's community lives in (by signing her name to a thirty year mortgage!), has given notice at her job where she is a professional engineer and will be joining our intrepid team to replace Ann, a heroic and pioneering woman who needs to go off adventuring to follow her heart. That leaves us patching the rest of the team together with a handful of delightful women who are working part-time while they also go to school and try to figure out what they want to do with their lives. There is so much more left to do, stabilising the two restaurants financially and building a team of staff that is committed to the spiritual as well as the ethical slant we take, making it sustainable for all, continuing to plant, prune, water and protect as well as harvest

our 'garden in the wilderness'. We will need more people to join us who are drawn to a pioneering life.

What Makes a Pioneer?

What does it take to be a pioneer? What qualities are required to step out of the mould and follow your heart even when the direction seems so impossible that you wonder how you will ever survive? What does it take to keep going when the trail seems endless and the food is running out and everything around you seems hostile to what you are trying to do? What about the disasters? How does one not lose heart?

I have thought a lot about these questions as I stumble along the path I have chosen for myself. It seems to me that the qualities which got me to take the first step are the same ones that have allowed me to flourish in a pioneering situation. I cannot claim these qualities are very developed in me but I glimpse them, bump into them and am inspired when I find them in my friends.

The first one has to be *vision and imagination*. You start with a vision of how some new step will change your life in a direction that you want to go in. The vision can be conceptual or it can be intuitive or a combination of both. And as you go along, taking the steps, breaking the trail and doing what needs to be done, the vision often expands and broadens out. But when the trail gets muddy or goes up a box canyon and you find yourself needing to backtrack or you find yourself lost, the quality needed then is the ability to reconnect with your vision. At other times you just need faith to keep going even when the vision gets temporarily obscured. Or sometimes perhaps the dumb tenacity to trust that once you did have a vision. Maybe those qualities all stack up to what the Buddhist tradition calls *virya* - energy in pursuit of the good. It also sounds suspiciously like the first limb of the Noble Eightfold Path!

Then there is *courage*, the courage to keep trying when the odds seem stacked against you. There is also the courage to stop and completely re-think your plan of action. And just enough smarts to know when to do what. And there is the brand of courage that urges you to follow your convictions when no one else understands what you are going on about. Siddhartha Gautama exhibited those courageous qualities many times as he sought enlightenment. He followed one teacher until he had learned all he could and when he realized that he still was not enlightened, he turned his back and walked away to keep up the search. Another time he took some milk rice and left his ascetic friends scoffing at his faintheartedness. But he did what he had to do to find enlightenment - luckily for us!



Another quality of the pioneer is *the ability to keep going* beyond what is comfortable, letting your own immediate needs be set aside for the sake of the bigger picture, taking just enough to keep yourself going and letting others take what they need without resentment. This requires a willingness to dedicate yourself to something higher than what you can see above your head just now. And it has to be backed with a sense of integrity, that comes from knowing that you are doing what you deeply believe in. If that integrity is not there, you are in danger of falling into the quicksand of resentment when you get no obvious personal payback for what you have done. Sometimes there will be no payback other than knowing you lived what you believed.

Kshanti, the Buddhist quality of *forbearance or patience*, has to be there in the pioneer also. It can manifest in the ability to look into an utterly impossible situation and not get so desperate you end up making a big mistake. Kshanti includes the ability to wait, allowing the future to be unknown for much longer than is comfortable, not making a move until some way becomes clear. Or, paradoxically, it may mean being willing to step into the fog guided only by your vision or intuition about which is the right way to go. Allowing solutions to unfold, like flowers. And again, finding just enough smarts to know which is called for. It is far too easy to become paralysed by fears and anxiety and to just sit down on a rock and cry.

Flexibility, fluidity and resilience are qualities that have been drawn out of me by the challenging situations I have put myself in. These are the best lessons I am learning, lessons all pioneers have needed to learn. Bend or you will break. Hold to your vision and ideals but hold them lightly and let them evolve. Hold people to their word but expect them to be at least as flawed as you are yourself. And learn what gives you strength and what weakens you, and strengthen yourself all you can. Find what inspires you and go back to it often to drink deeply.

One of the most interesting lessons that pioneering is teaching me is that I have to constantly *redefine success*. I wither when I fall back on defining success in terms of my own ego or what I am accomplishing in the eyes of others. When I find that dip in confidence, that feeling that 'I can't do this', a strange thing happens. I feel myself getting smaller and at the same time, I have to expand. The egotistic me has to shrink, give up, let go, back off. Of course 'I' can't do 'it'. Then the part of me that is connected with my goal or vision expands and opens up a vast ocean of resources and creativity. A new definition of success comes in when the big picture is in



view. The more I give, the larger I become. But it isn't simple or straightforward and I seem to have to re-learn this lesson over and over.

In the end, the quality that has kept me pioneering has been this darned restlessness and inability to accept second best. I just don't settle down because of a sense of unsatisfactoriness, because of this unwillingness to let things be less than perfect when I can figure out a way to move forward. I am sure this is why I became a Buddhist in the first place. And to my mind, all Buddhists who seriously take on this path are pioneers, are working in the garden in the wilderness that Sangharakshita offers us in his poem. What better thing to do?

Walt Whitman, our quintessentially American poet, sums it all up for me in *Leaves of Grass*:

*...moving yet and never stopping, Pioneers! O Pioneers!*⁵

Notes

1. Sangharakshita, *Complete Poems 1941/1994*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, England, 1995, p299.
2. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, VT, 1995, p21.
3. *Ibid*, p73.
4. Helen and Scott Nearing, *The Good Life*, Schocken Books, Inc., New York, NY, 1970
5. *The Works of Walt Whitman*, Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., Ware, England, 1995, p211.



Work As *Practice*

1981 WAS A YEAR OF crisis in my life; a year when I came to an important decision: it was time to put something back into the society from which I undoubtedly benefited but in which I had refused to participate. (I had been involved in left wing and feminist politics for several years and was becoming disillusioned.)

After much soul searching, I decided to train as a nurse. For the next fifteen years, nursing was at the heart of my life. In a way, I had found my love.

In 1992, I came across the Dharma, and was soon introduced to the Buddha's teaching on Right Livelihood, the fifth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path:

*'And what monks, is the Noble Truth of the Way of Practise Leading to the Cessation of Suffering? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: - Right View, Right Thought; Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood; Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.'*¹

I learnt that Right Livelihood is work that is ethical; work that doesn't degrade you, but gives you an opportunity to make a useful contribution to society.

Being an idealist, I immediately examined my own situation in the light of what I had learnt. I found nothing lacking. I was - and remain - confident that nursing is Right Livelihood.

A Nurse's Life

At that time, I was a senior sister in a Coronary Care Unit, managing a 10-bedded unit caring for critically ill people. I enjoyed my work, both the contact with patients and working as part of a team. I enjoyed giving freely of my energy and expertise and seeing such clear results - the discharge home of healthy people. And I was happy that I was making a real contribution to society.

Part of my job at that time was resuscitation training; teaching hospital staff - nurses, pharmacists, radiographers, porters etc. - how to respond to the sudden cessation of cardiac activity i.e. what to do if someone's heart stops beating. I participated in that situation

many, many times, working as part of a team attempting to resuscitate those who have prematurely died.

But even when we were successful in bringing our patients back to life, I found we had not necessarily solved all the problems. People often had psychological difficulties as a result of their brush with death. The enforced realisation of their own mortality often led to a questioning that I found moving, uplifting and inspiring. It was a privilege to help people face up to this very real fear and to come to a resolution to make the most of the remainder of their lives.

This aspect of my work made me ask myself many questions. Where is consciousness at the time of cardiac arrest? How can one make emergency treatment as untraumatic as possible, given its inherently traumatic nature? How should one support the staff who go through these life and death situations as part of their everyday working life? How to, even whether to, involve the family in the resuscitation attempt?

Learning more about the Dharma, I started thinking about the value of life in a different way. I read in the *Dhammapada*:

*'All beings tremble before violence.
All fear death.
All love life.'*²

But there were still many questions: should we simply prolong life because we have the capability - in every situation and at all times? If not, how does anyone come to a decision of what is the right thing to do? And what about finite resources and rationing in health care? We might want to give everyone the best possible care, but resources do not always allow it.

Endless discussions with my new friends at the Manchester Buddhist Centre around these issues almost certainly made me a better nurse, more aware of the ethical implications of decisions that I had previously

made on quite a pragmatic basis.

On Buddha Day 1993 I became a Mitra of the FWBO and, realising I wanted to commit myself fully to the Three Jewels, I asked for Ordination into the Western Buddhist Order.

By now the Dharma was having more and more of an impact on me. I began to notice the gossiping and backbiting that went on in the workplace and the effect it was having on me. Dharma practice is about change, but there were aspects to my work environment that made it very difficult to implement change. Sometimes I felt as if I was caught in a net of other people's views of what was acceptable and what was not. It was alright to be vegetarian, for instance, but to decide to stop drinking alcohol was definitely not OK! As well as this, I began to find the power politics very difficult to deal with. My initial response was to stand back and let those interested in power games get on with it, but when it came to budget and staffing discussions, I couldn't help getting drawn in as I had to stand up for the needs of the Coronary Unit under my care. On occasions my refusal to get involved was seen as something sinister. People felt challenged by my stance, and counter-attacked by criticising my growing commitment to Buddhism.

Building Project

1994 saw the start of a new project in Manchester: an old warehouse had been bought to house a new, much larger Buddhist Centre and volunteers were needed to help with its refurbishment and renovation. Evenings and days off now saw me wielding hammer or screwdriver in a cold, dirty, noisy building site. The contrast with my ordinary working life was sharp. But what had the strongest effect on me was not the very different work I was engaged in, but the way people worked together. Although nurses, especially nurses in critical care, work together in tightly-knit teams, the degree of trust, care and co-operation I experienced in the building project was an eye opener to me. We held a strong collective vision of what our work on the new Centre was for, and that vision transformed the building work into a pleasure. I delighted in it.

In the end, the contrast between working in the hospital and working with members of the Sangha became too much. I sold my house forty miles from Manchester, resigned from my job, and spent the next six months working full-time on the building project until the Centre was opened in June 1996. There followed a further fifteen months working as part of the team running the administration of the new Centre. During this time I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order.

Gift Shop

1997: another option arose. For some time my friend Akasasuri and I had been discussing the possibility of starting up a women's team-based Right Livelihood. We wanted to open an Evolution shop.

Evolution is the name given to a chain of gift shops run by the Buddhist trading company, Windhorse Trading. At last, an Evolution shop in Manchester became a possibility and Akasasuri and I set out to make that possibility into a reality.

The shop has now been open for nearly three years and in that time I have had a very different experience of Right Livelihood to the one I had as a nurse. These days my work is as shop assistant and Dharma spy! I am involved in running a gift shop which is also an (under-cover) centre of Dharma activity in the heart of the High Street.

Aims of Team-Based Right Livelihood

The aims of team-based Right Livelihood are four-fold. Firstly, to provide work that is ethical. We try to ensure that the goods we sell do not involve any exploitation. We try to make sure that the producers of the goods are given a fair price for their products; and that the people who buy them get value for money. We place a high value on our practice of honesty and straight-forwardness and it is important to us that we are scrupulous in this area. If, for example, someone is given insufficient change, we will do our best to correct our mistake immediately.





shop becomes a crucible: a place of transformation where the only limitations are our ability or willingness to engage. It requires fearlessness if we are to step knowingly into this crucible, really facing up to ourselves squarely.

Transformation

This transformation takes place when we apply the principles of the Dharma to our everyday working life. There is no aspect of the Dharma that I cannot practice as part of my work in the shop. In particular, there is the practice of mindfulness. We handle 'things' all the time, often very fragile things so we need to take care. Our small stock room is often crowded so we need to be careful about the way we move around to avoid hurting ourselves or others, and to avoid breaking things.

Another area in which we can practise is in developing a spirit of service. We put ourselves at the service of the customers, helping them to choose the right gift at the right price. Awareness is needed to be of help in a sensitive and caring way.

Responsibility

One of the most important areas in team-based Right Livelihood is learning to take responsibility. This applies not just to the practical aspects of the job, many and varied as these may be. (In some ways, that is the easy part of it.) We also need to take responsibility for our mental states - really taking on the Buddha's teaching that they do not arise at random but in dependence on conditions. We can learn to spot the conditions required for the arising of positive mental states and try to bring them about. For example, a proper night's sleep may be a pre-requisite for maintaining positive mental states throughout the day, so we need to consider this when planning our evenings. We also need to learn how to work with our negative mental states, not passively waiting for them to go, but seeing them as our mental states. We have created them and we have a responsibility to do something about them, knowing that if we don't, that mental state will have unpleasant consequences.

*'We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.'*³

Through team-based Right Livelihood, we learn to take responsibility both for getting the task done and for our own mental states, and we can begin to respond to the needs of others in the team. Obviously, we cannot take responsibility for others, each must do that for themselves; but we can bear others in mind, helping them to create the conditions they need to stay in positive mental states. For example, if we know that one of our friends really doesn't like it if there are dirty cups in the sink, we could decide to clear them away, even if it doesn't really matter to us. In this small way, we can help each other and thus begin to take responsibility for the overall situation.

Secondly, we practice dana, or generosity. We operate on the principle 'give what you can and take what you need'. This means we put as much of our time and energy into the shop as we can; and we are given, as support, an amount that covers our basic needs. Each of us calculates our needs separately, and aim to take as little as we can, so that the surplus from the business can be given away. This surplus is given to help fund Buddhist projects both locally and nationally.

Thirdly, we prioritise our own personal spiritual practice. We see our work as a means to fulfilling our aspiration to move towards 'seeing things as they really are'. As part of our work, or to complement our shop work, we go on retreat regularly, including solitary retreat. This helps to develop that deeper sense of what it is we are trying to do with our lives, including our work in the shop.

Fourthly, there is the practice of working in a team. We encourage, support, and challenge each other in our attempts to practice the Dharma. We try to bear each other in mind. The team provides good soil for the development of spiritual friendship, which, as the Buddha reminded Ananda, is 'the whole of the spiritual life'.

To work according to the principles of team-based Right Livelihood is transformative. You could say the

Each of us can also take responsibility by trying to maintain a connection with the common vision, the inspiration that motivates us to work in team-based Right Livelihood. We each have a responsibility to ensure that our connection with the Three Jewels is alive and vital and that we can see it in operation through our daily work. In our shop we have visual reminders of the bigger perspective in which we operate. It is important to us, for example, that we have taken some of the space in our stock room to create a beautiful shrine in front of which, every morning, we recite the Refuges and Precepts, creating a context for the day's work. We gather there again at the end of each day for a brief collective ritual. This holding of the individual and collective vision is vital to the success of the team and the business since in the end our spiritual practice is its *raison d'être*.

Another central aspect to team-based Right Livelihood is the need for open and honest communication. In fact, without it, the team can't function. This can be a very challenging and transformative area of practice. It is not an area in which everyone feels naturally comfortable, but through kindness and looking out for each other an atmosphere of trust can be built where each team-member can be open about how they feel, and discuss with others the 'working ground' of their individual spiritual practice. The team can then give support and encouragement. All this requires courage, the courage to let oneself be seen by others. To open up, believing that others have one's interests at heart, is a mark of real friendship, and a sign that the team is really working.

*If there is to be any real, genuine Buddhist movement in this country, as we hope eventually there will be, it can only grow out of a community of people who are ethically, psychologically and spiritually in true contact and communication with one another - who are not just fellow members of an organization, but friends, and related perhaps even more deeply than that on the spiritual plane.*⁴

The element of the team working well and pulling together is essential if we are to consider ourselves as Dharma spies. The way we relate to each other, the friendship and trust that exists amongst us all go to create an atmosphere in the shop that draws comment. Each time someone says that the shop has a friendly, relaxed, comfortable, helpful atmosphere, the Dharma has touched someone who may never have walked through the door of a Buddhist Centre. The leaflets on our counter advertising Newcomers classes may lead to another person stepping into the Manchester Buddhist Centre and hearing the Dharma, learning to meditate, and being touched in a way that brings meaning to their life.

In the shop my work really matters. It matters because through it I am being transformed, I am moving towards my ideal, moving towards becoming

the person that I want to be, towards fulfilling my potential. I am also contributing to other people in the team growing and changing, and collectively we are helping the Dharma to flourish through the money we give, and through creating a place in the heart of the city where people may come across the Dharma for the first time.

All this does not mean that nursing has lost its appeal. Often I feel drawn to re-enter that world, but I am convinced that what I am able to do in the shop is of real value. I am committed to working in Right Livelihood for all the reasons I have already stated - and that means I must live with the tension that I am not able to work as a nurse.

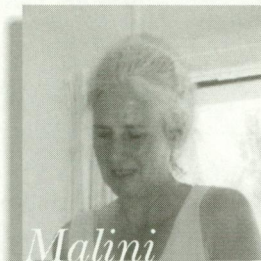
Notes

1. Mahasatipatthana Sutta, *Digha-nikaya*, 22.21
2. *Dhammapada*, transl. Thomas Byrom, p49
3. *ibid.* p3
4. Sangharakshita, *Vision and Transformation*, Windhorse 1990, p110



Tea-break in The stock room

Healing Work



Morning Reflection

Today the world seems to be in harmony. The sun - the fire element - is shining brightly. The sea - the water element - is responding: sparkling, reflecting the light of the sun. Its movement is rhythmic, and at the same time one has a sense of immense depth. There is a little breeze bringing a freshness to the air, a relief after the stillness and humidity of the last few days. The earth is still moist from yesterday's rainfall, the refreshed plants are reaching up to the sun with renewed strength and vigour. The earth has not become sodden by the rain; it is still firm beneath our feet giving a sense of solidity

and presence. How wonderful the world seems when it is in perfect balance as it is today. How wonderful our bodies feel, too, when the elements within us are in balance, each nourishing the other, each with its different vibration of energy interacting with all the others with ease. Not too heavy, nor bogged down with too much earth or water; not ungrounded or dried up with too much air or fire; and not turbulent or irritable with too much wind (air).

How rare it is to feel in perfect balance. This is what many of us strive for, and yet perhaps, if we were always in perfect balance, we would forget that life is impermanent, intrinsically unsatisfying and illusory. We would be sitting in our god-realm, unaware of the song of impermanence.

As a Buddhist acupuncturist and healer, my work brings me daily into very immediate contact with the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths state that 1) there is suffering 2) there is a cause to suffering 3) there is a state that is free from suffering and 4) there is a path that leads away from suffering.

As a healer I try to ease people's pain by using my hands, directing towards them feelings of love or



metta. As an acupuncturist I try to get the elements in someone's body to work in harmony, to enable energy to flow freely throughout their being by inserting fine needles at specific points. As a Buddhist, I try to develop awareness of the nature of suffering and its causes, as I work with my clients towards a state of freedom from suffering.

Preparation for Work

Preparing my room for healing is like preparing my room for meditation. It helps to set up a positive and conducive atmosphere which then paves the way for the development of greater awareness, and greater positivity. These in turn can become the basis for developing greater insight into reality. But if that is not always possible, at least there can be a clearer understanding of the specific problems which people bring to me for treatment.

In cleaning and tidying my room, I am not only cleaning in a literal sense. I am also mentally trying to clean up the energy I bring to the room. Some days when I am cleaning I feel immense gratitude for being in such a beautiful place. I feel a strong aspiration to maintain the beauty around me. I experience a deeply-felt devotion to the higher forces for good, whether they be angels, or devas (god-like beings of light), or the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I am aware of their presence, but not their form, and feel truly blessed, humble, receptive, open and expansive. On other days I do the same thing, but I am not open and receptive. Cleaning feels like a chore. I just don't want to do it. I feel heavy and contracted, filled with craving or aversion, wanting things to be different, unaware of what is around me or even, really, what I am doing. I have simply become a habit.

I try to reflect on the nature of the mind. The way it sees things is illusory. Nothing objectively has changed. All that has changed is the contents of my mind and it is up to me to empty them. Sometimes that is relatively easy. I laugh at myself and let them go. But at other times it feels as if there is a gremlin in there that refuses to budge. This gremlin seems to be embedded in the very cells of my being and is not easy to dislodge.

Interconnectedness

Very often when I'm finding it hard to let go of a habitual way of thinking or being, my clients will turn up in the same predicament. It is as if there is some higher force saying 'time now to look at this attachment and let it go'. I have several clients at present with arm problems. Each has come with their own particular physical cause, yet none of them has recovered simply through working with the problem on the physical plane. Change only starts to happen when I can help them to look at what they habitually hold on to.

Interconnectedness works in other, unexpected, ways. At one time I was studying *The Perfection of Wisdom*



texts, which communicate the Enlightened vision of Reality in terms of 'sunyata' or emptiness. In my work I was putting more emphasis on opening myself to my own emptiness and trying to make myself more receptive to higher forces in the universe so that they could work through me. Then a client turned up whom I had been treating for some time. This person had a severe head injury which caused a lot of pain both physically and emotionally. Their whole accustomed way of life had suddenly come to an end. Not surprisingly, all the emotions of the grieving process were present, including anger. It was in such a state that they suddenly said to me, 'its all an illusion - I'm totally empty'. My ears pricked up. Was this not the emptiness of sunyata? Was the suffering also, ultimately, an illusion? Enough trust had built up between us by this time so that we were able to have a good discussion - not least on the importance of metta, or loving-kindness, towards oneself, as well as towards others.

Working with people is a path of working with the mind, one's own mind, as well as the minds of one's clients. With some people I do a lot of talking, which can be a necessary part of the healing process. Talking with a person helps me to come to some understanding of what is going on for them. At other times talking on

the part of the client can be part of tension-release or even avoidance until trust has been built up between us. At other times, or with certain personalities, there is the initial talking and then we go into a deep silence. The atmosphere tangibly changes and a sense of peace and stillness descends and we are connected through this shared experience. It is on these occasions that I know that a deep level of healing is taking place, way beyond that of the physical body, and we are working on the mind in a very direct way. At other times, I am working with people in silence but it is not a real silence - they have gone into their own inner world of thoughts. It is so easy on those occasions to just let my own mind wander and not keep focused on what I am doing.

At such times I just look at the beautiful environment around me, the sea, the trees, the flowers and feel myself nourished by the beauty. I allow my mind to expand and on some level this gets transmitted to my client. But on other occasions I, too, can get lost in my own thoughts so that all conscious connection is lost. I have to admit that this does not often seem to be picked up by my client; but I know that I have ceased to be in the present and awareness has been lost. Even at such times something useful may be happening. On one such occasion a client said, coming out of her inner world, 'I feel I keep going round and round the same old circle.' I laughed and said, 'Yes, we are very attached to doing that aren't we?.... we continue round and round until we are able to stay with the feeling and stop reacting.'

Praise and Blame

Another important practice is working with the so-called Worldly Winds - especially praise and blame. In any area of life, we feel good when we are praised and not so good when we are blamed. Likewise in healing it is so easy to feel good when a client feels much better after a treatment, and to feel disheartened or inadequate when they don't. I have to be constantly vigilant in keeping my mind open and caring; wanting to do the best I can to help someone, and at the same time not getting attached to the results. We are, after all, a series of processes, and the speed of recovery is largely dependent on how far along that process someone is when they turn up for treatment.

My work as an acupuncturist and healer isn't separate from my life and practice as a Buddhist. My work helps me to become aware of and to investigate my mental states. It helps me to develop metta, karuna, mudita and even equanimity, the four 'illimitable' positive emotions of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. It enables me to develop insight into conditionality. In short, it gives me plenty of opportunity to work at purifying my own mind and to do what I can to help others to do likewise.

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In Search of Freedom, Meaning and Love

Vimoksalehi

FOR AS LONG AS I can remember the direction of my life has been determined by a search for freedom, meaning and love. This is what motivated me to become a Buddhist. In many ways I didn't know what I was taking on when I started calling myself a Buddhist. But I did know that Buddhists believed in non-violence and they didn't believe in God.

Over time I learnt that the practice of Buddhism addresses every aspect of one's life. One of the simplest yet also most comprehensive formulations of the Buddhist path is the Noble Eightfold Path. At its centre lies Perfect Vision, which ultimately is the vision of Enlightenment. The ideal of Enlightenment can be expressed in many ways. I find myself responding in particular to the idea of Enlightenment as freedom from all suffering.

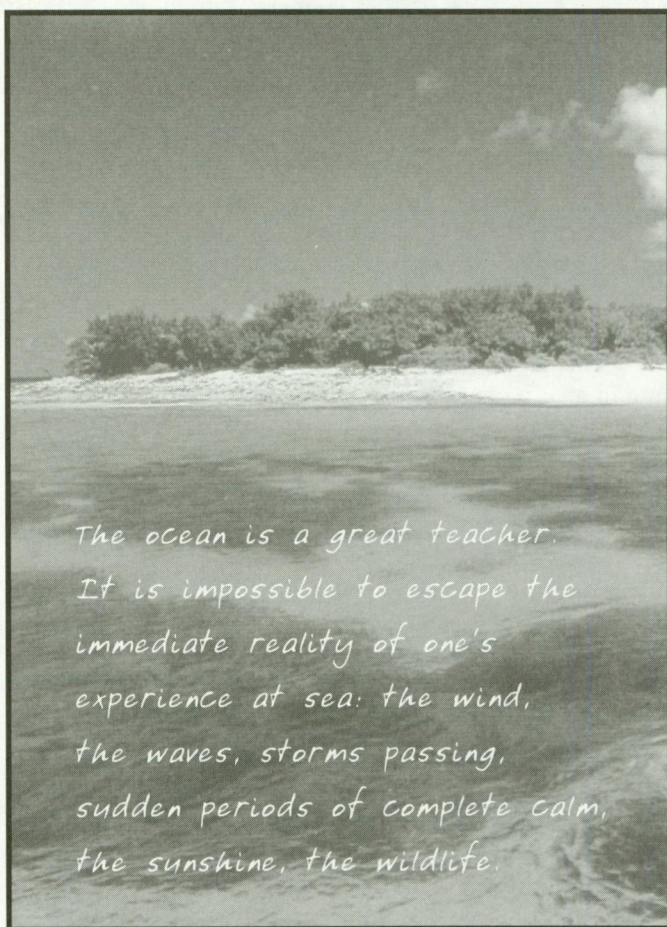
Another limb of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Livelihood. Discovering this was very exciting, as one of the main ways I had previously searched for meaning in my life was through my work. My first occupation was nursing, in particular caring for terminally ill patients. Although this was very rewarding in many ways, I felt constrained by the hospital system. It was at odds with my desire to work in a way that allowed me to feel potent and free. I decided to change my livelihood.

Changing Directions

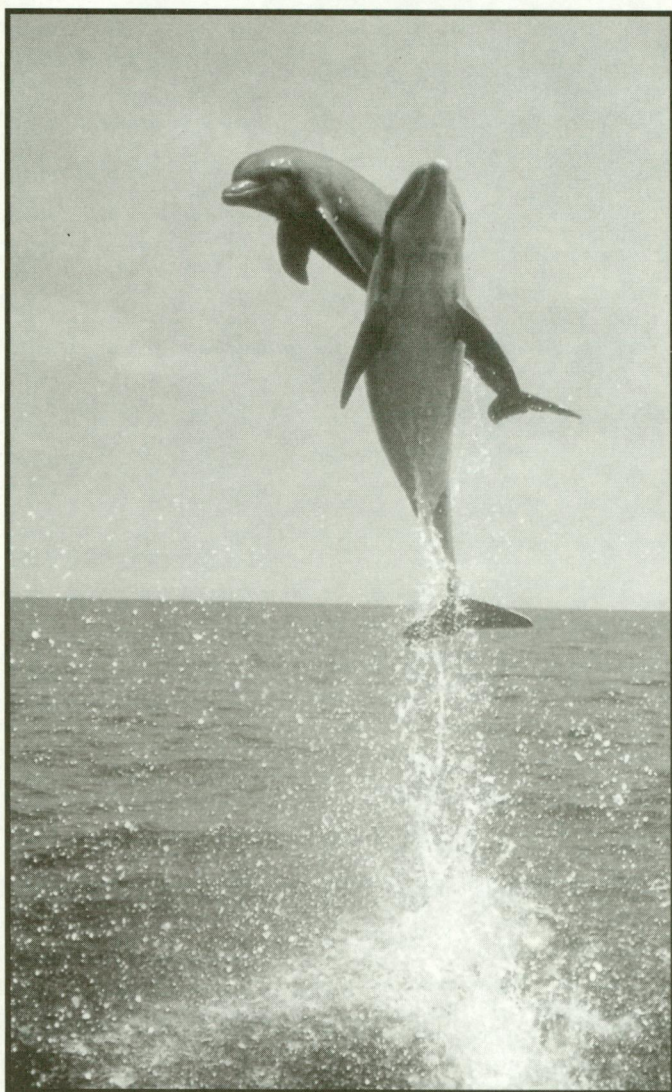
I was inspired by Bodywise, a natural therapies centre and Right Livelihood business run by women in the East End of London, near the London Buddhist Centre. I joined the Bodywise team and worked as receptionist and as a massage therapist. I also became involved in teaching yoga. I appreciated working in an environ-

ment where I could freely be of service to others. I enjoyed working as part of a team with other Buddhist women.

Yet in spite of this, I often felt that something else was calling me. Sometimes the call was quite subtle and



*The ocean is a great teacher.
It is impossible to escape the
immediate reality of one's
experience at sea: the wind,
the waves, storms passing,
sudden periods of complete calm,
the sunshine, the wildlife.*



manifested as a feeling of dissatisfaction. At other times it was very strong and manifested as a yearning for freedom. Gradually it became clear that this yearning came from my passionate love of the natural world, in particular my love of the vast blue ocean with its many wonderful and mysterious creatures, and my love of the Australian bush.

I went to the Canary Islands for a solitary retreat, living in a cave overlooking the ocean. One day, as I sat watching dolphins playing in the distance, I had a strong experience of impermanence. Life was short and unpredictable, and I wanted to live it as fully and effectively as possible. I had always been concerned with the lack of care so often shown towards the natural environment and the destruction of the world's remaining wild animals and places. I realised that, more than anything, I wanted to devote the rest of my working life to helping to conserve the environment, particularly the marine environment. More specifically I wanted to go to Townsville, a small city in north Queensland, Australia, and study marine biology on the Great Barrier Reef.

This realisation resulted in a period of intense conflict. How could I want to leave a Buddhist Right Livelihood business that was part of a thriving Buddhist village to go to a place where practising Buddhists

would certainly be thin on the ground? At the same time, how could I not follow my search for freedom, meaning and love that had brought me to the Dharma in the first place?

Work as Practice

The work of a marine biologist consists of a number of different elements. The most exciting and glamorous aspect is fieldwork. Most marine biologists spend about three months a year at sea carrying out their research. Life at sea has many rewards and also many challenges. One of the most rewarding things is to be in an environment that is so vast, untamed and magnificently beautiful, and to encounter wild creatures who have a mystery all of their own.

The ocean is a great teacher. It is impossible to escape the immediate reality of one's experience at sea: the wind, the waves, storms passing, sudden periods of complete calm, the sunshine, the wildlife. Things change quickly and dramatically, a reflection of one of the fundamental Buddhist principles - that all things are impermanent. Part of my practice is working with these constant changes. Do I resist? Do I welcome them? How attached am I to a particular state? On the ocean I am more fluid and adaptable to change than I am in my day-to-day life on land. The environment demands it of me and I must respond.

One's working companions are also great teachers. Most work at sea is not a solitary experience; usually quite a few people with a range of skills are needed to carry out the work. In order for things to go well, people need to take responsibility, not only for themselves, but also for the others on the team. The outcome of one person not taking responsibility for their work usually has repercussions for the other team members. This is true, of course, for all situations where people work together as teams. However, the ocean is often an unforgiving environment, and the consequences of one's actions may result in team members experiencing unnecessarily unpleasant and possibly dangerous situations. The ocean makes it impossible to escape the truth of our interconnectedness.

Research science involves a number of other components and much of my time is spent reading, writing, analysing data, doing laboratory work and applying for funding. Marine biology is an extremely competitive field and at times it can seem like a battlefield, especially with the Australian university system undergoing major funding cuts over the last few years. There is often cynicism regarding the workplace and I have had to learn to maintain my positivity in the face of that. Most recently I have found it useful to reconnect with my original vision and motivation for becoming involved in this field of work. I have been consciously reflecting on the importance of working to benefit and maintain the natural wonders of this beautiful planet on which we live.

Non-violence, Conservation and Conflict

It is now nine years since the beach cave retreat. I have just begun a PhD degree investigating the use of different techniques to determine the numbers of inshore dolphins along the Queensland coast. The project will determine the habitat types that are most often used by these dolphins. It will also look at activities, such as breeding, feeding, resting or socialising, for which dolphins use these habitats. This information is essential in finding how to manage human activities in a way that will minimise impact on these magnificent animals and ensure their long-term survival. At last my vision of almost a decade ago is manifesting as a reality.

Ethical Conflicts

This has not always been the case. During my time as an undergraduate student I found some of the course work at odds with my ideals and my practice of Buddhist ethics. At times I even wondered whether I had been mistaken in believing that my vision could become a reality. Most of these issues were related to the killing of animals for scientific investigation. Some of our tutorial sessions involved dissection and, while I could see the need to learn these techniques, I despaired at the numbers of animals that had been killed on our behalf.

This issue came to a head when I started doing my own research and had to face the reality that the work of the majority of marine biologists involves the killing of animals. Often this seems unavoidable for obtaining information that may be used to ensure the survival of the species. After much reflection I realised that I could not be directly involved with the killing of animals in my work. To do so would be going against fundamental Buddhist ethics, as expressed in the first precept, which is not to harm living beings - one of the principles that had so attracted me to Buddhism in the first place. I have not yet fully resolved the issue of working in a field that is involved with killing animals. I have, however, dealt with it for myself by choosing an area of work where there is no question of killing in the name of science.

The Dharma and the Environment

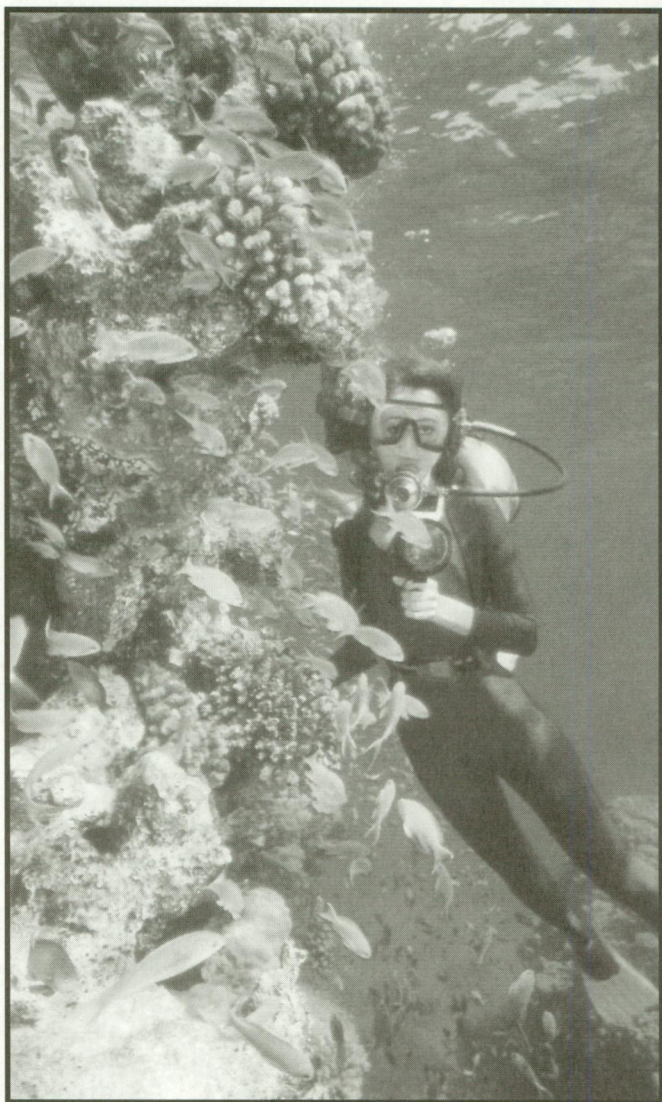
So far I have not directly contributed anything to the field of conservation biology. But I have now reached a stage where I am able to work on projects that I hope will provide information which will influence human behaviour in the direction of being less destructive to the environment. I am aware, of course, that scientific knowledge alone will not ensure that this occurs.

From a Buddhist perspective, destructive human activities are the result of greed, hatred and ignorance, the three poisons that keep human beings on the wheel of life. Environmental destruction is often seen as a manifestation of greed alone; greed that results in activities such as inappropriate development, overfishing, clear felling of forests, and the trade and slaughter of

animals. While some people are aware of the consequences of their actions but choose not to take responsibility for them, others may be unaware of the consequences of their action. The Buddhist perspective is that ignorance is the root cause in both cases.

Unenlightened human beings are by definition ignorant and do not fully realise the truth of the interconnectedness of all life, and the full consequences of their actions. We are all capable of acting in ways that cause harm to ourselves and other living beings.

I hope that my work as a conservation biologist will have a positive impact on the behaviour of human beings and the long-term survival of the natural wonders of our beautiful planet. But I also realise that more is needed. Human beings need to be able to see the extent to which their actions have consequences in order to be able to change from unskilful, harmful behaviours to skilful, beneficial behaviours. Thus ultimately human beings need the precious teachings of the Dharma. I hope that I am able to bring the Dharma to the lives of people I meet through the actions of my body, speech and mind. In this way I will be able to live a life that is meaningful and loving, and will ultimately lead to complete freedom.



Cultivating the Beautiful ... through Kalyana Mitrata



THE INSPIRATION BEGAN WHEN I was at school - a Catholic Convent run by nuns. The occasion was a nun telling us about Mother Teresa. What she said touched me very deeply. She was describing the work that Mother Teresa was doing and how she dedicated it all to God. Mother Teresa wanted to be an empty vessel through which God could do his work. She tried to set herself aside, set aside her own particular likes and dislikes and just attend to whatever needed doing. Although for her God was the guiding principle, and although by my early teens he no longer was for me, I've continued to be inspired by the general principle of what she was saying; and tried to put it into practice in my own life. I relate to it now as an aspiration towards living out the Bodhisattva Ideal and have tried to live according to that ideal in my various working situations.

Adorning Avalokiteshvara's Throne

My first real experience of Right Livelihood was working in Jambala (now Evolution), a gift shop in Bethnal Green, London, where I worked from 1980 to 1990. That experience taught me a lot. It wasn't an 'easy' time and it highlighted very clearly the difference between the Ideal of one's aspiration, and the reality of living it out in the day-to-day context of one's life. Although I was strongly motivated by the vision of the Bodhisattva Ideal, I was far too unintegrated to be able to put it into practice. I didn't know myself well enough. I didn't have enough faith. I was also going about some things the wrong way. For instance, I realised some of my motivation was coming more from self-hatred than from anything higher. I gradually came to understand that I couldn't become 'an empty vessel' from a basis of self-negation. I had to develop more faith and begin to value myself. I needed to learn that the tension between

how I actually was and what I could become was a crucial element in the whole process of transformation and to stop seeing it as a lack in myself; a cause for discouragement.

One year, our AGM report had on its front cover some words by Dogen. Dogen was a great Zen Master of thirteenth century Japan. He wrote the following words of instruction for the cooks in his monastery:

'When the cook takes the vegetable stem, it must be with the same power with which the Buddha turned the wheel of the Law. Our Buddhism must manifest in every movement of the hand, every pace of the foot. Not in great matters alone is there to be the great manifestation; in the tiniest thing we must grasp the power that pervades the universe.'

I remember clearly the strength of the bolt of 'priti' that shot through my body on reading these words for the first time. My hair nearly stood on end! Here it was again, in different words - they resonated with the inspiration to dedicate my life, in all its myriad manifestations, to the Three Jewels and to the Bodhisattva Ideal. Now I had more of a clue as to how to practice like that.

Daily activities in the shop provided plenty of opportunity to experiment with how to do this. Keeping the shop displays bright and sparkling was an on-going task that needed continual attention. Most of us found it an enormous chore: by the time you had got to the end, you had to start again. It was endless. I found that I could transform my attitude if I viewed the shop as a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara's jewelled throne. I began to imagine that as I cleaned and polished each item and carefully replaced it on the

shelf, I was shining and polishing Avalokiteshvara's throne, making it as spotless and radiantly lustrous as I could, out of devotion to him.

Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva that I have meditated upon since my Ordination in 1983. In those early days after my Ordination I felt so fortunate to be able to meditate upon him in the mornings before going off to work and then, out of my new understanding, try to maintain a sense of his presence throughout the day.

Total Dedication

Looking back over my working life I see I have always been drawn to what I call 'total situations'. I think this is how I have been trying to live out the myth that I first experienced that day at school. Totally dedicating your life to what you do, with no distinctions between work and play so that everything is an expression of your devotion. This was certainly true when I worked in the rock music industry - which I did for seventeen years. In those days, music was what I worshipped. I was completely immersed in that world. Later, when I realised that I'd lost sight of who I was or

where I was going, I began to see how misplaced that devotion had been. That sort of dedication needs to be directed towards something higher. Coming into contact with Buddhism in 1974 provided the context for a deeper, more meaningful exploration.

Working with the Mind

Taraloka, where I lived and worked for five years, provided me with the next opportunity for taking this approach to life deeper. I have always had a great love of meditation. Right from the start I was amazed at how it works, acting like a mirror, allowing awareness to grow, providing the means to see what needs to be cultivated or discarded. So direct, so practical and yet so mysterious and awesome in its potential breadth and depth.

My work at Taraloka included being Mitra Convenor - but as only a few mitras lived in the community, mitra convening was a small part of my work. So, besides being the gardener, one of my main responsibilities was developing meditation retreats. It was such a different emphasis to my life in London. Now I found myself on



retreat a great deal, spending much more time in formal meditation practice.

During this time, outside of meditation, I began to develop another way of working with my mind. I called it 'Stop and Realise'. These terms can be used to describe Samatha and Vipassana meditation. But I was using them as a way of bringing more awareness to what was in my experience in the ordi-

nary here and now: *stopping* to check the never-ending flow of mental events, and from there trying to *realise*, trying to gain a deeper understanding of the habitual flows of my being. This act, so simple in a way, yet deeply profound in its implications, remains a strong part of my practice. Tracking the mind, which is always going somewhere, striving to direct it towards the Goal, to bring it onto the Spiral and away from the ever-present lure of the Wheel. It's a way of staying connected with Dogen's words; a reminder that the power that pervades the Universe must be grasped in the *tiniest* thing.

A Turn Around

When my commitment to Taraloka was coming to an end, I began contemplating the future. I imagined myself moving towards an even more deeply-meditative lifestyle, perhaps becoming involved with a meditation retreat centre or vihara. It was around that time that I had a meeting with Bhante (Sangharakshita). During our conversation he spoke about the benefits of someone who had many years of experience both in the world of business and within the Movement becoming more public. I could see the truth of what he was saying and when I left our meeting I felt that he had gently turned me round to face the world again. Not that he had indicated in any way what I should do; it was more that I understood something more deeply after our conversation. I had no clear idea of how I should move forward; but then an opportunity came up which seemed the perfect vehicle: a new UK Convenor of Women Mitras was needed. Perhaps I could live out my aspirations through that work.

Opening the Heart

Since taking up my new post, one of my major sources of inspiration has been *kalyana mitrata*, auspicious friendship, friendship with the lovely, the good, the beautiful. I've always benefited from contact with others more experienced than myself, being drawn along and inspired by them. To have them take an interest in me, to feel their resonance with my spiritual potential,



allows me to blossom. My whole being responds to their vision, their experience, their deeper refuge in the Three Jewels. My heart opening like a flower to the rays of the sun, I find myself being drawn out or led onwards towards the goal of Enlightenment. This has never been truer than when meeting with Bhante. To me this

is the essence of the FWBO, the very heart of the movement. Necessary as all our structures and institutions are as an organisational framework, it is all there simply to facilitate *kalyana mitrata*. It seems as crucial to our development as the air we breathe, and it is part of what makes the FWBO unique.

This is the living heart of my work now. The opportunity for practising *kalyana mitrata* presents itself all the time, in every situation. I need to constantly be aware of it, to help ignite the spark of *kalyana mitrata* wherever possible, recognising that this is the fundamental basis of everything that I do. It is an enormous challenge. It's as though the seed of our potential is germinated through our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and *kalyana mitrata* provides the best conditions in which it can grow and flourish.

The mitra system is set up to help stimulate *kalyana mitrata* and to foster people's growth and development. My job is to ensure that that, indeed, is what the mitra system is doing.

I do this through a variety of means: three times a year I chair our week-long Mitra Convenors meetings. The women Mitra Convenors from FWBO Centres all over the UK (and Ireland) come together to discuss matters concerning Mitras and the mitra system; and to give one another encouragement and inspiration for the Mitra Convening work; especially in the work of facilitating the flow of *kalyana mitrata*. (There is a corresponding body of men Mitra Convenors with whom we keep in close touch.) Another aspect of my work is visiting Centres, meeting mitras and would-be mitras on their home ground. I come up with proposals for situations which don't fit into the 'norm', such as when women are wanting to become mitras but there is no women's Mitra Convenor or perhaps no women Order members at all at their Centre. I encourage Order members to take on Mitra Convening; deal with mitra proposals; mediate conflicts; meet with Devamitra, the

Overall Convenor of mitras; give talks; run day and weekend events for mitras, lead retreats, attend to general administration, and a mountain of correspondence. I also do a lot of reflecting!

Through my work I get to meet a huge range of people. I remember during my first ever Centre visit meeting so many people for the first time, from all sorts of backgrounds and lifestyles. I was worried that I would find it difficult to relate to some of them. But I didn't, and in fact that has never happened. Because, of course, we have the Three Jewels in common, to whatever extent, to whatever degree and, through our connection with them, we can always find a meeting point. I find that so encouraging - it just affirms the universality of the Dharma, that it can reach across any divide and find a way to communicate. The continual recognition of this fuels my faith and inspires my work. I love the different aspects of my contact with people such as the letters people write when asking to become a mitra. They express so strongly the sense of having found something so precious; and the often-profound effect it has had on them already and a vision of where they can see it will take them.

Everything I do is part of my practice. I'm trying to constantly cultivate the same open-hearted reverence that I can experience in meditation in daily life so that I am in contact with a higher, more mythic dimension, so that my life is taking place in the presence of Avalokiteshvara. Whatever I am doing, I am keeping

him in mind, as a constant witness and companion. He is my reference point, mirroring me back to myself in a million different ways, enabling me to see more clearly my states of mind and how I act. This is both challenging and daunting. Me totally transparent in his eyes, and whatever they see, their warm, compassionate gaze never wavers. Can I meet those eyes, so pure, so beautiful, so kind. His look of infinite tenderness just pierces my heart, always revealing how I really am.

Through cultivating this attitude I *am* able to live more in contact with the myth which is embodied in this figure of Avalokiteshvara. It is such an important link, this imaginative connection with the Enlightened consciousness; a link to a world full of significance, full of images, colour and sound, a world imbued with Reality. It is through such a connection that we are led from our mundane experience to the Transcendental.

When I was in Newcastle recently, someone mentioned a talk in which a Dharmacharini had spoken about sowing seeds of friendship. The image reminded me that at heart I want to be a true gardener! Being a true gardener is all about creating the best conditions for growth, tending things, cultivating the beautiful, encouraging things to flourish and blossom, to realise their true potential and this is what I strive for. I long to be that empty vessel through which Avalokiteshvara's compassionate activity can manifest, to purify my heart and mind so that my actions can truly be for the benefit of all. □

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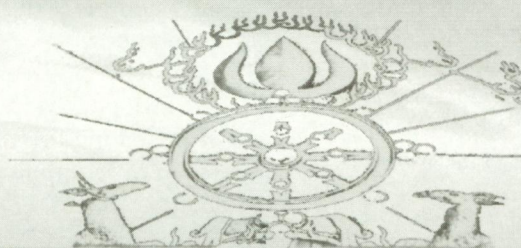
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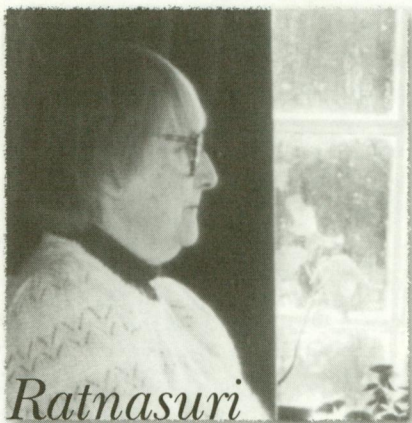
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Beyond Right Livelihood

I LIVE IN A community at Taraloka with twelve other women of varying ages, backgrounds and nationalities. Taraloka is a Retreat Centre for women, and has a wide variety of retreats to offer. There are two teams that run Taraloka: the Support Team that services the retreat centre, and the Retreat Team that oversees the running of retreats. So this is the Taraloka community's Right Livelihood. (It can be said to be Right Livelihood if it helps the transformation of society in the light of perfect vision.)

What about me? I live at Taraloka and have done since its beginnings in 1985. Last year I resigned from the Taraloka Council and from the Retreat Team. (I do still support some retreats and I am leading the Older Women's retreat in September.) But these days I don't have an occupation at Taraloka. I am not wearing any hats. Well, I do have one - I am Private Preceptor to thirty-five women; and Public Preceptor to quite a few as well. But really that is all. I decided that from my seventy-seventh year, I would be freer to follow my own inclinations. 'Retired' is not the right word - one doesn't retire as a Buddhist. Going beyond Right Livelihood seems more apt.

There are many kinds of challenges living here. There is the challenge of being the one member of the community who is not busy. (I do participate in community evenings, help with the community cleaning and take my turn at cooking breakfast and supper, washing up and things like that. But I am not as busy as the others.) I have more time to just sit and look out of the window if I want to. More time for reflection. More time for meditation. More time for study. Less structure in what is for the others quite a structured life-style. To do that, I need to be an aware individual, not swayed by what is going on around me, not minding if others are more busy than I am. But I also need to be sensitive and aware of my fellow community members, aware of others'

needs as well as my own. Some of them might be experiencing the menopause, or suffering from painful periods, and though those things are long behind me, I need to remember what it was like and feel empathy with them.

These days I feel the need to slow down; to take life more slowly than I have been used to doing. A more reflective life-style suits my old age. I need to reflect on death so that I can meet it when it comes. I realise death can come at any age, but the older one gets, when the body is so obviously wearing up, it is harder to ignore. My reflections often become a reflection on my ego. Who is this person called Ratnasuri? Will I let go when my time comes? Am I just this bundle of habits good and bad? Have I changed at all in the twenty-four years that I have been a Buddhist? Is the direction I am taking helping my development as a Buddhist? Would I be better to live on my own?

This conditioned being is trying to slow things down a little so she can see the way she reacts to circumstances coming her way. She has made some headway. One way is not to get too tired. Rest in the afternoon is essential. Mindfulness becomes more and more important - and more difficult. It is tempting to ignore one's ageing body.

I love poetry. I find it very helpful and inspiring. While writing this article - I was looking for something else in my computer files - I found this poem by Han Shan:

ON CLEAR MIND

*True nature is clear and deep
Like clear still water
If beaten with hate or love
Waves of vexation arise.*

*Arising without cease
Self-nature becomes turbid.
Vexations and ignorance
Ever increase unconsciously.*

*Self grasping another
Is like mud entering water.
Self moved by another
Is like throwing fat on the fire.
While the outer realm is chaos, self is true
When chaos is taken to be real self, self is born.
If self is not born
Vexations burning for aeons turn to ice.*

*Thus perfected ones
First empty the defilement of self.
How can the outer realm be an obstruction?
Resilience is the function
Of the self forgotten.
As soon as idiosyncrasies appear
You recognise them immediately.*

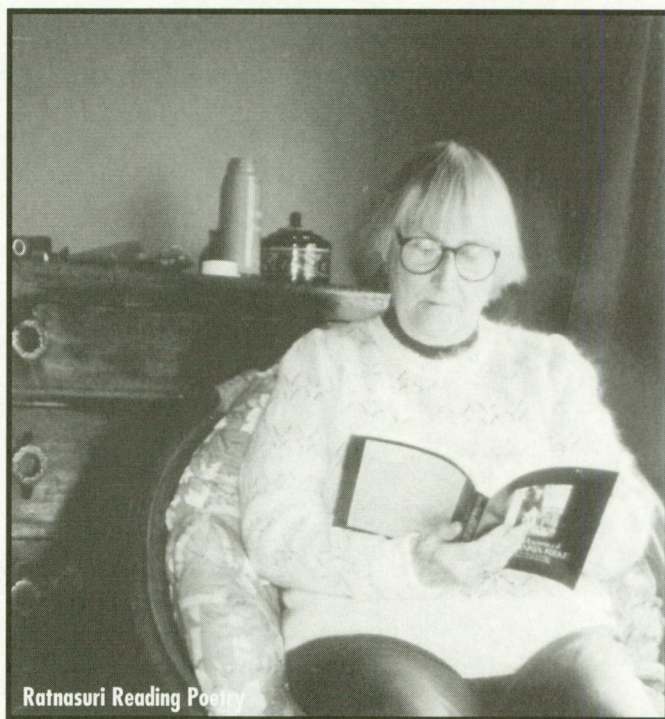
*The point of recognition is enlightenment.
The instant one thought returns to brightness
All traces are swept away.
That moment is refreshing.
Refreshing, quiescent,
Peerless, independent,
Tranquil, harmonious.
Nothing can match it.*

This poem tells me so much of how I need to practice: the need to develop a clear mind without the turbulence of hate or love. This is not the love of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. But the love that is always wanting, always craving, never able to fill the enormous chasm of the ego. The hatred is caused by not being able to fill that chasm. And the poem tells me I have a choice. I can choose the positive thought. I do not have to dwell in negativity. But I realise how much I need to be aware of where my thoughts are going. I am realising more and more that mindfulness is a key that can give me more choice.

Meditation is another way of slowing my mind, making me more aware of the way it can go off into tangents of distraction and fantasy if I let it off the rein. Come back to the breath Ratnasuri!! Metta gives me the love and compassion that expands my horizons out towards others. Metta gives me the positive emotion that helps me to deal with the challenges that arise in community living.

Reflection is something that I enjoy doing, so I give myself an hour every day purely for reflection. This is one of the advantages of old age. I appreciate that time, especially if the sun is streaming through my window.

In one of my reflections I wrote this small poem about how both action and non-action have consequences.



SUFFERING

*Not that soul destroying
agonising torment.
Just an itch perhaps
on the elbow or knee
Something not quite right
Perhaps I have forgotten
to do what was needed.
Perhaps now it has
rebounded back
Our Karma?*

I often reflect on impermanence. I think of how I was as a tiny child. Now here is this old woman of seventy-seven. I notice how my hair is in the process of going white - there are many more white hairs than brown. And yet I still think of it as 'my' hair - even though the texture, too, is different.

So many lifetimes, it seems, lived in this one body that has changed out of all recognition. A body that from the moment of birth has been inexorably moving towards death.

I don't feel at all unhappy about impermanence. After all, it is our only chance to become kinder and more compassionate, the only way we can learn to emulate the Buddha. Our only possibility to change for the better. Life would not be worth living without that possibility.

I see impermanence at work in the form of a meditation retreat, where time stretches and contracts. There is impermanence in the fleeting moments of joy, of rapture, of pain. I am a being of change. I cannot hold onto anything. Metaphorically speaking, it slips through

my fingers. There is realising that the only permanent thing in this conditioned life is impermanence.

Thinking of the beauty of impermanence, some verses by another poet, Rabindranath Tagore, came to mind. They are from a poem called 'Gift'.

*When you have leisure,
Wander idly through my garden in spring
And let an unknown, hidden flower's scent startle you
Into sudden wondering -
Let that displaced moment
Be my gift
Or if, as you peer your way down a shady avenue
Suddenly, spilled
From the thick gathered tresses of evening
A single shivering fleck of sun - set light stops you,
Turns your day-dreams to gold
Let that light be an innocent
Gift.*

Beauty is important to me whether it is a wonderful sunset, of which there are any number at Taraloka, or the sun shining through the petals of flowers, or drops of water sparkling on a spider's web. There is beauty in the happy faces of our retreatants opening like flowers after meditation. There is the beauty of a poem; or in the sound of an aria by Handel, or a cantata by Bach sung so beautifully. And there are Purcell's wonderful songs.

I have been thinking about the elderly women in the Buddha's day who went forth after having brought up their families. Here is a story about a woman called Sona. The *Therigata* tells of her many happy rebirths, then goes on to describe her rebirth in the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni. She lived at Savatthi in a clansman's family. She married and became the mother of ten sons and daughters, and was known as 'the many-offspringed'. (That's a very clumsy nickname. I hope the Pali sounds better.) When her husband renounced the world, she handed over the household, including all her fortune, to her sons and daughters-in-law. They seemed happy to keep her for a while, but then became ungrateful and started to resent spending what was now their fortune on her, and they ceased to show her any respect. She realised that it was impossible to live in that way. So

she left her family and entered the Order of Bhikkhunis, the Buddha's female disciples. She thought to herself: as I have left the world only in my old age, I must work strenuously. So while she waited on the Bhikkhunis by day, she resolved to give herself up to religious studies all night. And she studied thus, steadfast and unfaltering, as one might cling doggedly to a pillar on the veranda, or a tree in the dark, for fear of hitting one's head against obstacles, never letting go. Thereupon her strenuous energy became known. (What a Woman!!!)

Here is her poem of victory from the *Therigata*;

*Ten sons and daughters did I bear within
This heap of visible decay. Then weak
And old I drew near to a Bhikkhuni.
She taught me the Norm, wherein I learnt
The factors, organs, bases of this self,
Impermanent compound. Hearing her words,
And cutting off my hair, I left the world.
Then as I grappled with the threefold course
Clear shone for me the Eye Celestial.
I know the 'how' and 'when' I came to birth
Down the long past, and where it was I lived.
I cultivate the Signless, and my mind
In uttermost composure concentrate.
Mine is the ecstasy of freedom won
As path merges into Fruit, and Fruit in Path.
Holding to nought, I in Nibbana live.
This five-grouped being have I understood.
Cut from its root, all onward growth is stayed.
I too am stayed, victor on basis sure,
Immovable. Rebirth comes never more.*

It is lovely to read of women in the Buddha's time who won a victory over themselves. How steadfast Sona was, how wholehearted. She did not mess about. Having realised her family was not wanting to help her in her old age, she went forth. She served the Bhikkhunis by day, and at night studied the Dharma, and not only studied, but realised the Truth. There is no duality, the path and the fruit are one. She is both the path and the fruit. As we all are in our various ways - although we might have to wait much longer than she for the path and the fruit to merge.

This article bears some of my reflections, some of the things that inspire me, as I live my life in old age. As I live my life beyond Right Livelihood.



aranya

During celebrations held in Cambridge, England, to mark the 33rd anniversary of the founding of the FWBO, a new project was launched by Vajradevi to a very warm reception.

Aranya is the name of a fund-raising project whose aim is to buy a new women's ordination retreat centre in Europe. Aranya is being promoted by a particularly beautiful image: an island covered in trees, almost enveloped in mist. The sea shimmers before the island; and blue sky and massive banks of white cloud hover above it. The island has a mysterious, magical quality to it. It could be part of a mythical Arthurian landscape, the lost island of Avalon...

But it's not the myth of Avalon that's being evoked, but the myth of Aranya.

Aranya is a Sanskrit word meaning 'the forest'. It also means somewhere remote, distant and mysterious. Not just a forest or jungle, Aranya could equally be a cave high on a mountain top, a deep silent valley or our mist-covered island. It's any place away from the world, a place where few people go. Somewhere perfect for intense meditation practice.

The myth of Aranya is the myth of going forth. A few years ago, when Sangharakshita visited the women's Ordination team at Tiratanaloka, he said one of the main advantages of lengthening ordination retreats for women (which will be possible once a new Ordination retreat centre has been established) could be that the women who attended them would have a stronger experience of going

forth. Aranya is about helping to make this a reality.

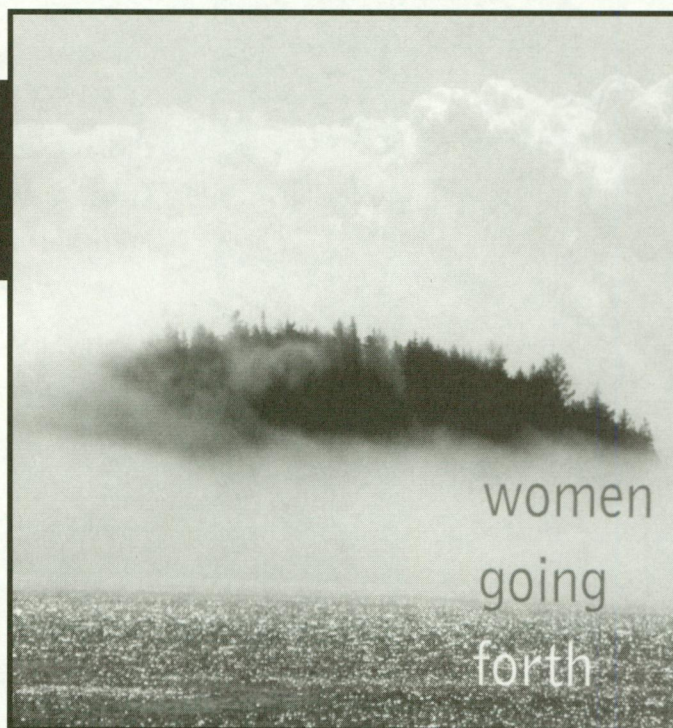
Over the next 18 months we are looking to raise £350,000 to buy land and a property.

We'll be looking for somewhere remote and somewhere beautiful. We haven't decided where yet, although we've had lots of suggestions - including Ladakh and Transylvania! However the most likely countries are Spain or Portugal.

Over the coming months, the Aranya fund-raising team will be visiting many UK and European FWBO Centres to talk about the project and how you can help.

The launch of this project is a significant step in the history of the FWBO. As with Guhyaloka where men's ordinations take place, and the women's Ordination training retreat centre, Tiratanaloka, and most recently, Madhyamaloka, the Preceptors' College in Birmingham, we have here another opportunity to help make real the vision Sangharakshita has given us for creating an Order and for bringing into being a New Society.

Aranya is a movement-wide project. Everyone, men and women, Order members, Mitras and Friends, are being invited to participate. For the new retreat centre won't only benefit the women who are ordained there. Its benefits will extend to the whole movement - in



women
going
forth

the same way that Guhyaloka benefits men individually, but those individuals in turn benefit the whole Order and Movement.

The health and spiritual vitality of the movement will be enhanced by us all working together to bring the vision of Aranya into being.

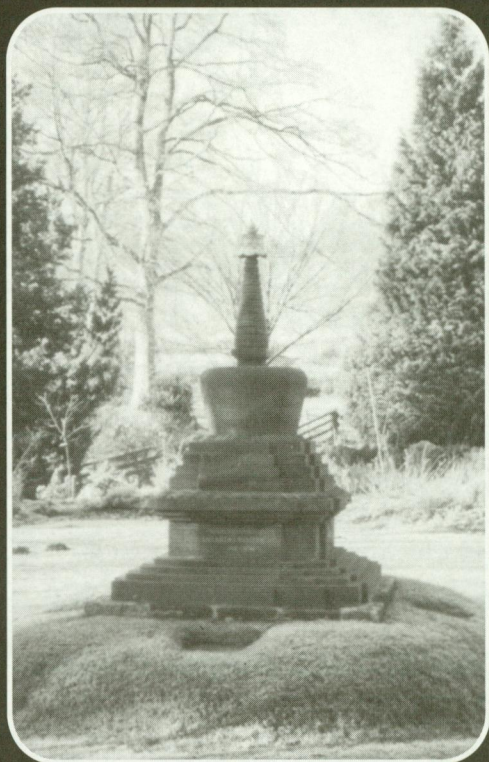
For many years now, Sangharakshita has been helping us to understand the Dharma, and to make it meaningful to us in the West. Our distinctive ordination, based on an individual commitment to the Three Jewels, is one of the most precious gifts he has given us.

Let's set that gift in an even more bright and beautiful setting by building a new Ordination retreat centre for women in Europe. Let's work together to create our own Aranya.'

Vajradevi

If you would like to make a donation, please make cheques payable to 'Aranya', and send to:
2 Tudor Road,
Moseley,
Birmingham
B13 8HA
UK

News from Tiratnaloka



Tiratnaloka is situated in the beautiful countryside of the Brecon Beacons. It is here that many of the 450 or so women world-wide (outside of India) who have asked for Ordination, come on retreats. These 'Going for Refuge' retreats help prepare women for Ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. (Going for Refuge retreats for American, Indian and Australasian women are also held in their own countries - but many of them, too, come to Tiratnaloka at some point, forging connections with other women from all over the world.)

Samata, chairwoman of FWBO Sarana, (the charity which runs Tiratnaloka), and a member of the Ordination Team, writes:

'Last year the Tiratnaloka community saw the start of a series of changes when the Retreat Centre Team (which is responsible for the administrative and practical running of Tiratnaloka) moved into a house in a nearby village. The new community is called 'Adhistana', which means Grace Waves of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

This has made it possible for the Ordination Team to expand as it responds to the growing number of women who are asking for Ordination. The first new arrival is Kalyanasri who has joined the Ordination Team for a six-month trial period. Kalyanasri, who has brought up two children, has spent most of her Order life living and working in Norwich as part of the team that produced the early *Mitrata* publications; as Mitra Convenor and working in team-based Right Livelihood. More recently, she spent nearly two years on an extended solitary retreat (see *Lotus Realm* No. 11.) We are delighted to have her at Tiratnaloka. In July, Taraka will be moving to Tiratnaloka from London, also with a view to joining the Ordination Team. Once the Ordination Team has eight members, there are plans to review how to best meet the needs of all the women seeking to join the WBO.

In 1999, fifteen women were ordained at Il Convento, plus two others at Tiratnaloka and one at Taraloka. This year seven women will be ordained in August at Tiratnaloka. In the autumn, our third six-week

Ordination retreat will take place at Il Convento in Tuscany. On this retreat, Anoma will conduct her first Private Ordination.

Longer Ordination retreats are a very special opportunity for everyone who attends them to deepen their practice of meditation and their understanding of what it means to Go Forth from the familiar and Go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Many rituals are woven through the retreat which help people to connect more deeply with the myth of Ordination.

Last year we began with readings from Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, reading from different locations around the building - the terrace, the cloisters, the olive grove and so on. In the early stages of the retreat there was an emphasis on purification through exploration of the Ten Precepts and daily reflections on the impermanent nature of the 'self' through the Six Element Practice. This took us into an extended period of silence during which the Private Ordination ceremonies took place. The Public Ordination ceremony was a day of great rejoicing after which we were again mainly in silence, focussing on our meditation practice for a further week. During the final stages of the retreat, there were talks from members of the team, and discussions about what it means to be a member of the Western Buddhist Order - all in the context devotional chanting and recitation of Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*.'



Buddhist Women in Nepal

London Mitra Sophy Griffiths visited Nepal recently. As well as trekking on her own through the magnificent Himalayas, she attended the Sixth Shakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women which took place at Lumbini, the traditional site of the Buddha's birth. The theme of the conference was, 'Women as Peacemakers: self, family, community and world.'

Sophy writes:

'It was an intense seven days with Buddhist women from all over the world. I found it a wonderful opportunity to meet so many different women and hear about their lives and struggles. It was the first time I have had contact with so many nuns and so many different traditions. I was certainly in a minority as a western Buddhist. This led me to ask a lot of questions. I became fascinated by how much traditions differed. It made me realise how much I need to consolidate my understanding of my own tradition, the FWBO. But it also made me feel more confident in my practice as a western Buddhist. Being with so many different Buddhists reminded me of our common ground. It is the fundamental Buddhist teachings that unite us.'



Sophy with other Buddhist women attending the conference

Walking the Highland Way

Navachitta, a New Zealander living in Wales, and Marianne Dixon, an Englishwoman living in Auckland, are planning an eighty-eight mile sponsored walk this June. Taking the path from Milnegavie, north of Glasgow, to Fort William, the walk ends with a steep climb to the top of Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain.

Navachitta writes:

'The stupa at Sudarshanaloka is now completed and we are looking to raise £350,000 for the building of New Zealand's first retreat centre in the same 250-acre rain-forest valley at Thames. As the English pound is strong against the New Zealand dollar, we are hoping that our fund-raising walk in Scotland will be a very successful fund-raising venture for Sudarshanaloka.'

Please send donations to:

Dharmacharini Navachitta, 'Tiratanaloka', Aberclydach House, Aber, Talybont-on-Usk, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7YS, UK



Navachitta & Marianne

There was great rejoicing at Bor Dharan retreat centre near Nagpur when three more women joined Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (as the Western Buddhist Order is known in India) bringing the total number of women ordained in India up to 14.

Srimala, who is the Public Preceptor with special responsibility for the women's wing in India, had arrived in mid-December to lead a one-week Ordination retreat that spanned the new millennium. The names she chose for the new Dharmacharinis were Ojogita, Ojushhuri and Ojonandi.

Amidst the rejoicing there was also a tinge of sadness as people remembered Chandan, the young mitra who was tragically killed in a road accident last Summer. Had she lived, she, too, would have been ordained on this retreat.

An estimated 5-8000 people attended the public Ordination ceremony and there was particular satisfaction that the organising and leading of both the retreat and the Public Ordination ceremony was carried off entirely by women - proof that the efforts people had been making towards developing greater confidence and independence were really bearing fruit.

Ordinations in India



Ojogita

Ojushhuri

Ojonandi

Buddhist Women Meet in Köln

An estimated 1,200 women attended a congress on the theme Women and Buddhism held in Köln (Cologne), Germany, from 30 March to 2 April.

Jnanacandra reports:

'The Congress was organised by Germans Sylvia Wetzel, who practises in the Tibetan tradition, and Sylvia Kolk, a disciple of the late Ayya Khema. Both have been involved in making connections between Buddhism and feminism for many years. Sylvia Wetzel has been seeking to introduce a feminist angle into Buddhism, whereas Sylvia Kolk has been involved in bringing Buddhist ideas into the women's movement. Those attending the congress were, of course, mainly from Germany, but there were also a number of Dutch and Swiss women, and one occasionally heard Spanish or English spoken. Since most of the programme and the workshops were conducted in German with no translation facilities for other languages, it was less of an international event than it could have been.

Highpoints of the congress were two excellent and thought-provoking talks from Americans Joan Halifax, who spoke on Engaged Buddhism, and Tsultrim Allione whose theme was transforming violent emotions into wisdom.

Around 30 different workshops were on offer, led by women from many different traditions (Theravada, Zen, Tibetan, etc. as well as some with a mainly academic background.) The workshops varied in quality, and covered a wide range of topics and perspectives, such as working with dying people, female images of enlightenment in the Tantra, experiences of three-year retreats, relations between women in and outside family, Zen practice, ways out of emancipation into female freedom(!), Buddhism and motherhood, women and responsibility (led by Kulanandi, a Dharmacharini from Essen), practising as a schoolteacher, points of intersection between the women's movement and Buddhism, etc. There

were also a number of creative workshops (voice, dance, drama,) as well as arts performances.

Themes raised during the talks and the final discussion included the interesting and important question of whether some of the traditional approaches to practice were equally helpful to women as to men. For example, Allione questioned whether the whole terminology and approach of 'battle' was a useful concept for women. In her own experience she had not found it useful. She thought that an approach of embracing and transforming emotions worked much better than an approach of containing and overcoming them which, in her opinion, was adapted to the psychological make-up of men.

The importance for women of having female teachers was another topic of discussion; including the difficulties that can arise from having exclusively male teachers. The complexity of dynamics that are often associated with mixed situations and the value of women-only situations was affirmed. I noticed that for many this was perhaps something of a new realisation, and single-sex situations something yet to be achieved. In this regard the FWBO, with its established practice of single-sex situations, has something valuable to offer other Buddhists.

Although it was made explicit that such exploration was not about turning against men, nevertheless, some good points and important questions were overshadowed by quite unnecessary polemics and put in a rather derisive tone. Perhaps when women are in the process of breaking free from dependency on men, a little therapeutic blasphemy is understandable.

Overall, during the course of the Congress, the atmosphere grew deeper. By the end many voiced the wish to continue with such meetings, expressing warm thanks to both Sylvias for organising the event.'

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Books of special interest for women: Two translations of the Therīgāthā (*Psalm of the Early Buddhists, Elders' Verses II*; both versions in paperback: *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns*). The translation of the commentary on the Therīgāthā (*The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*).

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12-19

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June

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9-16

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16-23

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July

21-28

Reflexology and Meditation*

28-Aug 4

Tai Chi and Meditation

August

4-11

Creating the Freedom to Choose

25-Sept 1

Women's Intensive Retreat

September

8-15

Hillwalking Retreat*

22-29

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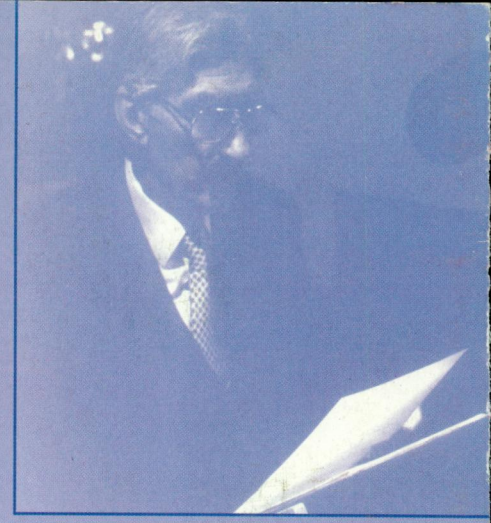
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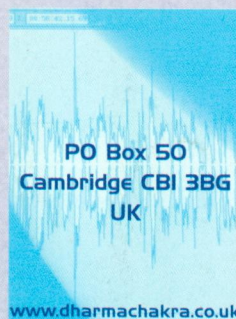
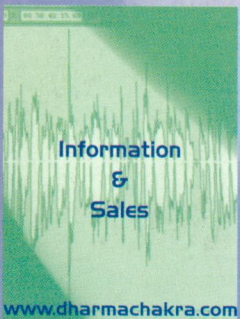
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