



LOTUS REALM

a new voice for buddhist women

Self and Other: Responsibility and Spiritual Life

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LOTUS REALM *A New Voice for Buddhist Women*

"Just as in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses some lotuses grow in the water, some rest on the water's surface and some come right up out of the water..."

So the ancient texts describe the Buddha's vision of humanity – individuals struggling to grow beyond the circumstances of their births towards that complete unfoldment which is Enlightenment.

A symbol of spiritual growth and development, the image of the lotus is known throughout Buddhist tradition. We think not only of the Buddha's great vision after his Enlightenment, but of Mahapajapati Gotami joyfully taking up the eight 'rules of training' 'like a wreath of blue lotus'; and we are reminded of the many Bodhisattva figures of the Mahayana tradition, young, beautiful, bedecked with jewels and seated on lotus thrones.

The realm of the lotus is the realm where spiritual values reign supreme: where all the circumstances of life, both individual and collective, conduce to spiritual development. Buddhist tradition depicts such a realm in a mythical way in its descriptions of the archetypal Pure Land, Sukhavati.

In 1967 Sangharakshita founded a new Buddhist Movement, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO or TBMSG as it is known in India). At its heart is the Western Buddhist Order, a spiritual community of men and women committed to furthering their own and others' spiritual development through traditional practices of meditation, devotion, study and the development of spiritual friendship, within the context of a germinal New Society which the movement seeks to bring into being. Order members, Mitras (those wishing to further their involvement with the movement and the Order) and Friends (those who participate in any way in the activities of the FWBO) often live together in residential men's or women's communities; work together in team-based Right Livelihood businesses and co-operate together to run rural retreat Centres and city-based Buddhist Centres where people can come into contact with the Dharma. Some of those involved in the movement are concerned with the development of the arts; whilst others – especially in India – are engaged in social work projects.

In living out Buddhist values in the midst of contemporary society, members of the Western Buddhist Order and their friends hope not only to bring about radical change within themselves, but also to effect a change in contemporary life through their efforts to bring into being a 'lotus realm'.

Since the time of the Buddha women have Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels, living a life committed to the practice of the Dharma. However, their numbers have been few (in comparison to men) and records of their lives and realizations even fewer.

The technological and other changes in the modern world have made it more possible than ever before for women to take up the challenge of spiritual life. Dharmacharinis, women members of the Western Buddhist Order, who have participated fully with their Dharma-brothers in pioneering this new Buddhist Movement, have gained considerable experience in the leading of the spiritual life under modern conditions. It is this experience which they hope to share through the pages of this magazine – for the benefit and interest of all who may choose to read it.

SELF AND OTHER

Responsibility and Spiritual Life

AVALOKITESVARA, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, clasps to his heart the jewel of the Bodhichitta, whilst his other hands stretch out with implements that will help living beings in their struggle for freedom from sorrow.

Avalokitesvara's clasped hands remind us that we cannot ultimately be effective in the world unless we strive to develop within ourselves the Bodhi heart. The Bodhi heart arises out of the conjunction of Wisdom and Compassion. Wisdom is the perception of 'sunnyata', sometimes translated as 'emptiness' – emptiness, that is, of any deluded conception that phenomena of any kind are fixed, final or absolute. The Heart Sutra puts it thus:

"The Bodhisattva of Compassion, when he meditated deeply, saw the emptiness of all five skandhas, and sundered the bonds that caused him suffering."

Compassion is the desire to help all living beings attain to that vision which, we are told, alone constitutes total freedom from unhappiness and sorrow.

But how do we make sure our lives contain those elements that will enable us to deepen our understanding until we reach a perception of the emptiness of all phenomena? And how do we broaden our sympathies with others until we feel love and compassion for all living beings?

A crucial condition in causing us to grow seems to be intensity. Intense situations demand of us that we rise to greater heights of awareness, new perceptions, new understandings, and greater empathy.

Taking on responsibility increases the element of intensity in our lives and requires us to face up to certain issues. For example, for some of us the difference between being responsible *to* others and being responsible *for* them can be a contentious matter. Sometimes, it seems, the mothering instinct confuses things and we end up trying to be responsible *for* people, forgetting that their lives are their own. Making sure that one's own genuine needs are fulfilled in order to carry out one's public responsibilities is also an area to which attention must be given if we are to be truly responsible. The apparent tension between one's own needs and 'the needs of the objective situation' can force one to grow in an effort to discover a creative solution.

What motivates people in society to take on the responsibilities of leadership, decision making and so on? Usually, no doubt, it is the desire for power, status, or wealth. But within a spiritual community taking on responsibility of whatever kind requires greater selflessness, greater maturity, and a greater capacity to be a kalyana mitra or spiritual friend. The Bodhisattvas after all, are said to be the Great Spiritual Benefactors. □

Kalyanaprabha

RESPONSIBILITY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

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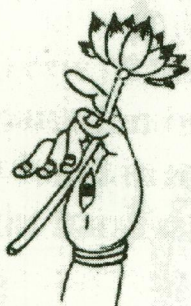
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THINKING

Vision and Responsibility

SAMATA



**Samata is
Chairman of
Tiratanaloka
Retreat Centre
and a member
of the team
which prepares
women for
ordination into
the Western
Buddhist Order.**

THE BUDDHIST VISION is the Vision the Buddha gained on his Enlightenment. It is the Vision of human consciousness

utterly free from all negativity, from greed, hatred and delusion; or, put more positively, it is the Vision of existence as expressed by an entirely creative consciousness. Buddhism, we could say, is the communication from that higher level of untrammelled creativity, that Transcendental level, it is the communication from an Enlightened perspective, to a lower level, to the unenlightened mind. Or, to put it another way, Buddhism is the communication of a direct Vision of How Things Really Are: it points out that all things are impermanent; it reminds us that all things arise in dependence upon conditions. When those conditions cease to be, those things – whether microbes or solar systems or our own thoughts and feelings – also cease to be. It is because of its impermanent nature, because it has the capacity to change, to be restructured, that human consciousness can grow and develop into ever more creative modes of functioning and responding.

In communicating this Vision, the Buddhist tradition has made use of different languages, the languages of both concepts and symbols to arouse the unenlightened mind, to awaken it to

an experience of Reality; it is a communication that seeks to introduce us to the Transcendental perspective or the Transcendental dimension.

The Transcendental perspective from which the impermanent nature of all things is clearly apprehended, as well as the potential in all situations for positive change and development.

RECEPTIVITY TO THE TRANSCENDENTAL

Our task, therefore, as unenlightened beings, is to try and understand what is being communicated by becoming more and more open to that higher dimension, being willing to be

influenced by that higher dimension. It means cultivating the faculty of shraddha. Shraddha is sometimes translated 'faith' but its meaning is more adequately expressed in the formula: 'the ultimate in us responding to the ultimate in the universe'. Receptivity to the Transcendental means developing the faculty of shraddha; and putting ourselves into situations where we come into contact with that higher dimension and letting ourselves be changed.

To know intellectually that Enlightenment is our goal is not difficult. What is difficult is putting ourselves into conditions that promote a change in our unenlightened consciousness, putting ourselves into situations that encourage us to continually transcend our limited perspective.

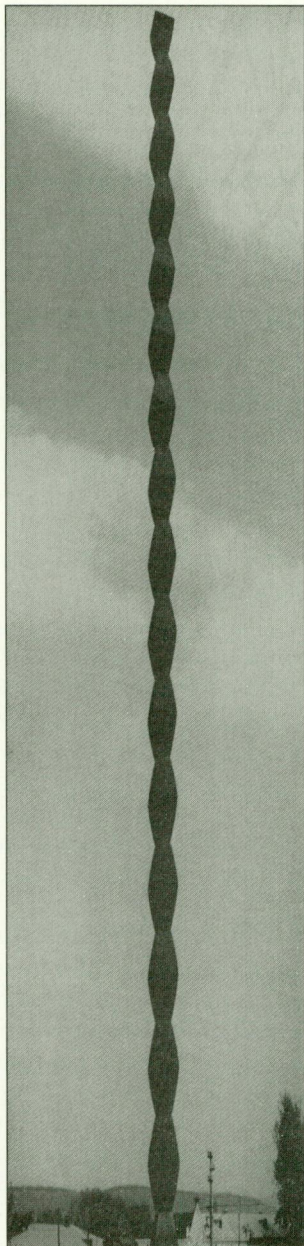


BIG

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE: THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE

We can see the Bodhisattva as the embodiment of this principle of self-transcendence. The Bodhisattva's mind is the mind of perpetual self-transcendence. It is this momentum of self-transcendence that is the key to the real meaning of existence.

I find this idea is given imaginative expression in the work of the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) in a piece entitled *The Endless Column*. Set on the brow of a hill, the Column is a series of cast-iron beads whose surfaces were originally highly polished, giving them a reflective quality. They seem to move upwards in a rhythmic flow, conveying a sense of soaring weightlessness. Brancusi



Brancusi: *Endless Column*

wished to create an effect of 'cosmic endlessness.' He wrote of the piece:

*"The effect is of perceiving only a section of something that has always approached us from below and will always continue beyond us."*¹

GOING FOR REFUGE TO THE THREE JEWELS

To have such a vision is to be in contact with a meaningful and vivid symbol or concept which expresses something of our vision, and in the light of which we make sense of the world; a concept or symbol which reveals to us that ultimately both individually and collectively we are a part of something far greater, wider, more 'cosmic', boundless and limitless than we currently realize. The most far-reaching and comprehensive expression of this is in the formula of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels which states that the ultimate meaning of human life is the quest for Enlightenment or the realization of the Transcendental perspective (symbolized by the Buddha Jewel); that the way to attain that perspective is through the practice of the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma; and that ultimately human relationships fulfil their highest potential in the relationship of kalyana mitrata or spiritual friendship particularly with those who have attained some degree of Transcendental insight: this is what constitutes Sangha or spiritual community. This vision, of course, lies at the heart of any Buddhist life, and is, in fact, what makes one a Buddhist. The final act of Dogen (1200-53), the founder of Soto Zen, is said to have been to circumambulate a pillar on which he had written:

*"In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, in your life and as you approach death, always, through all births and deaths, take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha."*²

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But how do we deepen our Going for Refuge? How do we develop a Transcendental perspective? To start with we have the experience of shraddha: our own deeply felt response to the Three Jewels, an intuitive sense that ultimately Beauty, Truth and Goodness are to be found in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. But this experience, this intuitive experience needs to be clarified, deepened and made more vivid by deepening our knowledge and understanding of the Dharma, through study and reflection. We can often lack confidence in our ability to make progress on the Buddhist path because we don't have a thorough enough knowledge and understanding of the Dharma which we need in order to put it into practice effectively. Without the foundation of clear understanding, our faith can be easily shaken and undermined by wrong views and confusion. Perhaps we find ourselves doubting whether we can really make progress on the path to Enlightenment. We may even think everyone can do it except ourselves! But if we believe it is possible for others if they sincerely practise the Dharma, why should it not be possible for oneself? The Transcendental perspective tells us that the potential for self-transcendence in the direction of Enlightenment is inherent in all beings – we are not an exception. If we find ourselves overcome by self-doubt, we must clarify our thinking, and find a way of opening ourselves again to the bigger picture.

GLIMPING THE BIGGER PICTURE

The inspiring example of others whom we see as being further along the spiritual path than ourselves is one means by which we come into contact with that bigger picture. For instance, there are the accounts of the lives of the great teachers of the past – Padmasambhava, Nagarjuna and the many other truly great teachers whose biographies can be uplifting, moving, challenging and inspiring. Then there are our own kalyana mitras, those with whom we are in actual contact, people whom we feel are – at least to some extent – further along the path than we are ourselves, whose vision is broader and deeper. Being in contact with them, in communication with them, opens up a greater vision to us. However, if those who inspire us are to function in a way that really helps us orient ourselves towards the Transcendental, we must want to emulate them! It won't be enough simply to admire them from a distance. This means being prepared to put in the same quantity and quality of effort as them in leading the spiritual life. If we are not willing to do this, we have not really learnt from their lives and we have not yet really valued their spiritual example.

BEING EXEMPLARS

Taking this further raises the question of whether and to what extent we can be exem-

plars for one another. We may not yet have gained the Transcendental perspective, our vision may still be limited, but if we are committed to the spiritual life, if we have, say, effectively Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we can at least exemplify the act of spiritual commitment, the daily effort towards self-transcendence, and the desire to become more and more receptive to the Transcendental. And we can give the challenge and encouragement that others need to stimulate *their* spiritual growth.

CHALLENGE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

We often speak of the importance of challenge and encouragement in the spiritual life, but what do we actually mean by those terms? From one point of view, we can see that they are not really very different. After all, it can be a challenge when a spiritual friend reflects back to us our own good qualities. It is a challenge because once we know our friend sees those qualities within us, we have to recognize that, yes, I have those qualities. To admit to that fully may require a change of self-view, and changing one's self-view is always challenging. An old self has to die in order that the newer, truer self can emerge. Our friend's words challenge us to recognize our own potential. It becomes harder to ignore the fact that perhaps we are not living up to the best and highest in ourselves. In other words, our friend's encouragement is challenging because it makes it difficult for us not to take ourselves more seriously – more seriously as spiritual beings with a spiritual destiny. When we take ourselves more seriously in this way, encouragement can have an enormous impact on our lives and the choices we make. Sometimes just a few words with a friend can change one's whole perspective on a task which is presenting itself as daunting.

Perhaps as women we need particularly to learn to encourage one another to think big and to take risks – both in spiritual terms, and in our efforts to work in the world for the good of the Dharma.

Perhaps we also need to learn to look at one another more in terms of adding to resources. A friend of mine once noted that when a number of men got together to take on a project, when others wanted to join them they were seen as increasing the total resources available. Whereas when a number of women found other women wanting to join them, they tended to see this as being a greater demand on existing resources. Is this a result of our conditioning as 'providers' and 'nurturers'? If it is a pattern of behaviour we recognize, does it mean we as women need to radically change our view of one another, seeing one another much more in terms of the benefits and resources which we bring to situations?

WHAT DO WE EXPECT OF OURSELVES?

It may be worthwhile pausing to ask ourselves what we expect of ourselves: how big is our own vision? We can pose ourselves questions:

What effect do I expect to have on the world during the course of my life?

Do I have a vision that I would like to see given expression to in the world?

How large is that vision? Does it extend beyond my present geographical situation? Does it stretch into the future? Does it take account of people I may never meet?

ACTUALIZING VISION

Developing Vision is part of spiritual life. Spiritual life involves being able to think big and to imagine into the future. We need to be able to imagine that we can become radically different from what we are now and what we can do now. To cultivate vision, we have to be able to think around and ahead of our present, immediate circumstances and experience and imagine new things coming into being in the future.

But this is not enough. It is not enough just to have Good Ideas. One can have a big, wonderful dream which inspires people in the moment, but all too easily such ideas are nothing more than pipe dreams, pleasant fantasies, building castles in the air.

If we have vision, our dreams will not fade away when the clear light of day dawns. Instead we will remain faithful to them, doing whatever is necessary to see them actualized to whatever extent that is possible. For that to happen we need to understand first of all how they express that central act of Going for Refuge. If we can see that, we may be confident in our vision and in our efforts to give it expression. Then we will need to develop *sati* and *sampajanna*, that is, recollection and mindfulness of purpose, for to actualize a vision means staying aware of our goal over time and not allowing ourselves to be deflected from our purpose.

PERSEVERANCE

In his book, *Awaken the Giant Within*, Anthony Robbins writes:

*"It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives, but what we do consistently."*³

This is an important point. To enact our vision we have to be prepared to do whatever is required for as long as may be necessary. We will, therefore, need tremendous persistence and perseverance. Hakuin (1685-1768), another Zen teacher of Japan, used to say to his students when they were struggling with their koan practice:

"Perseverance"

A quality greater

Than any precept

Or virtue:

Perseverance makes

*People great.*⁴

GOING BEYOND OURSELVES

Actualizing our commitment to our vision in the form of taking a decision, or making a plan that embodies a big vision, is a rewarding experience. Through working on a large project, something in which we will have to learn to co-operate with others if we are to see it come to fruition, we have an immediate experience of the Dharma at work.

I have seen this in some of the larger projects undertaken in the FWBO: for instance, creating the women's retreat Centres, Taraloka and Tiratanaloka, or the building of the new Manchester Buddhist Centre. Such projects have drawn in many people to engage in the process of working together to transform themselves and transform the world. The challenges that are thrown up by such projects give us countless opportunities each day to go beyond who we



Hakuin: Self Portrait

think we are and what we think we are capable of. As a result, a great deal of dynamic energy, skilful motivation and emotional positivity is freed up.

When you start to 'think big', you don't know what is going to happen or where your thinking is going to lead you. It is crucial not to put limits on what you consider possible too quickly. We need to begin by freeing up our ideas, letting ourselves dream.

When I took up the challenge of establishing a new retreat Centre for women in the FWBO, I sometimes thought I had stretched my thinking as far as it could go – but then the objective situation required that I go even further – for instance in thinking about the sums of money involved which became far larger than I originally anticipated.

Part of what was needed was an understanding of what it means to take a calculated risk. To 'think big' means to take risks and to step into the unknown. What we envision does not yet exist, it is something we want to bring into being, and we cannot know exactly what that will mean for ourselves or others.

Another view that may prevent us from moving forward to actualize our vision is the idea that we are not really experienced enough, we do not really know how we are going to do all that might be necessary to make our vision concrete. In fact, as I have discovered, it is not crucial to know precisely how something is to be achieved before taking the first steps towards its creation. If we are in touch with the Greater Vision, we can let the details unfold as we go along. If we are circumambulating our central pillar of Going for Refuge, if we are seeing how enacting our vision is an expression of our Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we will find we do have the confidence to let things unfold step by step. If Going for Refuge is our basis for acting, we will not have the ordinary kind of emotional investment in the outcome of events. We won't be rocked by temporary setbacks. Instead we will have faith and confidence that we will be able to find out how we can achieve our goal and respond appropriately as the details become clear. Working in this way, we will find we can draw on further resources within ourselves to take whatever initiative is required. We are, as Sangharakshita has commented, often capable of far more than we think we are!

The starting place is finding out what the next step is towards actualizing our goal. We may realize that we have to work on ourselves in some way before we can take further steps to actualize our vision. Years ago I talked with a friend about a vision I had for purchasing a number of houses in East London that could house a number of women's communities. However, I discovered I was not yet able to follow such ideas through. I had a lot of growing

and maturing still to do! But we can have the confidence of knowing that we will be able to follow up such ideas in the future when we have gained more of the necessary personal qualities.

WHY BOTHER?

In discussing the whole topic of 'thinking big', a question arises: why bother? Why bother to stretch ourselves at all? Why go to all this trouble? What is the point of developing our vision and taking on challenges?

Being stretched takes us beyond limiting beliefs about who we think we are and what we believe we can and cannot do. In order to face up to and overcome obstacles, we have to push beyond our limits. This applies whatever our circumstances. Even if we are confined to bed and not working out our vision 'in the world' we can work on our mental states and be prepared to put in the necessary effort until we achieve our goal, whatever that goal might be – it might be simply cultivating a more skilful state of mind.

Our ultimate goal, after all, is to gain Insight into How Things Really Are. Sangharakshita, in discussing the principles of Right Livelihood with workers from Windhorse Trading, remarked,

*"It does seem that Insight is more likely to arise if the situation is an extreme situation"*⁵

Intensity, it seems, provides a more adequate basis for the gaining of the Transcendental perspective.

This is the opportunity created by the 'crucial situation', that is, a situation of great intensity in which one is pushed to the absolute edge. One must be in that situation but not let oneself be disturbed. The challenge is to experience in the midst of such a crisis the calm and equanimity of Insight. Our mundane 'equanimity' is not the same thing since it is all too easily disturbed and overthrown.

We experience increased intensity in a situation in accordance with the degree of responsibility we are prepared to take. Taking responsibility in working or other situations means our decisions affect a lot of people. We cannot drop everything and run off when the going gets tough. We have to face up to difficulties and find a way through them through a deepening of our own understanding and insight.

What really enables us to break through to a Transcendental perspective is insight at a time of crisis into the intensity of our own desire that something should or should not happen. We see the strength of the emotion we have invested in a particular result and the limitation of that attitude: after all, we are not in control of the universe, and we cannot necessarily have what we most desire. To experience this strongly, there needs to be a lot at stake. We are not talking about a mild disappointment', but a

**"To 'think big'
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Creating Taraloka Retreat Centre

'bitter disappointment', a 'cruel disappointment.' Sometimes such insights come through experiencing powerful and unpleasant emotions such as intense jealousy or envy. Whatever it is, it is in such situations that we gain some insight into the nature and strength of our own ego. It is as if we are caught in the act of grasping. By dwelling in the experience of that feeling (not expressing it), by just looking at it, seeing it, we can ask ourselves, who is this 'I' who is getting so angry, so upset?

By taking the initiative, by taking up challenges and repeatedly putting ourselves into intensive situations, we find we are 'cooking our ego'. This idea comes from the nineteenth century Bengali mystic Rama Krishna. A 'partly-cooked' ego suggests we have matured a bit – we have developed a relatively positive selfhood, achieved a certain degree of individuality. We are somewhat less reactive and defensive: our ego has softened, we are more receptive to higher or further possibilities. We are more emotionally positive. The well-cooked ego, however, is a bit different. The well-cooked ego has the attitude: 'I am the servant'; whereas the uncooked ego says, 'this is mine', and hangs onto what we have already got, it clings to a known identity. We feel our uncooked ego when we want to settle down with things as they are, when we feel resistant to change. We don't want to go on to a higher level, a further stage in our growth and development. We don't want to be cooked! But just as a cooked grain or vegetable is more pleasant to eat when properly cooked, so a cooked ego is more pleasant to be around for others and to live with oneself!

One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of living and working in an intensive

situation with others is having to work day-to-day at creating genuine harmony. In my own community there was a period when I found myself having to sort things out with one of the other community members on a daily basis. If we didn't do that, negative reactions would smoulder under the surface and resentments came to be harboured which could so easily destroy all we were trying to create. The two of us are, in fact, very fond of one another and the challenge has been to bring that feeling into our moment-by-moment living and working together.

In 'thinking big', in developing our vision of what we ourselves can become and of what we can do for the world, and in trying to make our vision a reality, we find ourselves propelled into situations which galvanize and accelerate our spiritual growth. If we do not turn back from the difficulties, with the help of our friends, these situations will eventually bear fruit in the gaining of that Transcendental perspective which lies at the very heart of the Buddhist Vision. □

Notes:

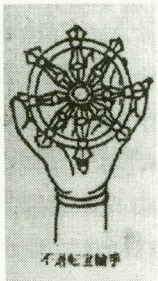
1. Eric Shanes, *Constantin Brancusi*, Modern Masters Series, Abbeville Press 1989, p97
2. quoted in: Sangharakshita, *Extending the Hand of Fellowship*, Windhorse 1996, p36
3. Anthony Robbins, *Awaken the Giant Within*, Simon and Schuster 1992, p32
4. John Stevens, *Three Zen Masters*, Kodansha International 1993, p96
5. Unpublished Seminar, 'Right Livelihood': Sangharakshita in Seminar with workers from Windhorse Trading, 1993, p6

This article is based on a paper delivered to a gathering of women Order members at a seminar on the theme:

Responding to the Cries of the World: Responsibility and Spiritual Life – see Report in *Lotus Realm* 4.

**"One of the most
challenging and
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HAPPINESS AND FREEDOM



Reflections from a Centre Chairman

Khemanandi

Khemanandi

is Chairman

of Brighton

Buddhist Centre

THERE ARE CURRENTLY *about one hundred Order members and mitras associated with the Brighton Buddhist Centre. Many live in men's or women's communities, whilst others live alone or with their families. Also associated with the Centre are three team-based Right Livelihood businesses. A new venture, currently being developed, is an ethical law firm. An Arts and Natural Health Centre, run by a local Order member, is now well established and complements the Centre's activities.*

To others the role of the Chairman isn't always clear. Although the more visible aspects might be teaching and organization, the position is not primarily practical or administrative, but concerned

and Sangha more effectively.

I offer encouragement, inspiration and direction. It feels like gently steering a big ship, an activity which requires the expression of *Khema*, patience or forbearance, the quality incorporated in my name.

As chairman I have two overall objectives. The first is to create the conditions within which all those associated with the Centre can lead effective spiritual lives. This requires guarding and developing the spiritual momentum and striving to use the Dharma as the point of reference wherever possible.

The second objective is to keep communicating and exemplifying Buddhist principles to a wider community; we have to find ways of taking the Dharma beyond the boundaries of our own FWBO group, and finding the right "language" so that we can engage more and more people in metta-ful and meaningful communication.

"For the benefit of all beings I accept this ordination"

I made this statement at the conclusion of the ceremony in which I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. I knew that acting upon it would necessarily take me into new territory. As I approach my eighth Order birthday, I have been thinking about how this resolution might affect my day to day life. Acting for the benefit of all beings means living skillfully. It is 'kusala-karma'. Sangharakshita describes 'kusala-karma' as

*"action which is directed towards securing, both for oneself and others, the best possible results both in terms of happiness, knowledge and freedom, i.e. it is action which is constantly mindful of the law of karma."*¹

It is during the early stages of our Buddhist practice that we first begin to consider and recall the Five Precepts as guiding principles. We practice them against a backdrop of growing sensitivity to the consequences of our actions. We feel an increasing urge to take responsibility for our actions and guide them in a positive direction. So from this point we are already trying to live lives which benefit all living beings. In this way we bring alive the Bodhisattva Ideal.

For many people the Bodhisattva Ideal is a



with the spiritual direction of the whole local FWBO. I spend a good deal of time talking to people about their lives, being a friend, looking for ways to help people express their aspirations, their Going For Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma

great inspiration. It is the aspiration to alleviate suffering, to move beyond an identification with one's own spiritual practice and achievement to a concern for the spiritual growth of everyone. **The Four Great Vows** of the Bodhisattva can be summarized as:

- I vow to save all beings from difficulties*
- I vow to destroy all evil passions*
- I vow to learn the Truth and to teach others*
- I vow to lead all beings towards Buddhahood*

Perhaps considering this perspective of the Bodhisattva Ideal would help us to awaken our highest aspirations when we chant the Refuges and Precepts. I find it helpful to remember the commitment that I made at my ordination and to work to bring together those lofty aspirations and the everyday level of Buddhist practice.

Sangharakshita describes the Bodhisattva's work as being like an upsurge of spiritual energy, which is not harnessed to any particular goal and which does not seek to justify itself – or anything – through its activity. Such freedom of energy arises out of *prajna*, the wisdom which is sometimes called 'appreciative understanding'. As we develop metta and live increasingly from the basis of love rather than power, we will develop a degree of insight which enables us to see things as beautiful, which responds to the positive, the good, the potential in people and situations. Fully developed, this attitude expresses *prajna*. Just to concentrate on developing this kind of awareness could be my practice – and it would certainly make me a more effective chairman!

Vidya – aesthetic appreciation – is another transcendental quality possessed by the Bodhisattva. It is the antithesis of the utilitarian relationship to the world which is at the root of our non-enlightenment and upon which our most fundamental miccha-ditthis (wrong views) arise. It comes "naturally" to see the world in terms of what we can get from it. When we find ourselves in a demanding situation we can relate predominantly to the tasks themselves and the goals we are trying to achieve, seeing ourselves, other people and material resources as means to achieving them.

In Buddhism both the end and the means must reflect wisdom and compassion. There are not many cases where we can justify the use of power, or a utilitarian approach to achieve the aims of love. The Bodhisattva is motivated by the aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all beings but works with the energy of *prajna* which is free and not harnessed to any particular goal. The whole question of how we work, how we apply ourselves to the goal, is so important because it addresses the means by which we effect the transformation of our lives and our world.

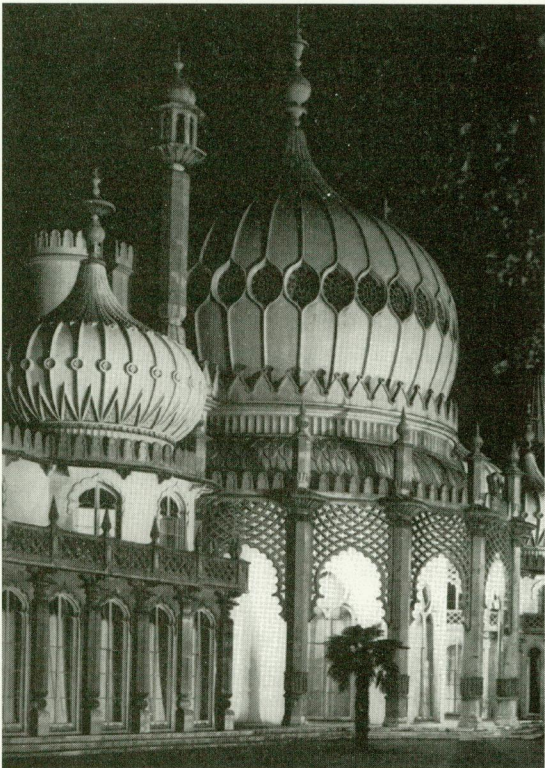
My own tendency is to relate to myself in a utilitarian way, as a resource to meet the needs

that I see around me. There can be a lack of metta for myself, a lack of freedom and choice in how I respond, and I can feel driven by the external situation. Benefit will arise from stepping back into a perspective of greater *vidya*, bringing some of my experience of solitude and meditation into my work as chairman. I strive to set up the conditions for a sense of depth and equanimity to prevail in the midst of activity and to cultivate the experience of beauty and appreciation of the good, the potential in people around me.

In taking on the chairmanship I have changed: I have had to take myself and the efficacy of my spiritual practice a significant degree more seriously. I endeavour to exemplify my commitment to the Three Jewels in a way which I know can have an effect on the spiritual lives of a great many people. This demands that I develop courage, honesty, individuality and above all kindness and appreciative understanding. I see this commitment as being to each person who comes through the doors of the Centre, to ensure that it is genuinely the Dharma they encounter, and that they will find the conditions which will meet their spiritual needs at whatever level. Along with everyone else in the Western Buddhist Order, I strive to secure the conditions for happiness, knowledge and freedom for all beings. □

Note:
1. Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse 1989, p35-6

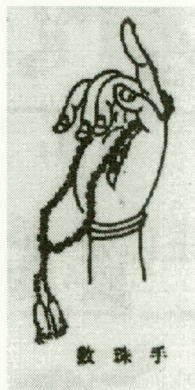
Brighton: The Pavilion



"In taking on the chairmanship I have changed: I have had to take myself and the efficacy of my spiritual practice a significant degree more seriously."

LOOKING DEEPER

by Ratnamala



NEARLY FOUR YEARS AGO I became ill with Sjogren's Syndrome which is an auto-immune disease. Since then I have had to face living with chronic illness, my main symptoms being rheumatic pains and fatigue. Being ill can be a struggle and a limitation. Life can be painful and boring at times, but it can also be creative and spacious.

I live with my son, Sam, and his father, Alaya and keep a flexible approach to activities, resting when I need to. I have time to see my friends, to study, read and reflect and to keep up my interest in the visual arts. Dharma study gives my mind a positive focus and I enjoy co-leading a study group for women once a week.

Illness has been an opportunity to get to know myself more deeply, to learn about life through my own experience. In fact, whatever our circumstances, life is a great opportunity: from the Buddhist point of view it is the opportunity to grow spiritually, to develop Wisdom and Compassion.

Ratnamala



"It is much easier to follow the channel that is already there, that has been created by our habitual actions, than to change direction and break new ground."

I came across Buddhism about three years after the deaths of my father and grandfather. I was particularly encouraged to learn that I could actively create positive states of mind through my own efforts, and that I did not need to be at the mercy of my moods. I realized that my life was my own responsibility, and that it was up to me what sort of person I became.

What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.

If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the

beast that draws the cart.

What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.

If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, joy follows him as his own shadow.¹

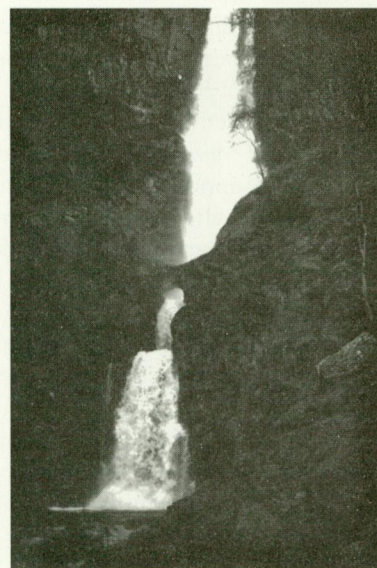
We are creating ourselves all the time. Our habitual actions are like a stream of water cutting a channel in the earth.

Over time those channels become deeper and more defined. Each action affects the course by imperceptible degrees. It is much easier to follow the channel that is already there, that has been created by our habitual actions, than to change direction and break new ground. We may feel we don't have a choice as we are so often carried along by the force of our habits, but in fact we can choose at every moment between acting skilfully out of generosity, love and awareness, or being unskilful, acting with craving, hatred and delusion

We may think of ourselves as having a certain temperament or personality which we see as fixed and unchanging, rather than seeing that we simply have particular habitual tendencies. We may see ourselves as hot-blooded or easy-going or impatient and so on, that is how we are, always have been and always will be. If we want to transform ourselves we need to think of ourselves in more fluid terms.

What we are like and how we act affects other people, affects the world. To act skilfully towards others we need to develop love and empathy. We find this expressed in the words of Shelley:

"The great secret of morals is love; or a going



Waterfall

out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.”²

Through love we feel connected to others and wish to do what is best for them. If we act with anger and ill-will, we create suffering for others as well as ourselves. We may become angry and resentful when we feel hurt by someone, and it can be hard to let go of these emotions. I remember being on a retreat years ago when every time I sat down to meditate I felt angry. I realized I was angry because I had not expressed the feelings of dissatisfaction to the person who had become the object of my anger. Resentment had built up over a period of time. I vowed in the future to be more honest and I have found this to be a very effective antidote to anger and resentment. Being honest does not mean being harsh and unkind. We can express ourselves honestly in a friendly way.

The Buddha instructed his disciples to be compassionate, to free themselves from hate and ill-will even when they were provoked.

*When men speak evil of ye, thus must ye train yourselves: “Our heart shall be unwavering; no evil word will we send forth, but compassionate of others’ welfare we will abide, of kindly heart without resentment: and that man who thus speaks will we suffuse with thoughts accompanied by love, and so abide; and, making that our standpoint, we will suffuse the whole world with loving thoughts, far-reaching, wide-spreading, boundless, free from hate, free from ill-will, and so abide.” Thus, brethren, must ye train yourselves.*³

This is a demanding teaching. If we are hurt by others and blame them for our suffering, we can feel justified in our anger. But the Buddha’s teaching asks us to train ourselves to respond with love and compassion. In doing so we show understanding towards the other person and don’t take their actions too personally. In having a compassionate response, we are still able to recognize it if someone has acted badly.

On a radio discussion I heard recently, someone made the point that we live in a culture of blame. These days people do not express remorse or guilt for their misdeeds or crimes, but they blame others, or their upbringing or circumstances. Do we blame circumstances or other people for our negative states of mind? Other people and circumstances do, of course, have an effect on us, but we can take responsibility for how we respond to them. This may be difficult to accept and even harder to practice, but it is crucial that we learn to do so.

Last year I went through a period of depression for about six months until I realized what the matter was: I was feeling that to be of value

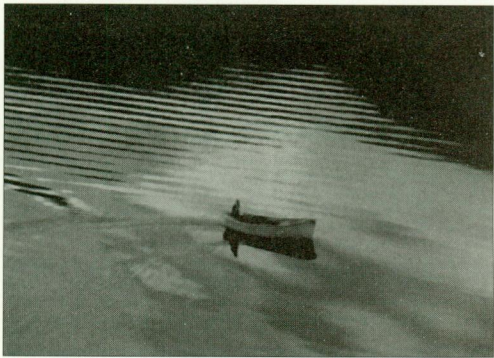
in the eyes of others I must be useful and that what I was like as a person mattered less than what I did to be useful. Being ill, I was not able to be that useful. I have only been spreading the Dharma to a limited extent and have not been taking on wider responsibilities and duties. I was imagining what people who only knew me from a distance would be thinking about me, seeing only the externals of my life. I feared they would be thinking I was lazy and selfish. To get over my depression, I found I had to stop worrying about what others might think of me, worrying about appearances, and be confident in the way I live my life as an expression of my own commitment to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Appearances can be deceptive.

It is easier to be seen and known by outer roles, position, achievements, possessions, lifestyle, the trappings of our lives, than it is to be seen and known for what is in our hearts and minds. It is difficult to perceive what motivates someone’s actions. Even apparent altruistic acts can contain self-interest, motives can be quite mixed. It is very easy to make assumptions and reach conclusions based on superficial impressions or rumour. To really know ourselves and others we have to look more deeply.

I can be seen as ‘an ill person’, but I do not identify myself purely with my physical body. My experience includes thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination. Our bodies can be ill and uncomfortable and our minds healthy and happy, our experience rich and creative.

I am a mother – but what does that tell you about me? I have given birth and I am bringing up a child, but what sort of mother am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What other interests and activities do I have? What are my aspirations? Who are my friends? What other life experience have I had? Roles and labels are limited. They may define occupation, status, social and family group but they make of us a unit of generalization, a stereotype. Labels cannot really define us. In fact the deeper we look the more indefinable we seem to be. We are a flowing stream of consciousness which we can direct with awareness and effort. By taking responsibility for ourselves we are actively engaging in a creative process, becoming more and more fearless, free, wise and compassionate. □

**“the deeper we
look the more
indefinable we
seem to be. We
are a flowing
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which we can
direct with
awareness and
effort.”**



Boatman

Notes:
1. *The Dhammapada*, trans. Juan Mascaro, Penguin 1987, p35
2. quoted from: Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse 1989, p59
3. *Some Sayings of the Buddha*, transl. F. L. Woodward, Buddhist Society London 1973, p65

VAJRAGITA IN HOLLAND

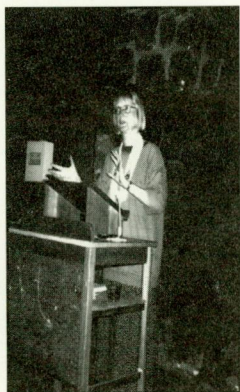
SPIRIT

Pioneering



散花羅手 (三結印)
(ハダクノエ)

Vajrapushpa



Vajragita lecturing

FOR NEARLY TWO decades now, Vajragita has worked with energy and persistence to establish FWBO activities in Holland. Aged 58, she is a mature woman, both in years and in experience. But there is a side to her character which is light, playful and humorous. Every now and again it is as if, true to her name, she breaks into song...and dance! ('Gita' means 'song'.) After giving a talk recently, a member of the audience asked her whether she was a professional mimic!

A wise old woman she may be, as well as playful and enthusiastic, but there have been times over the last ten, fifteen years when she has felt simply daunted by the task of spreading the Dharma in her native country. In October 1984, three years after her Ordination, and after spending a couple of years in England learning more about teaching the Dharma, she was on a boat on her way back to Holland. She found herself feeling 'very scared'.

"I had very little money but I knew I had something else valuable to give. I knew too that I wasn't going to be looked after. Everything around me in society signalled power; power that I felt I couldn't possibly compete with. It was very scary to stand alone in a world that thinks so differently and acts so differently from what the Buddha was teaching. I was initially very alone in Holland, away from my spiritual friends who were mostly living in England."

Vajragita was not a complete newcomer to taking initiative and responsibility. Even before her ordination she had been organizing meditation classes and retreats in Holland. She had also worked as an occupational therapist with physically disabled children in Arnhem.

The spell in England had been important because it had given her more contact with her spiritual friends and the alternative society that people involved with the FWBO were trying to create.

"I wanted to live in a women's community and would have liked to have experienced more of that. I wanted to learn as much as possible about teaching Buddhism and meditation. It was nice not to have an ordinary job, to be free in that sense and to let go of being Dutch, to learn to live in another country."

After my return in 1984 I just started doing things. Beginners' courses, retreats. Just sending out advertisements, hanging up posters in shops and cafes...Leading Beginners' meditation courses brought up the fear sometimes: doing it on my own, without support, having to rely on my Dharma knowledge which wasn't very deep at the time, and knowing that what I was wanting to communicate, the Dharma, is something so profound, challenging, valuable...I felt the responsibility when I was bringing it into people's lives; I would have to follow it up with them, they would have to follow it up...Coming into contact with the Dharma has consequences!

I got all sorts of reactions from people. It was very easy for them to attack and to criticize me and what I was doing because it was just me; I didn't appear to have a movement, or a structure around me. I had to



Vajragita teaching Beginners Course

accept that I would just carry on teaching even though I wasn't necessarily doing it so well. I knew that if I were to disappear, there would be no FWBO in Holland, nothing would happen, at least not for some time. That thought kept me going; sometimes it felt like a heavy burden; at other times it felt like a strong motivating force."

She may have found the process of communicating the Dharma in Holland at times tough and demanding, even terrifying, but I don't

think she has ever been anybody's fool.

"Dutch people are very sensitive to authority," says Vajragita. "They make you into an authority figure and then resent the authority you seem to have. I had a lot of criticism, for instance, for being intolerant and dogmatic when I was probably just expressing my own ideas and opinions. It was different once I began to believe more strongly that I could have my own opinions and express them."

Anyway, I had to learn how to put the Dharma across in Dutch, and also more generally, in my 'own' language. I couldn't just imitate Sangharakshita, my teacher, or the way in which people teach in England. Gradually, I developed a way of teaching which is more interactive and more in tune with what the Dutch people like."

Women sometimes tried to compete with me, particularly when I was leading a study group. On the other hand I have sometimes had to be a bit 'softer' and less direct with men because they don't always like strong women, or women in a leadership position."

Looking back over the early years of establishing the FWBO in Holland, Vajragita knows that she can now be more open, more honest, more flexible with other people. The early years were a balancing act between communicating what she had learnt and absorbed previously, and adapting to the needs of that particular cultural and social milieu. On a personal level, it was a balancing act between sticking to her own views, and accepting and working with 'feedback' and criticism from other people. She learnt quite a lot about competitiveness, arrogance and lack of receptivity, the need to prove oneself. As she puts it, 'people want to tell their own story and not hear anything new.'

She admits now that she was often rigid. But then she had to make all the decisions on her own. She had to take responsibility for herself and for the situation by doing things in her own way; by not trying to please everybody else.

"I never needed any meetings! When I had an idea I could just do it. I would have loved to have had a chance to talk things over with somebody else, but I must say it was nice too just to be able to operate in this simple and straightforward way!"

Initially the people who responded to her teaching did so partly at least because they responded to her. They wanted to help her and not necessarily to get the FWBO as a movement off the ground. On the other hand they were quite dependent on Vajragita for support and encouragement. The turning point emerged when more people began to feel that they were actually behind the Dharma. Then the FWBO Sangha in Holland began to gain cohesion and momentum.

A major change happened when more Dutch people were ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. Many of them had spent several years in England, too. Now they were naturally keen to get involved with the running of the

FWBO in Holland, and inevitably, perhaps, both critical and appreciative of Vajragita's approach. Khemasiri, in particular, wanted to take on more responsibility and she became Chairman of FWBO Holland in 1993. Vajragita embarked on a six-month tour of the world. It provided a helpful transition both for her personally and for the others in Holland who were beginning to take on responsibilities she had previously carried.

Back in Holland, Vajragita found herself wanting to give advice, to take control once more! She worried about finances, worried about other Order members being too ambitious, worried about people making too many mistakes!

"I had to learn how to distance myself from the situation and consider much more carefully where and how I could intervene, say or do something useful. I also realized I was scared of things getting bigger, and it took me a while to realize that a team of people could do so much more than one person on her own."

For the first time I could also be clear, or I had to be clear about why I didn't want to do something! My habitual response for so long had been one of having to do everything."

Letting go of responsibility has been a gradual process and perhaps a rewarding one."

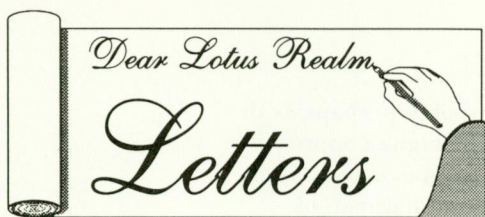
I now take on smaller areas of responsibility. I do a lot of teaching, for instance. I love Dharma study and find it most interesting when I connect it with my own experience. I enjoy retreats, seeing people change, sharing with them things that mean most to me. I have learnt much more about co-operating and being flexible. In fact, I don't think I would be a very good chairman in a large situation."

Listening to Vajragita makes me think that there has been something uncomplicated and straightforward about the way in which she has worked in establishing the FWBO in Holland; that it has almost come naturally to her. She doesn't see it quite like that. She believes that had circumstances been different, she would have chosen to be the person in the background, the one to hide behind the others. Instead, circumstances forced her to be a pioneer, to take on the full weight of responsibility, and she has clearly relished and grown with the challenge. □



Amsterdam

"circumstances forced her to be a pioneer, to take on the full weight of responsibility, and she has clearly relished and grown with the challenge"



Dear Lotus Realm,

Vidyavati asks, 'How many of us took the pro-choice stance on abortion influenced by convenience, until we encountered the Buddhist understanding of rebirth and the continuity of sentience from one life to the next?' (*Women Speaking Out*, Lotus Realm no. 4)

As a Buddhist I do not believe a woman simply has a right to choose. However, I do believe that, whether for convenience or perceived necessity, the woman must (ideally with the child's father) make the choice and take responsibility for the karmic consequences.

It is a compromise, but pragmatically I believe it is the unfortunate duty of every government to provide for safe, legal abortion services, and the grave responsibility of each woman/couple to decide whether to use them... We cannot advocate the legal removal of choice and personal responsibility. Is not personal responsibility the very essence of Buddhist ethics?

Catherine Hopper
London

Vidyavati replies:

From a Buddhist perspective, while there is always the freedom to act according to one's own will, I don't think we can speak of a 'freedom of choice' in connexion with abortion.

As Buddhists we are training towards Enlightenment and the guiding principle for our actions is that of non-harm. While it may be a hard choice in many situations to take the consequences of sexual activity when it results in pregnancy, abortion cannot be taken as a justifiable expediency spiritually speaking, for whatever worthy social, economic or psychological reasons.

According to Buddhist teaching three conditions need to be present for a new life to begin: a healthy sperm must meet a fertile egg, and a being from the bardo of becoming must be seeking a

human form. The hotly debated religious question is, 'when does life/the soul/sentience become present in the embryo? The Buddhist view suggests conception will not occur without a consciousness being present. Whether it is fully 'arrived' in a single moment or does so over time is a matter of debate. But we can assume at the very least that if we intervene, a life in development will have been truncated.

Terminating life is an unskilful action arising from unskilful mental attitudes including the attitude of having power over another's life. It is said to be 'weighty negative karma' and will inevitably lead to suffering (as many women who have had abortions will testify.)

Taking this into account, Buddhist principles lead one to argue that it would be preferable from the point of view of women's spiritual well-being that abortion should not be available. After all, abortion will adversely affect a woman's spiritual path to freedom, and it is this which I think is the unacknowledged tragedy of the issue.

Having a woman's body means we hold the biological capability to conceive life and to destroy it in a way that men cannot.

Most forms of contraceptive act to prevent the meeting of sperm and egg so the 'ground' for sentience to arise is not established. Rather than compromising Buddhist principles over the issue of abortion, we could be doing more to educate people in the use of non-harmful forms of contraception.

Illegal abortions may number as many as when abortions are legally available, but to make abortion illegal makes it clear that abortion is not an ethical option.

What about compassion for the mother, some may ask? The strongest Buddhist argument against abortion is metta or compassion. If we feel metta, how can we exclude a developing life from the whole picture?

Dear Lotus Realm,

Thank you for the invitation to speak out in the last issue. It has helped me decide to raise my voice from muted tones to speak loud and clear, both in this magazine and elsewhere.

Please could we have an issue devoted to discussion of Subhuti's book, *Women, Men and Angels*. It has been a highly controversial book, primarily about women and their spiritual aptitude. It has received little space in this magazine other than a short book review.

Although its subject matter is not dharmic in the strict sense of the word, it affects how women see themselves and other women, and how men perceive women, and could affect how the Dharma is presented and taught by the FWBO in wider society.

Cherry Collins
Norwich, UK

Kalyanaprabha replies:

A number of women Order members are planning to contribute to a booklet responding to *Women, Men and Angels*. Their intention is to further clarify points made by Subhuti; and to deal with some of the issues that have arisen for women (and some men) in connection with the book.

Dear Lotus Realm,

I was recently diagnosed with M.E. I am determined to learn the lesson the illness has to teach me, to sort out the imbalances in my life which led to my becoming ill, and to use the experience as a basis for spiritual growth.

At the moment, though, I feel very alone with my task. Are there any other Buddhist women who have, or who have had M.E. who would be willing to share some of their experiences and insights?

Caroline Tosswill
39 Church Hill Road
Handsworth
Birmingham B20 3TN
UK

Opportunities at the New Manchester Buddhist Centre

Two years ago the Manchester Buddhist Centre vacated its premises in leafy Chorlton-cum-Hardy. A six storey warehouse had been purchased in the heart of Manchester city whose renovation was to take two years.

A team of men and another of women embarked on the necessary stripping out of the old building, pulling down interior walls, removing rotten window frames, drawing out scores of rusting nails from the wooden beams which would be sanded and varnished in keeping with the vision behind the reconstruction: to highlight the natural materials that were used to create the building a hundred years ago. The women's team renovated much of the wood work which is extensive, removing the thick, tarry green paint that smothered the original wood. Long hours with hot-air guns, sandpaper and varnish brushes eventually restored the staircase and the many window frames to their natural beauty. Other work included sealing brick walls after

sand-blasting; and cleaning and replacing dozens of window catches.

All this was laying foundations for the future: the creating of a beautiful building which would communicate something of the Buddhist vision through its very fabric. Thanks to the outstanding enterprise and vision of Mokshapriya, who headed the project and was responsible for most of its design, the Manchester Buddhist Centre must now be one of the finest Centres in the FWBO. It is certainly the largest (outside of India)!

However, with the completion of the building work in July, there was the feeling that things have really only just begun. Can members of the Sangha work together to create a Pure Land, or a real example of the New Society as envisioned by Sangharakshita?

One aspect of that New Society is team-based Right Livelihood. The new Manchester Centre provides space for four women's

ventures: Clear Vision Education; Bodywise Alternative Health Centre; and production of a documentary video.

And of course *Lotus Realm* has its own office in a quiet corner on the second floor complete with its new computer. Here the team gets on with its work of producing its magazine – one opportunity for women practising the Dharma to communicate their experience and reflections to others. □

Members of Lotus Realm team. l-r: Kay Stubbs, Kalyanaprabha, Jackie Cole, and Dharmottara.



dharma education

Changes to the English education laws in 1988 brought in new requirements for religious education. Many schools now find themselves obliged to teach Buddhism, often for the first time. Teachers may know little about it, and there seems to be a common view that Buddhism is abstruse and difficult to teach. Few resources have been produced to aid teachers.

To respond to this need, *Clear Vision Education* was set up as a wing of the Clear Vision Trust. Its

aim is to produce high quality resources for teaching about Buddhism in schools.

Its first project was to produce what has become a highly acclaimed video with accompanying 'teachers pack' for children at 'key stage 2' i.e. 7-11 year olds. Its four short programmes introduce children (and their teachers) to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and Buddhist Worship in a way that is meaningful and interesting to them. A second video for older

children is being released this Autumn which covers ground such as the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhist Ethics, and the life of the Buddha.

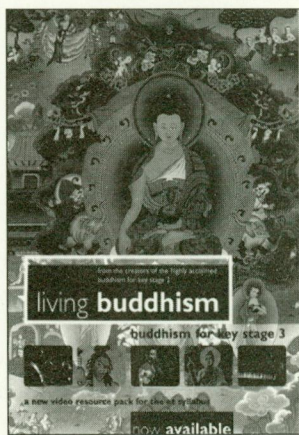
Clear Vision Education is being developed by a team of women headed by **Padmasri** who spent her working life in education, and moved to Manchester last year to work for Clear Vision. There she is developing a team whose aim is to produce materials of excellence that will bring the Dharma to

thousands of children and teachers for the first time. As well as producing resources, she and her team provide high-standard in-service training for teachers.

She writes:

Clear Vision Education supports two full-time workers, Ngaire Moorhouse and myself, and we have a number of volunteers who work part-time. Most of us are new to working in team-based Right Livelihood and the challenges as we develop our work and our team are many! Seeking to bring a successful business into being means learning new skills such as how to plan, invest, take risks, respond and be efficient and ethical in a competitive business world. It means having a vision and working hard to realize it. Providing a high standard of in-service training means we need to keep up with the educational world, and understand the needs of both teachers and pupils in today's schools.

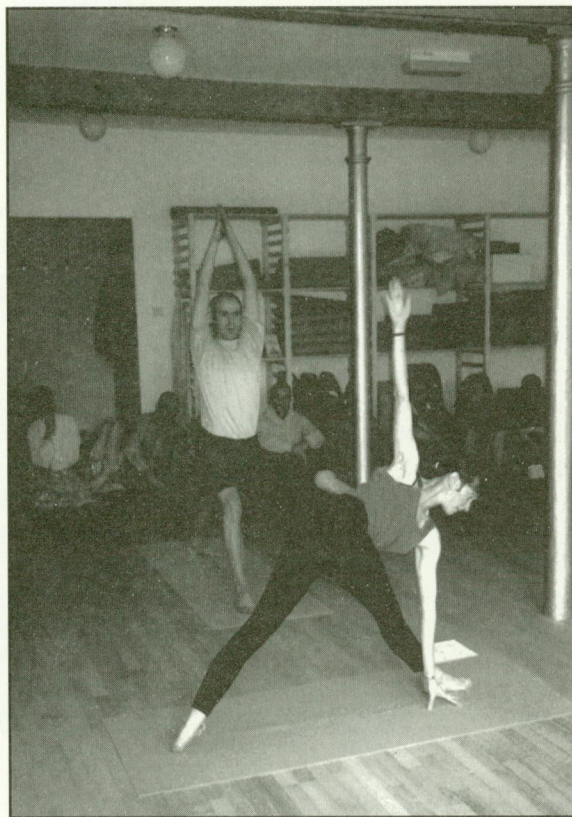
But bringing team-based Right Livelihood into being is about more than simply learning business skills and developing teaching techniques. It also means bringing into being a team which is characterized by kalyana mitrata or spiritual friendship – friendship that can flourish amongst a group of women for whom work is their spiritual practice and spiritual practice their work. That, too, requires vision, commitment and determined and consistent effort. Devoting ourselves to our work, we are transforming ourselves even as we seek to transform the world in accordance with the principles of the Dharma. □



Clear Vision Education's most recent production:
Video Resource Pack for 'Key Stage 3'

Bodywise 2

Bodywise (Manchester), a new women's Team-based Right Livelihood business, opened this Summer. Situated on the second floor of the newly opened Manchester Buddhist Centre in the heart of the city, **Bodywise Natural Health Centre** offers yoga classes, massage, acupuncture and shiatsu.



Rosey Cole and Dhiramati demonstrate yoga postures in the new yoga studio at Bodywise

Our beginnings stretch back four years when a few women involved in natural health care started to meet up, driven by a desire to work alongside other Buddhist practitioners. In those days having our own centre seemed a far off dream.

When the Manchester Buddhist Centre bought and renovated its new, large premises in the city, we were offered space to accommodate our business: suddenly our vision became a real possibility and, two years later, a reality.

Bodywise takes its name from the well-established health centre associated with the London

Buddhist Centre, also run by a team of women. They have given invaluable support, advice and friendship forging an on-going link between our two teams.

Bodywise (Manchester) began as a team of three, but already we have attracted two women to move to Manchester to join us. Our

vision is to create an increasingly vibrant, friendly, successful health centre offering high standards of treatment and teaching.

Getting in touch with the more mythic dimension of our vision, we have drawn inspiration from the images of the medicine Buddha; and Ratnasambhava, the Buddha of abundance, profusion, generosity, creativity and beauty. The warm yellow of our walls reminds us of the radiant warmth of Ratnasambhava, whose love and compassion shines on all equally without discrimination.

Ratnasambhava's right hand is held in the gesture of giving. So we aspire to cultivate

an attitude of generosity in all aspects of our work and with all whom we encounter. Financially we aim to generate enough income not only to support ourselves but with surplus to give away to support Dharma projects.

Still in its infancy, just how **Bodywise** will develop in the future is an exciting unknown. We have no exact blueprint for how to proceed, which gives us a great opportunity to take initiative and act creatively as we explore the possibilities that lie ahead.

Rosey Cole



DOCUMENTING *experience*

Vidyamala, a New Zealander, worked for a number of years in the video and film industry. Late last year she began working on a documentary video portraying the experience of women practising the Dharma in the context of the FWBO/WBO.

She writes:

My experience in New Zealand working with video and film gave me a vivid appreciation of the impact of these media in communicating to a wider audience. I want to contribute to keeping records of the achievements and struggles of contemporary western women Buddhists. Initially my vision was quite specific to making this particular documentary video, but as the project has developed I have come to appreciate the archival value of simply recording as much material as possible of women speaking about their experience. Much of it will not be used in the video but there will be many hours of footage for historians to refer to in the future.

Women sometimes bemoan the lack of records of women who have practised the Dharma in the past. Who are our spiritual forebears? Why are there so few records? I think we will never know for sure. But we can respond creatively now by taking the opportunity to ensure women of the future don't have to ask those questions. This time history will be recorded. Our stories will be told. I am part of the first generation of the Western Buddhist Order. What is our place in

Buddhist history? How do we live our Buddhist ideals? What does it mean to be a woman practising the Dharma in the late twentieth century? I hope the video will contribute to our beginning to answer these questions, and that it will provide inspiration and encouragement through showing the example of women practising.

Specifically the video will be in Three Parts looking at different

principles and how these are expressed.

PART ONE will explore the centrality in the Buddhist life of the act of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; and the significance of men and women receiving the same ordination, a ceremony which recognizes their commitment to the Three Jewels. It will



Vidyamala at work



Ngaire and Lotte filming

also explore the significance of women being ordained by other, senior women members of the Western Buddhist Order; and the development of retreat centres for women.

PART TWO will look at lifestyle. Ordination into the Western Buddhist Order is based on the depth of one's commitment to the

Three Jewels. This commitment can be expressed through a variety of life-styles. The video will portray, amongst others, 'career women', mothers, artists, women who have chosen to practise celibacy, women who live together in single-sex communities; and women who work in Team-based Right Livelihood businesses with other women. It will also include women from the Indian wing of the FWBO.

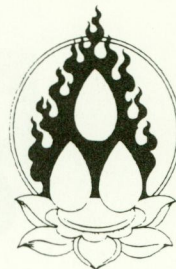
PART THREE will focus primarily on women who are taking a lead in the spiritual community: those who have developed new projects and who are reaching out to the wider world. The underlying principle to be expressed here is that of spiritual friendship: the WBO is a network of friendships that both seeks to express the Buddhist ideal of Sangha, and which provides a foundation for people to step out into new areas of responsibility.

Having successfully raised the funds for the project, I have started travelling around the movement conducting interviews and gathering video material. The work is very inspiring and my predominant impression is of the preciousness of the spiritual community. Each interview is unique and I am reminded again and again of the remarkable steps people have taken in order to pursue their spiritual vision. Frequently I find myself humbled – I find it a great privilege to be doing this work. I am also arranging to gather video material from abroad.

The team working on the video comprises Lotte Derricourt, Ngaire Moorhouse and myself. We are based with the Clear Vision Trust at the Manchester Buddhist Centre where Mokshapriya has generously made equipment available to us.

For the future I am committed not only to making this particular training for other women in filmmaking to continue this important work. □

ORDINATIONS



I am looking at a happy photograph, a photograph of the women who were ordained at Tiratanaloka this year; a photograph of people who were as diverse as their names. For instance, the four from the Manchester area: Padmasri working for Clear Vision Education; Nandana, who is a very lively 81; Dharmottara, who works for *Lotus Realm*; Kamalavajri, who is a

their lives; to practising the Ten Ethical Precepts which are the working out of that Going for Refuge; to keeping up a daily meditation practice contemplating a Buddha or Bodhisattva figure; and to the creation of genuine harmony and unity in the Order which is the responsibility of all Order members.

The retreat was led by Srimala, who conducted the public ordina-

ordination of any kind) is still something of a rarity. An ordination retreat is particularly intensive focusing as it does on the experience of spiritual death and rebirth. As the hours and days passed with more meditation and reflection, and we entered a long period of silence, there was plenty of time to reflect on the significance of the step which the ordinands were about to take. Over the course of a week, two by two, they left the retreat each evening to enter the secluded hut on the edge of the 'forest' where their private ordination ceremony took place. Afterwards most chose to spend the night alone in a tent, reflecting on the step they had taken. The public ceremony included the announcement of their new names and the giving of the kesas which they would now wear on public occasions to mark their commitment to the Three Jewels and membership of the Western Buddhist Order.

Next year's ordination retreat may be the last one to be held at Tiratanaloka. We are looking for an 'out of the way' place that will symbolically represent a Going Forth from the world – a retreat centre where ordination retreats could be considerably longer because there would be no other demands on it. It would be good to have two full months for people to prepare before the ordination ceremonies; and then a further month on retreat after they were ordained.

The Western Buddhist Order is always changing as we as people change. Each new Dharmacharini and Dharmachari coming into being has an effect on the Movement as a whole. There are unlimited possibilities for each and every one to change, to become Enlightened. With each new being the potential is there.

Ratnasuri



Preceptors: (from left) Ratnasuri, Dhammadinna, Sanghadevi, Srimala, Ratnavandana, Anjali

speech therapist. Then there are two from Norwich: Saddhasuri, and Sampada, both of whom live in a community. Saddhasuri works in one of the Windhorse Trading shops. Sampada, another very lively older Order member supports classes at the Norwich Buddhist Centre. Let's not forget Nagasri in Cambridge, who has just finished art school, and is now helping out at the Cambridge Centre. And from London, Gunasiddhi and Dayapakshini. Then there are the three new Dharmacharinis who travelled from overseas: from the USA, Amitaratna; from Germany Shakyadevi; and from Finland, Maitriprabha. Though their backgrounds differed widely, they were united in their common commitment to Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels ever more deeply throughout the rest of

tion ceremony, whilst the private ordinations were carried out by Srimala and five other senior Order members. The private preceptors chose the names for the new Order members, a privilege and a task that is much enjoyed. This year for the first time the final decision that someone was ready to be ordained was left to the Public Preceptors and was not referred to Sangharakshita as has been the case previously. Another noteworthy development is that there are now more women in the WBO who were ordained by women Preceptors than by Sangharakshita. (Sangharakshita, who founded the Order, conferred all ordinations for more than a decade and a half.) This marks a significant shift for the women's wing of the Order and is of wider interest in the Buddhist world where ordination for women by women (indeed

Spiritually Reborn

Cameos of three new Order Members



AMITARATNA

Amitaratna is English but for the last six years she has lived and worked in Seattle, USA. She moved there because it felt like her 'heart's home'. She loves the mountains and lives in an area of outstanding natural beauty with not only mountains but lakes and the sea which dominate the city of Seattle. The spaciousness of America is what attracted her bringing with it a sense of freedom from her past conditioning.

Amitaratna means: 'boundless jewel' and suggests the infinite possibilities of the creative mind. Changing her external conditions by moving to Seattle helped Amitaratna to grow and change; but the crucial change came when she realized that she could only truly break free from her conditioning by not limiting her mind.

Amitaratna is the only woman Order member in Seattle. Her nearest Order friend is Varasuri who lives over 450 miles away in Montana. She keeps in touch with Varasuri and other friends in the US and Canada by phone, by e-mail, and by travelling vast distances. In Seattle she continues to lead classes and helps out in any way she can to develop the Sangha. Her ordination has proved a boost to others pursuing the spiritual path: if she can do it, so can they!

Viryaṇḍra



SHAKYADEVI

Shakyadevi is the first German woman who prepared for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order within her situation in Germany. (Others before her moved to England for their preparation.) For the last nine years she has been involved in establishing the FWBO in Germany, and the Meditation Centre in Essen where she works as part of the administrative team.

Shakyadevi is a 'single mother' bringing up twin boys. She has had to find ways of creating the necessary conditions within her life to enable her to deepen her practice of the Dharma. Getting away on retreat was a rare occurrence. In deepening her understanding of what it means to Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels, Shakyadevi has become a woman confident to practice the Dharma even if circumstances are difficult.

There is plenty to do in Germany to help spread the Dharma and within days of her ordination, Shakyadevi gave her first public talk at the Essen Centre; and soon after co-led a retreat for families. Her most important contribution, however, has simply been her ordination and her example proving that people in all sorts of situations can, with effort, imagination and determination, Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

Kulanandi



MAITRIPRABHA

There is a word in Finnish which denotes what is said to be the most prominent characteristic of Finns: *sisu*. It means something like 'determination, strength, staying power.' Maitriprabha certainly exemplifies this quality. She has been involved with the FWBO in Helsinki through its ups and downs for a decade. Throughout this time she has had a particular interest in the metta bhavana practice – and now she has been reborn with a name that means 'radiance and beauty of metta.'

Before Maitriprabha's ordination, no Finns had been ordained for a long time, so it has seemed almost miraculous to have a newly ordained Order member around at our Centre.

It is important for people when they come to an FWBO Centre to meet friendly, committed people of all kinds. Now there are three women Order members, as well as men Order members who help run the Centre in Helsinki.

For those who have known Maitriprabha for some time, it has been inspiring and encouraging to witness the process of her deepening commitment to the Three Jewels.

Sridevi

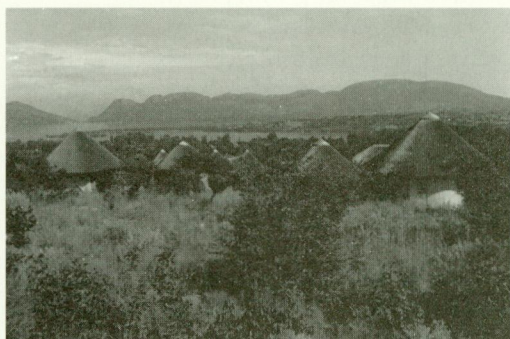


SOUTH AFRICAN OPENINGS

Christa Kunert is 45, married, with a 15-year-old son. She grew up in Germany, but later moved with her husband's job to England where she encountered the FWBO and became a Mitra. Five years ago she and her family moved to South Africa. There she has continued to keep up her practice, and is determined to see an FWBO group established in South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg. She writes:

Within a month of arriving, Ian Tromp contacted me. He had read one of Sangharakshita's books and written to the FWBO in England and been given my address. I taught him to meditate, and he helped me to produce leaflets advertising meditation classes. People started to come along – sometimes as many as thirteen people crowding into my house to meditate, study and do pujas together. But I found people come and go and there was a period of almost two years when there were only two other women who met with me regularly.

Happily, at the moment, there are enough of us to make it worth our while renting a room from the local Theosophical Society. We hold retreats in the country-



Huts: simple accommodation for retreats

side in a retreat centre built by a former Catholic priest. The accommodation is ideal – simple huts with thatched roofs. There is also a large meditation hall.

One of our retreats was at-

tended by two visiting Order members, Sobhana and Kulamitra. They both happened to be visiting relatives in South Africa at the same



Retreatants with Christa (back row, centre) and Sobhana (with cap)

time. But although people often seem inspired and happy on retreat, they do not always come back to our classes. So we are struggling with numbers, but I feel it is my responsibility to carry on, especially now that Ian is leaving for England.

We have no activities for women only as yet, but the majority of people who come along are women. No black people have come to the classes. The reasons for that can only be guessed. I have found South African people and perhaps especially black women in South Africa quite fixed in their views, finding it difficult to adjust to change even in their everyday lives. I think for many people a change in their 'religion' would be just too difficult to cope with. On top of that, most people don't have their own transport and public transport is very poor. It is also quite dangerous to travel around in the city.

I see my own responsibility as not just to keep running classes, but also to develop my own practice of the Dharma. I have developed strong connexions with Sangharakshita, Kalyanasri and Sobhana, to all of whom I write

regularly. I follow a study course by correspondence with Sobhana who comments on my notes and answers my questions in great depth.

This Summer I attended my first 'Going for Refuge' retreat at Tiratanaloka Retreat Centre in the UK. During this retreat we had a special ceremony in which Kalyanasri and Sobhana officially became my kalyana mitras (spiritual friends.) I realized how much I have missed through living so far away from the Sangha. I am determined to find a way of paying for future air tickets because I simply cannot wait another six or seven years to attend another retreat!

Returning to South Africa I am immersed again in this country which is so beautiful in many ways: the climate, the landscape, the great variety of birds and animals. But the political situation here is volatile. People are frustrated because election promises cannot be kept. The crime rate is increasing all the time and many white people live in houses secured with razor wire, alarm systems and big dogs.

The Dharma teaches us that change is always possible – even in a situation like this, so I continue my work for the Dharma, running classes and retreats, and keeping up my own practice. □

convention at *taraloka*

Ten Order members and 44 mitras attended this summer's bi-annual Order-Mitra Convention at Taraloka Retreat Centre. Many countries were represented: as well as 'locals' from England and Scotland, mitras arrived from Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Holland, Australia and New Zealand.

The first impression on walking into the large marquee which served as a shrine room was simplicity – if not bareness. Where was the shrine? Cushions were arranged around a central space at whose centre was a large dharmachakra wheel made from river stones. There was no Buddha image; and no coloured shrine cloths.

In her introductory talk, Varabhadri explained it was up to

us, the retreatants, to use our creativity to build a Buddhaland within the waiting space of tents, fields, trees and sky. We were divided into groups, one for each of the five Buddhas of the Mandala: Vairocana, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi. Each group would construct its own shrine and prepare for a puja. What followed was a full programme of talks, workshops, slide-shows, pujas

and a cultural evening.

The real magic of the retreat came from the pujas, one for each of the five Jinas. The pujas were held at the time of day (or night) associated with that particular Buddha. Through the hard work and creative inspiration of each of the groups, the bare space within the marquee was gradually transformed into a strikingly beautiful shrine. □

Sue Johnson

DHARMA FOR THE DEAF



Hannah Manasse is a free-lance sign language interpreter. In July she was asked to interpret for the Dalai Lama who was giving teachings at the Barbican Centre in London. She writes:

It was a unique and exciting opportunity. As Buddhist terminology does not yet exist in BSL (British Sign Language) Jane Coskry (who shared the interpreting with me) and I spent a good deal of time preparing, discussing the Dharma with deaf friends and finding ways of expressing it in BSL. Fortunately BSL is a very flexible language and one that is growing all the time, so our task, though challenging, was not impossible.

Our two days of interpreting was extremely taxing as the material was often very theoretical and abstruse. It demanded a far higher level of concentration than usual. This is because one cannot interpret without first understanding what has been said, and I had to work very hard to understand exactly what the Dalai Lama was saying (usually through his interpreter) before I could render it into BSL.

It was also a particularly moving experience as it is the first time I have been able to combine my livelihood and my spiritual practice in quite so literal a way. I felt strongly motivated to 'get the message across'. It is always of the

utmost importance that I transmit the message faithfully, but the fact that the message on this occasion was the Buddha's precious teaching made it even more crucial. To be responsible for communicating the Dharma was at once daunting and exhilarating.

The British deaf community has traditionally been aided – but also dominated – by Christian 'missioners'. To my knowledge this was the first time that such an important exposition of the Dharma has been made accessible to deaf people in Britain. I hope it will be but the first step in making the Dharma accessible to yet another group of people in the Western world. □

On the Record

Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes

ed. by Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY 1995
£8.95/\$12.95

DHAMMADASSIN

This book grew out of a retreat for women held in California in August 1989. Women from different Buddhist traditions – Tibetan, Zen, Shingon, Theravada, Ch'an, Pure land – write here about their experiences of practising and reflecting on the Dharma, putting into print some of the issues which they think about, work with and seek dharmic solutions to: mothering, relationships, abortion, stress, death, families, conflict in the world, choices between lay and monastic lifestyles.

The whole lacks a unified basis and view, but in some pieces there is a universality which takes it beyond being just 'American'. (At least one of the women is not American at all – Ayya Khema is German! One might wonder who smuggled her in here – but let's be glad they did as her piece is one of the best in the book.)

Initially I was put off by the Dedication: to those "striving to...adapt Buddhist practice to the North American setting in ways that are both comfortable and authentic." Whilst being aware that some 'translation' is needed as Buddhism spreads, isn't it we who need to adapt to the Dharma, not the other way round? Might not our notions of 'comfortableness' otherwise remain unchallenged? One example of this bending to contemporary ideologies runs:

"We are not being asked to believe anything or accept anything (particularly not to buy something simply because a man said it, however enlightened he may have been.)" (p158)

This misses the point: the Buddha *was* enlightened. To overlook that in trying to reassure those with an ideological antipathy for his physical masculinity is an error which 'comfort' cannot justify. Similarly one cannot dismiss "problematic features...such as hierarchical structures, authoritarianism and sexism" as "Asian cultural carry-overs" which can be dispensed with at will.

The true value of spiritual hierarchy is not even mentioned; whilst the fixed self-view that brings about the other two 'problems' is part of the human condition and surely needs to be transformed by men and women alike.

I was, however, impressed by three of the pieces. Margaret Coberly, in her moving reflections on impermanence and conditionality in a busy inner-city casualty department in New York, put the case for "directly confronting the issues stemming from our mortality."

There is no mention of 'comfortableness' here. Acceptance of and co-operation with how things really are shines through, along with the 'expanded world view' which they bring. Jacqueline

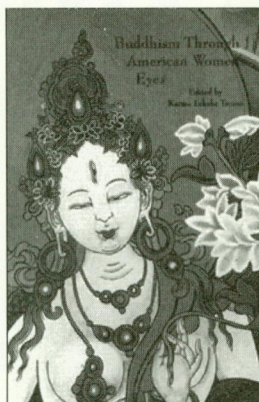
Mandell is a meditation teacher and mother of twins. She writes warmly but unsentimentally about 'Mothering and Meditation.' She has comments to make on non-attachment in child-rearing, and asks direct, pertinent questions about access to the Dharma: "If it is only for monasteries, childless women, women with grown children, women who can afford child care or women with supportive husbands, we are in trouble. We have a fringe religion." (p51)

She does touch on the thorny issue of women having a 'lower birth', but her desire to 're-examine the tradition

and effect profound changes' is not possible on the basis merely of the intelligence and education she cites as flourishing amongst modern Western Buddhists. Some profound experience of Transcendental Insight, of direct experience of what the Dharma actually is (not just what we would like it to be) seems vital here.

Ayya Khema, the Theravadin teacher, was handed the title 'Dealing with Stress'. Her well-judged, kind but firm piece gives a clear dharmic perspective on this much-hyped modern malady: "In Buddhist terminology we don't necessarily call it stress, we just call it dukkha." The antidotes she cites are traditional – mindfulness, recollection of our own death, continuity of purpose – and her reflections and suggestions on dukkha are perceptive and encouraging. "We don't have to like the way things are, but we can like the way they teach us something."

In 'The Monastic Experience', five women describe living as nuns in different traditions, both in America and in the East. They speak of the



**"Whilst
being aware
that some
'translation'
is needed as
Buddhism
spreads,
isn't it we
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Dharma, not
the other
way round?"**

THE CHOSEN PATH

Walking on Lotus Flowers Buddhist Women Living, Loving and Meditating

Martine Batchelor
Thorsons/Harper Collins, London 1996
£9.99/\$18.00, pp205

PUNYAMALA

In this book, Martine Batchelor has sensitively evoked the day to day lives of women from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and the West. These individual portraits include the abbess of a monastery, a disc jockey, a mother, a surrealist painter, and a professor. They span an age range from 20 to 80.

Two of the more remarkable life stories are those of Ani Tenzin Palmo and Songgyong Sunim. Ani Tenzin Palmo, an Englishwoman, became a Buddhist at 18 in 1961 and began practising in the Theravadin tradition until she met Chogyam Trungpa Rimpoche. She became his disciple and almost immediately was made a nun. She then spent a total of 24 years in India. On the advice of her lamas she became a hermit and spent many years on solitary retreat in a cave near Ladakh, once becoming trapped by tons of snow. She has a great love for meditation and is able to communicate her experience in a down-to-earth way.

"People talk about what you gain from meditation, but it seems to me it is not a matter of what you gain but of what you lose. Meditation is a process of uncovering

and discovering what you have always really known."

Songgyong Sunim from Korea was a remarkable 80-year-old who became a nun at 18. She had a hard life serving her elders but at 33 she was determined to find out more about the true role of a nun and went in search of a Zen master. She struggled and suffered keenly from self-reproach until *"the self-reproach had pierced through me to the point where I felt I could toss the great masters over my shoulder."* From then on, she experienced vivid and tranquil states of mind. She continued to show great determination in her quest for Enlightenment. Eventually she settled down and devoted herself to the guidance of young Zen nuns.

Some accounts are no more than a sketch but Martine Batchelor successfully conveys the uniqueness of each woman's voice. She also highlights the beautiful imagery employed by many of her contributors by using it in chapter headings. The title of the book comes from I Tsao Fashih's statement, *"When I walk I am stepping on lotus flowers, so I am always happy."*

I was particularly struck by I Tsao Fashih's faith

**"...Martine
Batchelor
successfully
conveys the
uniqueness of
each woman's
voice."**

"On the Record" continued

benefits of living in a contemplative community, of temporary ordination, and glimpses of life as an eight- and ten-precept nun in Burma. There is, however, no mention of a lifestyle other than the 'married with children', or the 'monastic'. Jacqueline Mandell's belief that Burma's tradition of temporary ordination is 'fantastic for Western society' remains disappointingly within the lay/monastic dichotomy. The FWBO community model provides an alternative for women left to choose between the conventional Western role of wife and mother, or the traditional Eastern model of serious practitioner as monastic.

The book jumps right over the points addressed by Subhuti in *Women, Men and Angels*. It may be true that *"the unborn knows no gender"* (p149),

and that *"ego and delusion are common to all of us, whether we manifest in a male or female body"* (p151), but more specific self-questioning around biological conditioning, female passivity, initiative and energy is not to be found here (perhaps they're not issues for American women?) The editor in her introduction cites the ancient Theris and their songs, making the point that they were *"surely not the only women throughout 2600 years of Buddhist history to gain insights, yet of the others we have no record."* (p13)

The women who contributed to this book have 'gone on the record' with their particular concerns, their practice – even their unclarity. Perhaps it takes more self-questioning to produce Theris. □

and joy. She is a Pure Land practitioner who sees the Pure Land around her. Ayya Khema's wise and direct words touched me, as did the practical compassion of Jongmook Sunim, a young Korean nun who is a disc jockey. I was fascinated by Yahne Le Toumelin's account of the development of her painting as her practice of Buddhism deepened.

Walking on Lotus Flowers is also challenging. All the women portrayed are wholeheartedly dedicated to the practice of the Dharma. Several mentioned that they reflect on their actions at the end of the day: "What went well? How were we able to serve others? What attitudes were good? When we are able to abandon acting negatively or do something kind, however small, let's rejoice." How many of us begin our day with the thought, "Today I am not going to harm others. I am going to try to be of benefit to others. Today I want all my actions to be motivated by the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of all other beings."

I enjoyed the diversity of Buddhist practice that is contained in this book. It conveys the richness of the Buddhist tradition since it includes Theravadin practice, followers of Tibetan Buddhism, Zen nuns, and a TienTai practitioner. But herein also lies one of its weaknesses. It could be confusing for anyone new to Buddhism who might well be left wondering What is Buddhism? Is it grappling with Zen koans, becoming devoted to your lama, or neither? Martine Batchelor does not

provide any commentary or guiding framework so those without their own framework of Buddhist practice could become lost in eclecticism.

The book might also be criticized for the fact that of the eighteen contributors, sixteen are nuns. Underlying this seems to be an assumption that to be truly dedicated to the Dharma, one needs to adopt a monastic lifestyle. But in fact what makes a Buddhist a Buddhist is the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. Lifestyle then evolves out of that effective commitment. It is possible to be a fully committed Buddhist and to lead a celibate life or to live with a family. One can 'work in the world' or live in a retreat centre. Of course one set of circumstances may provide much easier conditions for practice. But in the end what makes the difference is the effort one puts in to transform oneself and to realize more and more deeply the Buddha's teaching.

Another issue Martine Batchelor fails to address is raised by Christina Feldman: "for many people a major gap exists between their daily lives and their retreat lives, and lacking a sense of spiritual community has a great deal to do with this. It is essential to emphasize the need for sangha." (p194) Within Buddhist practice we cannot ignore the need for continuous and effective spiritual friendship. Without it few of us could manage to "walk on lotus flowers." □

DHARMACHAKRA TAPES

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Manchester M4 1DZ
United Kingdom

Letters may be subject to editing

To lead a Buddhist life we need, above all, four things:
a vision of the kind of person we could become;
practical methods to help us transform ourselves
in the light of that vision;
friendship to support and encourage us on the path;
and a society or culture that supports us
in our aspirations

21 - 28th December

The Four Gifts: Week 1: Led by Dayanandi

28 - 4th January

The Four Gifts: Week 2: Led by Sarvabhadri

taraloka winter retreats

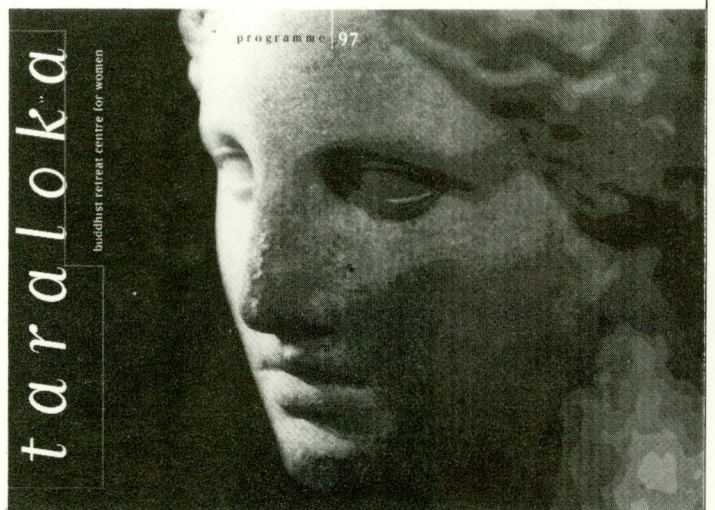
*I come to you with four gifts.
Dare you accept them?*

4 - 11th January

Freedom of Heart: Intensive Meditation

Led by Ratnavandana and the Taraloka Community

*LOOK OUT for our new
1997 programme!*



LOTUS REALM REPRESENTATIVES AT FWBO CENTRES

BRITAIN

LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE 51 Roman Road, London E2 OHU: Subhadramati
BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST CENTRE 135 Salisbury Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 8AL: Penny Brown
BRIGHTON BUDDHIST CENTRE 15 Park Crescent Place, Brighton BN2 3HF: Annie McAuley
BRISTOL BUDDHIST CENTRE 9 Cromwell Road, St Andrews, Bristol BS6 5HD: Pat Finnegan
CAMBRIDGE BUDDHIST CENTRE 25 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8EG: Brenda Kent
FWBO COLCHESTER c/o 13 Chrismund Way, Great Tey, Essex, CO6 1AZ: Marja Edwards
CROYDON BUDDHIST CENTRE 96-98 High Street, Croydon, Surrey CRO 1ND: Franky Henley
EDINBURGH BUDDHIST CENTRE 55A Grange Road, Edinburgh, EH9 1TX: Linda Goodman
GLASGOW BUDDHIST CENTRE 329 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3HW: Patricia Beskal
LANCASHIRE BUDDHIST CENTRE c/o 6 Tottleworth, Rishton, nr Blackburn, Lancs BB1 4AN: Kamalavajri
LANCASTER FWBO c/o 30 Adelphi Street, Lancaster LA1 4AF: Sue Lupson
LEEDS BUDDHIST CENTRE 9 Heddon Place, Meanwood, Leeds LS6 4EL: Patience Walker
LIVERPOOL MEDITATION CENTRE 37 Hope Street, Liverpool L1 9EA: Dharmottara
MANCHESTER BUDDHIST CENTRE 16/20 Turner Street, Manchester M4 1DZ: Kay Stubbs
NOTTINGHAM BUDDHIST CENTRE 9 St Mary's Place, St Mary's Gate, Nottingham, NG1 1PH: Ann Whiteside
NEWCASTLE BUDDHIST CENTRE 3rd Floor, Newe House, 10-12 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, NE1 6QG: Jackie Jackson
NORTH LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE St Mark's Studio, 12 Chillingworth Road, London N7 8SJ: Jill Warner
NORWICH BUDDHIST CENTRE 41a All Saints Green, Norwich NR1 3LY: Linda Bell
SHEFFIELD BUDDHIST CENTRE 499 Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2QE: Linda Thomas
WEST LONDON BUDDHIST CENTRE 94 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2 5PL: Catherine Hopper
TARALOKA WOMEN'S RETREAT CENTRE Cornhill Farm, Bettisfield, nr. Whitchurch, Shropshire, SY13 2LV: Dayamala

EUROPE

FWBO IRELAND South Frederick Street, Dublin 2, Ireland: Anne McMahon
CENTRO BUDISTA DE VALENCIA Plaza Rojas, Clemente 3 Bajo, Valencia, 46008 Spain: Paramachitta
FWBO GERMANY Buddhistisches Zentrum Essen, Herkulesstr. 13, 45127 Essen, Germany: Andrea Brandenburger
HELSINGIN BUDDHALAINEN KESKUS PL 288, SF-00121, Helsinki 12, Finland: Maitriprabha
BOEDDHISTISCH CENTRUM AMSTERDAM Palmstraat 63, 1015 HP, Amsterdam, Netherlands: Khemasiri
VASTERLANDSKA BUDDHISTORDENS VANNER Soddermannagatan 58, S-116 65 Stockholm, Sweden: to be appointed

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

AUCKLAND BUDDHIST CENTRE PO Box 78 – 205, Newton, Auckland, New Zealand: Averil Hunt
WELLINGTON BUDDHIST CENTRE PO Box 12 – 311, Wellington North, New Zealand: Varadevi
MELBOURNE BUDDHIST CENTRE 34 Bishop Street, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia: to be appointed
SYDNEY BUDDHIST CENTRE PO Box 725 Coogee, NSW 2034, Australia: Caroline Ralston

USA

ARYALOKA RETREAT CENTER Heartwood Circle, Newmarket, New Hampshire 03857, USA: Viriyagita
FWBO SEATTLE 2410 E. Interlaken Blvd, Seattle, WA 98112, USA: Sandra Roulette
SAN FRANCISCO BUDDHIST CENTER 39 Bartlett Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, USA: Susan Michael

INDIA

TBMSG (INDIAN CENTRES) c/o Dhammachakra Pavartan Mahavihar, Raja Harishchandra Road, Dapodi, Poona 411012, India