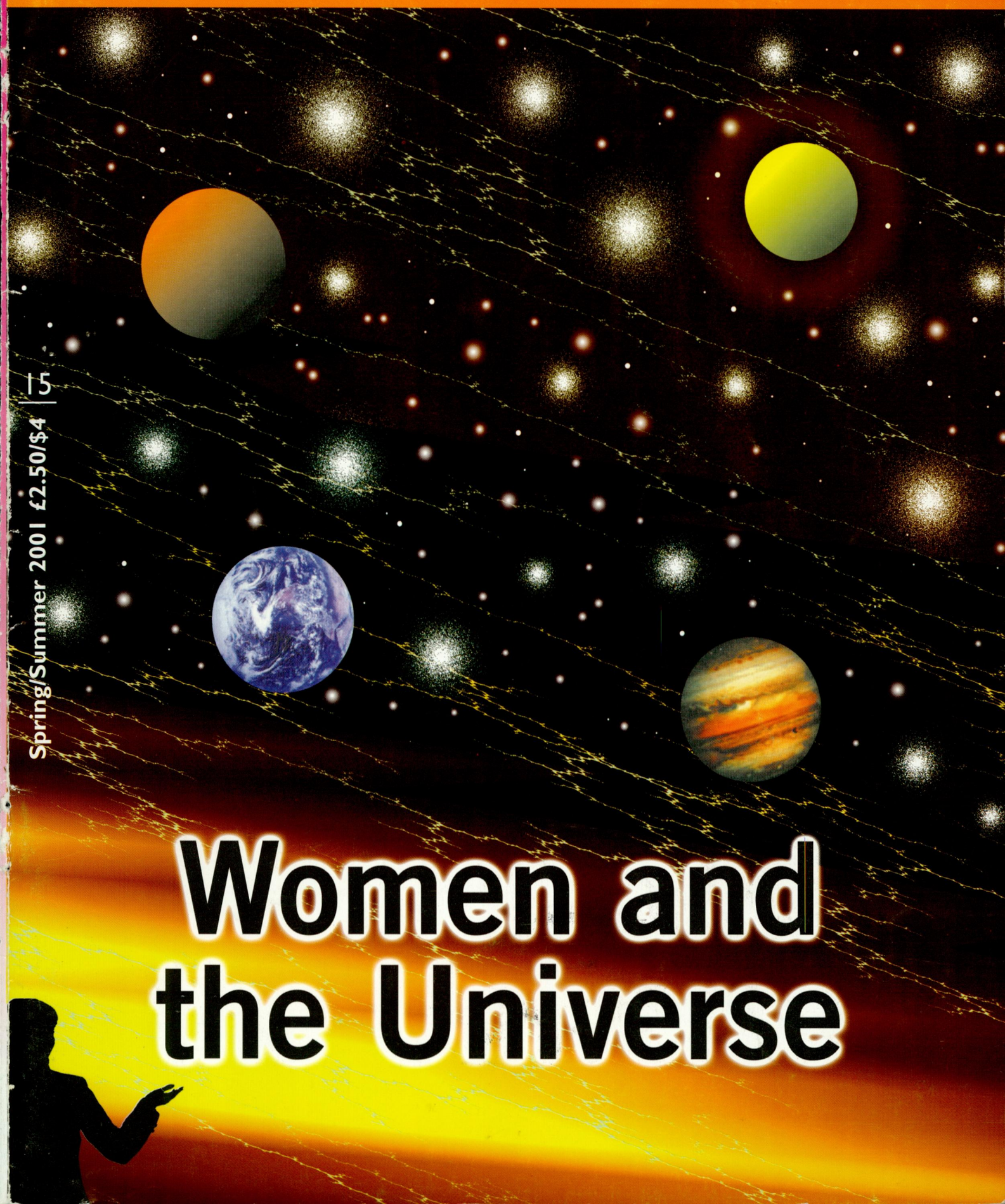
LOTUS REALM

a new voice for Buddhist Women



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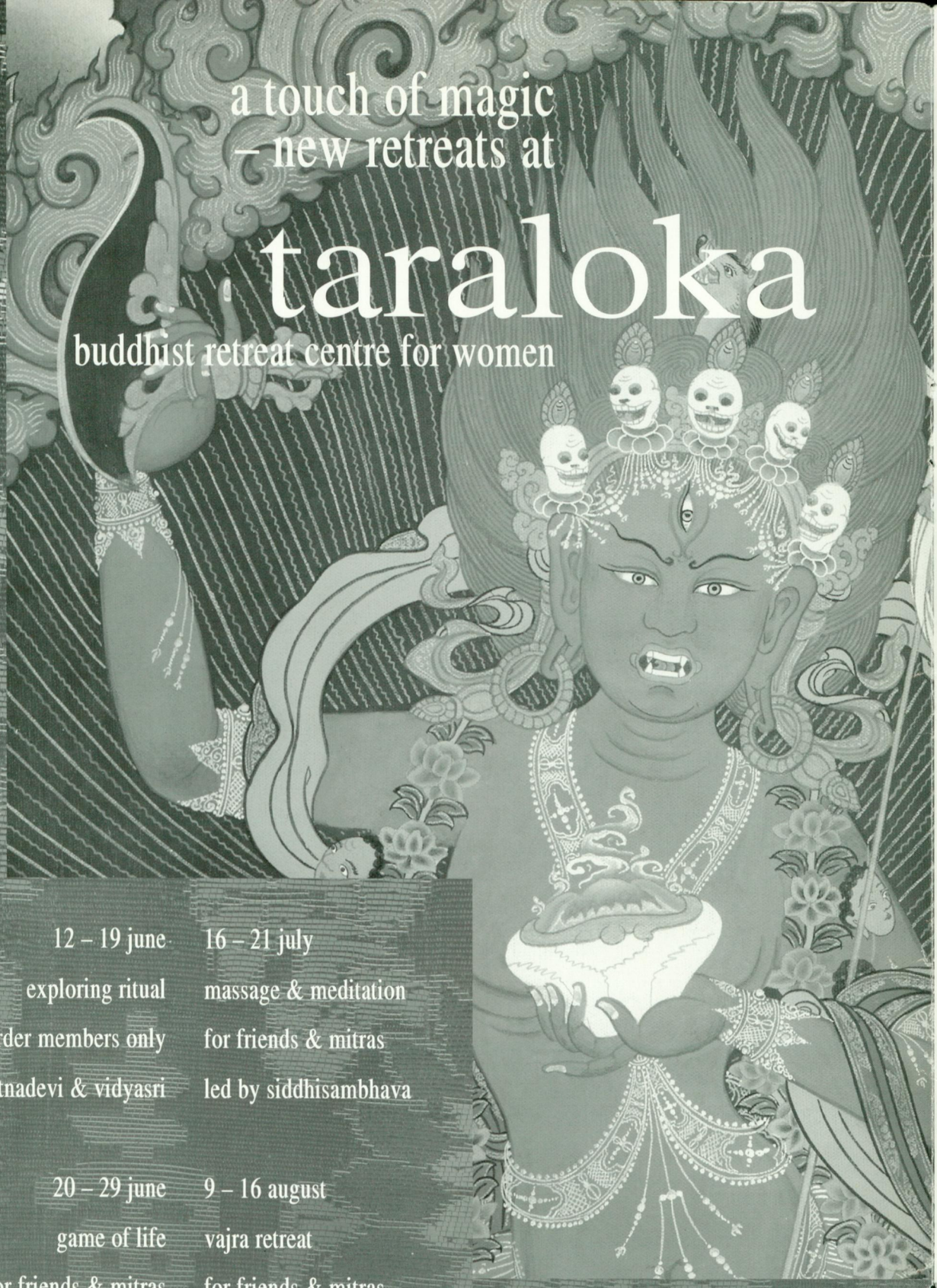
Women and the Universe



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

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

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

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

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

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.

** 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.*

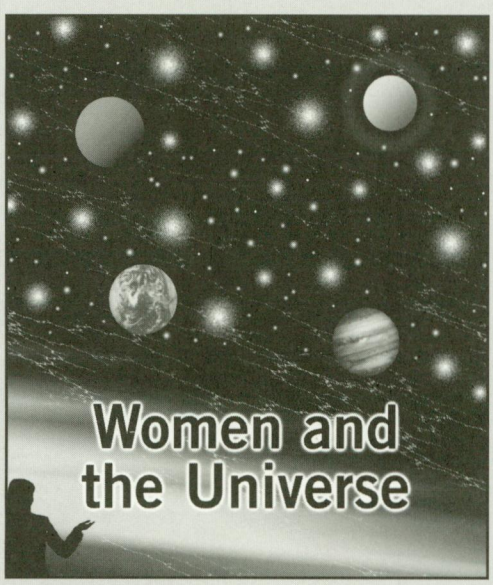

Illustration: Sue Purcell

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

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Dear Readers,

I may as well admit it. Another article was needed for this issue of *Lotus Realm* but in the end I could find no one free to write it. Gradually the truth dawned upon me that I would have to write an article myself - or at least an extended editorial. And I was left with the vexed question of what, then, should I write about? Especially given our theme. Then it came to me - why, of course - Women, Lotus Realm and the Universe - that was the topic! That most vital of questions - what is *Lotus Realm*'s place in the great scheme of things? Now that surely was a subject which must interest *Lotus Realm*'s readers for might they not from time to time ask themselves that very question? So let me see if I can convey to you something of my thinking on the subject. Why has it seemed important to keep this publication going over the years, at times through very considerable difficulty? I see three important aspects to *Lotus Realm.* Firstly, it's a Buddhist magazine. Secondly, it's a magazine for women. And thirdly, it's an FWBO magazine.

A Buddhist Magazine

If you are reading this you are likely to be a Buddhist yourself. It is likely, at least if you are a western reader, that you will have come across Buddhism at some point during your adult life. And if at some point you not only encountered Buddhism (perhaps I should say, the Dharma) but decided to practise it, it means almost certainly you did so because you were disillusioned with old values - perhaps Christian values or values of some other religion or else the materialist, rationalist values that so predominate today.

I think we should not forget the sense of freedom that comes with shaking off old, dead, meaningless, restricting values and embracing the Dharma. I remember well the point when I dared to stop believing in God. (I had hesitated for a while lest he strike me down with a thunderbolt.) It was as if the heavens suddenly opened up to reveal infinite possibilities. And you realise that your life is not in the hands of God at all but is in your own hands. Like the birth of a new world. And that experience of freedom and liberation and potentiality naturally enough one wants to share with as many people as possible.

If we move in largely Buddhist circles, we may begin to forget how radical is the Buddha's teaching, how entirely revolutionary to our western culture, and what tremendous opportunities for positive change it offers. In this issue of *Lotus Realm* Kulaprabha refers to the disturbance caused to the nineteenth century Christian establishment (and thus to western civilisation itself) by the writings of Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin. They wrote about discoveries in the fields of geology and biology. However, as Buddhists will no doubt agree, the implications of the Dharma for humanity are still more radical, even more far-reaching. Not that we have to create a noisy disturbance (although no doubt some people are disturbed by the implications of the Dharma.). The Dharma creates a quiet revolution when enough people catch its subtle fragrance and desire to practise it. Only in that way will its values start to permeate society. But that subtle fragrance comes only from the lives of people who are actually practising it. And it is here that *Lotus Realm* comes in. Lotus Realm is one vehicle for people who are committed to practising the Dharma to communicate their experience to others. Committed is a key word. Committed means, in more traditional language, to have effectively Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels. It means in actual fact to have made the Three Jewels the central values of one's life and the effort to make every aspect of one's life an ever greater expression of that commitment. This is what it means to be a member of the Western Buddhist Order. One of the interesting discoveries I made in editing articles for *Lotus Realm* was, the fact of someone's effective commitment to the Three Jewels always seemed to make a difference to the way they wrote. Even if she was not a particularly good writer, something important shone through. This is why, generally speaking, the main articles in *Lotus Realm* are

written by Dharmacharinis. These values which shine through, the values of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the values that say the meaning of human life is ultimately to be found in the striving for Enlightenment in the company of others, these values, with all their radical implications, are what a Buddhist magazine seeks to communicate- and is what I hope *Lotus Realm* is communicating - to as many people as possible - though I am sure many more people would get something from *Lotus Realm* than at present know of its existence and I often wish we could bring it to their notice

.

A Buddhist Magazine for Women

But *Lotus Realm* is not just a Buddhist magazine. It is a Buddhist magazine by and mainly for women. Our cover notes explain that, '*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.' This may need some justification for it is certainly going against the stream of some aspects of contemporary opinion to suggest that women are a different case to men. Personally speaking, having by a set of peculiar circumstances found myself for a period of seven years working with an otherwise entirely male group of Order members, and finding myself now living and working in a community of women, I do not need any persuasion that men and women have a 'somewhat different approach to life, even spiritual life.' I do not think it even worth arguing the case. It is something you have to experience for yourself through your own deepening self-knowledge. So *Lotus Realm* exists because women benefit from hearing from other women who practise the Dharma and for whom there are particular issues and challenges in taking up the practice. There is a thoughtful discussion of one such area by Padmachandra in this issue. Lotus Realm is a vehicle for women practising the Dharma to communicate about their experience to other women, to inspire and encourage them.

I rather have the impression that there is no other western Buddhist movement where this has been explored, or is being explored so fully and so thoroughly as it is within the FWBO. I don't know of any other Buddhist sangha where women have taken off and done things on their own in quite the same way, developing their own natural style whether in establishing retreat centres or in deepening an understanding of friendship. In the FWBO the responsibilities we hold and the institutions we run are in principle the same as those responsibilities held by men and those institutions run by men - but the style is subtly different - in the same way if you go from country to country visiting FWBO public centres, you will notice subtle - sometimes not so subtle - variations that are a consequence of cultural differences.

But I think we can go even further. I feel we have something of great value to offer contemporary women in general on this topic. The gender issue is still very topical - how does one lead one's life as a woman these days? Many of those apparently intractable problems of career and family, relationships and so on all take on a different hue when regarded from the stand-point of spiritual life. If one sees the meaning of life as the striving after Enlightenment in the company of others, and trying to create a society in which those values are upheld, how differently then do many of our problems look. Many of them can just melt away and life becomes something so much richer. It was always my hope that somehow *Lotus Realm* would become a vehicle for communicating with ordinary women who have never heard of the Dharma - but we have a long way to go before we appear alongside *Woman's Realm, Cosmopolitan* and *Family Circle* on the Newsagents shelves. Still, perhaps one day, with a new editorial team of gifted Order members with journalistic backgrounds.....

An FWBO Magazine

Lotus Realm is not just any old 'Buddhist magazine for women'. Clearly it is an FWBO magazine. When we re-launched the magazine in 1995, we thought in terms of making *Lotus Realm* 'a new voice for Buddhist women' generally and tried to avoid being too 'in-house'. I don't think we succeeded very well - and in any case in time we came to realise this was really a false position. We were obviously an FWBO magazine and instead of trying to minimise it, it would be much better to be clearly and straight-forwardly an FWBO magazine. Nevertheless I still very much hoped that other Buddhist women would find something of value in *Lotus Realm* and when editing the magazine I am always aware of our non-FWBO readers, some of whom are active workers for the Dharma in their own fields, people I

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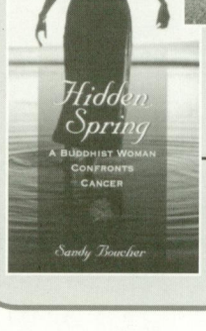

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admire and appreciate (and some of whose works have a valued place on Taraloka's library shelves.) Just as I have gained inspiration through reading books about the lives and practice of other Buddhist women, so, I hoped, might they gain some inspiration from the pages of *Lotus Realm*, perhaps finding new ways of understanding what it means to be a Buddhist in the modern world, for, as I said above, I think the women in the FWBO have something quite unique to share.

And in being an FWBO magazine we wanted to reflect the international character of our movement. We manage this better in some issues than in others - for it is still the case that the greater majority of our readers and contributors live in the British Isles - but in bringing each issue together I am well aware of our sisters in the Americas, in Australasia, in the other European countries, even in Africa and of course, our many sisters in India and as much as possible we try to include articles from around the world.

One last thought. Not all our readers belong to the FWBO, not all our readers are women, and we even have a few readers who are not Buddhist - though they are surely sympathetic in some way to Buddhism. So of course *Lotus Realm* is for them too - in whatever way they may benefit from it.

So these are my thoughts on *Lotus Realm*'s place in the Universe - or on why have an FWBO Buddhist magazine for women. I hope some of what I have written may resonate with every reader in some way. Perhaps it may even persuade you to take out a long-term subscription - for yourself or for a friend or relative - or to take a few copies to your local women's bookshop or some other outlet where you think people might benefit from coming into contact with Buddhism, with committed women Buddhists and with the FWBO. And perhaps if you have thoughts, ideas, responses, you will yourself put pen to paper. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kalyanaprabha

Contributors

Bodhaniya grew up in the English Midlands. After leaving school she took up medical training at Barts hospital and went on to work in paediatrics. Most of her working life, however, she has been a GP (family doctor). After her husband's death a few years ago, and having brought up her four children, she sold the family home and now lives in a small flat in Birmingham with a fellow Dharmacharini. She works in Evolution, a women's team-based Right Livelihood.

Kulaprabha grew up in Scotland. Her interest in science took her into research as a chemist. Although relishing the world of scientific enquiry, she found it was 'not enough'. She joined the Western Buddhist Order in 1988. For many years she was fully involved in the Glasgow Buddhist Centre as well as leading retreats in other cities around the world. Currently she is devoting more time to Dharma study and to leading retreats.

Padmachandra grew up in Scotland and trained as a social worker. After seven years she moved to London to join a Buddhist Right Livelihood business. She was ordained in 1999. Since then she has been working part-time with adults with learning difficulties, teaching meditation and writing poetry. She lives in a women's community in South London.

The Great Wonder

Science and the Universe

Kulaprabha

AFTER THE SUN HAS SET, there is a very bright star visible just now in the western sky. A couple of years ago, when I was in India, I saw the same star setting westwards over the Arabian Sea. It was followed by a red star moving in the same westerly direction but setting much later. What are these bright stars? The one which sets soon after the sun is Venus. She is the goddess of love - beautiful, powerful, and sometimes jealous. Behind her across the Indian sky came red Mars called the God of War by the ancient Greeks. Another bright star in the Indian sky is Abhijit, Victorious, who helped the Hindu gods to conquer the asuras.' Arabian sky-watchers called it Vega. Two more bright stars, one white and the other yellow, have been very noticeable for most of the past year if you live in the northern hemisphere at a latitude of about 65 degrees north. If you are a regular sky-watcher you'll have noticed that they are not so bright as they were last year and you'll also know that they have been tracking across the sky relative to the other stars and that they weren't there at all a couple of years ago. And these other two stars? They are Jupiter, father of all these gods, and Saturn, the old god whom Jove/Jupiter overturned to take the throne.

Mr. Lyell's Edinburgh Reflections

Leaving the sky and looking at the earth - near Edinburgh there is a spot on the East Lothian coast, where, in the early eighteen hundreds, Charles Lyell sat and looked at the layering in the rocks and thought... and thought...and started out on the chain of reasoning that was to bring him right up against the deeply-held view of his day that this earth of ours was wrought from nothingness by the hand of God some 4004 years previously. Not a Greek god this one, of course, but the Yahweh of the Old Testament. If Lyell had been in India in some equivalent spot he'd not have had such a hard time declaring his conclusions as ancient Indian views of the cosmos had already portrayed the present universe as of an incalculable age. And, what's more, of a nature where whole world systems periodically come into being and go out of being over an even more immensely vast timescale - thereby forestalling any need for the cosmological First Cause represented in the figure Yahweh. Lyell's train of thought gave rise to modern geology. Geology has a lot more in common with the ancient Indian cosmological time-scale than it did with the Christian equivalent.

St. Hilda's Shells

Further down the east coast of Britain is a place called Whitby. If you walk along the cliffs there and in the surrounding bays, you'll likely come across some seashells. These shells are remarkable in that they are embedded in the rocks. In fact they are rock - but somehow in the shape of shells, some recognisable from the ordinary shells lying beside them washed up by the tide, some unlike any shell washed up on the beach but clearly a shell nonetheless. The shells at Whitby are often spiral in shape. What are they? They are the coiled up venomous snakes which Abbess St Hilda changed into stone so that they would not bite and poison her monks and nuns in Whitby Abbey or the local population of Whitby. It's not recorded what St Hilda thought about the bones of huge dragon-like creatures which occasionally became visible when parts of the Whitby cliffs collapsed. But no doubt such a determined and confident

woman would not have quailed at a mere dragon.

Myth and the First Scientists

Have you ever wondered what the fore-runner of science is? It could be myth. This is an idea suggested by Karl Popper, a 20th century philosopher of scientific method.[2] One of his main ideas is that far from starting out with an open mind, then forming a theory by drawing inductions from objective evidence, in practice scientists start off with a definite view, then gather and consider subsequent evidence and then modify the view accordingly - or not if they have too much invested in the old view. Myth, he suggests, might be the starting off 'view' of 'proto-scientists' many centuries ago. And a view begins with an emotional response. What might their emotional response to their world have been? Consider the imaginative description quoted in the centre of this page of pre-historic Man's response to the universe he found himself in.

> *In the beginning, we may say, life was a mystery. That, at least, was how it seemed to primitive humanity. Without formulating it as such, people felt, as though in the blood, that life was strange, incomprehensible: a mystery. Then later on, though still during humankind's unrecorded past, people began consciously, explicitly, to think about life. Our ancestors apprehended that they were - without knowing how or why - in the midst of what seemed to be a strange and even hostile world, surrounded by all sorts of things which they could not understand or control. In the morning they saw the sun rise, and in the evening they saw it set. But why the sun rose and why it set, and what happened to it when darkness fell, they just did not know. Sometimes there were great storms - the world grew dark, rain fell, thunder seemed to crack open the earth and the sky would be lit up by an intermittent and terrible glare. But what caused these disturbances no one could tell. The days might be long and warm, or they might be short and freezing, but why they should be so was, again, a mystery. Eventually, they discovered that they could strike two stones together to make fire - and here was another mystery.*
>
> *Almost as soon as these mysteries arose, it seems, they would have been where named and given a place in a larger pattern of meaning whereby people could make some sense of their lives.*[3]

If this might have been the proto-scientist's response I can recognise similarities with my response as I grew up and started wondering and finding out more about the world I lived in. Being now somewhat better read than I was then, it also puts me in mind of Aristotle's view that, 'it is owing to their wonder that men now begin, and first began, to philosophise.'

Aristotle mapped out the beginnings of scientific investigation and separated them into separate fields of enquiry. Philosophy and science (science is just the Latin word for 'knowing') were not such separate disciplines then as they appear to be now. Indeed, for a long time the philosophers and the scientists were the same men. And the beginnings of science, certainly of the scientist's aspirations, are to be found in the contemplative spiritual exercises of the Stoics and Epicureans. For the ancient Greeks, Natural Philosophy - Physics - was a necessary contemplative exercise which Aristotle describes thus:

'*nature, which fashions creatures, gives amazing pleasure in their study to all who can trace links of causation, and are naturally philosophers.*'

And Philo wrote:

'*Those who practice wisdom are excellent contemplators of nature and everything she contains (they are joined in thought to the sun and moon, and all the other stars, both fixed and wandering) and though they are attached to the earth by their bodies they provide their souls with wings.*'

Is that not a wondrous piece of writing? That more than any other sentence I have yet found tells you what it feels like to try to understand the world we live in in all its detail and complexity and yet never lose a sense of its wonder and beauty. Indeed its wonder and beauty become even more clear and strongly felt in delving into its make-up, origins and design.

The quotes from Aristotle and others given are from *Philosophy as a Way of Life* by Pierre Hadot.[4] Reading this book and one by Brian Magee, *The Great Philosophers*[5] has changed my opinion of Western philosophers. Twenty years or so ago I was a rather disparaging critic of Western philosophy as an occupation for seemingly idle thinkers who just sat behind their desks and made it all up as they pleased. (By the way, my criticism was uninformed but that didn't stop me!) Scientists, it seemed to me at the time, were not so full of hubris and vanity. We got out there and did some actual work and got some evidence before we attempted to explain the Universe. Magee draws out the links between the emergence of ideas in Western philosophical terms and the parallel empirical observations and emergence of scientific ideas. What is fascinating in his book is how he brings to life the interplay and even cross-fertilisation of ideas between them.

Iron Scourges over Albion

But not everyone feels towards scientific enquiry like this. Indeed some have felt the opposite. William Blake didn't like Isaac Newton's new take on the world. The great English visionary rejected what he saw as the notion of God with measuring callipers in his hand. He wrote

'*For Bacon and Newton, sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang*
Like iron scourges over Albion; Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs .. '[6]

John Keats trained as a surgeon but thankfully for us gave it up and gave us his poetry instead. He too resisted what he felt to be the implications of Newton's work on the nature of light and his discovery of the scientific origins of the rainbow. When he wrote,

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'

He was protesting against the discovery of how prisms diffract sunlight into rainbow colours. He felt that unweaving the rainbow stole possibilities of beauty and poetry from the world. For a fascinating account of this kind of emotional response to science see the book *Unweaving the Rainbow* by Richard Dawkins.[7] Though disagreeing with Keats' response, Dawkins pays tribute to his sensitivity and genius: 'Keats was a more likeable character than Newton and his shade was one of the imaginary referees looking over my shoulder as I wrote.'

But despite these responses, I think that the impulses which led Blake to mysticism and Keats to poetry are much the same sense of awe and wonder that lead others to look at the skies, the oceans, the landscape, and all their myriad occupants and prompt them to much effort, thought and experiment in trying to find out how these wonders have appeared, their causes and conditions, and their underlying connections.

World-shattering inconsistency

To return to the proto-scientists:

'the particular view of the world held in any one society or social group...would satisfy people for perhaps a very long time indeed. But eventually some inconsistencies would appear, some aspects of the world or of themselves would be discovered that could not be explained within that system, that would not fit into it. Some people would then simply choose to muddle along with the old system, making a few adjustments here and there, while others would dismantle the whole apparatus and start again from a completely different governing principle.'[3]

This is the hub of it - 'eventually some inconsistencies would appear'. This is the essential scientific point of no-return. What do you do when an inconsistency appears in your life or work? How do you feel? Excited? Curious? or Threatened? Fearful? Complacent? Do you want to draw out the inconsistency more clearly? Ignore it? Or swamp it with quibbles and old theories refurbished for the occasion? These sorts of inconsistencies are the cutting edge of science. They are the windows that open out to better and deeper understanding. The process of gaining understanding involves a readiness to let go of the old ideas, even though your scientific reputation may have been founded on them! The ideas and theories of science can only be provisional, not to be known with absolute certainty, and a good scientist is aware of that. If he were not aware of that there would be no way he could be a scientist because he would have no way for him to improve his theories and predictions.

As a young researcher in chemistry, I was brought up on this sort of 'creed'. I remember an initial panic in the first few weeks of starting my PhD work. It went along the lines of how was anything I found out (about the catalytic properties of titanium dioxide) going to be able to stand significantly beside the great body of what was already known? After all it might not agree with what was already known. In that case, why would anyone pay any attention to me? The answer, I realised, was that everyone would pay attention to my results - if I did the experiments reproducibly and in accordance with scientific method. If I did that and discovered a major inconsistency then it was open to me to dismantle the preceding body of scientific thought on the subject and rebuild it on a firmer footing that explained more than had been explained before - and other scientists would accept that. In fact the catalytic properties of titanium dioxide, though interesting enough in their way, did not overturn much of the currently held scientific theories on catalysis! But nevertheless - imagine the thrill of watching an experiment come to its conclusion aware that only you, of all beings on the planet, knew what had happened. These experimental conditions had never existed together before, nobody had ever seen this before and so far only you knew about it. And often you didn't understand it!

Go back fifty years and you find the publication of a piece of scientific research and thought that really was world-shattering in its implications, namely the publication in 1859 of *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. It's not that easy a read but there is a version of the same ideas and arguments, updated with subsequent discoveries, called *Almost Like a Whale* by Steve Jones.[8] Try that. To understand the uproar caused by Origins you need to know that it came out subsequent to Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Together these books dared to challenge the unchallengeable, that hither-to-fore edifice of authority - the Bible. Actually Lyell and Darwin were not the only source of challenge to the Bible in nineteenth century Europe but they especially brought to bear one very important quality of science. Science works. It is incredibly successful in describing and understanding the world around us, in making predictions, and in providing the underlying theory for inventors and innovators. It has a lot of weight because of that. People may not like its conclusions but they can't gainsay the weight of empirical evidence with which it backs up those conclusions. (In fact people can gainsay anything and frequently do. The Darwin/Lyell world view is still being denied and opposed by Creationists in USA and elsewhere. Not with any evidence though!)

Going back to the idea that science starts with myth. I think this is a way of saying that science starts with a sense of wonder, and it looks and observes the object of its wonder. A long time ago things were explained by myth.. And then at some point some people began to think the myth was being taken too literally.

Modern science has mainly been a western phenomenon. A major myth of western culture is the myth presented in the Bible. What happens when the scientist starts to gather evidence that what the myth suggests to be true is in conflict with our actual experience in world? That depends on whether people believe their own myths literally. The uproar in response to *Origins* was probably in direct proportion to the tendency within Christianity to believe fully and literally in its own myths - especially its myth of Creation, Created and Creator. It has to be admitted that a myth which places mankind at the head of Creation has some appeal to one's ego. No wonder, then, that Darwin was mercilessly lampooned, and worse, for telling us that we were in facts descendants of monkeys!

God's Funeral

Some of the scientists, philosophers and theologists of 18th and 19th century Europe were in process of demolishing the Bible's claims to authority. Hume and Kant helped undermine Ontological, Cosmological and By Design proofs for the existence of God. To put it simply, these were that God existed because He was a 'necessary' Truth; or He existed because things are contingent and need a necessary First Cause; and the related arguments that things being so obviously designed there must be a Designer. What I sometimes feel when attempting to understand the thinking of these philosophers is a great surge of freed imagination and purpose, strong enough to demolish whatever wrong thinking it encountered. The German scholar and theologian David Strauss gave a helping hand to the demolition process with his linguistic and historical analysis of the Bible. His work was translated into English by George Eliot under the title of *The Life of Jesus.* Biblical authority couldn't stand up to such analysis which was probably why none of it was studied in Catholic seminaries of the time.

What was Darwin and Lyell's particular contribution to all this movement of reaction against the major myth of their times? Lyell's geology demonstrated the impossibility of believing that the world had been created all in one go some few thousand years ago. In Darwin's case, others before him had promoted a theory of evolution but his unique contribution was to expound the theory of natural selection and thus remove any necessity for what has been called a 'metaphor of purpose' when contemplating natural history, the idea that God was no longer a necessary truth, cause or designer. Further, Darwin showed there hadn't even been a nice regular staircase of development with man standing on the top floor. There were in fact many hopeful starts that came to nothing. Evolution can happen - but frequently doesn't. There is no evidence of an imperative purpose involved in it. He also provided an alternative explanation for those stone snakes and dragons on Whitby beach! Was 'God's Funeral' about to begin? At least in Europe? All these different threads and influences are followed through in A. N. Wilson's book of the same name.[9]

Did the challenge to religious authority by Giordano Bruno and Galileo some 200 years before come to fruition with Darwin and his fellow scientists and philosophers? Giordana Bruno thought that the universe, like God, was infinite, that the earth travelled round the sun and that in the cosmos there were many earths. He was burned at the stake in Rome in 1600. His last words were:

'I neither ought to recant nor will I. I have nothing to recant, nor do I know what I should recant.'[10]

A Sense of Mystery

In 1610, Galileo looked through his telescope and saw Jupiter and four of its moons. Not a wandering star but a planet and one, like the Earth, that revolves round the Sun not the other way round. Nowadays, with a click of a mouse button, science gives us awe-inspiring close-up photographs of this giant of a planet - as awe-inspiring surely to some of us as his mythic predecessor was to the Greeks. And is not Venus as beautiful as ever in the evening and morning skies? Though now we know that she too is a planet shrouded not in 'the mists and yellow fruitfulness',of Earth but in her own trailing clouds of sulphuric and nitric acids and carbon dioxide covering forever her often molten surface of glowing lava and flowing rocks. Only a few million miles between us and Venus and yet look at the difference - on this earth conditions combine to form Keats and Newton, oceans and blue skies; there no such life is possible. Much the same can be said for Mars the red planet - a few million miles in the other direction and again no such life can exist. And who knows what planets revolve round Vega! Indeed who knows - as yet - what planets and what beings revolve round any of the myriad stars in our own galaxy or any of innumerable other galaxies, some of them now visible to us via the Hubble telescope that orbits high up in our sky. In some ways the ideas that so shook the world of 19th century Europe have become commonplace. But that may not be to our advantage. It's one thing to be convinced, it's another merely to take it for granted.

The challenge to Christian religious authority is well established now, even commonplace. But although Darwin certainly held irreligious non-Christian worldviews himself and many others of his contemporaries found their way to similar positions, it was by no means true that most 19th century scientists did so. Or even 20th century scientists. The question to be raised and answered is again about myth. Myths can be undermined if they are held too absolutely and they can be in conflict with experience. Does this mean there is no place for myth in our lives? Or no place for religion?
Einstein certainly did not think so:

'Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.
The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavour in art and science.'[11]

Nor would Newton, though he had his difficulties with some Christian dogma:

'I don't know what I may seem to the world, but, as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.'

'Truth is the offspring of silence and unbroken meditation.'

Much more could be said. In particular about science and Buddhism - indeed this is the first mention of Buddhism in this article! I might have said a lot about impermanence and insubstantiality and to what extent empirical scientific enquiry can find its way to the Wisdom which Buddha points us towards. What and where are the limits of reason? Or I might have attempted some comments about the implications for a Buddhist ex-scientist of Hume's thoughts on causation. It is fairly easy for such an ex-scientist to be complacent about the provisional nature of scientific thought - about how it can't be proved but progresses through being disproved. It is another thing altogether to contemplate that perhaps there are no causal links at all. Where do Hume and the Dharma lead us in this respect and can science follow? I am not going to enter that domain here. It needs a lot more thought by me.

Instead I'm going to send this article off to my Internet provider and hope that it lands in the *Lotus Realm* e-mail box. And tomorrow, I'm off to lead a retreat on the *White Lotus Sutra*. It's a sutra of nearly all myth and parable and has very little in the way of conceptual content. It also has very little that is in conflict with anything I've been talking about here. It can easily hold the Hubble telescope's vastness of perspective, both of space and of time, within its own perspective of infinite world-systems and infinite space. It states in its own way the idea of an interrelated, interconnected and conditioned Universe. If I still thought that science could satisfy my search for meaning, I'd still be a scientist. It did satisfy me for a time. What happened? It is hard to say. In some ways I think my idealism outgrew science. In other ways I got to the point of having my university job made permanent and fairly quickly after that found myself wondering whether I really wanted to carry on doing it. Basically I wasn't satisfied by it any longer. I'd been meditating for about a year by then. What started me meditating? I came across the Glasgow Buddhist Centre and I remembered how impressed I'd been years before when I read some books about Buddhism. Mostly what impressed me was that it was a religion that did not involve believing in God. What impressed me next was that I thought there would be no conflict between Buddhism and science, especially when I read about the levels of conditionality which Buddhism described as operating in the universe. I thought that Buddhism would fit very easily into a scientific perspective. It took me a few years to see that this was the wrong way round! Other things challenged me as well. I realised that although I was happy in many ways with partner, baby daughter, house, car etc. something else was still needed for a sense of deeper satisfaction. Science asks the question, how? I suppose I started asking the question, Why? Science seemed inadequate to the job of providing a satisfactory answer. The Dharma was not only adequate but overflowing with the offer of meaning and of providing a deeper satisfaction. Twenty years on I am still influenced by my scientific background and I'm grateful for its inspiration and clarity. I'm grateful to those earlier scientists, men who helped break down adherence to the myths in my culture that had begun to bind men's minds rather than free them. However commonplace their ideas are now, those men had to face a great spiritual insecurity and sometimes emotional bleakness in striving to honour their thinking. For me it has been very different. With my thinking formed by standing on their shoulders, it has been easy task to move into a different religious setting from theirs and a different - and much richer - mythic inheritance. And I am very glad that what inspired them has led me to understand something of the Buddha's teaching and its one taste, the taste of freedom, where myth and intellect live not in mutual enmity but in mutual wonder.

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The Universe

The River under the River - A poet's journey

Padmachandra

'Where are you going?' asks a friend I have met on the road to the railway station.

'Off to my caravan', I reply, and can already feel a slight habitual sheepishness creep over me.

'What will you do there?' comes the next question, and here, as usual, I hesitate. Sometimes I say 'I am going to my caravan to write', or ' I find it helpful to spend time on my own' or ' to deepen my meditation practice'. But none of these seem quite adequate or even fully truthful. Yes, I do hope to spend time alone, and to write poems, and to meditate more undistractedly. But these are all more definable components of something else that I find more difficult to explain, even sometimes to myself. In order to really communicate myself to my friend on George Street, Croydon, I might have to launch into a poem, or song, or enact some ritual gestures. One way might be to recite this poem I wrote a couple of years ago;

TRACKS

It's not the pawprints themselves
but the wondering
about the kind of animal that left them.

Even the poet himself
is obsessed with this question.

No matter how foolish he looks
he's up there, wandering alone,
hoping to catch his original face
before he was born.

This poem was written after reading a book of poems by the American poet William Stafford[1], whom I sensed had the kind of attitude a 'tracker' might have in the mountains; a certain quality of listening. After reading a number of his poems, I began to have a sense that I was entering a particular medium. I had a sense that underlying all the poems was some kind of river. The poems were like the sounds that the river makes. If one were to go to sleep and wake up again, the river would still be there, and there would be no end to the unique and specific noises that the river would make. Coleman Barks recognises this quality in Rumi's work, where it is even more evident. He writes; 'these poems are not monumental in the western sense of memorialising moments; they are not discrete entities but a fluid, continuously self-revising, self-interrupting MEDIUM.'[2] This evidence of an underlying medium points to a conception of mind that is far deeper and broader, and more fluid, than our usual pop-psychological conception of individual mind. The modern view tends to be 'scientific' and focuses on the brain, which is conceived as a kind of computer, separate from other computers. That which is visible and conscious is over-identified with, in this model, with little credence given to unseen or unconscious factors.

Turning to the work of Carl Jung, we have a rather different model that portrays the conscious mind as the tiny tip of the iceberg of the human mind. Below this, he identified another smallish layer as being the 'personal unconscious', and the huge boundariless remainder consisting of what he termed 'the collective unconscious'. In his work, he tried to demonstrate that what he called archetypes - edgeless primordial patterns appearing again and again in both the individual mind, and the collective life, in the form of symbols or ratios - originate in our instinctual life. Anyone who has actually tried to move through a forest and catch sight of a deer or shy bird will know that there is an involvement and alertness in the whole body involved in this activity. It is almost as if we return to our animal body, and to our instincts - we become more aware of our belly, and the lower part of the torso - we sense the world with our bodies, not just the part of our body above the neck. As a consequence we feel more alive, more attuned to the world and our relative place within it. As indicated by the poem, this awakeness in the body is a vital element in becoming attuned to our 'inner life'.

Thirdly, there is the Buddhist conception of Mind - with a capital 'M' - which allows the possibility of going beyond the personal ego altogether. Only poetry can approach a description. One appropriate image might be that of Indra's Net, in which the Universe is perceived as being a net of jewels, each radiating light, and being reflected in each other, so that each jewel reflects all the other jewels.

In our poem, the poet is himself intrigued, and passionately in search of the amazing 'animal' that seems to speak through his pen, and which is wiser than he is. We could say that this receptive seeking or following is the artist's work, and also the work of the spiritual practitioner, as long as it

Within

takes place within the wider context of an intention to increase and deepen consciousness.

I also imagine the poet is wandering alone in the mountains, on a mission that might seem to others to be foolish, misguided, or even a selfish misuse of time. It is this attitude, somehow internalised by me, which caused me to feel slightly sheepish, on meeting my friend on the way to the train.

The Courage to Create

I believe women can have particular issues in this area, as traditionally they have taken the role of carers and nurturers for others, and have been defined in terms of their relationships to others. It takes great courage for some of us to step away from those voices of doubt, step away from the perceived voice of the group, and follow the path of a more creative inner life.

One of the most inspiring qualities of 'great' artists is their refusal to compromise to the voices of utilitarianism. This confidence seems to be rooted in a lack of attachment to a fixed sense of self, connected with a conviction through experience of the innate intelligence and fecundity of deeper levels of the mind. For example, it seems to me that the greatest poets - the ones whose work lasts, because it reaches people's hearts and minds across centuries and cultures, such as Emily Dickinson, Basho, Rumi, and Antonio Machado - have managed through their own distinctive personal and original voices, to reach a place that resonates with universal and recognisable truth, whenever another human mind that is receptive and ready touches it. It is as if they see themselves as a vessel, through which the deeper forces of wisdom and empathy can speak. In order to have this conception of the self, it is necessary to continually 'go forth' from a fixed view of the self. It is necessary both to clarify the mind - to clear the 'vessel' of anything that might block or distort that which is passing through it - and to guard against becoming attached to, or over identified with any of the material that passes through. Mark Strand begins a poem; 'I empty myself of the names of others. I empty my pockets. I empty my shoes and leave them beside the road...'[3]

Essentially, we want to quieten down the incessant and often meaningless chatter of the habitual river of most of our conscious thought, in order to listen to something deeper - the river under the river - which feels more essentially meaningful, satisfying and real. The kinds of choices individuals make about what input to avoid, and what to cultivate, will differ from person to person. For example, I often avoid prose in both written and spoken form. I like to create spaces in my life which are free of the functional exchange of information, and business-type

interactions, and during these times I like to avoid televisions, telephones, and computers. The sorts of input I seek at the moment are certain sorts of music, dance, poetry, and writings about poetry These inputs seem at present to be the kinds of conditions that lead to me inviting something deeper in myself to speak. As this 'something' seems to want to be unlimited by a historical personality, it is more resonant with the language of myth or symbol.

'Hanging Loose'

Most Buddhists are familiar with the teaching of 'guarding the gates of the senses', in terms of being mindful of input. But the idea of actively listening to music, or reading poetry that is not the utterance of the Buddha or his direct disciples, may seem for some Buddhists to be breaking either the precept of cultivating simplicity and contentment, or that of cultivating mindfulness. I personally find that such activities seem to reach parts that often the sutras, or even meditation, can't on their own reach. It seems to provide a bridge between my mundane experience, and the more rarefied experiences of the spiritual life. It is almost as if some part of me remains unmoved or frozen by the traditional Buddhist teachings, however much my conscious mind agrees with them. In his book, *The Religion of Art*, Sangharakshita writes that participation in the arts is important for the establishment of the Dharma in the West, because unlike our Eastern counterparts, westerners tend to be under-developed emotionally (there being an overemphasis on intellect)[4]. Elsewhere he explains that in order to develop - in order to bring all of ourselves to be present and fully conscious to our spiritual path - we need to 'find emotional equivalents to our intellectual understanding'[5]. Of course, this is not to say that everyone in the West will find it helpful to participate in the arts in order to develop.

It is in the process of continually letting go and 'hanging loose' to experience, that we can see the vital connection between the life of the artist, and the spiritual life. There is a phrase used by practitioners of Zen Buddhism that relates to this. They say that in order to make progress on the path, one must 'get out of one's own way'. In fact, in the Japan of Basho's day, where Buddhism and the Arts were inextricably linked, haiku masters would frequently change their names, and wander from place to place. The Perfection of Wisdom texts of Mahayana Buddhism, where perhaps the most concentrated essence of this teaching of 'not fixing the mind' can be found, are full of the most paradoxical and yet strangely moving and beautiful interaction between the enlightened mind, and other not so enlightened minds. One has the sensation on reading them of having no place to stand on - no place to land. The truth communicated by both the Perfection of Wisdom and, on a more mundane level, much worthwhile poetry, is *metaphorical*. One could say that from a Buddhist point of view, our suffering and ignorance is caused by our tendency to take our experience over literally. *The Diamond Sutra* tells us that the enlightened mind views worldly phenomena as 'stars, a fault of vision, a lamp, a mock show, dew drops or a dream.'

Anonymous

Back to the journey, and things have moved on. I have reached the caravan, and actually I've already been there for nearly a whole day, on my own. What is the relevance of such solitude in this exploration of the inner life? One of the important aspects for me is the sense of not being an object to anyone else's subject. I wish to feel anonymous - to lose control - to get a little lost. This may be accentuated for women by the fact of living within a female body and psychology. It seems to be part of our psychology to be more sensitive to and aware of other's feelings and needs. I recently read that brain research had shown that the connection between emotions and cognition is more developed in the female brain. This has both positive and negative implications for women. The downside can be a difficulty in getting distracted or waylayed from more long term and far-reaching goals, by becoming caught up in the more smallscale world of immediate connection with others. In the Greek myth of Psyche and Amor, Psyche must undertake a number of tasks in order to find her lost love. One of these tasks is to descend into the underworld, with a very particular place to get to. One of her tasks is to be able to pass by some female figures who appear to be drowning, and pleading for help, without being distracted into helping them. This story isn't meant to encourage an unkind attitude, but illustrates the need both to discriminate, and to be single minded and determined where some tasks are of vital importance. One could say that the Buddha, on going forth from his wife and child, was only able to do so because he had a greater task to undertake, on behalf of all humanity, including his beloved family.

There is another aspect also to this area of 'being seen'. Many tribal peoples believe that to have one's photograph taken causes one's soul to be stolen. I was thinking that there is some truth in this. Think how soulless all those photographs of celebrities in Hello magazine - to give one example - can be. A person who parades his or her life in public, unless they are very skillful at separating their worlds, can end up sacrificing their psychic depth. The Greek poet C.P Cavafy writes of life:

Do not degrade it by dragging it along,
taking it around and exposing it so often
to the daily silliness
of social relations and parties,
until it comes to seem a boring hanger on...[6]

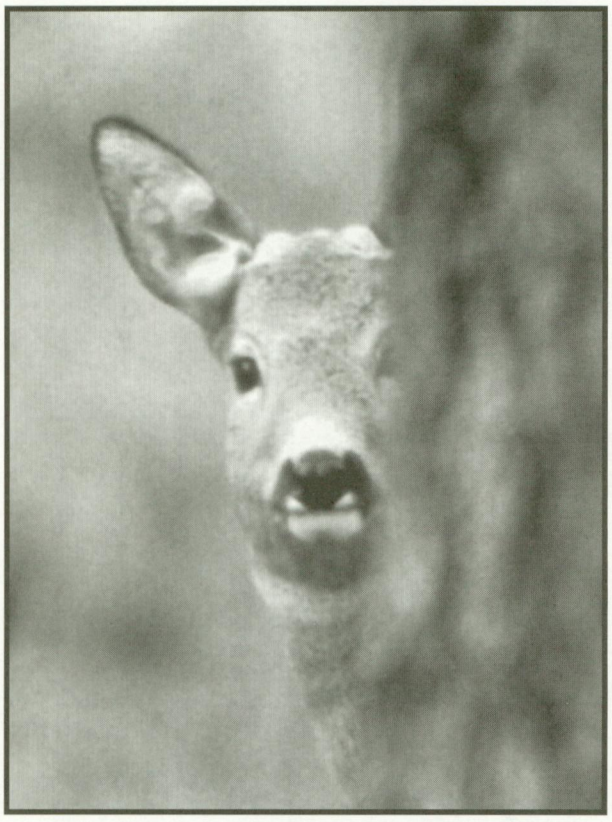
Solitude and the Desert

For many women, solitude frees them temporarily from the perceived expectations of others, and the roles they may identify with. For example, women tend, more than men I believe, to be identified with their physical characteristics, and sexuality. The female form has a particular place in the collective psyche that allows it to be more easily objectified. One glance at the top rack of magazines in any newsagents will demonstrate this. Until women free themselves from their own identification with this dynamic, as they become more mature and conscious, it can be an inhibiting factor. Solitude also allows a woman to discover aspects of herself that are not defined in relation to others. For example, she may become aware of a child-like aspect of herself that needs her attention, and of her masculine side. In my experience I discover a sense of potency and wholeness, that I don't experience often in other situations. There is something particular and special about spending time alone, letting the mind slow down, that can restore me to a sense of

depth and direction. It is an experience that feels very special, private, and unique.

What am I doing now in the caravan? Am I sitting at my desk scribbling away furiously? No! I appear to be lolling about on the sofa, not doing much at all. In fact I look slightly dull and blank.

What's happening is what I have come to recognise as the 'desert' effect. Before coming here I have been working quite hard, and communicating with a lot of people. This is therefore a period of transition, which often feels very fruitless, hopeless, and uncomfortable. I wonder why on earth I am doing this, and feel a million miles away from anything poetic.. Meditation is a struggle, and I feel very bored. Luckily I have been here before, and I recognise the landmarks. Paradoxically, this boredom - this feeling of being in a desert, can be seen as a positive sign. When material that is 'unconscious' is ready to become more conscious, it requires a reorganisation, or widening of consciousness; things must fall apart - things will feel chaotic. I have learnt that if I just 'stay with it', something new almost always begins to emerge, if I give it time. This pattern can be seen in the archetype of the healer, or shaman, who must often endure trials of sickness, or even death, before being able to ascend or descend into different levels of consciousness, and before returning to heal or teach others.



Receptivity and the 'Invitation'

Ah! Now I seem to be at my desk. Although I'm not writing furiously, I'm revising a few old poems, trying to get back into the mood. I had an image recently of this phase on the creative process. I imagined that it was like entering the forest looking for some shy, wild animal. You wait, and wait. You put food out, and continue to wait quietly. Finally, you see something stepping out from behind a tree. As you focus your eyes, you realise that it is not the animal you were waiting for. This is an animal made of cardboard, cellotape and string, as it creaks towards you. Nevertheless, you are a wise and compassionate artist, and you take pity on the poor beast - your first attempt at a poem. You stroke its head and give it something to eat. You begin to feel a real kindness developing in your heart. Whilst absorbed in this, dusk begins to fall. Suddenly, somehow, you feel yourself to be surrounded by a number of warm flanks, and soft muzzles. You feel as if you have entered a different realm, and you are surrounded by a group of live deer - the animals you had been looking for in the first place (although more beautiful than you could have imagined).

The attitude of receptivity and 'invitation' is very important in any inner work. Mary Oliver, in her *Poetry Handbook*, points out that if Romeo and Juliet had not both arrived at the appointed time, they wouldn't have had their rendezvous. As a writer or meditator, it is important to stick to our appointments with ourselves. Otherwise, the shy animal that we may be seeking will not be encouraged. It is good to create an environment that becomes associated with meditation and/or poetry through regularity of practice. It is good to create spaces in which you won't be interrupted by other people, or telephones. Mary Oliver also writes:

> To interrupt the writer from the line of thought is to wake the dreamer from the dream. The dreamer cannot enter that dream, precisely as it was unfolding, ever again because the line of thought is more than that: it is a line of feeling as well.[7]

In *Writing the Australian Crawl*[8], William Stafford, in a similar vein, reminds us that unless we put pen to paper, that particular thought may never become manifest. The act of writing, which is more of an outward action than thought, but perhaps less than speech (as speech cannot be revised, or crumpled into the bin), is nonetheless an action. Actions precede consciousness. For example, it is often only after I have written something that I am struck by the meaning of

it. In fact, it is not uncommon for it to take days, weeks, sometimes months, to fully assimilate/understand something I've written.

The sound of the sea is getting louder. Let us leave the poet in her caravan to whatever it is she is trying to do there. Let us re-enter the city, and the crowded streets. Everyone seems very busy, rushing to and fro. Everyone seems to have somewhere to go, and wants to get there very fast. Look at people's faces as they pass. Although they seem very active, most people's faces look absent. But here comes a woman who is walking more gracefully, and purposefully. She looks different. What is it? Something about her face. It looks alive and inhabited. Here is someone in touch with her inner life. This is the person you approach to ask for the directions you need.

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The Ethical Universe

Interview with Bodhaniya

LR: Bodhaniya, you qualified as a doctor in 1965 and for the next thirty odd years practised as a hospital doctor and then in general practice. What drew you to medicine?

BA: I was fascinated with how things tick - how life ticks, how people tick. My main motivation wasn't wanting all beings to be well - although the desire to help people did come into it.

LR: In 1998 you gave up your practice as a doctor. What do you do now?

BA: *(Laughing)* I work in a gift-shop, an Evolution shop, it's a team-based Right Livelihood here in Birmingham.

LR: What made you take that step?

BA: Having come across the Dharma, I realised that if I was serious about my spiritual life, that was where my energy had to go. Being a GP is a very full-time job. I think it defined me as a person. Perhaps because I'd been a doctor for such a long time it was difficult for me to shift my being in a different direction. That was why I gave up my work in 1998. After my ordination in 1999, I realised that although it was very nice not to have any major responsibilities, from the point of view of my spiritual practice, I did need a focus. So I joined the shop team last September, and now work four days a week. I also keep time for my family even though none of them now live with me. I have two grandchildren and another one on the way. I think that being a grandparent is an important role.

A Matter of Ethics

LR: What sort of ethical background do you come from?

BA: I was brought up with a Christian background. I was at a Christian school for ten years. I tried hard to grapple with Christianity both then and later in my life. I wanted some kind of ethical base - but I found it difficult because I didn't have the magic quality 'faith'. I just didn't believe in a Creator God.

Bodhaniya (far right) with husband, Clive, and medical colleagues 1965

LR: What do you see as the biggest difference between the Christian and the Buddhist perspective on ethics?

BA: There is the perspective in Christian ethics of God as Judge. At some time after death God judges each being according to the good and bad they have done and that determines their future. That seemed to lead to a sort of judgmentalism coming down through all levels of society. God was the ultimate judge and then below God there were tiers of judges who one was supposed to look up to and do what they said. I think this is one of the areas I had difficulty with. My being kept rebelling. I didn't feel free, I felt trapped.

LR: What do you mean by 'judgmentalism'?

BA: Making a decision about whether another person is good or bad; or right or wrong from one's own stand-point - often without being in full possession of the facts. It's very difficult to know another person. Also the setting up of laws about what is correct and proper and what is incorrect and improper without perhaps sufficient consideration. An example of this is in the area of sexual activity. The Christian perspective is very proscribed. Certain sexual acts are fine and other ones are not. The Buddhist point of view is that motivation is the key to determining what is skilful and unskilful. In Buddhism actions are said to be skilful or unskilful according to the motivation that lies behind them. Skilful actions are motivated by love, generosity, compassion and mindfulness. Skilful actions bring happiness and unskilful actions bring unhappiness. But this doesn't mean that if we are unhappy or in pain it is because we have behaved unskilfully. It might be a different order of conditionality at work.

The Buddha taught that everything in the universe arises in dependence on conditions. But there are different orders of conditionality, relating to the physical inorganic, the physical organic and to the mind. The ethical order of conditionality is just one order of conditionality, one aspect of the universal law of conditionality - although of course it's a very

important aspect. It means we need to learn that our actions have consequences. But there is no Judge deciding whether what we do is good or bad. When the Buddha said that unskilful action brings suffering and skilful action brings happiness he was just describing the natural workings of the universe.

LR: Do non-Buddhist societies recognise this 'natural law' at all?

BA: The importance of motive is recognised, for instance, by aspects of British law. If one killed someone in a car because one had driven at him or her in a rage, one would be accused of murder. If one were drunk or driving too fast, one would still be held responsible and accused of manslaughter or death by dangerous driving. If, however, one was taking all precautions but someone had stepped right out in front of the car, one wouldn't be held responsible. So we do understand in British law that motivation is crucial.

In Buddhism we see unskilfulness being more to do with foolishness and ignorance. Most often we don't set out to cause others pain. I feel I have a duty to clarify my ignorance - to try and see more clearly how the laws of the universe really work so that I can act in keeping with them - act more skilfully.

LR: Has an understanding of Buddhist ethics changed the way you see things?

BA: When I was a teenager I came across the teaching of the Roman Stoic, Marcus Aurelius. One of his teachings stayed in my mind ever since: 'Look thou within. Within thee is the fountain of good. And it will ever spring if thou wilt ever delve.'

It was really only when I became a Buddhist that I realised that this was about being receptive to the positive sides of myself and others. The more I could relate to others on that basis the happier my life would be. And I have found that to be the case.

One of the things that has changed in my perspective on ethics is realising that I had all I needed to practise the Dharma. I had always thought someone 'out there' would have to tell me what to do - but after I became a Buddhist I realised I had everything I needed. And if I had it then so did everyone else.

LR: Do you mean the potential for Enlightenment?

BA: Yes. I have the sense that this potential for Enlightenment is in fact the basis for sentience - I've no proof of this - I couldn't say an amoeba is striving for Enlightenment - but I have this intuitive sense that this is the unifying factor of all life and this is why life is so precious and that is the basis for Buddhist ethics. I had this experience very strongly at my ordination. I was ordained at Il Convento in Tuscany. I was given the name 'Bodhaniya', which means, 'capable of Enlightenment'. After my ordination ceremony I went into the olive grove where I was camping. It was full of a myriad of life-forms - wonderful toads and insects and tortoises - absolutely amazing - all singing and scampering away in the night. I realised it was this potential for Enlightenment which gave me this wonderful sense of interconnectedness with all beings.... (*Pause*).

LR: Perhaps we can move on to talk about your work as a doctor and ethical issues you have had to deal with.

The Ethics of Disease

BA: One interesting area was that after I became a Buddhist I realised that many of the problems people had were related to their own ethical perspective - or lack of it. For instance, people might not be prepared to take responsibility for actions which were causing them difficulty. They come along to the doctor for help but many of the things they came about were related to them being unhappy rather than necessarily to being ill in a physical or truly mental sense.

What fascinates me is this word, dis-ease. It implies that somebody is not comfortable - they are not at ease with their conditions. I was finding increasingly that disease had more to do with people's ethical framework and the choices they were making in their lives than any physical or mental illness open to treatment in the normal western sense. And that ease seemed to come more from an ethical life, a life more in accordance with the way things are.

I was recently on a retreat with Ratnasuri. She has been an Order member for eighteen years with a very strong practice. She's also been a private and public preceptor. One thing that struck me about her was the ease that she showed - both with herself and others - she seemed completely comfortable and at ease with everything around

her - because of her basis of love and friendliness and warmth which just emanates out of her. I think one of the reasons I found medicine difficult is that I felt increasingly that developing this sense of ease was the key - developing more positive emotion and awareness and getting a deeper ethical perspective. As far as I am aware, in Tibetan medical science the ethical dimension is crucial in treatment.

Here in Britain we've all this hi-tech treatment but if one stood back and looked at the general level of happiness since the inception of the health service in 1948, I don't think it would be possible to say that 50 years on people are one whit happier. There may be evidence that people are less happy. Each new 'advance' seems to bring with it more anxiety and more craving. And there is the underlying attitude that medicine should be able to make everything better - there is an underlying delusion. Increasing awareness of these issues made it more and more difficult for me to continue in general practice.

LR: What other ethical issues were you confronted with?

Animal Experimentation

BA: Another area I became more aware of was the use of animals in western medicine - both in developing treatments and in developing drugs. I was moving in my own life to becoming first a vegetarian and then a vegan and trying to avoid the use of any animal products in my personal life. It was very difficult to apply this in the working situation. For example in hormone replacement therapy, one of the leading brands uses the purified ingredients of pregnant mares' urine. That involves the horses being stalled up so the urine can be collected and they are constantly impregnated to keep the cycle going. I became aware that was the tip of the ice-berg really in the use of animals in western medicine - although there are moves not to use animals and very strict laws as to how animals are treated. A lot of the work that used to be done on animals is now done on tissue cultures taken from human tissues. But there are Eastern treatments such as acupuncture which as far as I know has no dependence on any kind of animal model whatsoever.

Abortion

LR: Did becoming a Buddhist have implications in other areas of your medical practice?

BA: One of the areas where my ethical perspective changed dramatically was in the area of abortion. I was a medical student in the early 60's when abortion was still illegal. It was the time of the move towards greater sexual freedom and better contraception. The debate around abortion was very strong and I was an active pro-abortion campaigner. I felt that women should have the 'freedom to choose' - although I did have an underlying sense that abortion wasn't ideal. But given the suffering caused to both the woman and the child they didn't want, I felt that abortion was a reasonable alternative. As I came to take Buddhist ethics more seriously, my view changed. I became more and more aware that abortion involved taking life and was therefore unethical. I found in my medical practice that this was one of the areas where I needed to be very careful. I had undergone a change of attitude but the law hadn't and therefore it was important that I gave the women appropriate counselling and the service that they were entitled to from a doctor. So I would see women and counsel them and refer them to a clinic but I ceased to sign a consent form to say that I agreed with the procedure. I would explain in the letter that this was due to my religious principles rather than to any belief that the woman didn't come within the remit of the abortion law.

Genetic Testing

I think the other area that I have found increasingly difficult is that of preventing the birth of children with a variety of defects. Genetic testing is developing all the time and pregnant women who are happily pregnant are now routinely offered tests which will pick up certain diseases such as spina bifida or Down's syndrome and people at particular risk can be offered testing for particular diseases. If the child is found to have a major abnormality, these women are offered an abortion. These tests are built into the system and I don't think sufficient explanation is given to women about the area they are going into. My sister recently found herself pregnant in her early 40's. She made the decision not to have the blood tests but she did go along at 20 weeks for a scan and the scan showed some features which suggested her child might have Down's syndrome. She felt inappropriate pressure was put on her to have further confirmatory tests leading to a possible late abortion. When her child was born he turned out to be perfectly normal. There was the attitude that a sensible person would have the test, and if the test came up positive have an abortion.


Bodhaniya (3rd from left) with family

In the early 80's I was working in a clinic for children with cystic fibrosis which is one of the commonest forms of serious inherited

disease in this country. Children born today with cystic fibrosis have a very reasonable life-expectancy but they do need a lot of treatment throughout their lives. In the early 80's tests were being developed to offer to pregnant women who had already had children with cystic fibrosis so they could choose to have an abortion if the tests came up positive. I remember one boy in the clinic - he was 14 and severely affected and his life expectancy was probably quite limited - he was very upset at the thought that if these tests had been available 14 years previously, he might not have had the chance of life. He felt that his life was well worth living despite his disease. I think a lot of these teenagers felt quite undermined - the underlying thought process under the development of these tests was that these lives were not of value and these children would have been better not being born. I think that is a very, very serious road to go down.

LR: What are your thoughts about contraception?

Contraception

BA: The main thing I would say about contraception is advice to all heterosexual couples that no form of contraception is 100% reliable. I used to say to the young girls who came to my surgery that although I was happy to put them on the pill they needed to be aware that the only completely safe form of contraception was to keep their legs shut! (I could get away with that being a woman myself!) I think one has to be aware that there is an underlying biological imperative to the sexual act - the imperative to reproduce - it's not just for fun. I think it is really important that practising Buddhists take this on board.

LR: Do you think they don't?

BA: I don't think they do enough. I think that people in heterosexual relationships should think very carefully and discuss quite openly what their views would be were the woman to find herself pregnant. This is an issue - like abortion - that affects men as well as women. If men don't take full responsibility it can contribute to women not behaving ethically.

LR: What do you think a man's responsibility is?

BA: A man's responsibility is to be aware of the possibility that pregnancy might arise from heterosexual activity and to be prepared to support and take that on board should it occur.

LR: Do you think some forms of contraception are ethically more acceptable than others?

BA: I think that is a very difficult area. Certain forms of contraception act on the basis that if there has been a conceptus, the union of a sperm and ovum, they prevent implantation into the uterine wall. These forms of contraception are the so-called 'morning after' pill and the coil. It raises the whole question of where does life actually begin. It's difficult to be sure where consciousness starts. It is quite a mysterious area. The traditional Buddhist view is that consciousness arises with the union of the sperm and the ovum but there has been some suggestion that consciousness comes into being over several weeks. These methods are obviously preferable to abortion.

LR: An ethical issue that concerns us all is the one of how we die. What are your thoughts about that?

On how we die

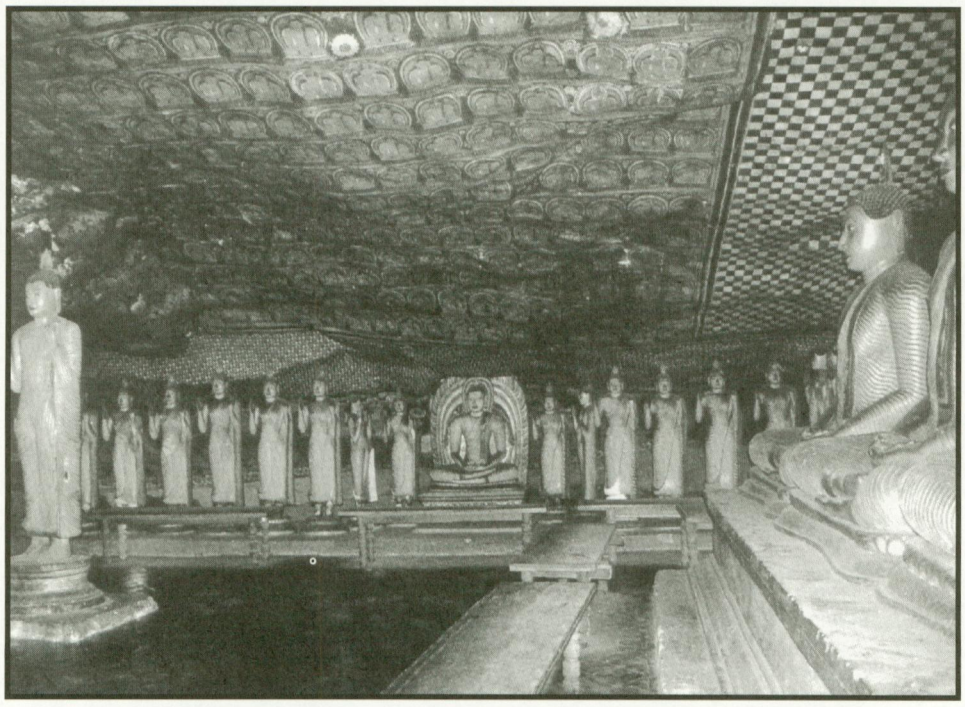
BA: I've been faced with situations where an elderly person is reaching the end of their days when I've felt they would be much better cared for in a lo-tech way in their own home even if their life was slightly shorter rather than being given all the hi-tech treatments in hospital and dying, I would have thought, in considerable discomfort. Some years ago, my father-in-law, who was living with us and who had Alzheimer's disease, had a stroke. My husband and I made the decision to keep him at home and nurse him and keep him comfortable. It would have been possible for him to have been artificially fed and he would probably have lived a lot longer than he did - he died very quickly. But it seemed appropriate to both of us, given that he already had a dementing illness, that this was the kindest way of his life ending. It was a very peaceful end - we were able to be there for him and support him to the end.

LR: Do you think as a Buddhist one can be involved in an act that would actually hasten someone's death, in other words what do you think about the issue of euthanasia?

BA: There are two aspects to this. There's no doubt that, for instance, in giving sufficient pain relief you might use doses of certain drugs that would depress respiration and might therefore hasten death. I think that given one's motive is to keep the patient as comfortable as possible treating someone like that is entirely appropriate. But deliberately to hasten death or to cause death is a different thing. There have been one or two points in my medical career when people have asked me to hasten their death but I have had to say I wouldn't do anything like that although I would do everything I could to make sure their death was as comfortable as possible.

You have to come back to your basic principles as a Buddhist - sometimes situations are not easy to understand - you have to go back to knowing that skilful action is based in love and clarity of understanding. You have to work out for yourself how to apply that principle in every situation you come across. That's why we talk about being 'skilful' - you have to learn how to do it through practice - and we may often get it wrong but gradually we do learn to act more and more skilfully, more and more in accordance with the way things are in our universe.

LR: Bodhaniya, thank you very much. ❑



Land of One Thousand Buddhas

Olga Kenyon

Buddhism was taken to Sri Lanka three centuries BCE where it flourished despite internal wars and attacks from South India. Two great Buddhist cities once flourished at Anuradhapura and Polonarua. You can visit the ruins which are situated amongst trees and lakes. Nearby are the breath-taking caves of Dambulla full of paintings and huge sculptures, some 2,000 years old. Buddhist monks still live there - and charge you for entry. Merely 300 rupees - just over two pounds sterling. Barely enough to keep the ceiling paintings of these marvellous caves in passable condition. Nowhere else have I caught so clearly the devotion of those early monks. They fled to the hills to escape persecution and poured out their faith and devotion in the frescoes and carvings with which they decorated the rocks.

The climb up to the caves takes nearly half an hour. Despite the heat I set off undeterred, recovering from each steep flight of steps by stopping to admire the view. My tranquil ascent was disturbed by beggars on each flight of steps, some of them without a limb. It was the first time I had seen such beggars outside of India and my first reaction was one of annoyance. This disgusted me so much that I decided I must divide my coins equally and give with a smile and a word.

At last I came to where steps gave way to a wide stone terrace overlooking a brilliant green valley dotted with paddy fields. I stood for some time breathing in the beauty and watching the monkeys jumping from branch to branch of the trees. They were sacred ficus trees - the same tree under which the Buddha had sat when he gained Enlightenment.

But it was time to explore the caves. The smallest is filled by the form of a vast reclining Buddha. His robe had once shone with gold but that had long since worn away, leaving the simplicity and strength of the bare stone.

The second cave was spectacular containing innumerable Buddha statues and paintings, some dating back to the first century BCE. Most were larger than life-size, sitting in lotus posture, eyes half closed, tranquilly meditating, yet still alert. There was also a group of standing Buddhas as well as two gigantic recumbent forms. The expressions on the faces of these latter were yet calmer and kinder than those of the seated figures, giving the impression of the peace attained from final release.

In one corner stood a king dressed in Hindu style, handsome, dignified - probably one of the monksí patrons. Above, the whole ceiling was covered with frescoes depicting meditating Buddhas. They have recently been restored by a local painter with such sensitivity that one feels one is in the presence of the original works.

Few tourists visited the third cave. Perhaps they had had their fill. I was able to sit undisturbed breathing in the atmosphere of reverence that still persisted even after so many centuries. Some of the nineteenth century re-painting of the faces made the statues seem aloof, even cold - yet their very numbers were a testimony to the warmth of the faith that wanted to show compassion to the world. Then I came to one that had not been painted. This time the stone face expressed pure compassion - a witness to the capacity of art to convey the truly spiritual.

Taking Risks in Sweden

Marianne Loid

There has always been a 'women's wing' to the FWBO in Sweden - right from when it all began in Stockholm in 1980.

At first we struggled quite a lot with the 'single sex principle' - did we want single sex activities, we wondered, and what was their purpose? Opinions were divided! Some people who had some experience of single sex situations in England had come to appreciate the principle and practice but others were not so keen. We felt the lack of a Dharmacharini in Sweden who could guide us.

At the Centre men and women attended classes together and sometimes there were sangha retreats for everyone. But slowly we started to create our own separate activities for women as well. In this we were encouraged and supported by the Dharmacharis (men Order members) who by then had moved to Stockholm and were running activities at the Centre.

Although we didn't have any Dharmacharinis resident in Sweden, some came from abroad to visit us: Rupachitta came once a year for a while, led retreats and supported us in many ways. Kulanandi began visiting from Essen in Germany. These visits were very precious to us, the opportunity to make personal contact with women Order members, to communicate with them and to benefit from the experience they were able to share with us. It has been very important for the development of the Swedish women's sangha that these Order members were willing to come and visit us, to get to know us on our home ground, to learn about our culture and to support us in developing our activities in a way that was not just a copy of the English way of doing things. (In Sweden we might have a sauna on retreat, for instance, and we certainly don't drink so much black tea!)

Over the years quite a bit of frustration grew up amongst us because we did not know how to move on. We were not able to become mitras because we didn't have a mitra convenor. One woman decided to take the step of asking for ordination but most of us were not yet prepared to do that. Still, there is always something positive about frustration and it pushed some of us to go to England on retreat and so to get to know a bit more about the movement in which we had become involved. And back home there were opportunities to do study with Satyaraja, our Chairman, which helped satisfy that thirst for Dharma study.

Then in 1997 Kulanandi offered to become our mitra convenor. She now travels from Germany four times a year to study with us, lead retreats and develop friendships. We also try and fit in some culture, nature and other kinds of fun so that she won't be totally drained by we 'thirsting beasts' up here in the north! This was a great step forward for the women's sangha and we are very grateful for her deep engagement in our progress. She really has become part of the Swedish women's sangha. With Kulanandi as our mitra convenor, we could at last become mitras. There was great rejoicing in the Stockholm Buddhist Centre when our mitra ceremonies took place. Today we are ten women mitras, nine living in Stockholm and one in Gothenburg. Seven of us have asked for ordination. Recently we heard the news that Sigrid (who was the first to ask for ordination) had been invited to the ordination retreat to be held in Tuscany later this year. That was great news! She will be the very first Swedish woman to be ordained into the Western Buddhist Order.

About a year ago, four of us who were pursuing our ordination requests decided to form a Going for Refuge group. We had no experience about how to run such a group. We were fortunate at that time to have Kalyanaprabha visiting us (she has agreed to visit us once a year, in particular to support the women who have asked for ordination.) On two of her visits we went away for the weekend together, into the beautiful Swedish countryside where we could relax, open up and take further steps in the process of building spiritual friendship. This has also been very precious to us.

Our latest projects have been about community living and team-based Right Livelihood. These, too, have arisen also out of a feeling of frustration - frustration that our ordinary living conditions do not give us the opportunity for the kind of intensive practice that we would like. In Sweden it is very common for people to live alone. Many Swedes are wary of living with people who are not members of their family. Some of us had the opportunity of visiting communities in England and trying out this life-style. We found we liked it and this led to three of us forming a community here. It is the first community ever in Sweden so it is something of a milestone in the history of the Swedish sangha. We found an airy and spacious flat to the south of central Stockholm with views of the forest and how delighted we have been - in fact the whole of our sangha seems to have been excited by this development.

Our second project is still in the process of becoming and it is about

team-based right livelihood. Work plays quite a central role in Swedish culture. Generally speaking the Swedes put a lot of energy into their education, work and career and strongly identify with their profession. Finding a way to make one's working life a part of one's spiritual life is, therefore, a big challenge and a great struggle for many of us in the sangha - both men and women.

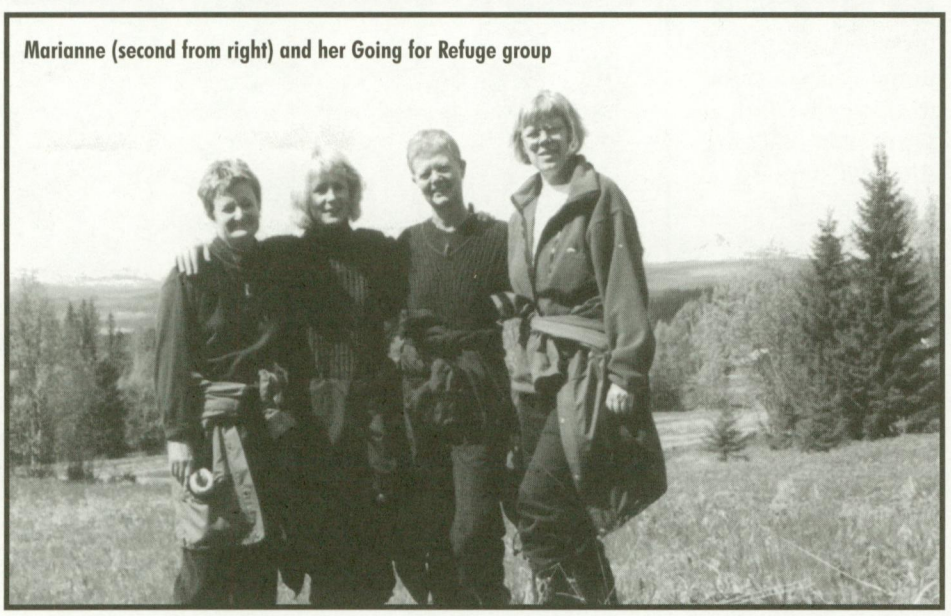
Some people do find a way to practise sufficiently effectively within their working situation by making small changes and working with their attitudes. For some of us, though, that is not enough ! Our ambitions are to be able to practice more fully in our working situation and to do it alongside fellow Buddhists. This has led some of us women to throw ourselves into a project of trying to set up an Evolution giftshop here in Stockholm. We are a team of three women and we have the great help and support of Satyaraja. It is a thrilling, exciting and - to be honest - difficult project. Without a great deal of help and support from Windhorse Trading and the shop team in Cambridge the project would not be feasible. But the help and support has been forthcoming and now we need all the good forces on our side to realise our dream of working together as women Buddhists.

So we are progressing - slowly, perhaps, but very steadily. I think the fact that we have had to 'go it alone' without the help of resident Dharmacharinis has pushed us to take responsibility and to take the initiative to make things happen - not only for our own sakes but also for the sake of others who come along to the Centre to meet the Dharma.

Who knows how the women's wing of the sangha will look in ten years' time? If recent developments steadily continue it will be larger and even more thriving than it is today, perhaps with a number of communities, Right Livelihood ventures and a whole chapter of Dharmacharinis, and, of course, deeper spiritual friendship amongst us all.


Stockholm


Country Retreat


Marianne (second from right) and her Going for Refuge group

Northern Light

Sridevi

I returned to Finland in 1991, after a short marriage and many years' involvement in the FWBO in England. Since my ordination in1978 I had worked at centres in East London, West London, Norwich and Bristol (with forays out to Scotland and Germany, as well as a trip to India). I used to make brief annual visits to Finland and felt convinced I would never return - until the visit in 1991. After all the years of energetic and enthusiastic engagement with the young Buddhist movement I had discovered in 1976, I came to a point where I did not know what to do next and for the first time found myself feeling homesick. I decided to make the return journey, realizing the next step was to undertake the conversion of my 'root demons' to the Dharma.

With help from a local Order member I found a place to live in central Helsinki and a job at a library. I got involved in the local FWBO centre, teaching classes, leading retreats, administering the centre. The centre consisted of one small room with separate tea-making facilities. I found this intimacy charming and fascinating - a small-is-beautiful experience. Everything else in Finland seemed so spacious, clean, modern and well-finished. A lot of space between things and people, nature present even in the cities. My experience a mixture of the stone-age and latest technology.


Helsinki


Tallinn

A decade has passed and things have changed. There are four more Order members in Finland, a retreat centre and a five-times-bigger city centre. Since last September it has been possible to have separate Order chapters for women and men. There is a men's community. These days I work full-time for the centre, as manager, secretary, yoga teacher and mitra convenor. Clearly, there has been quite a lot of progress - but have I converted any demons?

I sometimes wonder whether that is the same question as: why are there still no women's communities or right livelihood businesses in Finland? (The movement

arrived in this country in 1973). *Sisu* or determination and sticking with things whatever happens is the most distinctive quality of Finns - but it is not the same as *kshanti*, the spiritual quality of patience and receptivity. Lack of patience and receptivity means that real change takes a long time! Space between people is not easy to cross... It's great that women are strong, self-sufficient, independent - but how to find deeper togetherness...? Concentrating on study is excellent - but why not live the Dharma with each other on a daily basis? Being serious about meaningful matters is good - but a lighter touch and a bit of playfulness might be more effective... Work in progress.

You would recognise the *taste of salt* or the spirit of the FWBO here as anywhere around the world. But there are some distinctly Finnish features. On retreat at Abhayaloka, our rural retreat centre, you would be surrounded by northern nature and very simple buildings. Taking a sauna would be part of the retreat programme, and you might find yourself taking a dip in an ice-cold lake - maybe through a hole made in thick ice.

On the shrine-room walls behind the rupa you would see huge oil paintings by Nagashila and on the opposite wall an enormous Amoghasiddhi thanka from Nepal. During the puja the offerings would come from the forest. And the language you would hear is of course unlike any other heard in the movement (except for Estonian - of which we have learnt a little from our three staunch mitras in Tallinn).

Women's retreats have often been on a study theme - I think there have been three on the theme of *Kshanti*. Arts retreats have also been popular and strong experiences - there are many artists involved in the Finnish sangha. Fundraising is an almost unknown activity here - people's attitudes to money and generosity are quite different from England, for example. However, two years ago women mitras came up with a plan to raise funds for a facility for solitary retreats. Typical activities included a silent walk through the city in a group, ending by a statue of a woman folk poet. This project is fairly dormant at the moment but no doubt will be revived soon. Solitude and silence are issues here - Finns being naturally quite solitary and non-communicative but not very keen on solitary retreats.

"... we are living with strong energies and vast potential. I see the energy bursting through every now and then - and in between times the quiet striving for transformation continues."

Sridevi (far left) and members of the sangha

The Finnish sangha is still small: there are nine women mitras, including Tiia and Anne in Estonia. All except one have asked for ordination (two in Helsinki are not actively involved). There have been some dramatic comings and goings. I think we tend towards the dramatic - the 'all or nothing' approach. Intensity is important for us. This does not make for easy, smooth development - we are living with strong energies and vast potential. I see the energy bursting through every now and then - and in between times the quiet striving for transformation continues.

Norwegian Vistas

Maitrinandi

I first visited Oslo and made contact with its fledgling FWBO group last August. The previous winter Gunaketu had spent a couple of months there preparing the ground for his return to his native country. His plan is to establish the FWBO in Norway.

My first impression of Oslo was of an affluent and beautiful city surrounded on all sides by nature. There is forest and mountains on three sides and on the fourth the Oslofjord. The close proximity of nature made it easy to feel in touch with oneself and gave me a sense of groundedness. On a memorable excursion into the mountains north of Oslo, I experienced such a sense of peace, a calm and tranquillity born of that unsullied beauty.

Norway - A Few Facts

Population: 4.6 million

Land area: 323,917 square metres

45.6% of the land above the tree line

Discovery of oil last century means a general sense of affluence and low unemployment

In Norway one has the sense that people are used to living in harmony with the elements. They don't seem to close off if it gets cold or to be surprised by the annual return of winter. They just get on and deal with things and accept the way things are. Nevertheless, I was aware that in Norway, as anywhere else, people battle with the same fears and disappointments that beset human beings the world over and I felt deeply how much the Dharma was needed there too.

I visited the new Oslo Buddhistsenter where I was made very welcome. I talked with people about their responses to the Dharma. On the morning of Sangharakshita's 75th birthday a few of us gathered together to mark the occasion. Later in the day there was a celebration to mark Inge having become a mitra. Inge is Dutch but she lives in Oslo. She was made a mitra in Holland and is known as 'an outlying Dutch mitra' for as yet there are no facilities for people to become mitras in Norway - but no doubt that will change as things develop. I had the sense of witnessing the beginning of something very exciting. I found myself full of admiration for those who, like Gunaketu, are able not only to see the value of taking the Dharma to new situations, but are willing to follow it up with action. And I rejoiced in his and Inge's efforts. They kept alive their dream of creating an FWBO Centre in Oslo and are now, after several years of planning and preparing, their vision is beginning to come to fruition.

With Gunaketu's arrival last January to work full-time in Oslo, the Oslo Buddhistsenter is well and truly 'open for business' and a regular programme of activities has begun. There are the usual classes for Beginners in meditation and Buddhism, and a Sangha evening for Regulars. There is also the 'Buddha cafe' where, once a month, people meet in a city centre cafe to discuss current issues from a Buddhist perspective. In April there will be two guided tours around the Munch museum using the paintings and the Dharma as two ways of looking at suffering and liberation.

I plan to visit Oslo again in May/June when Atulyamati and Jnanamitra will also be there and we will lead a day retreat for women. We will participate in the Centre's activities and of course it will be another opportunity to walk in those beautiful

mountains which seem to hold the secret of stillness and contentment.

For more information about the Oslo Buddhistsenter contact:

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THE PALI TEXT SOCIETY

Pāli is the language in which the canonical texts of Theravadin Buddhism are written. The Pali Text Society was founded in 1881 "to foster and promote the study of Pali texts". We are a charity publishing Pāli texts, English translations, dictionaries, and ancillary works. Our aim is to foster and promote the study of Pāli texts and to make Theravāda Buddhist literature widely available.

We have published most of the classical texts and commentaries, and many works have been translated into English. New titles for both editions and translations are added on a regular basis. The Society aims to keep almost all its publications in print and to produce at least two new books and a volume of its Journal each year.

The Society is non-profit making and depends on the sale of its publications, on members' subscriptions and on the generosity of donors. Alongside its publishing activities, it provides Research Studentships for a number of people in a variety of countries who are working in the field of Pāli studies. It also supports the Fragile Palm Leaves Project, which is involved in the conservation and identification of South-East Asian manuscripts.

Membership

There are two categories of members: sponsoring and ordinary. All members may attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting, and purchase any of the Society's publications direct from the Society at the current rate of discount, which is 20%.

Sponsoring members also receive free (and post-free) one volume each year. (Note that The Pali-English Dictionary, The Pāli Tipitaka Concordance, and The Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names cannot be chosen as free books.) Sponsoring membership costs £20 for one year or £80 for five years.

Ordinary membership confers no rights to receive publications free (or post-free). It costs £10 for one year or £40 for five years.

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Brazilian Beginnings

A special event took place at Taraloka recently when Marcia Epstein had her mitra ceremony. Marcia is the first Brazilian woman to become a mitra in the FWBO. The ceremony took place in April on the last day of a retreat which was attended by women of nine different nationalities including two from Central America, one from North America as well as Marcia, the sole representative from the vast South American continent. Marcia lives in Sao Paolo where she is part of a thriving and expanding FWBO group. She first came into contact with the FWBO when she and her family came to live in Cambridge, England, for a couple of years in the early 1990's. After returning to Brazil she kept up her contacts and began translating some of Sangharakshita's writings into Portuguese. Her mitra ceremony proved to be a very happy occasion and there was much rejoicing as she made her three offerings to the shrine and was showered with confetti to three great shouts of sadhu!

NEWS FROM THE HIGHLANDS

Gunasiddhi

Inverness is known as the Capital of the Highlands. The surrounding countryside this far north in Scotland is very beautiful and varied. Rugged beaches to the east where at high tide dolphins are frequently spotted. To the west heather covered mountains and deep lochs. A population of 42,000. Not a big city - but one of the fastest growing places in Europe. Locals certainly comment on the changes taking place here.


Gunasiddhi

For several years Vimalavajra and other Order members from Glasgow had been running day retreats and meditation and Buddhism courses in the area. Between their visits, groups of people began meeting up in Inverness and in nearby Forres and Dingwall. Meditating together, studying the Dharma and building friendships.

In June 2000, I moved to join them and six months later Satyapada arrived. The distance between us and the nearest established centre does not seem to deter visitors. We have had a lot of visiting Order members from the rest of Scotland and even from further afield, such as Parami from Spain, Danavira from Cambridge and Vaddhaka from Padmaloka. People often comment on what a friendly group it is. There is an excitement about the pioneering aspect - anything seems possible.

Another notable aspect about our Highland sangha is that it is spread out over a wide area. For instance, amongst the women mitras I study with, one lives forty miles south and another lives twenty-three miles east, yet we still manage to meet every week, unless snow makes the travelling unsafe. Although the groups meet regularly, due to this geographical spread it is at the day and weekend retreats that the sangha is really able to get together. Introduction to meditation courses are also very well attended, the numbers far exceeding my expectations. There is definitely an interest and a need for the Dharma here.

Sources of Inspiration

I think it is the feeling of being part of something bigger that I find most inspiring. We are part not just of FWBO Scotland, but of a whole movement, part of this wave that is the Dharma spreading in the West, in the world. At times it strikes me as incongruous that we are sitting in a hired room near the bus centre in Inverness (of all places) chanting the refuges and precepts. Or in the depths of a Scottish winter we are watching a newsreel video with stories of ordinations in India. Climatically and culturally about as different from Inverness as you could get. But of course there is no incongruity, it is absolutely appropriate that a sangha is slowly building up in Inverness and this is what makes it worth being here, worth the struggles of earning a living and finding the time to do everything including travelling the long distances to get to occasional Order weekends.

Myth of the Highlands

Some people have asked why I chose to come to Inverness or if I was 'sent' here! When I first heard of the FWBO Highlands project it stirred a forgotten dream I had of living up here. Some years later my mother died. She was from the west Highlands. Perhaps it is in my blood, but I felt a very strong pull to move here. It is the magic of the place I love. Whilst seriously considering it, I visited for some day retreats. On the retreats I felt two passions came together, my 'myth' of the Highlands and the opportunity of helping build up the sangha. A couple of years later I left all that had become familiar to me around the London Buddhist Centre where I had been involved for the last fourteen years, and drove north. Who knows where it will lead? A Buddhist Centre in Inverness - now wouldn't that be something?

NEWS FROM ARANYA

Sandra Greenway

We never know what the morning's post will bring into the Aranya office: a French property magazine, a pledge form, a cheque for £5,000, or a book on web-site design.

'Aranya' is the name of the project which is raising funds to establish a retreat centre for women at which (among other things) three- or four-month ordination retreats will take place. The work involved is diversifying, following last year's initial launch and subsequent fund-raising visits to 26 FWBO Centres throughout Europe. Vajradevi and Moksanandi are currently researching the feasibility of buying land in Spain, France, Portugal and Italy, as well as considering practical details such as the importance of the land having its own water supply; whether the new retreat centre will use solar, wind or conventional power, the size of the support team that will be needed to run it and so on. The search for property will begin in earnest in the autumn.

The Aranya website is now launched into cyberspace! This provides an introduction to Aranya and to women's ordination in the FWBO. We will keep the site up to date with news of fundraising activities and our property search. Visit us at www.aranya.fwbo.org.

Meanwhile, fundraising continues at FWBO centres throughout the world. We need another £75,000 to bring us up to our target of £350,000. This should be enough to buy, renovate and equip a remote property suitable for a women's ordination retreat centre.

Future fundraising events

Reflections on Wildness

The compiler of this handy pocket-sized book, writes, 'I have found it fascinating to reflect on the relationship between the outer wilderness, the deserts and forests that are the traditional domain of meditators, and the inner calm that such places evoke.'
Available from Windhorse Publications or FWBO centre bookshops £4.99

Going Forth Game

Due out this summer, from the team responsible for the highly original 'Miraculous Mind'. A board game based on snakes and ladders that can be played alone, with friends or even long-distance over the telephone. The Going Forth Game challenges you to identify and address your habits! Expect an appearance from Mara and look forward to meeting some archetypal friends.

Buddhafield

Aranya will be at the Buddhafield festival, 11th-15th July. Support Aranya by buying a cool lemonade or late night hot chocolate at our stall. Chill out with us in the Aranya Acoustic Cafe before dipping into the hot tubs!

Infinity in the Palm of a Hand

Ratnavandana, an experienced meditation teacher, will be leading an intensive meditation retreat for Aranya from 9th -16th August at Vajraloka meditation retreat centre. This is a rare opportunity for women to experience the stillness and beauty of Vajraloka, a men's retreat centre set in the woodland and hills of North Wales. Open to all women who have experience of FWBO retreats
To book, contact Vajraloka on 01490 460 460

If you would like to support Aranya, donations can be sent to the address below (cheques payable to "Aranya").
Contact us for a fundraising information pack or details of fundraising events in your area.
Aranya, 2 Tudor Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 8HA. UK Tel: 0121 442 4626
info@aranya.fwbo.org
www.aranya.fwbo.org

VIEWING ORDINATION

Jo Hughes

Buddhist Women Speak on Ordination is a documentary that looks specifically at the ordination process for women in the FWBO. It was released in March and follows the *Motherhood* video which was released in 1999. *Buddhist Women Speak on Ordination* is the next in the *Buddhist Women Speak* series, part of the Buddhist women on video project which Vidyamala has been developing since 1996. I was glad to join forces with her for this production and put to good use some of the skills I'd learnt from my work for television.

The FWBO has a unique approach as regards ordination. In the first place, being neither monastic nor lay, ordination into the Western Buddhist Order is an acknowledgment of someone's commitment to practising the Dharma, which does not imply following any one particular lifestyle. (This does not mean, of course, that the practice of the Dharma is compatible with any lifestyle.) By far the most remarkable development in the WBO, however, at least as regards ordination, is that women now carry sole responsibility for ordaining women. When asked why he chose to break with tradition in this way, Sangharakshita responded,

'.. It doesn't really represent a break with tradition, because if we look at the Vinaya of the Theravada tradition, women were never just ordained by men, they were ordained first of all by women. But of course we've broken with tradition, using that tradition as a model, in that we regard ordination of women by women as valid and sufficient....the Dharmacharinis have Gone for Refuge to no lesser extent than the men.. so why should these women not be quite capable of giving, independently, ordination?'

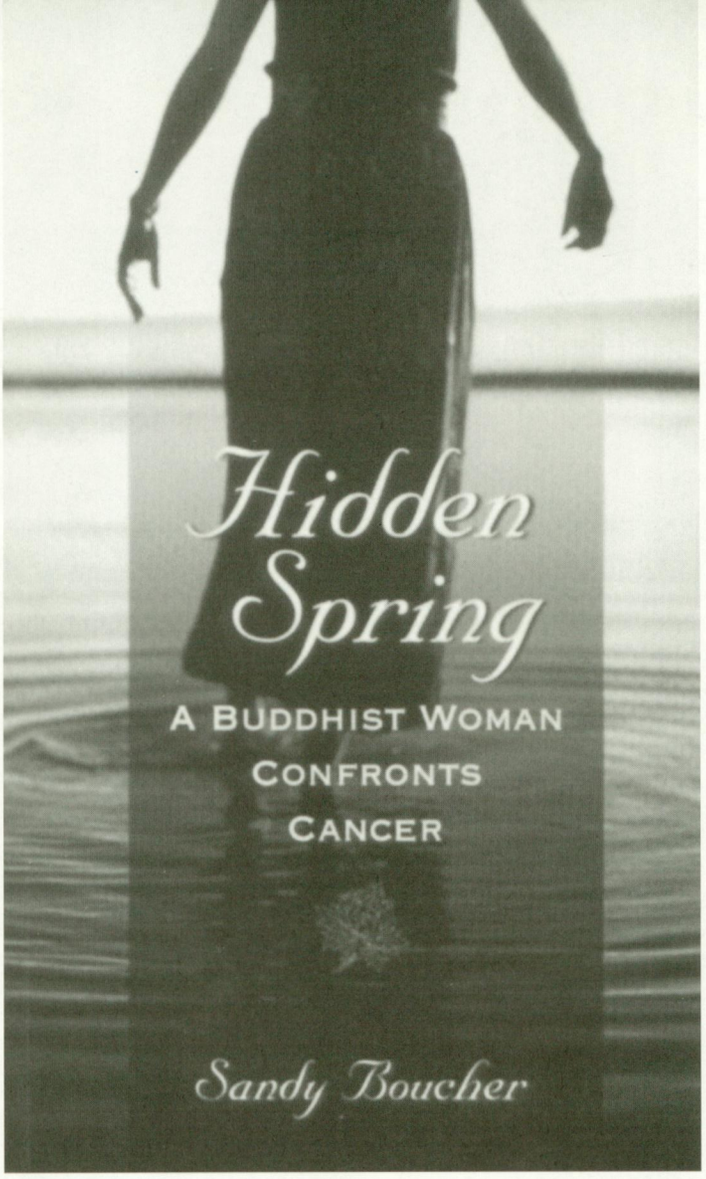
The documentary weaves an account of historical developments with personal stories. Padmasuri gives a thrilling account of the first ordination of women by women that took place in India in 1987. Sanghadevi and Ratnasuri give a sometimes humourous account of their responses to being asked to be preceptors in the West. 'I realised it would make Bhante's life quite difficult if I said no!' (Sanghadevi). A moving section in the narrative is when several Dharmacharinis recount their experience of ordination and talk about their relationships with their preceptors. Suryagupta recounts the difficulties of imagining herself joining an order in which there were very few people of Afro-Caribbean descent. Although sympathetic, Sanghadevi encouraged her to think beyond this position and to imagine herself a pioneer. 'As an Afro-Caribbean Buddhist Woman, I would be pioneering and making the way open to others...that really encouraged me.' A very human side to their friendship emerges when Suryagupta tells us Sanghadevi was the first to offer to baby-sit when her son was born and adds, '[Sanghadevi] just seems to have more and more qualities.'

Although the video hasn't yet been officially launched, it is available to the public and has already been shown on several ordination training retreats at Tiratanaloka. Many women have told me how encouraged they felt on hearing these women's stories. They said their faith in the ordination process has increased and it has galvanised their desire to deepen their Going for Refuge and enter the order. Maitreyi, a member of the women's ordination team, commented that she thought it was 'not only very clear but beautifully put together.'

These responses have brought home to me the importance of such material being made available, creating an audio-visual/ new technological culture where the experiences of a diversity of women committing themselves to the Buddhist path in the 21st century can be communicated and understood.

Buddhist Women Speak on Ordination costs £15 + £1.50p&p, individual rate and £34+VAT+p&p, exhibition rate. and is available from:

Clear Vision
16-20 Turner Street, Manchester M4 1DZ
Email: clearvision@clear-vision.org



Hidden Spring
A Buddhist Woman Confronts Cancer
Sandy Boucher
Wisdom 2000
£12.95 p/b

In the prologue to *Hidden Spring*, Sandy Boucher says, 'Buddhist practice does not prevent anything, it does not shield us from anything. It softens and opens us to meet everything that comes to us.' In this account of her year-long encounter with cancer, she vividly describes how her Buddhist practice helped and sustained her in facing the various challenges brought by her illness. With considerable honesty she documents her attempts to remain aware and mindful through the diagnosis of cancer of the colon and her subsequent surgery and chemotherapy.

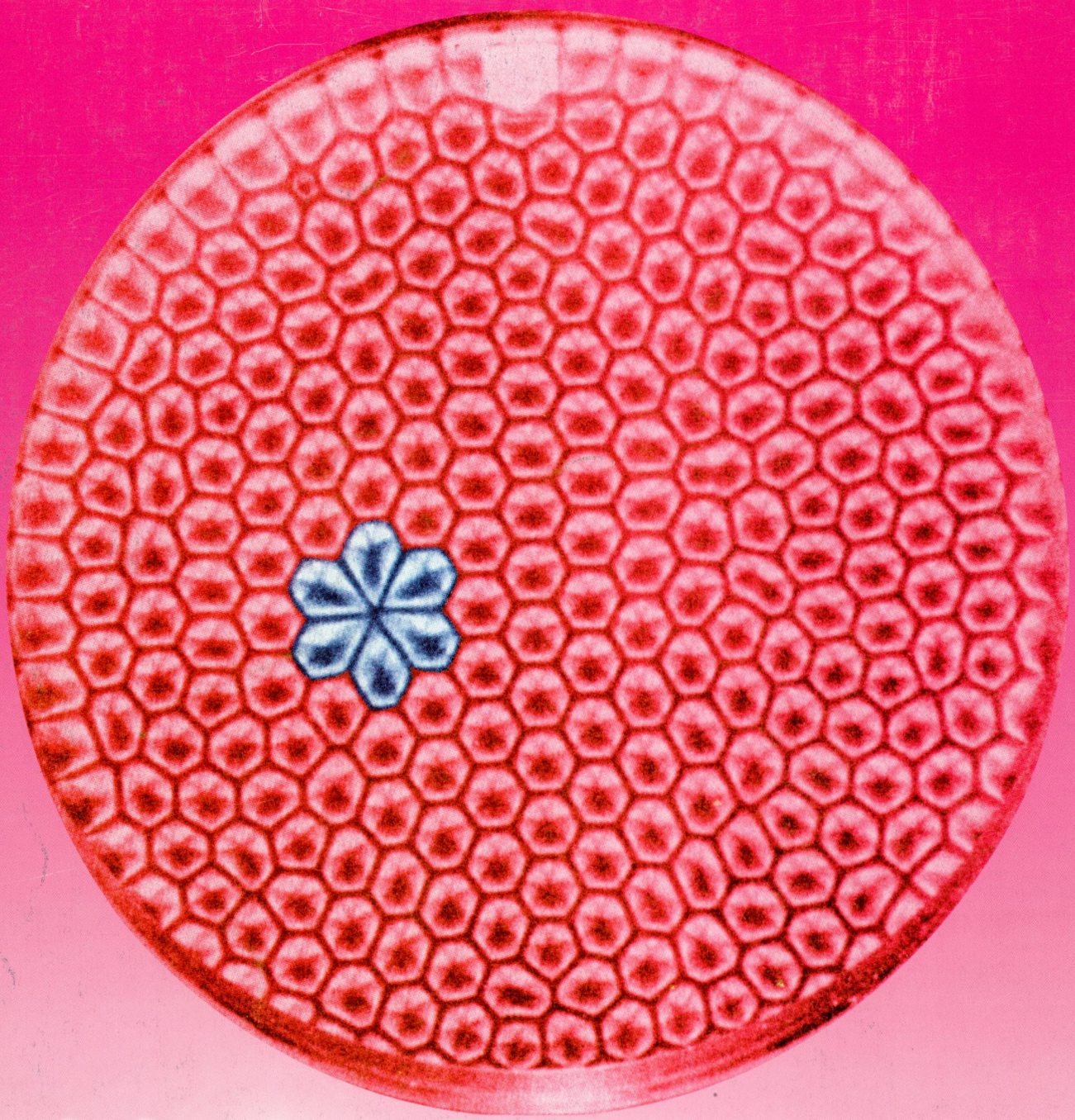
Sandy Boucher is an American writer who has been a practising Buddhist since 1980. Her teacher, Ruth Denison, trained in the Burmese tradition of Theravada Buddhism. Her main practice is therefore vipassana meditation and the cultivation of mindfulness. She also has a strong connection with Kuan Yin, the Bodhisattva of compassion. She draws upon these two strands of her spiritual practice to help her through her illness and suffering. Her life is turned upside down by the cancer. Within the span of a few days she has to make the transition from apparent good health to facing a life-threatening illness and a major operation. She describes not only her experiences of hospital and the various professionals and patients she meets but also the changes in her personal life. With great honesty she describes the difficulties that arose in her relationship with her lover causing herself further suffering. She gives us glimpses of her friends and their care, love and practical help. She intersperses the account of her illness with Buddhist teachings and recalls experiences she has had on retreat on which she draws to help her deal with the present.

This is a courageous, accessible and down-to-earth book. It gives a clear and illuminating account of how to apply Buddhist practice to the experience of suffering. Spending several hours in an uncomfortable hospital waiting area, Sandy Boucher shows how developing mindfulness of the body and her breathing, gradually gives rise to a state of calm. She finds aspects of Kuan Yin in her nurses and doctors. She finds moments of joy and luminosity in the midst of hell. Later, her body poisoned by chemotherapy, her practice of mindfulness becomes a matter of survival. 'My injured ankle had thrown off my sense of balance, so that I felt my fragility and the potential danger in the polished wood steps. "I am going down one step," I told myself. I feel the wood under my foot. I let my weight down on this foot. Now I'm moving the cane to the next step down. Balance. Bring weight onto the foot. Now centre myself to get ready for the next step.' She details her struggle to stay present in the moment and the interest that can be found in the rise and fall of sensations and the flux of phenomena.

By the end of the book, I too felt jubilant that Sandy Boucher was clear of cancer and shared in the joy of her dancing party on 'Liberation Tuesday'. It is a privilege to witness the spiritual growth that arises out of her suffering. I was excited by the fact that she demonstrates the radical and transforming nature of mindfulness. This book is a testimony to the fact that Buddhist practice can change your life even in the midst of great pain and uncertainty. Sandy Boucher shows that it is possible to go beyond suffering and find peace, joy and empathy with all humanity.

I warmly recommend *Hidden Spring*. Sandy Boucher has more than fulfilled her aim of 'drawing another tiny map of the territory (of cancer) to help the next woman or man who had to make this journey.' It will be a good companion for all those suffering from cancer and their relatives and friends - Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. But her book deserves a wider audience than just those suffering from cancer. Buddhist practitioners will find much to illuminate their practice of mindfulness in action whether they are facing a major crisis or in the ordinary vicissitudes of daily life.

Punyamala



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