

# LOTUS REALM

*a new voice for Buddhist Women*

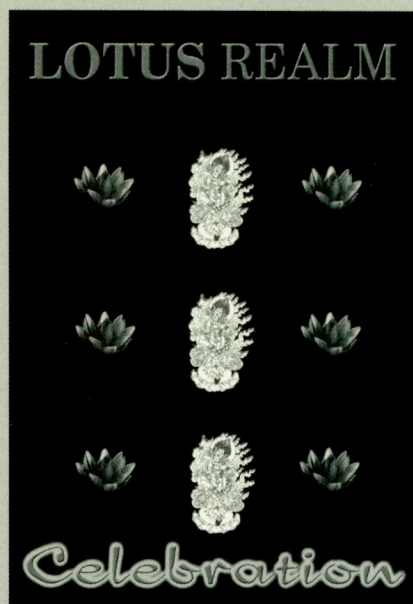


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# Celebration





Dakini image by Varaprabha

## LOTUS REALM

is produced by women members of the Western Buddhist Order and their friends

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This is the last issue of Lotus Realm in its current form. We hope a new magazine for Buddhist Women will appear in the not too distant future.

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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.



**THIS IS THE LAST** issue of *Lotus Realm*: time for me to say farewell to our readers. Before I go, I want to celebrate with you the sixteen years' existence of our Buddhist Magazine for Women. So we are calling this issue: A Celebration.

When Mallika originally got the magazine going, the new *Dakini* was, as far as I know, the first Buddhist magazine for women in the West. As such it was an entirely new genre. Those of us who have been involved in bringing out *Dakini* and its successor, *Lotus Realm*, have been pioneers in a new adventure. I hope those who come after us will be able to take things much further. Standing at the newsagents on station platforms with their rows and rows of magazines on every conceivable subject, I can't help wishing a Buddhist one was there. Idle dreaming perhaps - but why not keep our dreams alive?

Most often our articles have reflected current or future happenings and concerns of the FWBO and WBO. But on this occasion we pause and look back - time to take

stock, time to see what has happened. For those of you who have long been involved in the Movement, perhaps you will think, yes, times have changed indeed and what a lot has been achieved. Newer readers may find themselves surprised when they catch a glimpse of how things were more than a decade ago. Goodness! Times *have* changed! Readers who are practising within other traditions or who are not Buddhists at all will get a glimpse of a spiritual community in its early development. Perhaps some things will move and others inspire you.

The inspiration and dedication of the first women members of the Western Buddhist Order will live on in the articles that make up the issues of *Dakini* and *Lotus Realm* that are now scattered all over the world. May their efforts and dedication continue to be a source of encouragement, clarity and inspiration to all who read them.

Kalyanaprabha

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**Dhammadinna** is a Public Preceptor. She was ordained in 1974, since when she has played a crucial part in developing the FWBO.



**Vajrapushpa** was one of the original editors of *Dakini* magazine.



**Dharmanandi** was ordained in 1986, coinciding with the first appearance of *Dakini*.



**Mallika** was the original initiator of *Dakini* magazine and has cherished its development throughout the years.



**Kalyanaprabha** became involved with *Dakini* in 1988 and has continued as editor until the present day.



# Sixteen Years' Retrospective:

## Women Developing the FWBO

Dhammadinna

**RECEIVED WISDOM IS THAT** as we grow older we tend to dwell more on the past - or even in the past. It certainly seems to be true that as we get older our short-term memory fades, while at the same time we can remember scenes from our childhood vividly. Although my short-term memory is not what it once was, it is true to say I dwelt more on my past when I was younger than I do now. Then I needed to look back to make sense of my past, to try and see how it had contributed to shaping the person I had become. These days I am happy to dwell in the present and I look forwards to the future - even though I am probably well past the half point of my life! So to be asked to write a retrospective of the last sixteen years of events that particularly concern women in the FWBO and WBO, is an interesting task. I have found myself asking, why have a retrospective? What is history? Can I give an 'objective' account? Can I avoid falling into nostalgia?



Srimala and Dhammadinna. Mixed Convention 1978.



Most of the Women's wing of the WBO, pictured with Sangharakshita, 1981

### Why Look Back?

Looking backwards allows us to develop a sense of history, both individual and collective. A sense of history can help us see how certain things arise and then make certain other things possible. So we can see conditionality at work, especially, I hope, in the development of a spiritual movement, the creative forces at work. Looking back also means we can catch sight of what has been created by others, things from which we now benefit, and so develop a sense of appreciation and gratitude, both very positive emotions. We might not realise coming along these days to the FWBO that our experience is very different to what it was for people coming along even sixteen years ago. We might think that the activities and facilities that give us a



context for our practice, or the experience in the Order which helps us, has always been there. But in fact so much that seems solidly established now simply did not exist sixteen years ago, or was just in its infancy. Or again, seeing all that there now is (at least for women in the UK), we might think there is nothing much for us to do except benefit from what has been developed. While that may be true to some extent, if we really think about it we will soon realise that there is so much more that we could develop, both to provide a better context for our own practice and to reach out to share the Dharma with many more people. We may find that by learning about the pioneering efforts of people in the past we are inspired to follow in their footsteps to create new and better facilities for those who will come after us.

### First Growth

Every present is created out of the past. The new *Dakini* magazine which appeared in the Summer of 1986 was no exception. For that first issue I wrote a short article that acted as a bridge from the old 'Dakini Newsletter' to the new magazine:

*'Ten years ago, during the blazing heat of the Summer of 1976, a group of women in a study group at the Archway Centre, Pundarika, dreamed up the idea of a news-sheet for women in the Movement.'*

*There were many less women involved in those days, scattered over the globe. This news-sheet was to provide a link between us all. During a seminar with Bhante (the Venerable Sangharakshita) in July of that year we decided to go ahead and also to call the news-sheet Dakini.'*

*It first appeared in October, a gestetnered few pages - stapled together, containing an editorial, aims and objectives and the first articles and poems. Its style was informal and unedited.'*

This informal, unedited news-sheet was read only by women Order members and mitras and by Sangharakshita. We felt free to write what we thought and felt about anything at all - which gave us a new sense of freedom. Things moved on and after two years we began to feel that our need to communicate with one another was being met in other ways: there were more retreats and other facilities and although some women wanted to upgrade *Dakini* into a more literary magazine, there was a more general feeling that it had served its purpose.

Seeds can lie dormant for a long time. Eight years later, in 1986, a more literary magazine, the new *Dakini*, was launched. It came on the crest of a wave of important developments in the women's wing. In 1985 we had had our first, very successful, women's Order Convention. Later that year a small team of women Order members and mitras had moved to the Shropshire borderlands to take up residence in 'Cornhill Farm' which was to become the Taraloka Retreat Centre for Women - the culmination of several years of fund-raising and planning.

### Taraloka

That too had grown from seeds planted several years

Cornhill Farm 1985 - before conversion began



earlier. I remember a women's study seminar with Sangharakshita held at Padmaloka in 1982. In the course of an Order meeting we were discussing the fact that not many women were becoming ready for ordination. There had been only sixteen ordinations over the previous five years. In comparison, the first three-month men's ordination retreat had been held in the autumn of 1981 in Tuscany, and twenty-one men had been ordained. Bhante encouraged us to be patient. We needed first of all to found a women's Retreat Centre. He reminded us that Padmaloka, the Retreat Centre for men, had been in existence for five years before the men's ordination process and the Tuscany Ordination Retreat had been possible. He felt that the women in the movement would benefit from the focus such a Retreat Centre would provide and that an effective ordination process would arise from it.

As it turned out, Taraloka began running retreats at the end of 1985 and an ordination course was held there in 1986, with Bhante attending part of it. The ordination process was developed over the subsequent years eventually resulting in 1994 in the purchase of another property which we named Tiratanaloka, a Retreat Centre dedicated specifically to helping women prepare for ordination. But that is another story to which I will return later.

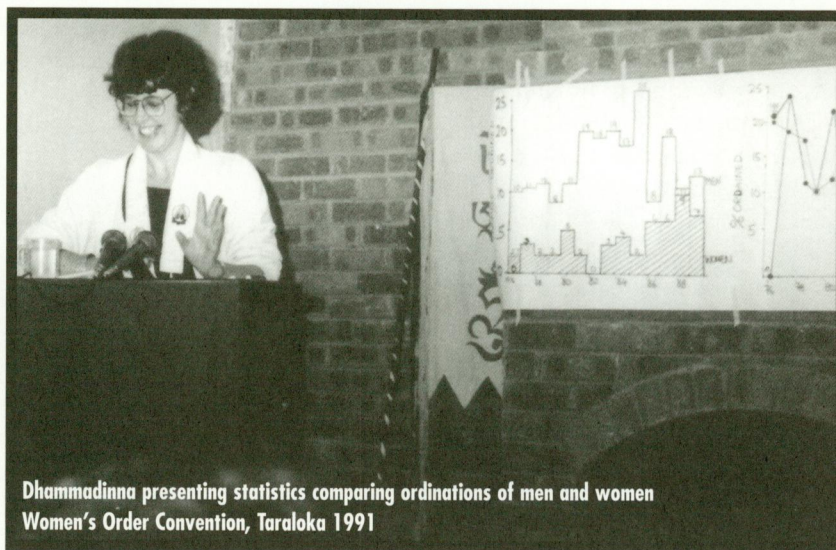
I would like to rejoice in the merits of Taraloka and its development over the last sixteen years, and the crucial

Taraloka Retreat Centre 2000





part it has played in the spiritual lives of so many women from all over the world and I know it holds a special place in the hearts of many of us. During the period 1986 to 1995 when ordination process retreats were held there, the number of women ordained rose considerably: seventy-five women entered the Order during those years!



The experimentation with single-sex activities began with retreats but quickly expanded to include single-sex communities and team-based Right Livelihood businesses. Over the years something that had begun somewhat spontaneously developed into an established way of practice, especially at Order and mitra level..

I think such places, built for women, by women, are rare in the Buddhist world, and were probably even rarer sixteen years ago. It caters for women at all levels of involvement, from Newcomers through to Order members, running introductory retreats, intensive meditation retreats, study retreats, Order events, as well as innovative arts and ritual retreats, retreats for older women, large Order/mitra events held mainly under canvas and so on. It is a beautiful place, Tara's Realm, and it is hard to imagine the Movement without it

### Why Women Only?

Rejoicing in the creation of Taraloka begs the question, why have separate facilities for women? In traditional Buddhism, as developed from the time of the Buddha, there was both a bhikkhu (male) and a bhikkhuni (female) sangha, who, though related, were two distinct orders. In fact the bhikkhuni sangha was, and still is, subordinate to the bhikkhu sangha.

Sangharakshita has said many times that when he returned to the West to found the FWBO, he had assumed the new Order and all its activities would be mixed, in accordance with the contemporary mores of our changing society. Single-sex activities arose out of the personal experience of people practising the Dharma. They were begun initially on an experimental basis. The men involved in the FWBO seemed to take to single-sex retreats and activities rather more readily than the women. There were probably all kinds of reasons for this. Perhaps women at that time who were keen to develop something for themselves had turned to the Women's Movement rather than to a spiritual life. Or perhaps it was because in the WBO in the early 1980's there were many more men than women Order members. With so few of us to develop events specifically for women, the task seemed somewhat daunting. At the 1976 Combined Order Convention, Sangharakshita said that he thought the women in the FWBO and WBO might feel pushed aside for a while but that it might be good for us. He was implying that we might need to create our own facilities and become more independent, something that he has always encouraged.

Sangharakshita talks about the reasons for, and positive effects of, single-sex practice, in his 1984 paper, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism* in which he discusses the ten ethical precepts undertaken by Order members at the time of their ordination. In his discussion of the Third Precept (abstention from sexual misconduct) he draws attention to the precept in its positive form: the development of contentment. He explores the idea that the higher realms available to human consciousness (traditionally known as the three lokas) are realms without sexual dimorphism, or androgynous realms. He goes on to say that sexual dimorphism is a state of polarisation, tension and projection and therefore of discontent, so it is something we need to transcend. We can do this temporarily when in a meditative state. He points out that practising chastity or brahmacharya means not merely abstaining from sexual activity, but transcending the sexual dimorphism on which sexual activity and sexual desire are based.

*'Meditation and celibacy go together: they mutually reinforce each other. For the same reason, we encourage single-sex situations of every kind. This is not simply in order to curtail the opportunities for sexual misconduct, but also, more positively, to give both men and women some respite from the tensions of sexual polarisation and to provide them with an opportunity of transcending, for a few moments, the state of sexual polarisation and being simply a human being and - to some extent - a true individual. For those who wish to develop as individuals, and to progress on the path to Enlightenment, meditation and all kinds of single sex situations are, in the absence of transcendental insight, absolutely indispensable.'*<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph, and the last sentence in particular, seem to me to be crucial in understanding the spiritual reasons for engaging in single-sex activities.

As I have said, at first, the men seemed to take to men's activities rather more readily than women to women-only activities. We did feel rather left out to begin with and I think I could say that we were not that independent. We tended to feel that the 'action' was where the men were. We were not used to putting on events or creating facilities



on our own. This may surprise the modern young woman! However, we began to rise to the challenge and set up both a small, temporary women's retreat centre, 'Mandarava', and a large, closed women's community in East London, 'Amaravati', which became a centre of activities for women in the mid-late 70's. (A closed community is one in which members of the opposite sex are not permitted to enter. The point of this was not to unkindly exclude men but to try and protect the integrity of the atmosphere which we were beginning to build up between us by living together just as women.) In this way, by 1985/86, we had built up a much more confident and vital sense of ourselves as women practising, living and working together, and were ready to take the next step - to found and build a permanent retreat centre and to give attention to creating a more effective ordination process for women.

Since then activities for women have gone from strength to strength. These days women very much appreciate and enjoy being on retreat together and often want to continue this experience in ordinary life, where possible. Over the last sixteen years many women's communities have developed around the world, as well as women's team-based right livelihood businesses. Vidyamala, in conjunction with Clear Vision Videos, has produced three fascinating videos on women and their spiritual lives. The first is an interview with Sangharakshita, in the second women speak on motherhood and the third looks at women and ordination.

### Changing Attitudes

However, I wonder whether attitudes towards single-sex practice are changing these days. There are still many single-sex women's retreats offered in the movement, both at Tiratanaloka and Taraloka as well as by public FWBO Centres, but there are also a great many more mixed retreats on offer. I have noticed that some women attending retreats at Tiratanaloka as part of their ordination process, have not been on a single-sex retreat before. Women today have usually been to co-educational schools and are used to being out in the work place alongside men colleagues. They are also used to working together with other women and seem happy enough in one another's company. They may not think it so necessary to practice with other women, nor understand the spiritual benefits. But I

am sure the same issues about polarisation and so on exist and need addressing.

Perhaps there is also another factor at work in the diminishing proportion of people who want to live in single-sex situations. The FWBO was founded in the 1960's and young people like myself who became involved with the Movement were very willing to embrace - or even to create from scratch - an alternative lifestyle. It was a part of the spirit of the times to dare to be radically different. Personally I was very keen to live communally and have lived in FWBO/WBO communities since 1972, and in women's communities since 1975. However, I think people today do not necessarily think in terms of an alternative society and perhaps this is reflected in the developing shape of our movement. These days, rather than choosing to live communally, more people involved in the FWBO as well as members of the WBO are opting to live with their partners - whether they have children or not - or are living alone.

### The Benefits

Single-sex activities are still crucial, though, in helping us become more individual (as Sangharakshita has outlined.) Practising within a single-sex context is a somewhat esoteric practice. In order to realise its benefits you have to get some experience of it - to whatever extent your circumstances allow. The benefits may be subtle, but I know my own experience is that I have become much more confident in myself and also in the spiritual potential of other women. I feel very much 'my own person' in a positive sense; free, independent, whole, whilst at the same time being deeply engaged in my friendships with other women and my work for the Movement.

In 2000 I made the personal choice to become an Anagarika, taking on the precept of abstinence from non-chastity. Interestingly, there are an increasing number of Dharmacharinis taking this step: currently around 10% of Dharmacharinis are Anagarikas. While this is very much an individual decision, it does reflect that a growing number of women wish to practice brahmacharya and enjoy the freedom which it expresses. I am sure that for many of these Dharmacharinis, involvement in some single-sex activities has helped them arrive at the point where they



Vajraccedika Community, around 1979  
l-r: Joan Graham (Padmavasini), Dhammadinna, Sridevi,  
Sanghadevi, Malini



wished to become Anagarikas, and will continue to support them in their practice of brahmacharya.

### How Women Challenge Women

The step into more intensive practice through engaging in single-sex activities which began in the early 1980's has, of course, its difficulties and challenges. One of these areas is our tendency as women to over-empathise with one another, and to get too caught up with one another emotionally. For those of us who have chosen and are able to live and/or work together with other women, this can be a primary issue. Of course, we can choose to live and work together with other women for a while, and benefit from this enormously, and then decide to pursue a vocation or live alone or with a sexual partner and raise a family. Often, however, women move on from situations of collective practice not because there is something else they want to do but because of a need for more 'space' or out of a feeling of being overwhelmed by the emotional demands of others; of always feeling responsible, of not being able to 'switch off' or be 'off duty'. From my discussions with my men Order friends, this does not seem to be an issue for them. Men seem able to take responsibility and then, when appropriate, let it go and play. On the other hand, women seem to pick up on each other's emotions and are affected by them, although this process is not always conscious. We may feel, for example, when we live with other women that we always need to be responding or that we do not have space or time for our own interests or inner life. Our challenge is to become aware of this and to work with it, developing a more objective view of a situation and the ability to respond by choice rather than by instinct - which means cultivating true compassion rather than pity or over-responsibility for others. This is an issue currently being talked about amongst some of us and I think unless we clarify this and know how to work with it, we will not be able to build long-term communities, teams or retreat centres that will be able to provide a mature context for practice in the future.

### Challenge from Another Quarter

One outcome of the exploration of single-sex activities in the late 1970's early 80's was that people started asking more questions about gender and the spiritual life. Many of these were asked in the series of seminars Sangharakshita conducted at that time. Sangharakshita has always said that he answered such questions because they were asked, and he felt he needed to answer them honestly, according to his experience.

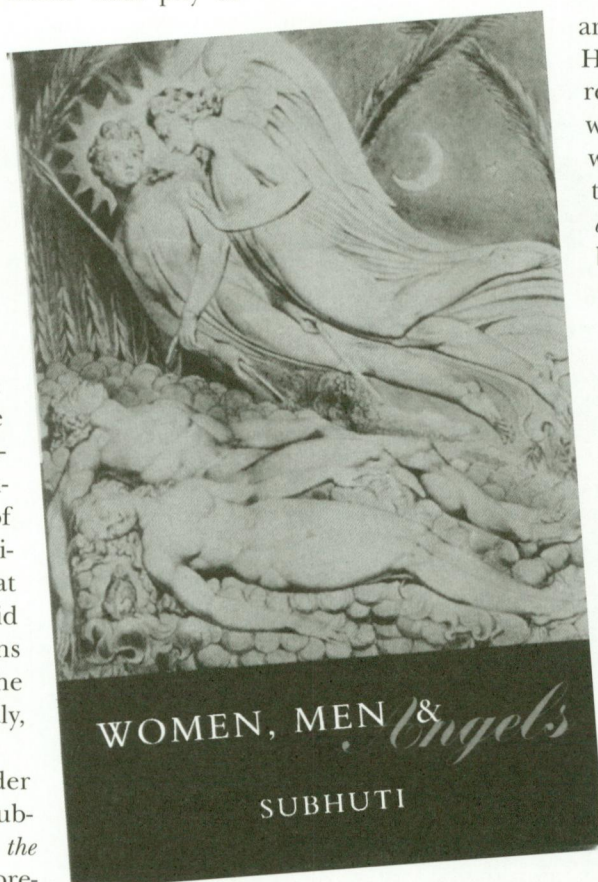
In 1994 Subhuti, a senior Order Member and Public Preceptor, published *Sangharakshita, a New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*. This book was a pre-

sentation of Sangharakshita's ideas, drawing on talks, books and unedited seminars. Subhuti has said that although the gender material was controversial he could not in honesty leave it out of such a book. It was in answer to the many letters, comments, and questions he had received about this aspect of *Sangharakshita* that in 1995, *Women, Men and Angels* was published. This book puts forward two main arguments. The first is a defence of the traditional view endorsed by Sangharakshita's own experience, that generally speaking, women are at somewhat of a disadvantage, at least at the beginning of their spiritual lives. The second is a refutation of the Feminist view that history can be seen in terms of a systematic oppression of women by men.

The publication of this book caused something of a furore both within the Order and in the wider movement. It was hotly debated for some time. Some people simply disagreed with one or both propositions. Some people, both men and women, became upset and angry. Some of us tried to consider whether or not the points in the book were true to our own experience as women practising the Dharma. Sangharakshita himself has said that with regard to the first proposition, it is an observation and not a teaching. We are, then, free to disagree, without compromising our Going for Refuge. He has also said that any discussion of the first proposition needs to be placed within the understanding that women, of course, can gain Enlightenment. We also need to understand that wondering whether biological conditioning has an effect upon us is not tantamount to biological determinism. The discussion of such issues may help us recognise obstacles, and thus overcome them.

All in all the book had quite an impact on the women's wing. However much we may not have relished the points, still less the way some of them were made, we were forced to think some things through: to what extent *did* our conditioning, whether biological or social, affect our practice of the Dharma?

These days the gender debate is not being aired quite so hotly in the Order - partly, perhaps, because there are enough people of some maturity to transcend, at least to some extent, gender polarisation. But the gender factor does not go away. Issues discussed by Subhuti in his book are ones that every woman who wants to live a spiritual life will have to face sooner or later. Perhaps in time a woman will write a book on the same themes, drawing on her own experience. In the meantime,





Srimala conducts public ordination ceremony, India



we have *Dakini* and *Lotus Realm*, both of which have included articles on these kind of issues. And in 1999 *The Moon and the Flowers: a Women's Path to Enlightenment* was published, a series of essays by women Order members on various aspects of practising the Dharma.

### Women Ordaining Women

But let us return to our over-view of the last sixteen years. Developments in the women's wing certainly accelerated after the founding of Taraloka. In 1987 Sangharakshita asked Srimala, Ratnasuri and Padmasuri to go to India and perform ordinations of women on his behalf. In 1989 he asked Sanghadevi, Srimala and Ratnasuri to perform ordinations for women in the West. Thus, as he had with the men a year or two earlier, Bhante handed on his responsibility for ordinations to senior Dharmacharinis. This not only marked the growing spiritual maturity that had developed in the women's wing of the Order, it also marked a revolutionary step in the entire Buddhist world. Generally, the lineages which allow women to ordain other women have died out and women either cannot be ordained at all or only by men. Women conferring ordination upon women - in an identical ceremony to that used by men - was another reflection of the deeply radical nature of our still new Movement - for it saw ordination not as an empowering or initiation, still less as passing certain tests or examinations, but simply as someone who is deeply Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels witnessing that same orientation in another person. If women could Go for Refuge (which they could) then they, no less than their brothers, could witness the Going for Refuge of others and so confer upon them ordination.

Since 1986 a few senior Dharmacharinis had been running a series of retreats at Taraloka which constituted an ordination process. However, in 1990 it became apparent to a number of us that the ordination process needed a full-time residential team to provide focus and continuity of *kalyana mitrata* (spiritual friendship) for the increasing number of women asking for ordination. Five of us came together and formed a team and began to fund-raise for a new retreat centre. In late 1994, we moved to what was to become Tiratanaloka Retreat Centre, in Wales. Since the ordination team has lived there, running Going for Refuge retreats full-time, 135 women have entered the Order. In 1995, 1996, and 1997, one-month ordination retreats were held at Tiratanaloka, but since 1998 we have hired 'Il Convento' in Tuscany where we can hold six or seven-week ordination retreats for women from all around the world. For the last couple of years we have been fund-raising for our own Ordination Retreat Centre in Europe, so that we can hold three to four-month ordination retreats for women. We hope this property will also have facilities for solitary retreats.

In 1998 I myself, who am resident at Tiratanaloka, became a Public Preceptor and in 2000 Sangharakshita handed on the Headship of the Order to the College of Public Preceptors, including the three women Public Preceptors. There are now a growing number of women private preceptors amongst the senior Dharmacharinis.

(By the way, I do not want to give the impression that buildings and numbers are everything. However, I do think that when we come together to create a facility, be it



a retreat, a community, a right livelihood business, a team of any kind, a city Centre, a Retreat Centre, an ordination process, etc., we grow in the process. We extend ourselves, develop friendships with those we live and work with and together we provide the contexts for the deepening of our spiritual practice in general, and for our meditation practice and Dharma study in particular.)

### Reflections from Dakini and Lotus Realm

I want to conclude this article with a few reflections that have arisen as I have thumbed through past issues of our magazine. I have been struck by a number of areas which have been on-going themes for women in the Movement over the past sixteen years so I will mention them briefly by way of conclusion:

#### The International Movement

So far I have focused on the development of women's activities in the UK. But of course, much has also happened in other parts of the world. In *Dakini/Lotus Realm*, the international aspect of our Movement has always been highlighted and there have been regular articles and interviews about events in India, USA, Australia, New Zealand and other parts of Europe. Over the years Dharmacharinis have left the UK and gone abroad to help spread the Dharma; or women who met the Dharma in their own country have come to Britain to gain more experience of sangha. Gradually local mitras have entered the Order in their own country, and, as in the UK, communities, right livelihood businesses, public Centres and Retreat Centres have been founded. In the United States, New Zealand, Australia and India, developments have been greatly helped by regular visits from Sanghadevi (to the first three) and Srimala (in India). India has so many women involved in the movement - many who need extra help to actualise their spiritual potential because of financial and social disadvantages. Some western Dharmacharinis have moved to live and work there. The Indian women's wing is slowly growing. All this is to be celebrated and rejoiced in.

#### Lifestyle

Another issue that *Dakini/Lotus Realm* consistently explored is that of Lifestyle. In the Order and Movement we often say that 'commitment is primary, lifestyle is secondary'. This does not mean that lifestyle is unimportant but it does mean that it is possible to practise, to become an Order member, whilst being a mother and having a family, or following a voca-

tion. Our magazine has featured articles about, and interviews with, many Dharmacharinis who hold positions of responsibility in the Order and movement and combine this and their spiritual lives in general, with being a mother, or with a career.

A noticeable development is that when the women's wing in the UK was still small, we needed to focus our attention on creating facilities that would promote growth in the women's wing - facilities such as the women's Retreat Centres. These days, if a Dharmacharini is inclined to take up responsibilities in one of the movement's institutions, there is less need for her to do that specifically within the women's wing. There are now a number of Dharmacharinis who are chairmen of public centres and others whose focus in their spiritual life is art.

In fact, *Lotus Realm* has focused on an inspiring mixture of lifestyle choices, sometimes emphasising the pioneering spirit or the taking on of responsibilities but also going into the actuality of being able to practice in a variety of skilful lifestyles. As such I think it has given enormous encouragement to its many readers.

#### Women and Spiritual Life

In the first issue of the re-named magazine, *Lotus Realm*, which appeared in the Summer 95, I wrote an article about women and ordination which included a section on issues and obstacles with which women working towards ordination and, indeed, in the spiritual life generally, often need to work. The issues I highlighted were: self-doubt and the need to develop confidence, conformity and taking risks, resolving the baby question, working with emotionality, independence, and individuality. I would need to refer you to that issue to discover how I explored these matters in depth. However, seven years later, I still think they are crucial issues for women involved in the practice of Buddhism. I also think that the developments we have made in the women's wing in the last sixteen years, the facilities that have been created, the deep-

ening friendships that have resulted, the greater experience of spiritual life which we have accumulated have all helped many women to make inroads into these obstacles and to begin to overcome them.

#### The Future

In an edition of *Dakini* (winter 1993), Sinhadevi asks Sangharakshita in an interview, 'And what would you like to see being developed in



Women's Ordination Team, Tiratanaloka 2002



the women's wing over the next ten years?' Sangharakshita answers: 'Just more of everything! More and more women being prepared for ordination, an extension of facilities for women of every kind. I would particularly like to see more development in India...'

Today, over eight years later, we have certainly fulfilled some of Sangharakshita's hopes. But there is so much more that we could create together for ourselves and others. Not only more facilities for spiritual practice all around the world, but we could, for instance, look for ways to reach out to people who might not come to an established public Centre. Another area, highlighted by the rapid growth of the women's wing of the Order in recent years, is the need for more post-ordination training.

But let us rejoice in what has been already achieved, let us resolve to face any obstacles and difficulties that may arise in our individual and collective spiritual lives, and let us determine to work together to create facilities for many, many women who may come into our movement in the future.

**Note:**

1. Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse 1984, pp65-6



Savita Bandgar is one of the girls benefiting from a project to help the children of rural migrant labourers.

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# Taking Risks With Words

Vajrapushpa

**WHEN EMBARKING** on a new project, it is often best to be blissfully unaware of the pitfalls and challenges that lie ahead. When a small group of us, Order members and mitras, decided to relaunch *Dakini*, then an in-house newsletter that had circulated amongst the women in the FWBO, we had little idea of what was entailed in producing a magazine. Between us we had three toddlers, only a little bit of time to spare around the edges, a lot of enthusiasm, a genuine interest in things literary and/or artistic - and very little money. I was an Order member of five years' standing and had a two-year old daughter. She came to some of the first editorial meetings, or else I left her to be minded by a friend: an adaptable and independent sort of child, I don't think she was much trouble either way.

The cover of the first issue now looks shockingly anaemic and, even with the beautifully executed dakini by Varaprabha adorning it, would hardly leap at you from a bookshop shelf. It was a far cry from the modern notion that to produce a successful magazine you get the design right first. Yet it was our intention that this new incarnation of *Dakini* would dance and sing in a more public realm than the old newsletter. And so the new publication emerged from the bedrooms and kitchen tables which the old magazine had inhabited, into public centres, retreat centres - out into the big, wide world - and over the years it reached many individuals. *Dakini's* initial relaunch and subsequent successes were a reflection of a more coherent identity, greater confidence, and increasingly expanding activities amongst the women involved in the still young FWBO.

## Writing as a Way

I had worked as a free-lance editor in Finland before moving to London in 1979. I was interested in writing: writing as a way of clarifying experiences, exploring and

developing ideas, writing as a discipline; and in women: women's 'conditioning', and what it meant to be a woman practising the Dharma in the FWBO, or in the West in general.

In my late twenties I had sought inspiration and affirmation from such writers as Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin, Esther Harding and Marion Milner, all of whom offered very positive notions and images of the 'feminine'. I had also been influenced by my involvement with the FWBO where there was a conviction that sharing your feelings and experiences with others is a good thing.

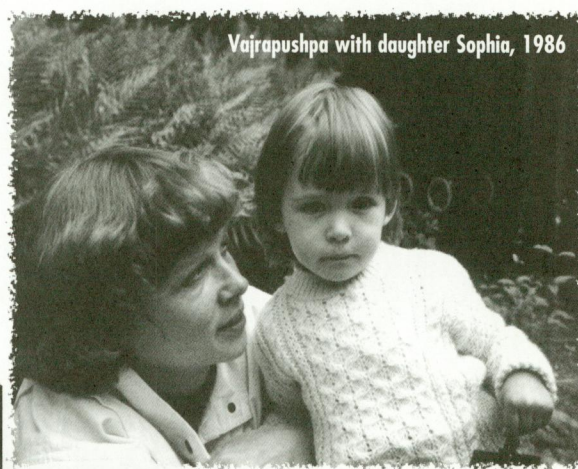
In my second editorial, I quoted from Anais Nin's essay 'The Artist as a Magician' in which she talks about the two distinct needs we have as human beings: 'One is a human need to be intimate with experience, to be

very close to experience, to be as directly related to events as possible.' The second need in human nature 'is to create something that has more permanence, which is the myth of our lives...The second step is to transform our experience through a well-crafted medium into something that has permanence for all times, articulateness for more than ourselves - so that it becomes timeless.'

During my years as editor I came to mistrust long sentences and learnt how to clarify what I thought the writer was trying to say, or even construct a meaning out of relatively scant materials. The punctuation in the English language was, and remains, a bit of a mystery to me. I got as far as getting a book on punctuation from the local library - but I never progressed beyond the first page.

## Variety, Views and Vision

Our brief was broad, and we looked in many different directions. We wanted to explore and establish further the



Vajrapushpa with daughter Sophia, 1986



"An independent sort of child"



place of the FWBO and the women's wing of the Western Buddhist Order within the wider Buddhist tradition, and particularly within the tradition of women's ordination and women Dharma practitioners. We looked for Eastern and Western role models, not just within Buddhism but within art, culture and spiritual endeavour in general. We looked for and found many of them - the weavers of wisdom, the remarkable women, the artists, the pioneers, the mothers, the great meditators.

Above all, we sought to celebrate the same variety within the lives of the women practising in the FWBO. Even though *Dakini/Lotus Realm* was a women's magazine, written by women, intended mainly for women, its aim was always to be inclusive. We tried to include and represent all lifestyles and approaches to spiritual life. So we invited them all to contribute: the mothers, the solitary meditators, the women working in team-based right livelihood businesses, the artists, the writers, the practitioners of alternative medicine, those willing to share their ordinary, everyday lives and experiences, those with special interests and skills.

Part of that broad brief that we had was to offer a window into the ethos, the culture and forms of practice in the FWBO. But I came to feel that this hardened to some extent into one of trying to 'represent' the Movement. I began wondering in whose voice were we speaking? Whose language were we using? Was the paradigm within which we assumed we had to express ourselves set too rigidly and prematurely? For instance, it seemed difficult to disentangle and question attitudes and assumptions concerning gender, art or manifestations of the FWBO's 'single-sex principle'. It was difficult to encourage a genuine and open debate.

We were keen to criticise outdated and rigid forms of practice and attitudes within the Buddhist world; keen to criticise the lack of spiritual values in Western society and the effects of Christian conditioning on women. Exploring our own views and assumptions would have made things a bit more interesting and made some of the writing less predictable.

But then, perhaps that was not really possible in the times when the Movement was still getting established on a wider scale and clarifying its principles and its identity. If principles are genuinely strong and spiritually sane, they will support a variety of views and lifestyles. But then it takes a lot of confidence and maturity to combine faith with a healthy doubt and scepticism. And we were not that mature.

Times have changed. Perhaps we need to worry less about getting the message across, or about our identity as women. I hope we can more easily and confidently let the individual voices speak.

### The Working Context

During the past thirteen years, I've trained and been working as a counsellor and a psychotherapist. I'm still thinking, listening, wondering what to say, what risks to take with words. I know better than ever before how well words can be used to hide the most important things. And what power they can have. The communication I have with

the clients is ephemeral, immediate and direct and into it I try to bring some kindness and equilibrium. I'm always searching for 'the names of the shadows between the words', searching for a meaning - a meaning that would enable the person to let go of negative emotions, or false beliefs and assumptions.

Since having a family I have led a typical 'from the sublime to the ridiculous' (and back again) sort of lifestyle where I would move from fairy-stories to the *Heart Sutra*, from meditation to household chores, from the simplicity of one-to-one encounters to the many-voiced music of family life. As I move along the continuum of life, I take less notice of the roles and categories that punctuate my experience.

Co-editing *Dakini/Lotus Realm*, initially with Kate Brady and later with Kalyanaprabha, was part of that mix for ten years. It was always interesting - and often moving - to read the contributions. Everyone wrote with sincerity and a willingness to share their thoughts. I felt very much part of the wider Movement in a direct way through this silent communication.

### Moving On

Now that I'm approaching fifty and have been in the Order for over twenty years, I have plenty of experience to draw on. I know myself reasonably well, and I'm aware of the limitations of what it might be possible for me to do. I know that I just have to keep going; keep practising; working out my priorities. I worry about not having enough time - for anything. And I need to be able to do nothing.

I also have a kind of 'the buck stops here' feeling; the responsibility lies with me. I'm alone with my *samskaras*, my tendencies and, somehow, knowing this 'existential aloneness' more deeply, I empathise and communicate with others. I'm less interested in forms than what lies behind them: the elusive meaning; the 'essence' that transforms.

Life moves on; the forms change. The magazine has had its colourful covers and it will cease to exist in its present form. The toddler who came to the editorial meetings is now an articulate eighteen-year old and looking forward to her studies of English Literature and Philosophy at university. Daughter Number Two is also growing up - more quietly perhaps - although she makes a nice sound on her saxophone. They have grown up within the English language and that language is their 'own' in a way that it will never be mine. I expect they know where to put their commas and semi-colons.

The French writer and thinker Helene Cixous describes writing as 'end without end, beginning without beginning. The opposite extreme of divine creation: without alpha and omega. In the beginning, it's always already in the middle'. True writing, says Cixous, is always going forward, always going beyond us. Its full 'meaning' can never be completely caught, or locked up. For her, writing is an act whose result (writing) continues to produce, independent of its author. Meaning is deferred, through unlimited readings and rewritings. That describes life, too, in its fast flowing and ungraspable nature □



# A PRECIOUS HARMONY

## Sixteen Years in New Zealand

Dharmanandi

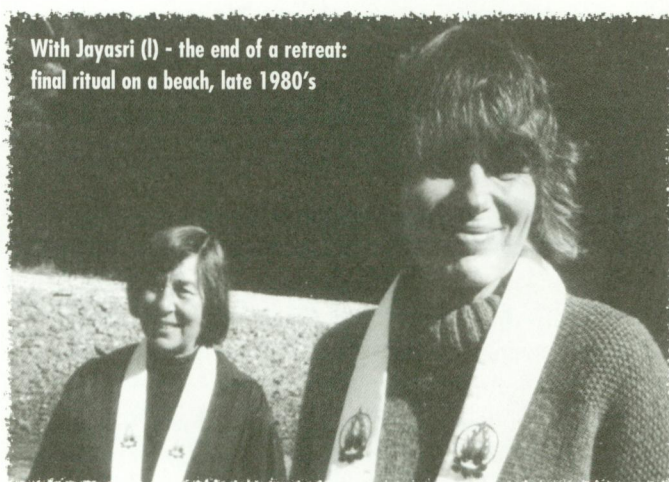
AS I SIT HERE in my home situated in the Waitakere ranges west of Auckland, I reflect on the last time I saw Aniketa. It was in early February and Aniketa was in hospital dying of an aggressive lymphoma. She was dying with a rare calm and courage. It was on my first visit to the Auckland Buddhist Centre in 1979 that I had met Aniketa, recently ordained by Sangharakshita. I recall her round, moonlike, joyful smiling face that day. Twenty three years have passed since that first encounter. Is it possible that I have been involved with the Auckland Sangha for so long? It is more than a third of my life.

### Beginnings

On June 2nd and 3rd 1986, on a small weekend retreat in a cottage in Norfolk I became Dharmanandi. I, too, was ordained by Sangharakshita. I found my name beautiful. It means 'she who delights in or rejoices in the Dharma or Truth.' I have grown more into the 'delight' aspect of it as the years have passed. Just ordained, I appeared in the first edition of *Dakini*, and now, sixteen years later, it feels auspicious to have a presence in the final edition of *Lotus Realm*.

Within a few weeks of my ordination I was on a flight back to Auckland to be welcomed into the Order by the New Zealand Order members. It was, however, an Order fraught with tensions and polarizations and those early years presented me with many challenges. Some of those challenges I dealt with skilfully, whilst with others I know I was simply reactive - collusive or exasperated.

Within a few months of being back in Auckland I became the Chapter Convenor for the mixed Auckland Chapter<sup>1</sup>. Very soon, though, the men separated out to form their own Chapter, leaving five of us as the first New Zealand women's Chapter. This was soon diminished, however, when both Vidyavati and Aniketa went to England. We struggled as such a small Chapter, various tensions arising between us. We had insufficient skill to move things on either personally or as a collective. I believe we had little notion of the meaning of Spiritual Workshop, of how to move things to a more significant level. Nonetheless, the three of us worked together in and around the Auckland Buddhist Centre, developing the women's wing of the



With Jayasri (l) - the end of a retreat:  
final ritual on a beach, late 1980's

sangha by running regular retreats and taking Dharma study groups.

The creation of an effective Order may have been tough but we were all deeply inspired by the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita. I had previously majored in Philosophy at Auckland University, but I had found that the Dharma far exceeded any system of Philosophy I had come across. The system of ethics presented in Buddhism seemed so far reaching, entering into the smallest interactions. The Dharma seemed then and still seems endlessly fascinating, complete and satisfying, on both an intellectual and an emotional level. The *Perfection of Wisdom* literature has a special appeal for me, with its sweeping away of concepts by use of paradox - it stretches my mind, my heart, my consciousness.

During those early years I visited England where I had family, and on two occasions took part in the month long women's pre-ordination retreats at held at Taraloka. In 1988 Varadevi was ordained and almost immediately became the Chairman of the Wellington Centre, taking over from Achala who was too unwell to continue.

From that time on I started to visit Wellington twice a year to give Varadevi some moral support and to help her develop things for the women there. In 1990 I became



overall Mitra Convenor for New Zealand. My good friendship with Varadevi stems from those early years when I would take the one hour flight to Wellington and stay with her in her Brooklyn home along with her son Charlie and Muzzy the cat. Whilst there I led or supported retreats, met up with the women mitras and often led a mitra day at the Wellington Centre.

### Difficult Times

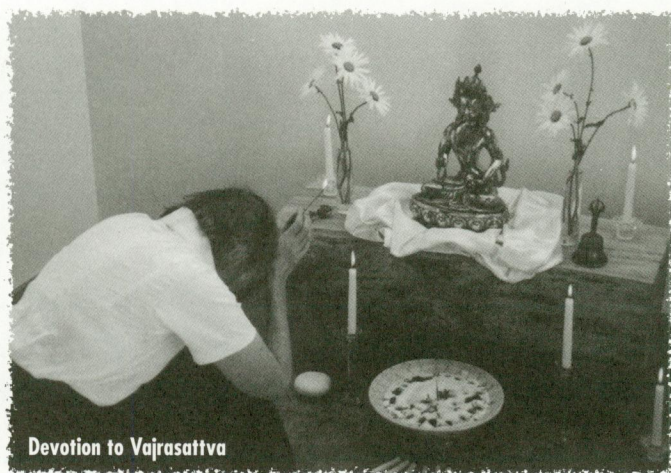
In Auckland we had abandoned our Centre in Hobson Street and were homeless, searching for a new property and fund raising. The rent for the Hobson Street space had become untenable and it seemed preferable to save toward buying our own Centre. Our activities mainly ran from a room near the University. I recall the Sunday morning pujas: we would arrive and firstly clear the room of tables and chairs, vacuum the floor and then set up a shrine. At the end of the puja we once more dismantled the shrine, and carried all the heavy tables back into the room. Did we really do that for nearly seven years? We did indeed - and the sangha continued to grow.

I was in a married situation and still working as a Social Worker in adult psychiatry. Indeed, most of us were in family situations, and also working. Punyasri who was ordained a year after me, was married with four children, Jayasri had one son, Aniketa had brought up her four daughters alone, her husband having died while the girls were still young. There was a trickle of ordinations during these early years as Navachitta, then Guhyaprabha and then Pundarikini joined the WBO.

In 1992 the Auckland Order and sangha went through a difficult time in what came to be called the 'Sister Annabel Affair'. Sister Annabel, a disciple of Thich Nhat Hanh, offered a Mindfulness retreat in Auckland. A number mitras and Friends and one Order member attended the retreat, some taking the Refuges and Precepts from Sister Annabel and receiving a new name. By taking initiation from Sister Annabel in this way, the mitras had really given up their mitraship. Sorting it all out was complex and painful. Three of the women and five of the men resigned as mitras and a sense of grief hung over the entire sangha. Some months later Sangharakshita questioned the status and connection of a number of local Order members, some of whom who had not been in contact with him or in a Chapter for some years. After much heartache for all of us four did resign. Despite an overarching sense of grief, there was now a sense of greater clarity in the Order, and of being able to work together. It was, in fact, a watershed, a turning point.

### Inspiration from Meditation

It is not simple to extricate my own growth and progress along the Buddhist Path from the history of the FWBO in New Zealand. It is a struggling sangha that has largely been the context for my spiritual life. I had no alternative - I could not uproot myself and move to a different centre because of my family commitments. I -



Devotion to Vajrasattva

indeed all of us - worked as best we could with the difficulties, albeit not without some heartache. Does difficulty mature one?

Possibly due to the relative isolation from the heart of the movement, with its greater opportunities for kalyana mitrata, I found myself turning to my meditation practice for nourishment and support. Meditation has always been important to me. At my ordination I took the Green Tara sadhana practice, but was also given Vajrasattva and Padmasambhava as additional practices<sup>2</sup>. I sense that these three figures gave a certain stability to my life and spiritual practice. Along with the basic meditation practices of Mindfulness of Breathing and Metta Bhavana, visualisation practice seemed to provide me with another approach to spiritual life and to the development of Insight. On a more mundane level, I could simply call on Tara or Padmasambhava when I felt unsure or uncertain and that seemed to strengthen me, and to nourish my inspiration. Other sources of inspiration were our women's Order retreats in which we took the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras as our theme. Such events helped us deepen our practice.

Life itself, the events of life, can also have a maturing effect upon one spiritually, perhaps to the extent that one can embrace them and reflect on the dharmic principles that underlie them. Death has been no stranger to me over these years and whilst a part of me can still inwardly rail against it and find it totally unacceptable, I sense that my understanding of impermanence has, none-the-less, sunk to a deeper level. A further maturing factor for me has been on-going friendships - something in this situation demands fidelity of me.

Along with my sadhana practices, the Refuge Tree practice was important to me, providing me with a vast and mythic context. With the introduction of the Shakyamuni Going For Refuge and Prostration Practice into the Ordination Processes at both Padmaloka and Tiratanaloka, I started to teach it on our own Going For Refuge retreats<sup>3</sup>. For a number of years several of us formed a sort of core team to lead retreats for the women who had requested ordination. We tried as best we could to replicate the themes of the Ordination Process retreats



in England. At the same time we encouraged the women here to make the trip to England to go on retreats at Tiratanaloka and to make connections with both the Ordination Team and the Public Preceptors.

### The Fruit

In 1997 Sanghadevi, a Public Preceptor, made her first journey to New Zealand to lead an Australasian Going For Refuge retreat. I recall Sanghadevi's initial response on the first evening of that retreat, that here, to her surprise, was a big and well developed situation. I recall having a positive sense of pride but also being overcome with tears: all our work had, then, borne fruit. We had collectively worked to build a healthy women's sangha, both here and in Australia. With the focus and momentum now provided by Sanghadevi's on-going visits, and her work with the Order Team, the situation is now blossoming with more women being invited to the Tuscany Ordination Retreat this autumn. By the end of the year our Chapter will have thirteen members! These days our Chapter does have a quality of depth to it, and for the most part, harmony too. It could all go further I am sure and yet when I reflect back on the women's Chapter of 1987, I am amazed at how far we have come.

Throughout the years, a number of men and women, Friends, mitras and Order members have made the trip to England and have decided not to return to New Zealand. There has been a sense of grief for me in some of these



losses, although I can understand them. For some it is simply easier to be part of a wider sangha, to be at the centre of the Movement with all its activities..

As the Movement in England starts to divide more into regions, so, too, our Australasian region is developing with the appointment of an Order Convenor for the men, and the appointment of Private Preceptors

in both Australia and New Zealand for men and women. The region is slowly but surely arriving at a maturity that its history would seem almost to defy. Or is it that maturity comes from the fire? During her life Aniketa was always concerned with the harmony of the Order in this region, and in her death she brought together Order members and those who were once Order members. I sense that in her dying she poured some healing balm onto an old wound and opened the possibility of an ever greater harmony in the wider sangha of New Zealand. □

### Notes:

**1: Chapter:** Generally all Order members belong to a local 'chapter', which meets weekly to encourage and help one another along the spiritual path. The purpose and function of chapter meetings has been the topic for much discussion and exploration over the years. A successful chapter meeting has been termed a 'spiritual workshop' and may include confession of ethical misconduct and exploration of what may have led to it, confiding of difficulties, sharing of inspiration, asking for encouragement or even advice and so on. Many chapters simply come together without any agenda. Order members may sit in silence together until someone wishes to speak. A thriving chapter can be a tremendous source of nourishment in the spiritual life of Order members.

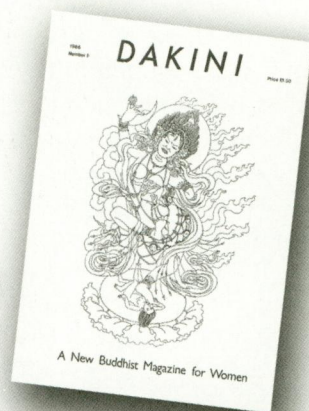
**2: Sadhana:** Sadhana practice comes from the Indo-tibetan tradition. It is a systematic spiritual practice of a devotional-cum-meditative nature. As developed in the Western Buddhist Order, it involves the visualisation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva figure. Order members generally take on a sadhana practice at the time of ordination.

**3: Refuge Tree Practice:** This involves visualising a Refuge Tree on which appear all the main teachers of past and present to whom the FWBO looks for guidance and inspiration. Buddha and Bodhisattva figures also appear on the Refuge Tree. During the practice verses are recited and prostrations are carried out physically thus involving the practitioner in devotion with 'body, speech and mind'. For further information see: Kulananda, *Teachers of Enlightenment*, Windhorse 2000.





# Dakini and Lotus Realm: A Celebration



Kalyanaprabha

## Introduction

Appearing for the first time in the Summer of 1986, we hailed *Dakini*, the new magazine by women in the FWBO, with great delight. At the Manchester Buddhist Centre where I was a mitra, women Order members were noticeable only by their absence - and this was the case at many Centres. Through *Dakini* we would hear women's voices speaking to us

## Disappeared

It was a year before the next issue came out, and then.... silence. The lovely lady seemed to have vanished....

## The Fatal Question

On my fortnightly visits to Taraloka I would meet up with Sanghadevi who had kindly agreed to 'take me on' and help me in my efforts to prepare for ordination. In return I did whatever I could to be of service to her. Once it was the plants, another time the computer. But one day she said, 'I wonder what's happening with *Dakini*. Bhante has been making enquiries. Do you think you could find out?'

## Leaping to the Rescue

I took up my mission and leapt onto my white charger. I discovered the lady was languishing in somebody's cellar. Nobody seemed able to get her out. 'I'll save her!' I cried.

## The Weighty Inheritance

Mallika had somehow brought together all the administrative papers. She gave them to me in two plastic bags. I took them home. In this way I became co-editor and overall manager of a Buddhist Magazine for Women.

## Qualifications and Previous Experience?

None.

SO BEGAN MY FOURTEEN year involvement with *Dakini/Lotus Realm*. And now I find myself sitting down to write a final article - a farewell, a thank you, a celebration. I hope to evoke something of the inspiration we had, convey to you something of the sense of adventure we had, give you an idea of the risks we took in our own small way, tell you something of what motivated us. I hope it may inspire some people to go off and do likewise in their own way. And I want to recall as many of you as I can who have contributed to the creation of our magazine and to thank you for all that you have done.

## The Joys of Editing

One of the great pleasures of the editorship has been preparing pieces for publication. In the early days those we invited to contribute were often hesitant about writing an article. We had to persuade and even cajole. These days women in the FWBO seem much more confident. If you ask someone to write an article, she will usually say yes. I think the change is due to accumulated experience out of which people can authentically speak. We now know a good deal about being a woman and practising the Dharma.

Editing someone's article you learn quite a lot about them: their particular mode of thinking, their turn of phrase, their perspective on life begins to impress itself upon you and there is a sense of being in contact mind-to-mind. In this way I came to feel quite close to some of my Dharma-sisters, some living on the other side of the world, others closer to home but whom I otherwise hardly knew. I would put down a finished article with a sense of gratitude for that person's life; a sense of admiration for what they were trying to live out - values so at odds with those of the ordinary world. I became aware that even if someone was not really much of a writer, nevertheless her Going for Refuge would shine through. What I wanted our maga-

\* \* \* \* \*



zine to be more than anything else was a vehicle through which the Going for Refuge of committed women could inspire other women to Go for Refuge themselves. If our readers have ever been touched in that way, then we can deem our magazine a success.

### For Women

We were proud of our women's magazine in the beginning. It was still unusual for women to get a project off the ground entirely without reference to men. Actually - if I may be a little controversial - I would say it is still pretty unusual.

We wanted *Dakini* to speak to women who were practising the Dharma in places where they couldn't easily meet women Order members. Even today there are many FWBO Centres without Dharmacharinis. Going by the letters and cards we have received from time to time, women from those Centres have especially appreciated the magazine.

Nor were all our contributors from the FWBO - although most were. Martha Dharmapali contributed an article back in 1992 on the practice of Buddhism in America; and I well remember my contact with Ayya Khema when I wrote an article about her life and work. She was very friendly, absolutely reliable - and very firm! Our readers also include Buddhists from other traditions as well as a few non-Buddhists. My mother was one of them and I would like to thank her for her appreciation and support.

### Working With Others

Any project you take on involves you with other people. The magazine was no exception. *Dakini* had a Management Committee which would meet at the London Buddhist Centre and discuss matters of concern. Mallika chaired the meetings until *Dakini* became *Lotus Realm*. She

always kept an eye on the magazine's fortunes. Then Viryaprabha took over. We hammered out our Aims and Objectives. We decided on themes. We debated long and hard what to call the new-style magazine that was to supersede *Dakini*. Thanks to all the Dharmacharinis who were members of that Committee

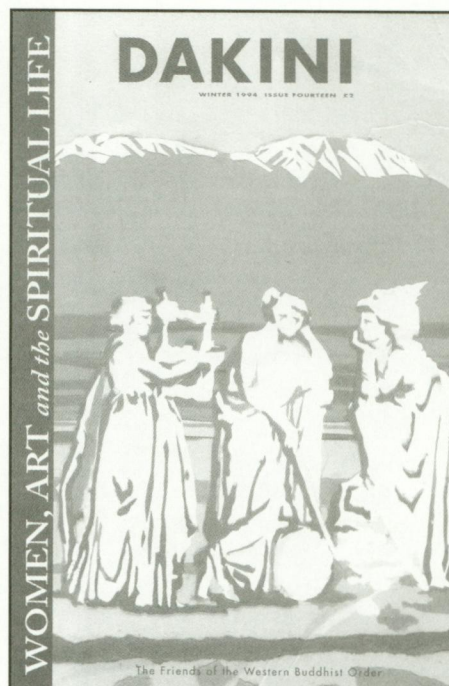
including Varabhadri and Sridevi who were poetry and reviews editors for the early issues, and all the others. Did our eagerness to include people on the Committee go a little far at times? Looking back, I find myself wondering why eight women were needed to manage a little magazine of twenty-four pages!

I inherited

Vajrapushpa as co-editor - along with the two carrier bags of papers. (Her previous co-editor had left the Movement.) And she acquired me - out of the blue really. Sometimes I wonder what it was like for her to suddenly find herself working with this enthusiastic and naive young woman whose approach to things was so different to her own. Whatever she may have thought, she kept it to herself. As for me, I came to appreciate my co-editor's intelligence, maturity, reliability and independence of thought.

When Viryaprabha joined us as news editor, we found we were an international editorial team - one Finn, one Briton and one American. Our News Pages appeared first in issue twelve of *Dakini* with news of the very first 'older women's' retreat at Taraloka; and a piece about Vajragita who had single-handedly set up the FWBO in Holland and who assured the reader, 'Anybody Can Do It!' News continued to come in over the years from all over the world. There was 'Going for Refuge in the Western USA'; and Punyavati's record of 'Six Months in India.' There was a retreat in Australia that had begun with a bush fire - and had gone on to study the Parable of the Burning House! There was the establishment of Tiratanaloka and so on....

Whilst helping to bring out a Buddhist Magazine for Women, I was also working for the Manchester Buddhist Centre. Among other things, I was doing what I could to aid efforts to bring a women's wing of the sangha into being in the north-west of England. *Dakini* became a little project around which women could come together and get a taste of team work. Looking through back issues I see the names of people who became mitras or even in due course joined the Order, all of whom helped with the administrative work for *Dakini*, dealing with subscriptions, advertising, promotion, and distribution. I don't know if their work for *Dakini* helped them. But they certainly helped the magazine. I would like to thank them all for their contribution. (I will use the names as they appeared in the *Dakinis* of the time): Mary Synott, Ngaire





Moorhouse, Meg St. Pierre, Gill Thomas, Allyson Garbett, Mary Norman, Siobhan Healy, Dinah Milsom, Ginny De'Giovanni, Carolyn Entwistle, Penny Morris, Jenny Marshall, Mollie Hamling, Jennifer Clarke, Jackie Cole, and Kay Stubbs.

### Mining Rich Seams

Generally the Management Committee decided on themes for each issue. We tried to gauge what was happening in the women's wing and what people were talking about and thinking about. Then we invited people to write. We were aware that we were sometimes breaking entirely new ground. I think of the questions Sanghadevi raised when reviewing the history of ordination for women in the Buddhist tradition in *Dakini* No. 7; or the issue on Motherhood - articles which, as far as we knew, had never been gathered together and published in this way before. We kept some feeling for bringing in women and the arts - one of Mallika's initial inspirations. *Lotus Realm* No. 7



looked at 'Poets and Painters' (all women of course.) We tried tackling more controversial themes with 'Women and Power' (*Dakini* No. 13) and 'Sex and the Sangha' (*Lotus Realm* No. 9.) Some issues were particularly geared to drawing from the wider FWBO - *Dakini* No. 10 focused on America; and *Lotus Realm* No. 6 - 'Social Action' -

included two articles by Indian Dharmacharinis.

### The Visual Field

Although I was happy to become a co-editor of a magazine, I drew the line at trying to design it. Nagabodhi, then of Windhorse Publications, had a suggestion. Try Diane Quin - she's a trained graphic designer. There was one small problem. She lived in Auckland. No email in those days of course - but we did not let distance deter us. If she was a Buddhist, a woman and willing to give of her services freely, then Diane it would be! It helped when she moved to Glasgow. Diane (later Prajnalila) was the designer for eight issues. Lisa Dedman took over for a couple of issues and was succeeded by Sophie Brown. Sophie had a full-time job and designed the magazine at weekends. Four or five issues were her handiwork before Sue Purcell took the job professionally. Sue was not a Buddhist but she was sympathetic. The last eleven issues were designed by Sue.

We had our own artist for *Dakini* and for the early issues of *Lotus Realm*. Varaprabha of Norwich drew the dakini image that adorned the early covers. Later, she also designed some of the covers. One I remember in particular used her woodcuts depicting the Buddha and the Four Sights.

Prue Burch (later Vidyamala), then of Taraloka, took on picture research. She was succeeded by Dharmottara and then Sarvabhadri. Dharmottara deserves a special mention for a magazine like *Dakini* and *Lotus Realm* could not be called her 'cup of tea'. Yet help with it she did and put up with the ignorance of the editor who could not always appreciate the subtlety of her choice of illustrations:

'What's this picture?' the editor would ask, trying to hide her suspicions. And, then, as casually as possible: 'It looks like a pile of blankets.'

'It is a pile of blankets,' my friend agreed, assuming that made everything clear.

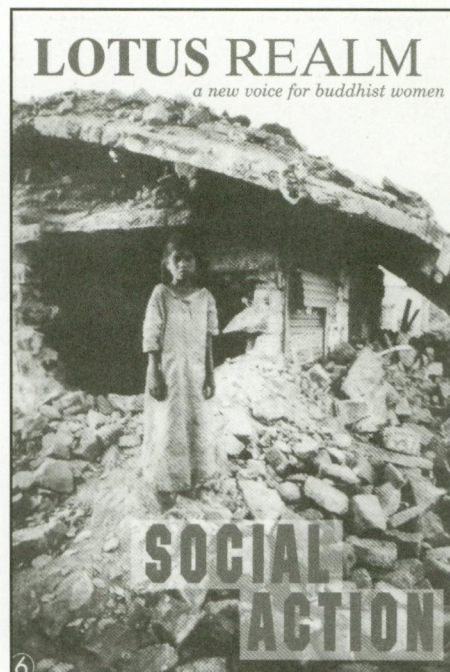
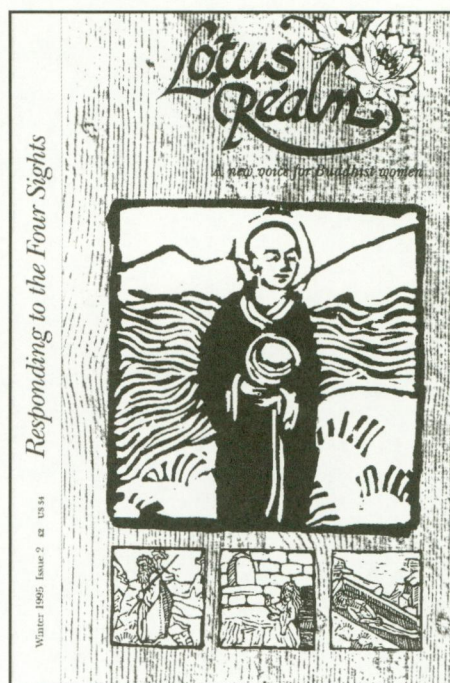
'Oh.' Pause. And then, in an attempt to be tactful: 'Do you think our readers will get the allusion?'

'Of course they will.'

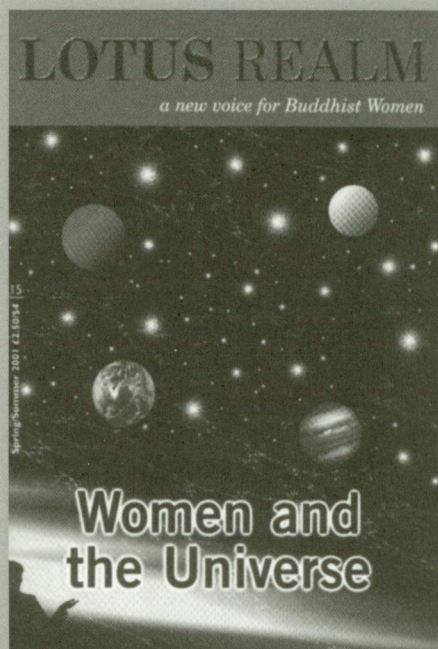
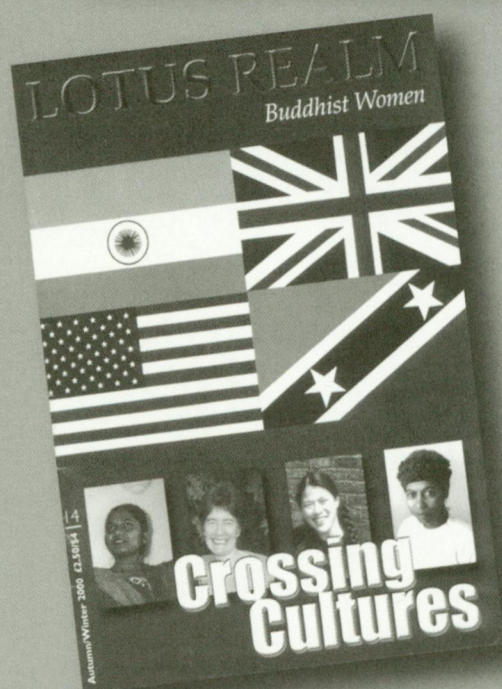
In the interests of spiritual life, of course, one practises giving up one's preferences in favour of someone else's. But was this desirable in the realm of magazine design? I was not too sure. But the pile of blankets appeared nevertheless.

### Hard Times

All things come and go. Everything con-fected comes together and then disappears again. The worldly winds of







loss and gain, pleasure and pain, blow all the time. *Dakini* was doing so well that in 1994 the Management Committee decided to re-launch the magazine with a new name. It would come out not twice but three times a year. It would be bigger and better and we looked forward to a bright future reaching an ever-wider audience both within and without the FWBO.

This initiative coincided with a very much larger one. The Manchester Buddhist Centre Council (of which I was a member) decided to purchase a large warehouse in central Manchester and convert it into a public Buddhist Centre. For many months the magazine's office operated from bedrooms and living rooms while the warehouse was gutted and the new Buddhist Centre built. Life changed for all of us. Now one was leading a Dharma class in a hired hall. Now one was discussing the promotion of a magazine in someone's back room. And next day one was again turning one's hand to building work.

Amidst this rather chaotic time, the new magazine had a difficult birth and struggled even to maintain the standards *Dakini* had reached. There followed a low time indeed. Most of those who had been involved in its production or administration decided to move on to other things. My co-editor, after ten years of loyal service, also felt it was time to move on. Support for the magazine amongst the Dharmacharinis waned (I think in the wake of the controversial *Women, Men and Angels*.) I wondered whether to give up.

But help was at hand. Windhorse Publications contacted us and offered to take over distribution. Kay Stubbs moved to Manchester and willingly took on one day a week administration. Sanghadevi encouraged us. Her interest in the magazine had continued long after she put to me the fatal question. And there was a card from Sangharakshita. He had heard there was talk of closing the magazine down. Please do ask the women's wing of the movement to think again before sacrificing so valuable an asset, he urged. Others might have lost faith in the project, but clearly Bhante had not. He has always encouraged, expressed his appreciation of and support for the magazine. It was his interest in *Dakini*'s fate that led to its revival in 1989. For this, as for so many things, one wishes to express one's heartfelt gratitude.

So *Lotus Realm* continued, the editorial office moving to Taraloka Retreat Centre when I moved there in 1998. Taraloka, with characteristic generosity, gave financial backing and support of other kinds. But the magazine was not to become an integral part of Taraloka - as for a while I had hoped. A Retreat Centre is perhaps not the best place to produce a magazine.

Last Summer I decided the time had come to hand *Lotus Realm* on or put it down for someone else to take up in due course. I hope before too long another, different publication will appear from the Dharmacharinis. '*Lotus Realm* does have a particular style,' people sometimes hint. Well, of course, the editor or editors will always influence the style of a magazine - and it is time for something different to emerge from our women's wing, something with a different voice - but still something that makes it possible for women to speak out their vision of the Dharma. Why should something new not emerge? After all, what were my qualifications for taking it on? Perhaps just that strong desire to help our new Buddhist movement grow and the wish for women all over the world to have an opportunity to come into contact with women practising the Dharma.





# Finding Our Voice



## Kalyanaprabha interviews Mallika

**LR:** Mallika, you are one of our longest standing Order members - you were ordained when the FWBO was still in its infancy - how did you become involved in a new Buddhist Movement?

**M:** I first came across Buddhism when I was about seventeen. I read a book about Zen by Christmas Humphreys. I was really interested when I read that - although I had many other things running through my mind as well at that time. But I had one particular thread running through everything I did - it was the feeling that there was something more - something else - it was a kind of longing that I had. Then came the sixties - there was a huge change in society - young people growing away from the values ordinary people had and looking for new ones - there was flower power and all kinds of exciting things *(Laughter)*

**LR:** How did your interest in Buddhism develop?

**M:** I went to a lecture of Chogyam Trungpa's and started a Buddhist group in Glasgow for people who went to his lectures. We used to meet once a month. We didn't really know anything about Buddhism or meditation so we would meet and sit in the dark. *(Laughter)* I was fascinated by Tibetan Buddhism. People in the group asked, why don't you ask to be ordained by Trungpa? But I didn't feel I wanted to be.

**LR:** What happened then?

**M:** A friend told me she had a tape of a lecture given by this man from the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. She played the tape for me and I knew at once that *this* was what I needed to hear. It was Bhante of course. I wanted to find out more so I wrote not just to the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara but to all the Buddhist groups whose addresses I had - I even wrote to the Dalai Lama - and told them that there was a Buddhist group in Glasgow. Quite a few people sent us books and I began to receive the Newsletter from the FWBO Centre in Archway. I found

that Newsletter so inspiring. I remember once they were advertising a jumble sale and they said, 'Bring your friends...Bring your enemies....' and I thought, 'Oh, I like the sound of these people!' *(Laughter.)* I phoned the number on the Newsletter and asked if I could come and meet Sangharakshita. That was arranged and I went down and met Bhante. I never looked back.

**LR:** What was your impression of him when you met him?

**M:** Oh...he was very friendly and gentle. I found myself telling him all kinds of things I wouldn't normally tell someone. I felt I had come somewhere very important. I didn't realise how important. I didn't realise what his learning or spiritual life had been.

**LR:** What was it like to be involved in those early days?

**M:** I found it quite ... magical. It was all so very different from the world as I knew it... exciting and new and different - and yet familiar. It seemed to be a return journey I was making. I realised that the longing I had had in me ever since I can remember had led me here and I was in the right place.

**LR:** You went on to be ordained not long after your meeting with Bhante?

**M:** Yes, I was ordained in 1974.

**LR:** You weren't as young as some of the other people involved in the FWBO at that time?

**M:** No, I was forty-four when I was ordained.

**LR:** Did you have many responsibilities as a new Order member?

**M:** Yes, I had those from the beginning. I was the only woman Order member in Scotland. Most of my



friends were men - and good friends they were! We had a Buddhist Centre in Bath Street in Glasgow. I used to do some teaching at the Centre - I taught meditation. I also did things like demonstrations of vegetarian cooking. I would just turn my hand to whatever needed doing. I was a sort of unofficial chairman. Vajradaka very kindly called me 'the leading light'! (*Laughter*) But it became clear that somebody was needed to work full-time at the Centre, so Gotami came up from London - and that was wonderful. She was just so strong and yet gentle. She could teach the Dharma and answer questions - it was such a wonderful relief to have her there and we became the best of friends.

**LR:** You had quite a number of other responsibilities at that time.

**M:** Yes, my life was quite full. I had a family - two teenagers and an eight-year-old. I was working with Iain, my husband, for an Arts Centre which was really very demanding indeed. But it was also very inspiring work. I could see what a transformation the arts brought about in the lives of the young people we worked with. We put on all sorts of things. Iain wrote operettas. (He was music, you see, and I was drama so we worked together very well!) He got choirs and orchestras together and taught them to sing and I taught them to act and did all the back-stage work ...

**LR:** So what made you leave Glasgow?

**M:** Our Arts Centre depended on our having the building and we'd been given the building by the City Council. Then one day, really for political reasons, they took it back - so we lost our jobs - well, we pretty well lost everything that we had. Coming down to London was another start.

**LR:** What made you come to London?

**M:** It was really Sanghadevi... She invited me to come down and help with the fund-raising for the women's retreat centre because I was experienced in fundraising for the Arts Centre. She asked me to come and stay with her so I had an experience of living in a women's community - Vajracchedika Community - which I very much enjoyed. We worked together in a small team and raised money. We were a splendid team! Then Iain and I moved down permanently which meant I could be involved with the London Buddhist Centre.

**LR:** How did the idea of a magazine for women come about?

**M:** It was at that time - the early 80's - that in the movement we had 'the Great Divide' - that was the time when there was a separation of activities for men and women, the men engaging in their activities, the women in theirs. The men had found that working together building the LBC [London Buddhist Centre] they were relating to one another on a different level, on a more spiritual level. Out of that came the realisation that it was going to be helpful spiritually for men and women to develop separately. But at that time there was a strong feeling among the women of not being very sure what direction to take and also feeling rejected by the men. Although I think on the whole we were not really rejected in the sense of not being wanted, I think quite a few men did seem to reject because it was the only way they could ignore the women, not get caught up with them - they had to reject them. I think later we came to appreciate that but it was quite hard to go through it. And now we ourselves can see the benefits. Even though women's conditioning is taking a long time to overcome, the women's activities and practice have really grown wonderfully in the last thirty years.

**LR:** What changes have you seen over that time?

**M:** Oh....women becoming confident - confident in taking the lead. I think we could do more of it. We explored this in one of our Order weekends at the LBC.

**LR:** Have you got thoughts about why women may be reluctant to take the lead?

**M:** My observation is that on the whole women are more group oriented at a level that is not very aware. If someone takes the lead they have to leave the group and that means the group is threatened. Taking the lead means being an individual and taking with you people who can follow the lead and become individuals themselves. That's what we did with Bhante - this individual who came to

Vajracchedika





teach and in following his teaching we are becoming individuals ourselves. I think women have to become more aware of the tendency to form groups and overcome it and try to not pull against people who are able to lead. I think women also have to learn to be less dependent on men.

**LR:** Do you think that is important?

**M:** Yes! If you're going to develop as an individual you have to be clear about your dependencies. Men take the lead very naturally. That's their conditioning. We have to not wait for men to do things but develop things in our own way. Traditionally women have often been in the background, helping in the background - helping some man, usually their husband or their boss, in feminine kinds of ways - smoothing things - helping them to do their job. But through women doing things together there is this realisation that women can also do the job - although not necessarily in the way men do it. I think we have to find out more and more about that.

**LR:** Do you think women have a different way of doing things?

**M:** Yes...yes, I do.

**LR:** Do you think women in the movement are taking the lead, taking the initiative, doing things 'in their own way' more these days?

**M:** Yes, for instance in the movement we now have our own retreat centres. Taraloka is a very beautiful retreat centre and women have created it themselves.

**LR:** Do you think there are some positive aspects to women's conditioning?

**M:** A very positive aspect of being a woman is that women form friendships very well, very easily and in depth.

**LR:** Are there other aspects in which we need to work on overcoming conditioning?

**M:** I think women could still do much more, especially in the arts. I think women can be fearful of being creative

**LR:** Why do you think that is?

**M:** Well, creativity is very challenging. You start to communicate when you become creative. You can't disappear and be creative. You have to have a voice and the beginning of *Dakini* magazine was that voice. I felt if we could talk about our experience of becoming creative, of wanting to become creative, even of being fearful about becoming creative - that would be a way of talking about women's spiritual lives. You see I think the creative process - being an artist - is so similar to spiritual development. Spiritual life is about being creative.

**KP:** Can you tell us a little more about the beginning of *Dakini*?

**M:** I felt there was a need for a women's magazine - where women could write, write articles, write poetry and exchange views and discover what it's like to be a Buddhist woman. I was wanting the communication to go much wider than just between women in the FWBO. The uniqueness of our movement where women have equal ordination with men is something which needs to be discovered by more and more women because there still are very, very old ways of doing things, particularly in the East and I hoped that our magazine might give this information to other women. I thought of it as a magazine for Buddhist women all over the world.

**LR:** How did you actually get it going?

**M:** I spoke to Vajrapushpa who, though Finnish, has a wonderful grasp of language and was a writer. I asked her if she would be interested in being editor and she said YES! I knew I couldn't do it - I wasn't experienced. A few others were also interested in becoming involved. Then I went to Bhante and told him what I was doing and asked for his blessing...

**LR:** Why did you use the name *Dakini*?

**M:** Because the Dakini, wherever she alights, initiates creativity.

**LR:** What did you envisage as the scope of the magazine?

**M:** We were quite ambitious - we were going to have four issues a year - but we didn't have any experience of producing a magazine. So the first one was a real triumph! I asked all sorts of people to help. My son got it printed for me as a gift. It was touch and go whether we would have enough material - we often had to persuade, plead - we didn't actually threaten but it got close sometimes (*Laughter.*) The threat was, if you don't let us have this article the magazine won't appear!

**LR:** What do you think is the most important thing for a magazine like ours to do?

**M:** I would like there to be more exchange with other women in the Buddhist world, making contact with Buddhist women throughout the world. I think with email and people able to communicate much more easily, it shouldn't be difficult to have closer communication with other women in the Buddhist world and find out what they think of us and to hear what their lives are like...

**KP:** What do you think they can learn from us?

**M:** That they can develop as individuals and not be so concerned about being women but about being Buddhists and speaking out and saying what their experience is and encouraging more and more women to become involved in our Buddhist way of life, in Going for Refuge.

**KP:** Mallika, thank you very much.

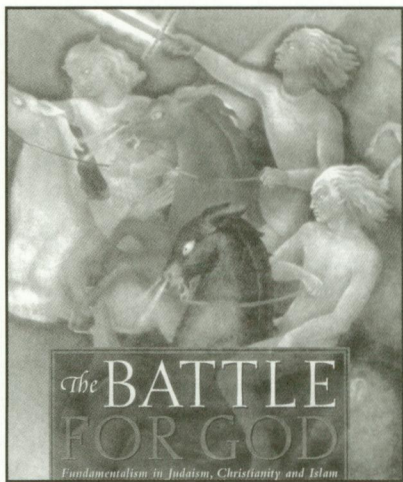


## **The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam**

**Karen Armstrong**

**HarperCollins 2000**

**£19.99 h/b**



*'One of the most startling developments of the late twentieth century has been the emergence within every major religious tradition of a militant piety popularly known as "fundamentalism". Its manifestations are sometimes shocking. Fundamentalists have gunned down worshippers in a mosque, have killed doctors and nurses who work in abortion clinics, have shot their presidents, and have even toppled a powerful government. It is only a small minority of fundamentalists who commit such acts of terror, but even the most peaceful and law-abiding are perplexing, because they seem so adamantly opposed to many of the most positive values of modern society...' (p.ix)*

If we are to understand what is going on in the world around us, we are clearly going to need to get to grips with fundamentalism. As with so many things, one is less likely to understand it if one thinks one already knows what it is: 'Well, it's a kind of fanatical religious extremism, isn't it?' If this is your answer, (as I confess it has been mine), you might

consider reading *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* by Karen Armstrong.

Karen Armstrong is well-known as having committed herself as a young woman to life as a Catholic nun and then having left her Order (in 1969) to return to 'the world'. Since then she has continued to study religious traditions of many kinds - her books include a history of God, a life of the Buddha and *The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's Creation of the Sex War in the West* - and is now widely respected as a commentator on religious affairs. All this breadth of experience is distilled into *The Battle for God*, an ambitious and far-reaching work in which she sets out to show where fundamentalism has come from and its relationship to the modern world.

*'Fundamentalists feel that they are battling against forces that are threatening their most sacred values. During a war it is very difficult for combatants to appreci-*

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ate one another's position. We shall find that modernization has led to a polarization of society, but sometimes, to prevent an escalation of the conflict, we must try to understand the pains and perceptions of the other side. Those of us - myself included - who relish the freedoms and achievements of modernity find it hard to comprehend the distress these cause religious fundamentalists. Yet modernization is often experienced not as a liberation but as an aggressive assault.' (p.xvi)

Armstrong's approach to this attempt at understanding is to focus on certain specific fundamentalisms: Protestant fundamentalism in America, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and Muslim fundamentalism in Egypt (a Sunni Muslim country) and Iran (a Shiite country). 'I do not claim that my discoveries necessarily apply to other forms of fundamentalism, but hope to show how these particular movements, which have been among the most prominent and influential, have all been motivated by common fears, anxieties, and desires that seem to be a not unusual

response to some of the peculiar difficulties of life in the modern secular world.' (xi)

The opening scene is set in the Spain of 1492, with the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the old Muslim kingdom of Al-Andalus and the voyage of Christopher Columbus to America. Thus were set in motion chains of events whose lines Armstrong carefully follows, showing the emergence of modernity in the West and, concurrently, the exile of the Jews (again) and the establishment of the Ottoman empire, which sought to sustain a society governed by Islamic law. We follow the story of modernization through the struggles of the Christian world to adapt to it, including the rebellion in America against the scientific rationalism of the 'Enlightenment', to the even greater struggles of Jews and Muslims: 'Muslims experienced modernity as an alien, invasive force, inextricably associated with colonization and alien domination' while 'the modern ethos was markedly hostile

towards Judaism'. Armstrong introduces us to many of the personalities who played a part in the emergence of the modern age, weaving the histories together to show the big picture but always ready with the personal details which make it real and readable.

What emerges - and it is scarcely possible to do justice to the delicacy and sympathy with which Armstrong shows it happening - is the repeated playing out of the response of the spiritual to the secular. Is it best to find a way of modernizing religion or to repudiate modernity as being antithetical to spiritual life? It is sobering to see how, time after time, when conflict arose, it did so between co-religionists - between those who rejected what seemed to them rigid and meaningless old traditions in favour of a personal religion which could find a rapprochement with the secular world and those who, horrified at this sacrilege, withdrew into an ultra-orthodox version of their faith. This



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...deepening the silence



polarization was inherent, as Armstrong shows, in the creation of the state of Israel, in the Iranian Revolution, in the Egypt of the Suez crisis...

The title of the book is of course highly significant. Although violence has been done in the name of so many ideologies to which human beings have given god-like power, belief in the contrary, sometimes bellicose God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition seems to have a special power to inspire violent acts on the part of his followers. It does seem to be true that the adherents of non-theistic religions (of which Buddhism is the principal example) are less at risk of succumbing to the call to arms on behalf of their faith; one might wonder, perhaps, whether they are at risk of the opposite tendency, a world-disregarding passivity, or a lack of zeal. Not that Buddhism is lacking in exemplars of fearless and decisive action: the Buddha was its first, and there have been many since. Buddhist communities under pressure have when necessary drawn on powerful resources: the strength of their belief that actions have consequences, and that a non-violent and compassionate approach will always be for the best in the long run. But Buddhists cannot afford to feel that they are outside the concerns of this book. Any discussion among followers of any faith - even discussions in Buddhist centres - will sooner or later hit this question: is it best to attempt to adapt to the world around us, or is that to compromise the purity of our values? Armstrong sheds light on this by introducing a crucial distinction, which reappears throughout her book:

*'We tend to assume that the people of the past were (more or less) like us, but in fact their spiritual lives were rather different. In particular, they evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called mythos and logos. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence... Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The*

*mythos of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal... The various mythological stories, which were not intended to be taken literally, were an ancient form of psychology... Logos was equally important. It was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. .. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel.*

*In the premodern world, both mythos and logos were regarded as indispensable. Each would be impoverished by the other. Yet the two were essentially distinct, and it was held to be dangerous to confuse mythical and rational discourse. They had separate jobs to do. Myth was not reasonable; its narratives were not supposed to be demonstrated empirically. It provided the context of meaning that made our practical activities worthwhile. You were not supposed to make mythos the basis of a pragmatic policy. If you did so, the results could be disastrous, because what worked well in the inner world of the psyche was not readily applicable to the affairs of the external world... Logos had its limitations too. It could not assuage human pain or sorrow. Rational arguments could make no sense of tragedy. Logos could not answer questions about the ultimate value of human life... (p. xv)*

This very clear assessment illuminates all that follows; it is instructive to see in detail the consequences of treating logos as mythos, or - just as disastrous - treating mythos as logos - instructive not just so that we can understand what other people have done or are doing but as a measure of the way we ourselves are living our spiritual lives. The detail is important; it is worth making the effort to engage with this substantial book not just in terms of its general argument but following the subtle twists and turns of the way it has manifested in history. Although the book is a substantial read, it is leavened by so many glimpses of people and communities perhaps never met before. It is

refreshing, too, to observe (through Karen Armstrong's eyes) such a broad swathe of history from a spiritual (rather than political or sociological) perspective. Armstrong's measured and empathic style gives confidence in her point of view; one has a sense of being on solid ground.

This book was published in 2000; it is not a response to September 11th 2001 but a foreshadowing of that day. Its conclusion has an added resonance read with the hindsight available to us now: 'Because it was so embattled, this campaign to re-sacralize society became aggressive and distorted. It lacked the compassion which all faiths have insisted is essential to the religious life and to any experience of the numinous. Instead, it preached an ideology of exclusion, hatred, and even violence. But the fundamentalists did not have a monopoly on anger. Their movements had often evolved in a dialectical relationship with an aggressive secularism which showed scant respect for religion and its adherents. Secularists and fundamentalists sometimes seem trapped in an escalating spiral of hostility and recrimination. If fundamentalists must evolve a more compassionate assessment of their enemies in order to be true to their religious traditions, secularists must also be more faithful to the benevolence, tolerance, and respect for humanity which characterizes modern culture at its best, and address themselves more empathetically to the fears, anxieties, and needs which so many of their fundamentalist neighbours experience but which no society can safely ignore.' (pp.370-1)

If the likelihood that such enlightened perspectives will dawn upon the protagonists on the current world stage seems small, perhaps that is all the more reason to try to understand what is happening, and to feel that that understanding will somehow, somewhere, in the small details, make a positive difference. □

Vidyadevi



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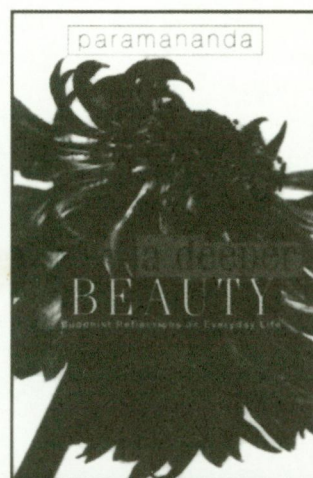
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## **Come and See for Yourself: The Buddhist Path to Happiness**

**Ayya Khema**  
**Windhorse Publications 2002**  
**pp208**  
**£9.99/\$15.95 p/b**

The effect of reading *Come and See For Yourself* is like having an invigorating shower. I feel energised with renewed vigour to bring to my spiritual practice, and re-inspired as a result of coming into contact with the depth of Ayya Khema's understanding and experience of the Dharma.

This book consists of translations of a series of twelve talks that she gave to an open audience at Buddha Haus, the Buddhist community where she lived in Germany and of which she was spiritual director. The starting point for each talk is a traditional Buddhist text. Ayya Khema would recite some verses from the *Dhammapada* or another short sutta or text, and then comment and elaborate on it, illuminating it from her rich store of knowledge. Her topics include explorations of the *Mangala Sutta*, the *Karaniya Metta Sutta* and the *Heart Sutra*. She deals with ways to overcome anger and resentment, as well as the treasures of the spiritual life, how to gain insight, and the seven fetters.

Ayya Khema is an excellent guide to the Buddhist path, having both wisdom and compassion. She understands our human frailties and weaknesses and she has great humanity. Nevertheless she is challenging, confronting us with the choices we need to make to find true happiness and meaning in our lives. She is entirely uncompromising, and again and again she spells out the need to turn our thoughts from the things of the world and pay attention to our spiri-

tual endeavours. Fulfilment comes not from outside us but from within; we can find inner happiness independent of all external conditions. It is heartening to hear this message delivered with such crystalline clarity at a time of such rampant materialism in society at large.

She has a straightforward, practical and down-to-earth style, and a knack of posing useful questions, which certainly gave me pause for thought. For example: 'What limits our generosity. Do we really want to support other people, or do we prefer to let the professionals deal with that side of things? How far do I extend my offer of help? Only up to a certain point or am I prepared to give unconditionally?' (p28) and 'Are we searching for the highest truth, for the ultimate goal, for that which transforms us and takes us beyond our human condition? Or are we stuck in our everyday life, just hoping to muddle through a bit better?' (p38-9). Ayya Khema has a contemporary turn of phrase that helps you to remember things. I liked 'Our thoughts are not duty-free - they always carry a hidden levy.' (p30)

She discusses some profound and sublime subjects with great clarity. Her description of the illusion of ego and how to eliminate it is very accessible and gives useful guidance towards weakening it. Her discourse on the eight meditative absorptions is based on personal experience and bears careful reading. The effect is both to make dhyanic states seem more achievable and to instil confidence to let go further in meditation, so progressing beyond thought and familiar states of mind. She also gives an illuminating commentary on the *Heart Sutra*, the only text in the book which is not from the Pali canon. She uses the analogy of bubbles in the ocean to clarify the idea that form is identical with emptiness. 'There are no things in themselves; there are only appearances. What appears before us as real is in truth like foam on the surface of the ocean. The little bubbles of foam completely forget they are in no way separate from the ocean upon which they appear so briefly, and they start getting all sorts of ideas about themselves, saying to one another, 'You know, I am a much nicer

bubble than you, '... What we identify as the forms of individual things are one with emptiness, as bubbles are one with the ocean and the ocean is one with the bubbles - they all partake of the one unity.' (p182)

In this uniformly excellent book it is hard to single out any chapter for particular comment. However, I did find the chapters on 'Five Ways to overcome Anger and Resentment' and 'The Faults of Others' particularly interesting, especially the latter. This is based on two stanzas from the *Dhammapada* and is thought-provoking and challenging. 'So criticism is not helpful - but acknowledgement is. If, for example, we notice someone being unmindful, the right response would be, 'I wonder how mindful I am at the moment?' This is the only worthwhile response. If we observe something unskillful in someone, and want to criticise, we should remind ourselves that criticism is harmful to us.' (p60). The message is that we can use the faults of others and our desire to criticise them to learn more about ourselves and what we need to purify. In this way others become a valuable mirror for us. Taking this approach is liberating because whilst we can change our self, we cannot change others.

This book will provide very good study material for people at different levels of experience. The way Ayya Khema presents her material lends itself to study and discussion, and it could well provide the basis for a course in basic Buddhism for those starting to practise the Buddhist Path. More experienced practitioners will find it stimulating, inspiring and refreshing.

The subtitle of the book is, *The Buddhist Path to Happiness*. I found it a joyful experience to read such accessible Dharma rooted in depth of practice. I am very pleased that this valuable resource for Western practitioners of the Dharma is now available in English. Ayya Khema has rekindled my own desire for Enlightenment; her words have the taste of freedom. □

Punyamala



**Places That Scare You:  
A Guide to Fearlessness  
in Difficult Times**

**Pema Chodron**  
**Shambhala 2001**  
**pp146**  
**\$21.95 (h/b)**

*'We are told about the pain of chasing after pleasure and the futility of running from pain. We hear also about the joy of awakening, of realizing our interconnect- edness, of trusting the openness of our hearts and minds. But we aren't told all that much about the state of being in- between, no longer able to get our old com- fort from the outside, but not yet dwelling in a continual state of equanimity and warmth. Anxiety, heartbreak, and tender- ness mark the in-between state. It's the kind of place we usually want to avoid. The challenge is to stay in the middle rather than buy into struggle and com- plaint. The challenge is to let it soften us rather than make us more rigid and afraid.'* (p.106)

This is the kind of scary place identified by Pema Chodron's 'Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times'.

Just as she is Chogyam Trungpa's dis- ciple, so this book (edited from talks given on retreat) is the descendant of Trungpa's *Sacred Path of the Warrior*. But *The Places that Scare You* is a new book for a new generation of Dharma practitioners. There are now of course very many books introduc- ing Buddhism, but there are not so many that meet the needs and even anxieties of those who have been attempting to follow the Buddhist path for a while - long enough to know what a 'two steps forward one step back' thing it seems to be, long enough to begin to question what they are doing in the 'state of being in-between'.

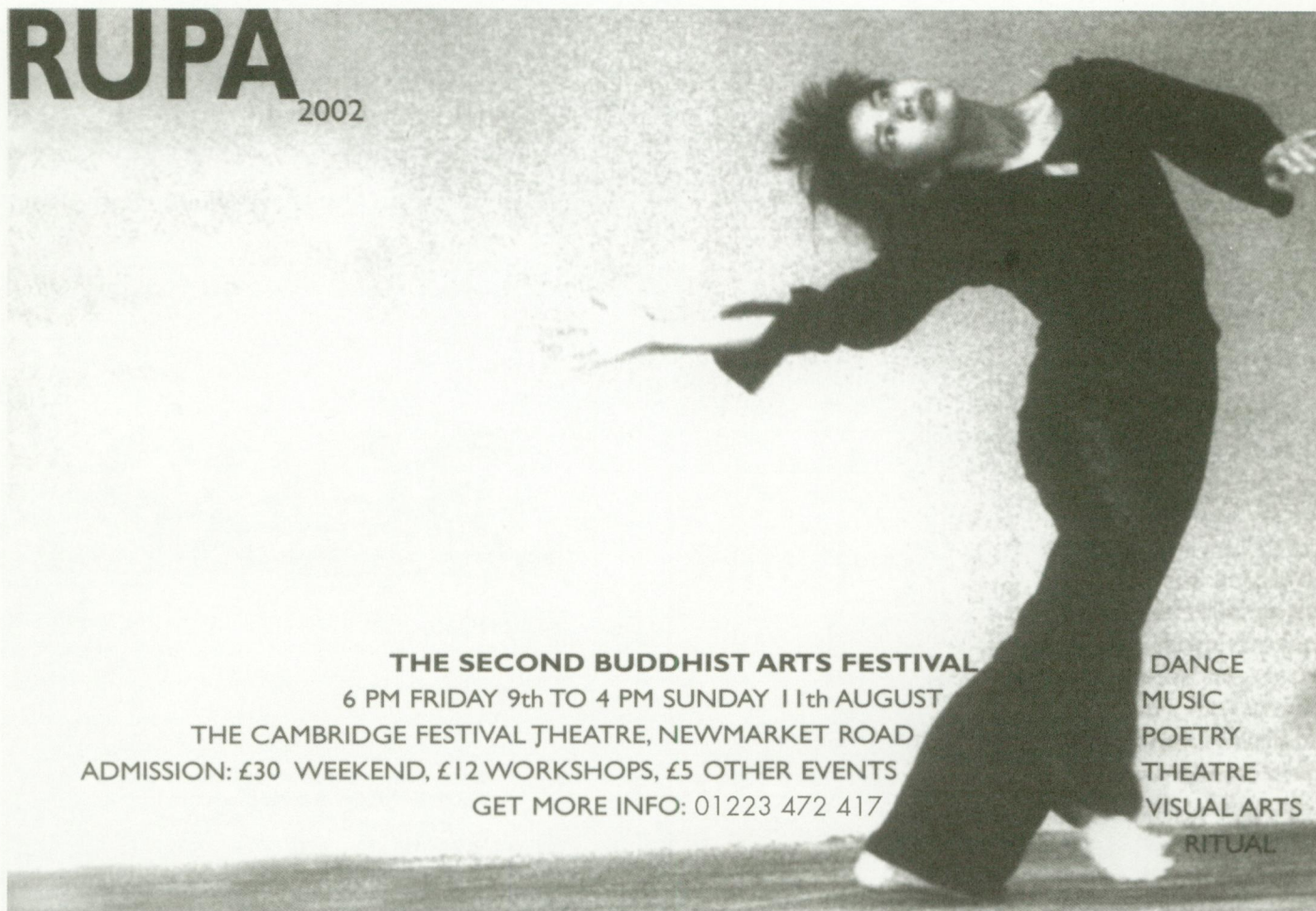
Pema Chodron brings her wise attention to this state. She is especial- ly wise to the stratagems of Dharma- farers: *'We will use the training against ourselves, trying to jump over issues that we're avoiding so as to attain some ideal- ized notion of all-rightness. I'm not mean- ing to imply that this is unusual. Welcome to the human race. But because of our training we can start seeing clearly what we do and begin to practise compassionate enquiry into our own process. Psychologically what is happening to us? Do we feel inadequate? Do we continue to*

*believe in our same old dramas?'* (p106) Not that Pema Chodron goes on to apply psychology to this problem, or any of the others she identifies. Her methods are strictly traditional: the *brahma viharas*, the Tibetan *tonglen* practice ('exchanging self for other'), the *paramitas*, the *Heart Sutra*, the *Mind-Training Slogans of Atisha*.

This book follows a format that has become all too familiar. What Buddhist book is published these days that does not offer us a pot-pour- ri of personal experience, cautionary tales, wise sayings from Rishi and Rimpoche that, and (however subtly added to the mix) a modicum of tra- ditional Dharma practices? What makes a book in this genre outstand- ing is the breadth and depth of expe- rience of the teacher, and Pema Chodron's experience does shine, burning steadily through the familiar format like the sun through clouds. And she has found about the right mix of challenge and encouragement to be really useful - if, that is, we can overcome the three kinds of laziness which (among so many other pitfalls) she so usefully identifies. □

Vidyadevi

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