

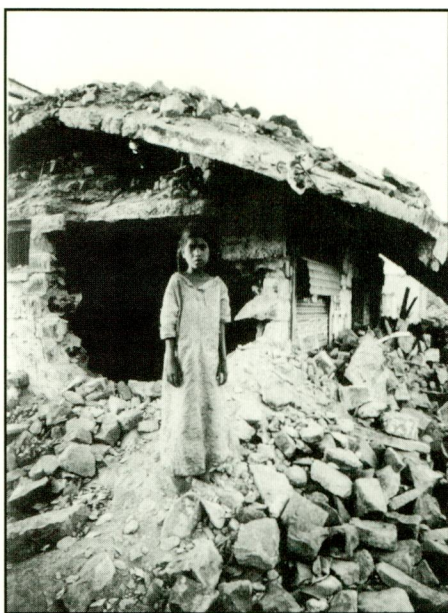
# LOTUS REALM

*a new voice for buddhist women*



**SOCIAL  
ACTION**





Earthquake Survivor, India

Photo: Ratnadeep

**LOTUS REALM**  
is produced by women members of  
the Western Buddhist Order and  
their friends. It appears three times a year in  
March, July and November

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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.



# Social Action

*'As a team we have sworn to reduce the suffering of our fellow human beings.'*

**COMING ACROSS THESE WORDS** in Alokasri's article, I was startled. She had written so movingly about her childhood aspiration to help those who suffer and how at last in coming across the work of Bahujan Hitay she had been able to fulfil her aspiration.

How rarely, I thought, did we in the FWBO in the West speak in those terms. We speak of spiritual life in terms of development: developing awareness; in terms of integration: integrating the various forces of our psyche into a harmonious mandala; we speak in terms of individuality: developing a strong, mature positive and creative individuality; we speak of taking responsibility; in terms of creating a New Society; but we rarely speak in terms of doing all that we can to reduce the suffering of our fellow human beings.

Perhaps we are afraid of such language. Is it resonant of old Christian attitudes that encouraged one to 'deny the self' in order to gain at last the right hand of God? Does it smack of the Brownie girls promise to 'think of others before oneself...to serve God and the Queen..' and so on? Are we afraid that dedicating ourselves to doing all that we can to alleviate the suffering of our fellows will mean - like the over-worked and harassed mother - forgetting about ourselves?

Perhaps it is understandable that we have become wary of such language. But perhaps it is time we moved on - moved on from the religious and cultural conditioning that has made us wary and time that we became more truly Buddhist.

Mahayana Buddhism speaks the language of altruism so movingly, so beautifully. In his long, devotional poem, the *Bodhicaryavatara*, Santideva praises the arising of the Bodhicitta, that will to Enlightenment for the sake of all beings as 'an unprecedented wonder', 'the panacea that relieves the world of pain'. Santideva leaves us in no doubt that the desire to alleviate the suffering of fellow creatures is the natural response of one dedicated to Enlightenment.

As many of the articles in this issue of *Lotus Realm* make clear, we can only really be of help to others by maturing and growing ourselves. Buddhist altruism does not stress helping others at the expense of attending to our own spiritual needs.

But perhaps there is a point to dwelling more on the altruistic dimension of spiritual life. When the heart is stirred by the suffering of fellow creatures and that longing desire to help relieve the pain in the world is kindled, we begin to transcend our narrow selves, and experience a broader view of life. When a group of people come together with that as their common goal or aim, with that same strong desire in their hearts - how much then might we achieve in bringing about real change in the world.

This issue of *Lotus Realm* focuses on various projects initiated by women who are working directly with people in society who are suffering in some way. I hope their example might spur us on to respond ourselves in whatever way we can - to dedicating our own lives to doing whatever we can, in fellowship with others, to reduce the suffering in the world.

Kalyanaprabha □

*Lotus Realm* would like to thank Dr Pralad Ganvir for his generosity in giving up some hours of sleep to translate the articles by Jnanasuri and Alokasri from the Marathi.

## Farewell:

After ten years of service to *Lotus Realm* and its predecessor, *Dakini*, Vajrapushpa has resigned as editor. Vajrapushpa's contribution both to the general editing and to the commissioning and editing of Book Reviews has been invaluable. I shall miss our lengthy phone conversations discussing, debating and planning... On behalf of all who work for *Lotus Realm* I would like to extend our sincerest thanks to Vajrapushpa for her work.

Although officially 'retired' as editor, she has generously given some assistance on this issue. Her involvement with the magazine continues as a member of the Management Committee.

Kalyanaprabha □

## Correction:

In the last issue of *Lotus Realm* in the news piece 'Dharma for the Deaf', Jane Coskry was incorrectly described as having assisted Hannah Mannasse in translating for the Dalai Lama. In fact Jane was the organizer who had arranged for Hannah and another BSL interpreter to be present at the Dalai Lama's visit, but did not herself assist in the signing.

## SOCIAL ACTION

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# DR. AMBEDKAR:

JNANASURI



Dr. Ambedkar

**"As you  
solve your  
problems and  
difficulties  
within your  
own homes  
and families  
by co-  
operating and  
working  
together, so  
you should  
work with  
and feel equal  
to men."**

**U**NTIL RELATIVELY RECENTLY

most Indian women led lives of virtual slavery, denied all personal freedom. Social inequalities of all kinds are in fact codified as part of Hindu religious law in the text of the *Manusmrti*, which in effect gives all social advantages to those belonging to the brahmin caste, whilst Shudras or 'untouchables' were regarded as being so low as to fall outside the caste system altogether and whose very touch would pollute a caste Hindu. Women of every caste are degrad-

ed by the writings of Manu. According to the *Manusmrti*, women are fickle, only interested in worldly and sensual enjoyments and infatuating men. Because of these traits, women should never be allowed to handle wealth or money. Manu even went as far as to say that women should not be allowed to leave their homes, and should not be allowed education. Nor did women have any right to divorce, however appallingly they might be treated by their husbands. On the death of her husband a woman was expected to throw herself onto his funeral pyre. (The husband, on the other hand, on the death of his wife, could choose himself another wife - and even when his wife was still alive, a husband was free to engage in polygamy.) In this way the laws laid down by Manu which were upheld and respected by caste Hindu society made women the slaves of men, leading a life devoid of human dignity.

These harsh strictures were worst for women who belonged to the Shudra caste. Shudras (both men and women) had no right to earn any money and had to depend for their basic human needs on left-over food which would be given to them by caste Hindus whom they were expected to serve in some menial way. Manu for-

bade Shudras to wear new clothes. Instead they had to wear garments that had worn out and been discarded by the caste Hindus.

During the dark and terrible ages when people followed the *Manusmrti*, some people such as Mahatma Fuley and Mrs Savitribai Fuley started reform work. Those who contributed to the uplift of women in Indian society include Judge Ranade; Gopal Ganesh Agarkar; Karmavir Vitthal Ramji Shinde; Maharshi Karve; Gopal Baba Varungakar; Maharshi Sahu Maharaj; Sayajirao Gaikwad etc. Thanks to their unstinting efforts, the conditions for Indian women became a little more tolerable.

However the greatest effort to improve life for women in India was made by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Due to his systematic and well-organized efforts, the veil of those dark ages is beginning to be lifted.

Despite his background (he was born an untouchable) Dr Ambedkar became a very strong leader. He was a powerful and intelligent man. He managed to awaken untouchable people from poverty, ignorance, and blind adherence to the strictures of the *Manusmrti*, and to kindle the flame of self-respect in their hearts.

He started his work for social reform in 1920 and from the outset gave particular attention to the needs of women. He held the view that to improve society meant improving the status of women. Very skilfully he involved women in his work of social improvement. All his work between 1927 and 1956 (the year of his death) included striving to improve the status of women in the social, political and religious fields. In a speech delivered on 27th December he said,

*'As you solve your problems and difficulties within your own homes and families by co-operating and working together, so you should work with and feel equal to men.'*

Babasaheb's advice was taken to heart and untouchable women worked alongside the men to help Dr Ambedkar bring about revolutionary changes to Indian society.

In 1927 Dr Ambedkar publicly burnt the *Manusmrti* because its so-called religious rules made untouchables and all women lead such degrading lives. In a speech delivered the same day, he told his followers they did not need to be dirty and wear unwashed and unkempt clothes as the *Manusmrti* had directed. From



# Bringer of Freedom

now on they should wash and clean themselves. 'Even if your clothes are old and torn, you can still keep them clean. You should educate your children, and you should not believe that wearing shell ornaments will increase the life-span of your husbands. If your son is an alcoholic, you should treat him firmly and show him the way forward.'

This speech was so strong and so stirring that on that very day people were able to make revolutionary changes to their lives. No wonder that the untouchable people as well as other women believe that Dr Ambedkar is their saviour!

From then onwards untouchable women played an important part in all the campaigns against inequality. On 2nd March 1930, action was taken against the rule which forbade untouchables - though Hindus themselves - from entering Hindu places of worship. The temple of Kalaram in Nasik was entered by a delegation of untouchables. This kind of direct action continued for nearly five years and many women took part, some being imprisoned as a result.

In a speech delivered in Yenale in 1935, Dr Ambedkar said, '*Inequality is the foundation of the Hindu Religion. Its principle concern is to hinder the underclass from progress. Because we are Hindus we are forced to lead this shameful, degrading life. I declare today that although I may have been born a Hindu, I will not die a Hindu.*' Many meetings were subsequently held (including many organized by women) to support Babasaheb's announcement and to discuss the issue of changing religion.

Thus slowly but surely changes were taking place amongst untouchable women. Women leaders were organizing conferences and meetings; and working to awaken self-respect. Babasaheb's vision of equality was spreading amongst them.

On 19th July 1922 at a women's conference held in Nagpur, Babasaheb said, '*Women must recognize their importance in society. Without that there will be no improvement in social life... You should be loyal to your husbands, but on the basis of equality and friendship. You are not a slave to your husbands. Educate your children including your daughters. Avoid arranging the weddings of your daughters when they are young and vulnerable. If you follow this advice, our untouchable community will be able to make progress and it will see deliverance from*

*these conditions.*'

On 16th June 1936 at a meeting in Bombay attended by members of the lowest castes, Dr Ambedkar said, '*You are a stain, a stigma, a mark of ignominy on the community. But women are really jewels of society. Society should respect the honourable character of women. Abandon your sullied and impure lives. Improve your status by changing your lifestyles.*' Women followed his advice, changing their lifestyles. As a result, many were imprisoned for breaking the religious laws of Manu.

In 1928 Dr Ambedkar, who was by then Law minister, was drafting a new constitution for an independent India. He devised the 'Hindu Code Bill' which was to give rights to all Indian women including the right to divorce, to alimony, rights of adoption or to be adopted, rights of inheritance, rights to inter-caste marriage and so on. He submitted the Bill to parliament. However, many Hindu political leaders did not want to see the kind of revolution in Hindu society that the Bill would have brought about. When Babasaheb realized how great the opposition to his Bill was, he resigned his post as cabinet minister.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Hindu religious leaders whose ongoing concern is injustice and inequality were reluctant to accept such revolutionary changes; but it is disappointing that upper-caste Hindu women opposed the Bill at that time. Today the same points from the Bill are being introduced to parliament again.

Whilst drafting the constitution for an independent India, Dr Ambedkar did his best to protect constitutional rights for women including the right to vote. The constitution outlaws discrimination based on birth, birth-place, caste, religion - and sex. Discrimination in education is also deemed illegal. Enshrined in the constitution are equal opportunities based on intelligence, education, experience and capabilities.

During the earlier part of his life Dr Ambedkar made every effort to improve his position and to progress

**"... Because we are Hindus we are forced to lead this shameful, degrading life. I declare today that although I may have been born a Hindu, I will not die a Hindu!"**







Jnanasuri (R) with Vimalasuri and Preceptors Srimala & Ratnasuri (behind)

***"He chose a religion which is based on knowledge and does not expect blind faith of its followers, nor the making of sacrificial rites. He chose the religion founded by the Lord Buddha."***

as a human being within the Hindu religion into which he had been born, but eventually he realized that it was impossible to be allowed even the most basic human rights so long as he was regarded as an untouchable. Since every Hindu is designated to a caste, and since that caste is designated to you by virtue of your birth and so can never be changed, so long as he and his people were regarded by others and by themselves as Hindus, they could never be free of the stigma of untouchability. In 1956 he decided that he would fulfil the wish he had made public in 1935 and change his religion. During the preceding 21 years, he had intensively investigated other religions to decide which one he should accept. In the end he decided to accept that religion which gives independence, equality, and brotherhood to every human being. He chose a religion which is based on knowledge and does not expect blind faith of its followers, nor the making of sacrificial rites. He chose the religion founded by the Lord Buddha.

The great conversion ceremony took place in Nagpur on October 14th.

Women took equal part in the ceremony with men, following their great leader by taking the traditional Three Refuges and then the 22 precepts which Dr Ambedkar himself had devised. Included in the precepts were vows to eschew the gods and

goddesses of Hinduism and to abandon the traditional Hindu life-style. By taking on the precepts, women freed themselves in a single stroke from untouchability, the caste system, religious fasting and so on. They began to distance themselves from the tradition of sacrificing innocent animals to please the gods. Women who had been downtrodden by the religious rules of Manu, who were leading lives of slavery, now started to think for themselves and to lead lives of freedom. Throwing away the chains of tradition, they took up the Buddha's Dhamma.

Today, as a result of Dr Ambedkar's work, encouragement and heroic example, women are holding down executive jobs and are active in many social, political, cultural and religious fields. They are also coming forward to help their poor sisters who have still to improve their lot.

Seven weeks after his conversion, Babasaheb died. He left his followers in despair. It seemed there was no-one else to show the way. Although they had converted to Buddhism, many did not yet really understand what it was. Even now some women who call themselves Buddhist follow some of the Hindu religious rituals. Many uneducated women need much more teaching about Buddhism so that they can practice the Dhamma. There are many women who for instance think Buddha was a god.

TBMSG, which was founded by Bhante Sangharakshita to help continue the great work of Dr Ambedkar, is working to help communicate these teachings to Buddhist women so that they can follow the Buddhist religion properly.

It is difficult for people to come out of the net of blind faith of following the old gods and goddesses. But many are doing so, leaving the old religion fully behind and becoming involved in the movement to spread the Dhamma of the Buddha. In fact many are working very hard for the movement in India along with keeping up their responsibilities to their families. They feel great respect and gratitude to Bhante Sangharakshita who has given them the opportunity to carry out this work. But for there to be a Buddhist Movement at all we have the great vision and inspiration of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar to thank. To that Great Man we bow and pay homage and respect a thousand times! □





# MY LIFE AND WORK for Bahujan Hitay

*Alokasri*

## **BOTH MY FATHER AND GRANDFATHER**

were followers of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and taught me from early childhood about the importance of social work. (Dr Ambedkar had a profound understanding of the importance of social change.) When I was eight or nine, I visited one of my friends who lived in a slum area. I was very saddened by the poverty I saw. I was sad to think that sometimes she had to come to school hungry because there was nothing for her to eat. My young mind could not comprehend why there are such great differences in the

world: why some people are so rich when others are so poor. I could not find an answer to these sorts of riddles, but I made up my mind then that when I grew up I would do some kind of social work to help poor people, especially women.

As I grew older I continued to try and understand those riddles of life. As time passed and I looked at the unpleasant and unexpected happenings around me, my mind began to go numb. I could not understand the unpleasantness of human behaviour. It began to dawn on



**Bahujan Hitay Hostel Girls**



**"I realized  
that my  
dream of  
helping poor  
and helpless  
girls was  
becoming a  
reality"**

me at that time that a man is himself responsible for unpleasant behaviour towards his fellow men.

I began to wonder how I could fulfil my dream of helping the poor, especially poor women. I began to despair for time was passing away. I had managed to get a degree from university so, feeling more confident, I began searching for a way forward to do the work I wanted to do.

It was at this time I came into contact with TBMSG (as the FWBO is known in India) and Bahujan Hitay, TBMSG's social work organization and there I discovered that it is possible to dedicate yourself to social work with honesty and sincerity, and that there did exist in the world good and honest people with whom I could work.

I started working as warden in the Bahujan Hitay hostel for girls. It was a difficult and responsible job. I was responsible for 80 girls, and it was up to me to help them shape their lives. At times you are their mother, at others their friend. To do this for 80 girls was indeed very hard! But I realized that my dream of helping poor and helpless girls was becoming a reality.

I also realized that working for Bahujan Hitay is not like an ordinary job. The aims and objectives of the organization are different to those of an ordinary organization. For us our work is also our spiritual practice. We feel that through our work we too are evolving and progressing towards our own emancipation. Our work is a tantric guru!

As hostel workers, we try to deal with all the problems that the girls have to face. Some of these problems are very difficult to solve. Sometimes there is a difference of opinion in what is the best way forward, but because of our common understanding of our work as spiritual practice, we manage to resolve and overcome our differences.

In ordinary society there are difficulties and weaknesses which can be overcome through educational, cultural and medical progress. It is Bahujan Hitay's main concern to bring about changes in society in those fields. However, we want to go further than this. We are also trying to bring in the teaching of the Dhamma. In the *Dhammapada* it says that the root of everything in human life lies in the mind. Whether you are happy or sad depends upon your state of mind. Happiness and sadness are the results of certain

**Bahujan Hitay workers: Visiting in The Slums**





conditions coming into effect. If we set up good conditions or circumstances, the results will be to our benefit. This is what we are trying to teach people and also to demonstrate through our own example and through our work. To create the conditions for happiness to arise is within your own hands - and to do so will not only bring about happiness for yourself but for other people as well.

Another tool of Bahujan Hitay for bringing about social change is through education. Our educational methods include traditional as well as experimental teaching methods. As far as the latter go, we rely on our own example of making our work our practice. This is not easy but it is effective in helping both children and adults to understand that actions have consequences and they can become masters of their own fate.

Thus in our adult education classes we not only teach reading and writing but also how best to behave skilfully in daily life. For instance, it is unwise to throw the dirt from your house into the neighbour's yard, or into the government's drainage systems! If you do this you will either block the drains or end up having fights with your neighbours! You can avoid much suffering by avoiding unskilful actions. The work of Bahujan Hitay is multi-faceted according to the perceived needs of the people in the community. For instance, in the slum areas where there is no tradition of education, children are not given the proper encouragement nor the space to pursue their studies. Many children therefore miss out on their education, play truant or become the Bad Boys of the community. We have provided special supplementary education

for these children. The effect can be seen in the greater achievements at school and a lower drop-out rate.

For the women in the slum areas, Bahujan Hitay has started practical training classes including sewing classes which enable women to bring in money to help with the costs of their households thus improving their standard of living. There have been instances when the breadwinner of the family has lost his job in the factory and a woman who has learnt a skill at one of our classes has been able to continue supporting the family.

There are also vocational training classes for teenage girls and boys so that they are able to work and/or start up their own businesses.

As well as these educational projects, Bahujan Hitay runs a medical service for women; vaccination programmes for children; and dietary advice services for the malnourished. We also run nurseries for babies; and have established physical education centres.

Most of these services are run by women. I am one of the co-ordinators and keep in close contact with all the workers, making sure that the aims and objectives of Bahujan Hitay are adhered to. This means I have to be on my toes almost all the time, to keep encouraging other colleagues and organizers to keep to the aims and objectives. It is a big responsibility!

Our overall objective in Bahujan Hitay is to create a New Society. As a team we have sworn to reduce the suffering of our fellow human beings. It is my firm determination to continue working like this for Bahujan Hitay. This is what I wish to do throughout my life. □

**"Our overall objective in Bahujan Hitay is to create a New Society. As a team we have sworn to reduce the suffering of our fellow human beings. It is my firm determination to continue working like this for Bahujan Hitay. This is what I wish to do throughout my life."**

Alokasri (centre) with friends





# Bodywise

## Right Livelihood

*Dharanasri*

**"I get a lot of inspiration from seeing each of us change and deepen our spiritual practice through engagement with this project."**

**L**OOKING AT *BODYWISE* from the outside you will see a well-run natural health centre offering a wide range of treatments from osteopathy and homeopathy to massage and counselling. A large choice of yoga classes brings about 280 yoga students through the doors each week. *Bodywise* rents out rooms to over 30 practitioners, including 8 yoga teachers! The enterprise is run as a right livelihood business by a management team of 5 committed women Buddhists including a yoga teacher, a shiatsu practitioner, an Alexander Technique teacher, a finance worker. I am the practice manager, responsible for administration, publicity and business development.

*Bodywise* provides a supportive, friendly and healing environment where patients and students get a taste of alternative ways of working with the mind and body. Through the Alexander Technique and yoga classes, students become aware of their bodies in a new way, discovering how old habits create tension and discomfort. Through the classes they learn to work creatively with both their mind and their body, letting go of old limiting habits. Some students go on to take up the practice of meditation.

Complementary medicine takes the whole person into account, including the patient's

life-style, diet and other habits. The therapists and practitioners encourage their patients and students to take more responsibility for themselves, making changes to their lives to set up more positive conditions for themselves. This

counteracts the tendency on the part of some patients to see a therapist as providing a magic cure-all solution without needing to make any effort themselves.

*Bodywise* practitioners give patients more time than is possible in doctors' surgeries and hospitals. This time and individual attention can be therapeutic in itself as patients are able to communicate more fully enabling the practitioner to gain a fuller picture of their complaint.

Since 1992 *Bodywise* has received funding from the local health authority for providing treatment in osteopathy, homeopathy and acupuncture to patients referred to us by their local doctor. Doctors have responded very positively to the work done at

*Dharanasri Bodywise*. Unfortunately the

level of funding is not enough to cover all the patients doctors would like to send to us.

### **BODYWISE COMMUNITY**

An unusual aspect of the team which runs *Bodywise* is that we live together as a community. It was a major step forward in consolidating the team and taking it onto a new level of intensity and commitment. There is a collective morning meditation practice and each week a community evening. At work the team spends one afternoon together each week. In our team meetings we discuss the managing of *Bodywise* and study the Dharma. In our community evenings





we might report in on our week, or on a particular theme, share life-stories, give one person an evening to talk about an aspect of their life and practice of the Dharma so that they can gain more perspective on it. Sometimes we just get together for some fun and take a trip to the theatre or cinema!

## GIVING AND TAKING

Income from *Bodywise* activities is put into a common fund, the *Bodywise* charity. Each team member receives weekly support for ongoing needs, all food, clothes, entertainment etc. with rent, retreat allowance and any other needs coming out of the common fund. Previously some team members were self-employed whilst others were supported by *Bodywise*. Now we all have the same financial arrangement, thus simplifying our lives and loosening individual concern with getting enough to live on with all the preoccupation and anxiety that can entail. I still have to manage and prioritize my spending, but my finances are part of the bigger business picture and not just a personal concern.

Sharing money and resources saves money and means we give more money away to activities in the FWBO which we would like to support. Taking the step of sharing our finances meant we had to open up this usually private area of our lives, explore our individual relationships to money and become aware of the varying levels of trust between us. In doing this a stronger sense of our interconnectedness has been revealed. We have developed a greater interest in each other's field of work, sharing our delights and struggles of our engagement with the world.

## CREATING SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

Living and working together brings in a variety of ways of getting to know each other so friendships can deepen. There are spontaneous meetings, over breakfast, in the *Bodywise* office, chats after a class. Then there are planned meetings, community evenings and so on. These interactions help to create a working spiritual community where the division between our 'facing the world' persona and our private self begins to

break down as we get to know each other in all our differences and similarities. We have created an intensive crucible-like context within which we can Go for Refuge, through developing living spiritual friendship, coming more deeply into relationship with each other and with ourselves.

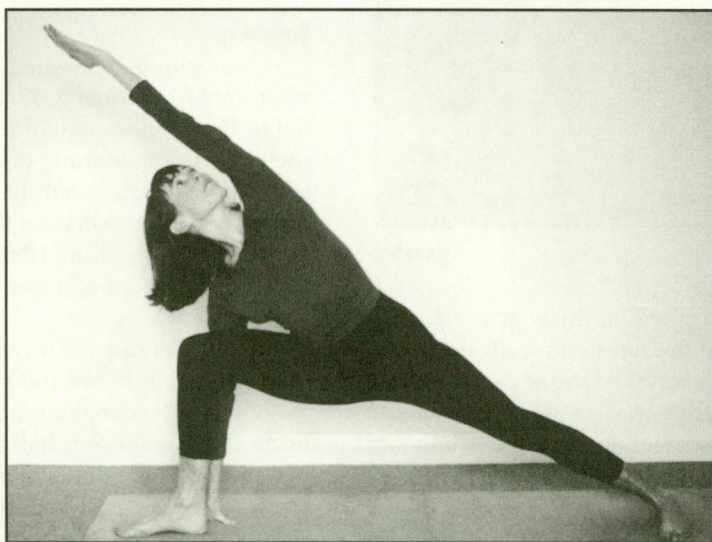
Working in a business, teaching classes, seeing patients for massage, osteopathy, shiatsu and the Alexander Technique is demanding work, involving intensive contact with individuals, groups and the local community. In the past my work and home life were about creating and maintaining my personal financial, physical and emotional needs. At *Bodywise* I am part of a network of conditions which enables each of us to operate on a level to include and go beyond those basic needs and beyond the capacity of 5 people working solo. There is care, mutual concern and a common vision that provides a positive base from which to relate to the community at large.

The regular contact with community members reflects back my limitations, affirms and supports my efforts and brings me great pleasure and joy. Having regular contact with people who know me well and have my interests at heart can be very helpful when I get stuck. They can help me clarify issues, provide practical help and emotional encouragement. I get a lot of inspiration from seeing each of us change and deepen our spiritual practice through engagement with this project.

I don't find it a situation in which I can settle down and not feel challenged. I am brought up against my resistance to connecting more deeply with other human beings; my desire to follow unconscious habits and to limit my effort. There are challenges in communication, opportunities to intensify my practice of mindfulness and metta, and stretch my ability to respond kindly and honestly. I cannot happily just do what I want to do when I want

to do it! There is a struggle, a tension, at times painful, between individuals and the overall situation. This is of spiritual benefit to each of us engaging wholeheartedly in this context providing opportunities for the arising of Insight into the nature of reality. □

**"There is a struggle, a tension, at times painful, between individuals and the overall situation. This is of spiritual benefit to each of us engaging wholeheartedly in this context providing opportunities for the arising of Insight into the nature of reality."**





# HEALTH AND HELP

*Karunadevi*

*Buddhism stands for the creation of the ideal society as well as for the creation of an ideal individual.<sup>1</sup>*

*You learn what it is you are trying to do in the process of trying to do it.<sup>2</sup>*

Sangharakshita

**"... I wanted it to be my life's work - I wanted it to be both spiritual work and a vocation, work that would nourish a broader dimension of human potential within and contribute to a vision for a better society ...."**

**THE DALY CITY YOUTH** Health Center opened in April 1990 as a small medical clinic with a few hours of counselling service. Today it is a multi-service center offering free medical care, mental health counselling, vocational guidance and job search skills, health education, HIV testing and counselling, a comprehensive pregnancy prevention project, and gang, violence, and truancy prevention and intervention services. It serves over 1200 teenagers on site yearly and reaches another 500 - 700 on the school campuses.



Karunadevi

The Center is located on the edge of San Francisco in one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the United States. Many of the teenagers who use our services are immigrants. Their families are struggling to earn a living and are not able to afford the expense of health insurance, nor are they able to pay for medical care.

The problems people bring to our Center include acute illnesses, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, suicidality, depression, physical or sexual abuse, problems with family members and relationships, involvement in gangs and violence, drug or alcohol abuse. One young woman, 'Ruth', came because her father, an alcoholic, had been beating both her and her mother for years. When she finally spoke out against him to the authorities, the family denied there was a problem. This caused Ruth considerable confusion and conflict. She periodically ran away and became sexually promiscuous. Coming to our Center, she found a sense of family and began to rely more and more on the staff for support. This helped her to graduate from High School and enrol in a nursing programme at the community college and so to earn enough money to move out of her parents' home.

## **Beginnings**

It was spring 1988 when I embarked on what were to become two major activities: one led to the development of the Health Center; the other to establishing the Bay Area FWBO which now has an established Buddhist Center in San Francisco. Almost a decade later I have become director of the Health Center, and the women's mitra convenor at the Buddhist Center.

My life was ripe for these two endeavours: my son had left home and was in his first year at college. My daughter, then aged ten, was living with me for only half the week. I had not been living with a sexual partner for four years - the first time I'd ever experienced that kind of independence. I was taking my work and my



# *for American Teens*

spiritual life seriously and I was not distracted by emotional entanglement with a man or needing his involvement in every aspect of my life!

Prior to that my life's work had reached a point where my heart and mind were yearning for more depth of expression. I needed something that would fully engage my energies and creativity and bring me more immediately into contact with individual and collective efforts for social benefit. I wanted it to be my life's work - I wanted it to be both spiritual work and a vocation, work that would nourish a broader dimension of human potential within and contribute to a vision for a better society, whilst enabling me to support myself and my two children.

One project fed the other. I found I needed to develop a balance in my life between outward-moving energies and inward reflection. I needed to cultivate inner spiritual confidence whilst gaining worldly confidence. I came up against my limitations in both arenas, meeting challenges that demanded patience and letting go of rigid expectations. The practices I was engaged in on the meditation cushion resulted in deeper awareness of myself, some of it exhilarating and some of it terrifying and painful. The same thing was happening as I proceeded to try to turn the idea of a health centre into something concrete that could really benefit people.

What happened in 1988 was also the result of eight years of Buddhist practice, as well as having developed my vocational skills to include administration, grant writing, and four years of experience successfully creating small educational programmes

## **Antecedents**

But how did I get to that point? Two years before I had discovered that I am a Buddhist, I made a major career change which greatly influenced my attitude to work. Prior to that, before my second child was born, I had been an elementary school teacher for 12 years, but I never really took my work seriously; family life and relationships always took priority. After my second child was born, I went to work part-time



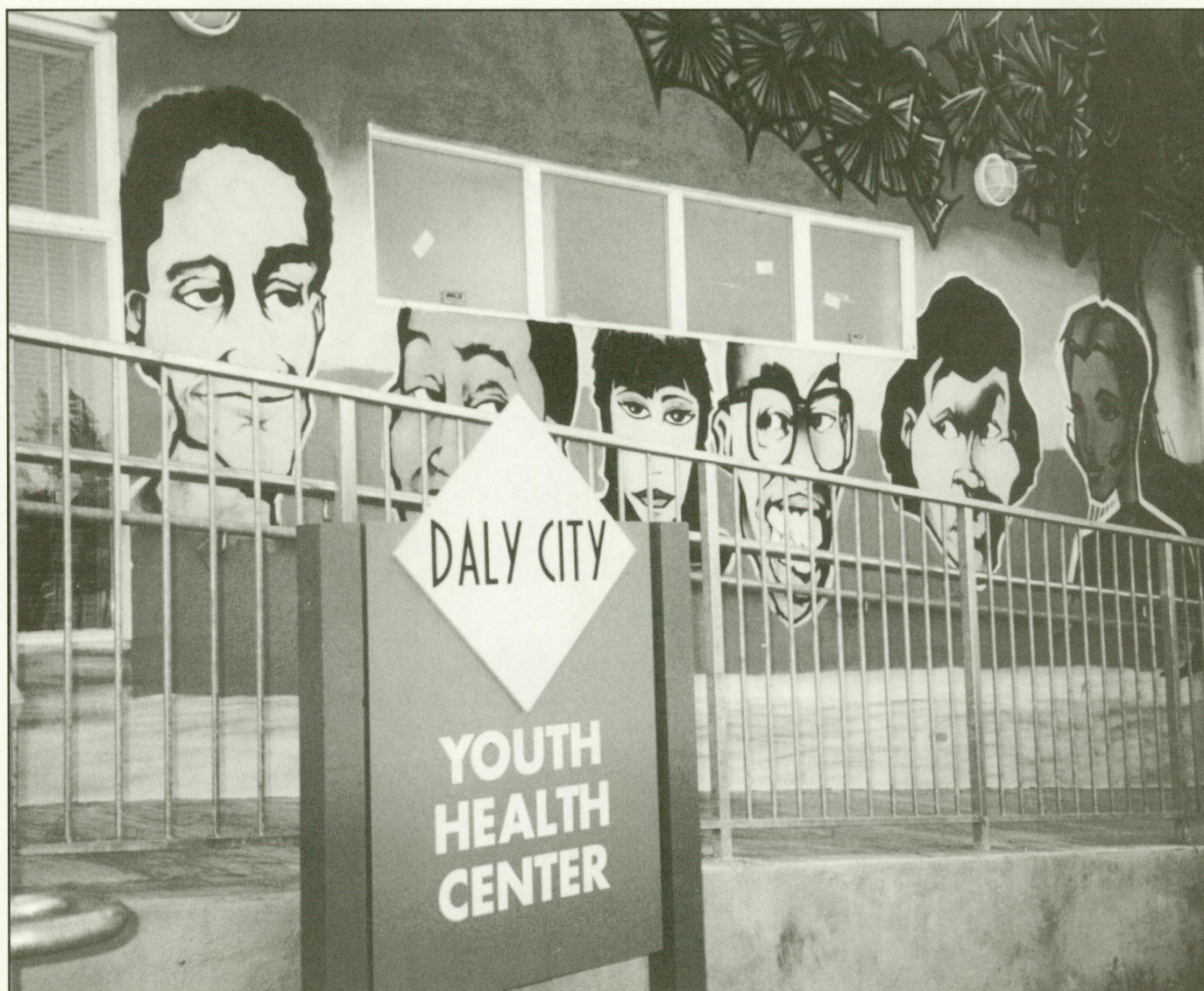
**Study group with Karunadevi (R) at San Francisco Buddhist Center**

for a non-profit work resource centre called New Ways to Work. I was a vocational counselor and co-director in a small experimental collective organization which helped people examine their work in the context of their whole lives and the society in which they lived. We stressed the importance of socially constructive work and integrating work with life. We conducted workshops and seminars called "New Ways to Work and Live" and "Create Your Own Work".

The most important thing I learned was that work, my work, could have a broader effect on society, and could be a vehicle for social and personal transformation. I also learned that collectivity is very difficult, in fact impossible, without individuality and a sense of personal responsibility. During this time I discovered Buddhism, and this had a significant effect on how I approached my clients. I began to take work more seriously.

The agency closed down in the 80's and I went back to education. I taught adults who were high-school drop-outs needing an alternative to the high-school diploma, usually for employment purposes. Within two years I became the manager, but five months later, due to budget cuts, the centre closed down. This is when I really started to take work seriously. Two





**"Whenever  
you make  
that small  
triumph over  
your own  
selfish interest  
by meeting  
the needs of  
the moment,  
you are  
taking a small  
spiritual step  
into a new  
more  
expanded  
self. "**

other staff members and I started to apply for grants to keep the services alive in decentralized locations, in adult schools and in the jails. Our applications were successful and these programs still exist. For the next two years I continued to apply for grants for new alternative education programmes in the county.

#### **Health Center and Buddhist Center**

It was in 1988 that I met a woman paediatrician who wanted to conduct a survey of adolescent health attitudes and behaviours. This became the starting point for what is now the Daly City Youth Health Center. I was attracted to the project because I had seen the effects of unmet physical, emotional, and social health needs on school-aged teenagers struggling with poverty, peer pressure, drugs, pregnancy, employment, and school. The Health Center is the largest and most challenging project I've ever taken on and I know that I could not have done it without my Buddhist practice.

Coincidentally and fortunately it was also at this time that I met Manjuvajra, a member of the Western Buddhist Order, and, with two friends, both now ordained members of the

Western Buddhist Order themselves, I began to help set up an FWBO meditation and study group here. Regular meditation, discussing the Dharma, and cultivating spiritual friendship helped me to create the conditions within myself, such as confidence, concentration, perseverance, and patience to move toward and refine the vision I had for social and personal transformation.

I am very grateful for the opportunities and success I have had - although it has not been without difficulties. A common and painful pitfall is viewing work as an extension of oneself and as a dependable source for self-confidence and meaning. I have had to struggle with the inevitable disappointment and lack of confidence which is experienced when things don't go the way you want them to. This often leads to over-working and is detrimental to spiritual development, because life gets out of balance. One usually perceives that there is little time to devote to meditation and other spiritual activities and views these activities as quite separate from the rest of life.

Doubt has also been a difficult issue for me, especially when the demands of the work at the



Health Center create stress and interfere with my time and abilities to be an effective Dharma teacher and spiritual friend. This is going to continue to happen, probably until I am a stream-entrant, or until I work out a way of reducing my responsibilities at the Health Center.

An important recent development is that now five women mitras from our FWBO sangha work at the Center with me. We meet weekly over lunch to report-in on our work and our lives. This helps us to consciously relate to our work as spiritual practice and to deepen our friendships with one another in this context.

I have found that an effective way we can maintain a balanced perspective is to define work as an expression of ourselves, a giving of ourselves. Subhuti talks about livelihood as taking a step beyond ourselves, beyond ego-clinging.

*'Whenever you make that small triumph over your own selfish interest by meeting the needs of the moment, you are taking a small spiritual step into a new more expanded self.'*<sup>3</sup>

Whatever one's work, given it is reasonably ethical or at least not unethical, becoming more aware of each action, interaction, decision made, word spoken, etc., will naturally bring more meaning, satisfaction, and balanced effort to the work. Work as a giving of ourselves can take us beyond ourselves, beyond our selfish desires and narrow perspective. To quote Sangharakshita,

*'If we are not prepared to meet the needs of the moment, to put ourselves out, how are we going to take that leap beyond ourselves into the Transcendental?'*

Sangharakshita emphasizes the act of Going for Refuge as the central act of a Buddhist life - the essential criterion of being a Buddhist. This act of Going for Refuge has several dimensions, one of which is the altruistic dimension. That altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge is our work, or you could say our work needs to become an expression of the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge. As our commitment to spiritual life deepens, we develop a sense of responsibility that extends in ever widening circles, and we find our work broadens. This altruism is referred to in Mahayana Buddhism as the Bodhisattva Ideal.

Lama Govinda writes that the Bodhisattva Ideal 'reveals the essential basis of the Dharma: selflessness, readiness to sacrifice oneself from love and compassion, and the rejection of self-interest for the benefit of others. The Buddha was a living example. His whole existence and activity was a living expression of what is the kernel of the Bodhisattva vow: "Whatever may be the highest perfection of the human spirit, may I realize it for the benefit of all beings."' <sup>4</sup>

Work can provide a means for us to challenge our limitations through persistent awareness, patience, and self-compassion for the

benefit of all. To quote Lama Govinda again,

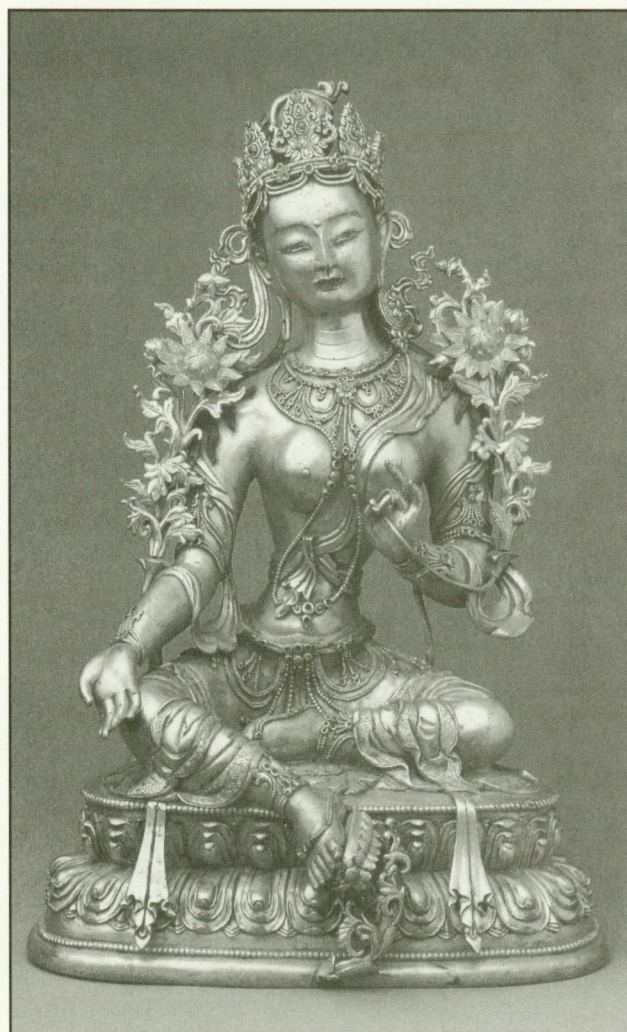
*'Nobody can say in advance where the boundaries lie of one's creative powers. In fact, it is probable that the intensity of our effort and the power of our devotion to the goal determines where these boundaries lie, so that whoever seeks the highest goal with total commitment of his psychic energy will become imbued with the greatest strength and his limitations will increasingly vanish into the endless distance.'*<sup>5</sup>

**"... whoever seeks the highest goal with total commitment of his psychic energy will become imbued with the greatest strength and his limitations will increasingly vanish into the endless distance."**

#### Notes:

1. Sangharakshita, *Vision and Transformation*, Windhorse 1990, p96.
2. Sangharakshita, *Peace is a Fire*, Windhorse 1996, p39
3. Subhuti, *The New Society*, Padmaloka Books 1991, section 3, p7
4. Lama Govinda, *A Living Buddhism for the West*, Shambhala 1990, p76
5. *ibid.*

Green Tara





# 'How Can the Sky be Polished?'

## A Meeting with Yoginis

*Varachitta*

*Amazing! an elephant sits on a throne  
Held up by two bees!  
Incredible! the sightless lead,  
The mute speak!*

*Amazing! A mouse chases a cat!  
An elephant flees from a crazy donkey!*

*It's marvellous Makhala,  
Do not doubt! If you're attuned, adept,  
Drop your doubts!*

*Amazing! a hungry monkey eats rocks!  
Wonderful! The experience of the mind -  
Who can express it?<sup>1</sup>*

**"Abandon the notion of permanence and reality. Wander alone in desolate valleys, without concern for your body or life. Work for the benefit of others and offer your body to feed the demons."**

**A swine-herd, an arrow-maker**, a sesame-pounder, one living in a ramshackle hut, others wandering from place to place, not settling anywhere; associating with people from the lowest castes and living on the edge of society; often poor, and frequently unnoticed - these are some of the women tantric Buddhist yoginis practising in India between the 8th and the 12th centuries. Among them were many highly realized teachers of the Dharma, women who had attained Enlightenment and became the founders of spiritual lineages which continue today. Their songs and teachings of realization, like the one above by Laksminkara, are the expression of a mind free of limitations, cut loose from the chains of dualistic thinking. They challenge us to experience our lives in a radically new way.

Across the snow-clad Himalayas to Tibet; back to the eleventh century when another woman yogini was born. Her name was Machig Lapdron. Her lifestyle - like that of her contemporaries in India - was unconventional. Like them she did not belong to a formal monastic set up - nor did she attempt to found one - although early on in her life she spent time in a monastery where she was renowned for her reading ability. For a short period she was a nun. Returning to the laity she was ostracized by

society for her association with a man, Topabhadra, by whom she had three children. This association was conventionally viewed as a terrible 'fall' from the dizzy heights of a nun.

Later in life she defied convention once more when she left her children and Topabhadra to continue exploring and deepening her spiritual practice. She left home to become a lone wanderer, visiting cremation grounds and associating with the outcasts of society - lepers and the poor. Like the yoginis in India, Machig taught both men and women. As with all true teachers, what she taught came from her own direct experience and assimilation of the Dharma.

The Chod practice which she founded still flourishes today. It cuts directly through clinging to an ego-identity, to limited views of oneself which are the foundation stones of ignorance. To do this practice, one goes alone to a fearful place such as a cremation ground or wilderness and then one visualizes giving up what is most precious, that is one's own body, as a gift to all beings. 'All beings' includes demons - abandonment of partiality being a significant aspect of Chod.

*Abandon the notion of permanence and reality.  
Wander alone in desolate valleys, without concern for your body or life.  
Work for the benefit of others and offer your body to feed the demons...<sup>2</sup>*

The life of Machig Lapdron, and the lives of the women tantric practitioners in India have many similarities. For the most part the Indian yoginis lived, as did Machig Lapdron, on the fringes of society, either with spiritual consorts, or alone, working at very humble tasks to support themselves - as a swineherd or an arrow-maker for example. Occasionally they might meet together, practice and exchange teachings, or they might simply teach one or two disciples, sharing their experience and spiritual insights on a more intimate level.

As their teachings were passed on from teacher to disciple down the line, the original



teacher - the yogini - could become obscured and the teaching simply absorbed into the vast body of tantric literature with no acknowledgment of its originator. It is thought that some yoginis' teachings were not recorded at all and simply died out. If this is indeed the case, it is surely a great loss - records of their lives, practices and teachings would be a source of inspiration to others.

In *Passionate Enlightenment*, Miranda Shaw suggests that western scholars have imposed their own preconceived ideas and conditioning on interpretations of the Tantra, not looking for highly realized women but assuming all practitioners were men, and assuming where women were active that their position was subordinate to male practitioners. Shaw brings to light the vital and important presence of women within the Tantric Buddhist tradition, both as practitioners and teachers. She also argues that far from being exploited in tantric practices (as some have suggested) women were consciously and actively engaged in pursuing spiritual growth through them, thus pointing to the principle of complementarity between the sexes rather than domination of one over the other.

The teachings given by the yoginis presented in *passionate Enlightenment* are incredibly fresh and alive, as if suddenly appearing before us now we saw an unkempt woman with a sharp and clear mind, spontaneously teaching the Dharma. These teachers transcend time, appearing to us as immediate, bright and sparkling - as they must have appeared when they first taught their own disciples. Many attained Enlightenment and their spontaneous outpourings often took the form of songs or poetry:

*When you see what cannot be seen,  
Your mind becomes innately free - reality!  
Leave the stallion, the wind, behind -  
The rider, the mind, will soar in the sky!<sup>1</sup>*

Some songs reveal the limitations of dualistic thinking, many others present nonsensical questions, pointing to a realm of experience beyond ordinary laws of logic and reason.

*Hum! What do you think when you cry out in surprise?  
What can distract you when you stare in amazement?  
How can a sky be polished?*

*What does a butterfly think?*

*The track of a water-bubble can't be found.*

*Upon waking, dream thoughts evaporate.<sup>4</sup>*

There was a very poor yogi called Kantali who lived by stitching rags into patchwork. He was the disciple of a yogini. One day she saw he was having difficulty meditating while he sewed and she offered him this spontaneous song:  
*Envision the rags you pick and stitch as empty space.  
See your needle as mindfulness and knowledge.  
Thread the needle with compassion  
And stitch new clothing for all sentient beings of the three realms.*

Her song matured infinite compassion in his heart. In response he roared with laughter. Passers-by thought him and the laughing, ragged, dusty woman with him, completely crazy.

The bold, unconventional and adventurous nature of these women is reflected in the kinds of places to which they were attracted - forests, riverbanks, abandoned houses, pleasure districts. The kind of woman who would travel alone, or in small groups to such places would have to be quite intrepid. Tantric yoginis, far from being docile and subservient, could be ferocious and untameable. For Machig Lapdron and her contemporaries in India, lifestyle, concern

over what others thought about them, possessions, marriage, children, the expectations of others, all had ceased to exert any power in the face of their deep confidence and reliance on the Dharma. Living outside of any religious institution, with such a shifting, unpredictable and often solitary lifestyle, their strongest reference point must have been their direct personal experience and practice of the Dharma. Their songs and verses of inspiration resonate with a vigour and confidence born of intimate association with the Dharma. □

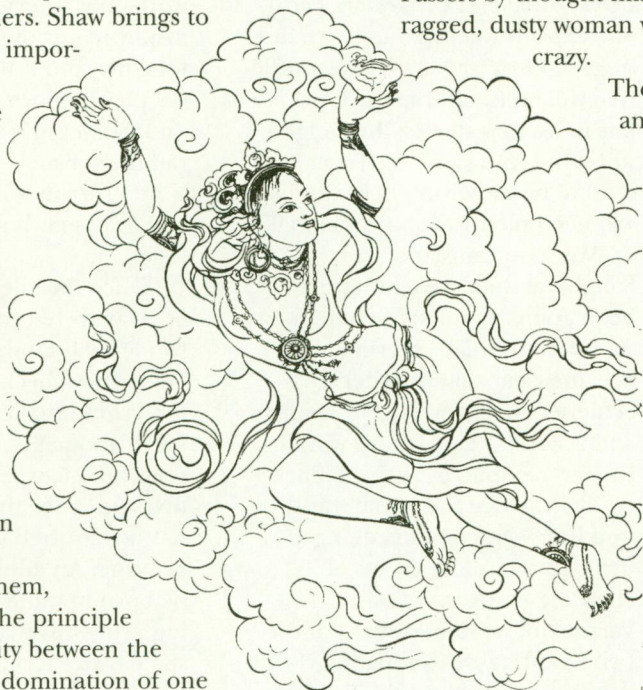
#### Sources:

- 1 Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press 1994
- 2 Machig Lapdron, *Cutting through Ego-clinging, A Commentary on the Practice of Chod*, transl. anila Rinchen Palmo, Dzambala 1988
- 3 *Passionate Enlightenment*
- 4 *ibid*

#### General:

Jerome Edou, *Machig Lapdron and the Foundations of Chod*, Snow Lion Publications 1996

**"concern over what others thought about them, possessions, marriage, children, the expectations of others, all had ceased to exert any power in the face of their deep confidence and reliance on the Dharma."**





# TRANSLATING

## *Le Dharma En Francais*

**Sanghasri**

**The challenging and inspiring project of translating Sangharakshita's teachings into French is now well under way:**

**ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO**, in February 1995, a small team of Order Members - Varadakini, Sanghaketu, Sudhira, Devagupta and myself - went to Paris to run our first weekend event in France. We have continued to run these events every 3-4 months. Since that first visit the little sapling that we planted has begun to grow. Although very few people attended our first weekends, now that we are able to run them in the centre of Paris (as opposed to the suburb where we began) larger numbers of people are coming and we even have three or four 'regulars' who are struggling to keep up their meditation practice in-between our visits .... the beginnings of a small sangha of Friends.

Shortly after our first visit, Varadakini decided that she would move there permanently to set up FWBO Paris (in French, *Amis de l'Order Bouddhist Occidental - Paris*). She expects to move out there in August. Once she is there our little tree will no doubt rapidly grow lots more new shoots: the Sangha will grow. And since the French tend to be rather intellectual, they will need plenty of study material!

Work on translations of Sangharakshita's teachings has been going on for some time now. After a few initial experiments, it became clear that in order to achieve a high standard of quality and accuracy, translations would have to be done by native French speakers. Once the initial translation has been completed, it goes through a careful process of checking and correction. Varadakini (who is French) and I (who am English) sit together with the original text and the French

translation and read out each sentence in English and in French to check for accuracy, any differences in nuances, etc. We enjoy this work - it is a very fruitful and inspiring way of spending time together and it makes us think deeply about what is actually being said. Sometimes we spend 10-15 minutes or more pouring over one word - surrounded by dictionaries and grammar books, discussing it together.

Once the checking is completed a corrected version is sent to two French mother-tongue 'readers'. They check for spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and any other anomalies. Further corrections are incorporated into the text and, once the cover design has been sorted out, it is ready for printing. An additional factor to be born in mind during the checking process is that we are trying to standardize terminology across the Latin-based languages.

At the moment there are seven texts at various stages in the translation process. They include *Religion and the Secular State*; *New Currents in Western Buddhism*; *Buddhism for the West*; *Mind Reactive and Creative*; *Vision and Transformation*; and *Human Enlightenment*. There is a completed translation of *Going for Refuge* which is the combined effort of a number of people. Varadakini is about to start translating *The Three Jewels*.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with one little step - perhaps our efforts will be the beginnings of establishing a Nalanda in France!



Sanghasri (r) with Varadakini



# THE DHARMA

## Starting in Estonian

**Tiia Looke**

**Tiia Looke lives in the Estonian capital, Tallinn, where she works as a psychologist in a Crisis Help Centre. In her spare time she translates Dharma books into Estonian.**

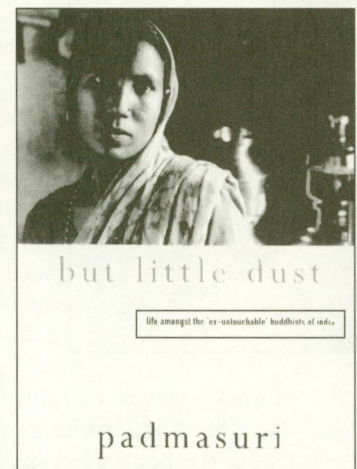
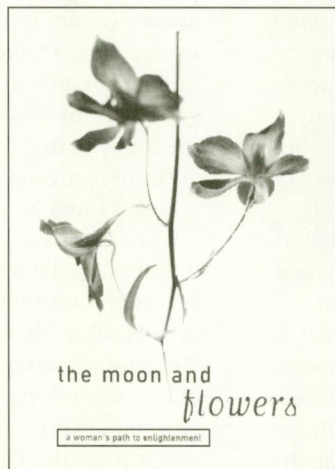
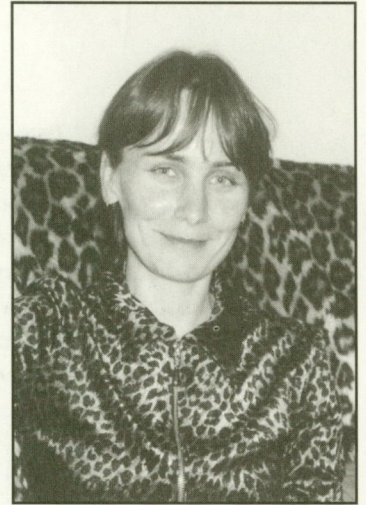
I CAME INTO CONTACT with the FWBO in 1989 and discovered at once the difficulties put in my way as a consequence of the limitations of language. My nearest FWBO group was in Helsinki but I didn't speak any Finnish. Sangharakshita's teachings, which form the basis of FWBO practice, were in English and I didn't know the English language either!

I wanted to be able to communicate with other Buddhists, so I began to learn Finnish. And I wanted to study Sangharakshita's teachings, so I began to learn English. At that time Estonia had not yet gained independence from Russia and it was very difficult to find courses or teachers in either Finnish or English, so I had to learn on my own. I learnt English mainly through translating Sangharakshita's book *Vision and Transformation*. In that way I really began to understand Sangharakshita's teachings.

In 1992 I went to live and work in England for a short period. When I returned to Estonia I

began courses in meditation and Buddhism in my flat in Tallinn. That made me aware of other people's needs for written material to help them in their study of

the Dharma and their practice of meditation. So I began work on



### New From Windhorse Publications... The Moon and Flowers But Little Dust

Available from FWBO Centres or with 10% p&p (15% outside UK) directly from:

**Windhorse Publications**  
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*Kalyanavaca (ed)*

Nineteen women ordained within the Buddhist tradition talk about feminism, motherhood, work, sexuality, friendship and many other issues that effect them as women trying to bring their lives into harmony with Buddhist ideals.

304 pages, £11.99

*Padmasuri*

Padmasuri's story takes us beyond the statistics of human suffering to meet some extraordinary individuals who have begun to discover dignity and freedom on the Buddhist Path.

216 pages, 91.99



Kamalashila's book, *Meditation*, which has now been published; and I worked on translating many of Sangharakshita's lectures. Another project - still in progress - is translating Vessantara's popular *Meeting the Buddhas*.

I have discovered that translating is not enough. Once a book has been translated it needs a publisher and then it needs selling! Sometimes it all seems a bit too much and I wish I could find more people who want to help me

with running FWBO activities in Tallinn and who want to help establish the Tallinn Buddhist Centre so that more and more Estonian people can come into contact with the Buddha's teaching. □

## Giving the Dharma - in German

**For the past two-and-a-half years, Sabine has been editing and preparing translations of works by Sangharakshita and other members of the Western Buddhist Order for publication in Germany.**



Last summer I worked intensively on Kamalashila's book, *Meditation: the Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight*. This made me keenly aware of how the work you do affects your mental states. Since the book deals with the whole topic

of working on one's mind, I found that while I was working on the text of the book, I became much

more aware of my own mental states and how to work on them. Working on other parts of the text, I felt certain teachings really sinking in, coming to mind again in situations outside of work. Translating and editing is a very fruitful way of studying the Dharma - it's certainly not just an intellectual exercise. On the contrary, I sometimes get the impression that I am understanding things on quite a deep level beyond the ordinary rational mind.

My work constitutes the realization of one of my life's dreams. I always wanted to do translation work having studied Russian and French. I enjoy working with language, trying to grasp the deeper meaning so that I can convey it accurately through the medium of another tongue.

The work I am doing now gives me the opportunity of making accessible to others what I myself greatly value, that is, the Dharma. Working to make it widely available is something both meaningful and important. I have gained so much from the Dharma, I want to

help other people come to know it.

At the end of September 1996 I made a decision to take whatever time it needed to turn our little publications venture, *do evolution*, into an independent business in which more and more Buddhists could profit from working with and for the Dharma. This decision was greeted with considerable enthusiasm since up until then only five books from FWBO authors had been translated into German - even though there are now three FWBO Centres in Germany. It is of course very necessary for people who are interested in the FWBO to have access to written material. Even if you know some English, reading in one's native tongue has a much stronger impact.

How I am going to achieve this ambition I don't yet know in detail. However, I won't let myself be deterred - I have a sense that I have found my life's work which will enable me to practise Dana - giving - giving that which is most precious - the Dharma, which shows us the way to freedom. □

**Sabine Konrad**

## Exciting news from

### Windhorse Publications

*April sees the publication of two new books which will be launched on April 6th in London at the celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of the founding of the FWBO.*

**The Moon and Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment** is the first anthology of essays by committed women Buddhists bringing together writings from several different countries around the world

**But Little Dust: Amongst the 'ex-Untouchable' Buddhists of India** is a new edition of Padmasuri's account of her life and work in Maharashtra.



# The Moon and Flowers:

## A Woman's Path to Enlightenment

FOR SEVERAL YEARS I worked at Taraloka, an FWBO retreat centre for women, during which time I was primarily involved in retreats for women new to Buddhism. Over and over again I was moved by the honest and searching questions which were asked by women experiencing their first taste of meditation and Buddhism. *How do you make meditation part of your life? Can you combine motherhood and Buddhism? Isn't Buddhism sexist and patriarchal? How can I be a Buddhist and carry on with my career? What is the Buddhist view on abortion? Can a Buddhist be a feminist? If I commit myself to Buddhism will I have to give up sex?*

For every woman who came on retreat, I guessed there were many more who were attracted to Buddhism but unable to attend retreats, or were not in contact with Buddhist practitioners. A book dealing with such questions was urgently needed, so I left Taraloka to initiate this project. Months of hard work followed, but now the book is about to be

launched. In *The Moon and Flowers* you can read about women Buddhists at home with their children; at work in the world; women meditating; studying; getting together in teams to set up and run right livelihood businesses; making friends; coming to grips with their sexual needs; and trying to lead ethical lives in the midst of an increasingly self-orientated consumer society. Of course these women do not claim to have all the answers. But by giving expression to their experience of practice they are, I hope, contributing to the debate about women's practice of Buddhism. They are also joining the surprisingly slender ranks of women who have given voice to their experience of the practice of Buddhism, who have not been afraid to share their lives openly with a wider public. May it benefit all who read it! □



Kalyanavaca

## But Little Dust: Amongst the 'ex-Untouchable' Buddhists of India

Padmasuri was born Hilary Blakiston in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, in 1951. As a child she was spellbound by a slide-show of African images. Later her interest in the third world brought her into contact with the British organization Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). She trained first as a nurse and then as a midwife in order to fulfil the VSO qualifications. In her mid-twenties, a desire to travel took her to India, a country which later played an important part in her life. She moved to Cornwall in 1976 to do midwifery training and there came across the FWBO. Four years on she entered the Western Buddhist Order and was given the name Padmasuri.

Returning to India in 1982, Padmasuri put her early nursing training to use in a much-needed medical project which she helped to set up in one of the poorest areas of Maharashtra. Most of those who made use of the project came from the ex-untouchable community.

Some years before, her teacher, Sangharakshita, had worked with those involved in the mass conversion movement at which under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar, thou-

sands of 'untouchables' repudiated the Hindu religion which had so down-graded them and turned to Buddhism. Now she saw for herself the realities of life for people whose mere touch had come to be regarded as spiritually polluting. As a woman she also witnessed at close hand the further degradation of half that community in a blatantly patriarchal society.

Perhaps surprisingly, her response to the suffering she encountered was to give up nursing in favour of teaching Buddhism. Her book, *But Little Dust*, charts her progress as she encouraged her Indian Buddhist friends to discover dignity, strength, and freedom on the Buddhist path of individual and social transformation.

This book is full of fascinating insights into the lives of some of the world's most oppressed people. Padmasuri's story goes beyond the statistics of human suffering to find both ordinary and extraordinary individuals who have begun to re-make their lives.

Helen Argent □



Padmasuri



# Women Take the Chair

*The majority of FWBO Centres were set up by men - either individually or in teams. Recently, however, more women have stepped forward to take on leading responsibilities in the FWBO, including those of Centre chairmen.*



Vidyavati outside Aryaloka

## VIDYAVATI

**IN SEPTEMBER '96**, Vidyavati became the chairman of Aryaloka, our largest and longest-established centre in the US. Aryaloka fulfils the dual roles of offering retreats and public classes, providing a focus for a sangha in the New England region. Vidyavati has been teaching at the centre for the past seven years, and was previously the Centre Director. She now combines her responsibilities as national mitra convenor for women with her new role at Aryaloka.

Since taking on the Chair, Vidyavati has initiated a phase of restructuring. Until recently most of the Order members running Aryaloka have come from overseas. Vidyavati herself is a New Zealander! Now American Order

members and Mitras have stepped forward to take more responsibility for running the centre, creating a distinctly more American atmosphere and allowing Vidyavati to function as a visionary chairman, cultivating new directions and maintaining a spiritual vitality in the activities of the Mandala. One of her goals is to establish team-based right livelihood businesses to enable Americans to step out of a pervasive work-ethic that doesn't encourage time-off for retreats, and to experience work as spiritual practice. Another is to develop the retreat programme to the point where Aryaloka can function as a full-time retreat centre, with public classes being held in nearby city centres.

## PARAMI

Parami moved to Valencia with her friend Paramachitta in 1993 to help establish FWBO activities in Spain. In June 1996 she became chairman of the Valencia FWBO.

I came here fired by enthusiasm convinced I was putting the Bodhisattva Ideal into practice, sure that this was the first step in bringing the Dharma to the immense Spanish-speaking world. Of course the enormity and beauty of that vision soon clashed with the mundane reality of a small situation, personality conflicts, living in a country whose language I didn't speak, the difficulty of finding work, and missing friends and familiar situations. At times I thought of running away.

Slowly but surely I settled. My friendship with Paramachitta got deeper and stronger and I made other friends. Personality conflicts resolved and we all gained greater



Vidyavati at Portsmouth, New Hampshire



perspective. I speak pretty good Spanish now and earn enough through teaching English to more or less make ends meet.

Mokshananda, the first Order member to come to Valencia, who founded the FWBO here, now works with a team of men running an Evolution shop which is gaining a good reputation in the city.

Shuddhavajra translates and publishes - a crucially important part of our vision to make the Dharma and Sangharakshita's teachings available to native Spaniards. Other people prepare translations for use by study groups.

Activities at the Centre are still small, but stable. As well as the five Order members there are ten Mitras, the majority of whom have asked for ordination. We run courses and introductory classes as well as a regulars class and a practice night. "An ever-widening circle, the Sangha grows."

Becoming Centre chairman marked an important point in my life here. I was saying: yes, I care. I am committed to the concrete day-to-day attempts to create a sangha, as well as to trying to stay connected to my original vision of playing a small part in opening the door of the Dharma to the vast, rich and varied Spanish-speaking world: to play a small part in realizing the Bodhisattva's vision.

## VIJAYASRI

*Vijayasri recently became only the second woman in recent years to take up the post of chairman at one of the English FWBO public Centres.*

"No one ever becomes a chairman who is ready to be a chairman. You become it by doing it." It was this advice that gave me the most reassurance during the peri-



Valencia

od last Summer when I was questioning myself as to whether I was capable of taking on the chairmanship of the Croydon Buddhist Centre.

I have been involved with the Croydon Centre for 17 years now. I began as a Friend, became a Mitra, then an Order member and as an Order member became the women's Mitra Convenor, so my new role seemed in a way a natural progression.

Still, I certainly did not feel ready to take on the chairmanship when the position needed filling. The decision was a big step into the unknown. I was helped to take that step by the encouragement I received from my friends. In fact one of the truths which became clearer to me was that of interconnectedness: one can only take on such a responsibility with the trust and confidence of others.

Having been taught the Dharma here myself, and having seen many others benefit from its teachings over the years, I feel much gratitude to everyone who has made it possible for the

Dharma to be taught in Croydon. I feel privileged to help carry on this work. The Buddha said, "The world is burning": the world needs the Dharma - not least in the suburban hinterland of Surrey.



Vijayasri



# Mexican Visit

*Olga Kenyon*

**Reina, Sonia, Isabel, Lourdes, Bertha, Monica - these are the evocative names of some of the women studying the Dharma in Mexico City under the auspices of the FWBO. They meet together in a brilliant blue house (a house resembling Frida Kahlo's house, now a museum) and the discussions - usually voluble - that their Dharma study provokes continues over tea and in homes and cafes.**

They have been meeting for some years now since - ever since Upekshamati, a Mexican Order member first began teaching meditation in the city. Upekshamati

trained for ordination in England where he worked in a restaurant in Croydon as part of a team running a right livelihood business. He left the English shores and returned to his native land to build up a sangha in Mexico City.

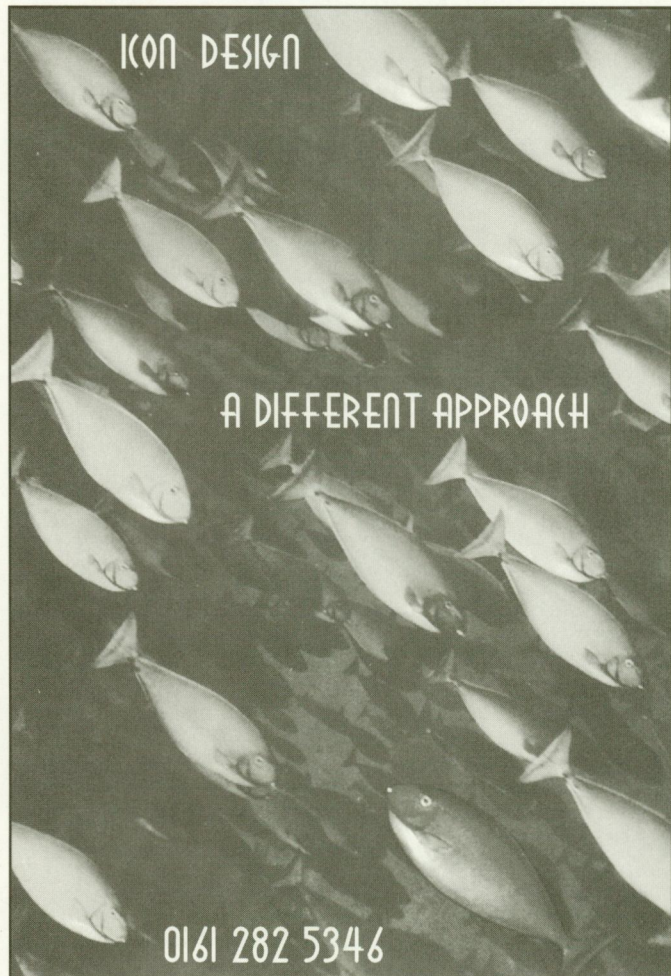
I had wanted to visit Mexico for years, but my career and my family made me postpone realizing my dream until this January when Upekshamati suggested I come out for a month and see whether I could stand the altitude, pollution and the population of nearly 19 million. I found the altitude and pollution had no worse effect on me than those of West Yorkshire where I presently live; and I found the Mexican people friendly and affectionate and they soon took me under their wing.

Mexico City is a place of sharp

contrasts - rich and poor; beauty and ugliness. Many Mexicans work extremely long hours for very little pay. Primary school teachers - mainly women - earn about \$3 an hour; and maids \$25 a week with little free time to visit their children.

Such a situation raises questions about compassion - how do you respond to the many poor who live precariously by trying to sell a few sweets or cigarettes that nobody wants to buy. We discussed these and many other topics in our meetings, drawing on the Dharma to help us.

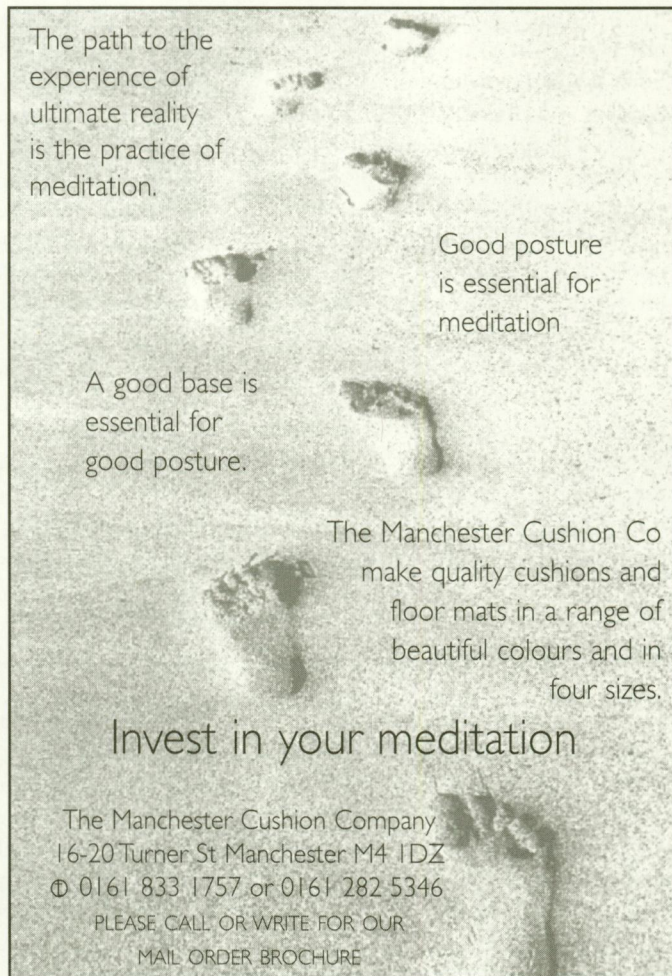
It was a privilege to stay in Mexico City and join in the activities of the FWBO sangha there. I hope more and more Mexicans are able to take up the practice of the Dharma.



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# 'What Makes a Buddhist Choir?'



Ratnadevi

*Music has always been an important influence in Ratnadevi's life. She studied for a degree in music in Essen, Germany, where she specialized in piano, cello and Delacrose rhythmic. She now lives in Glasgow where she teaches piano and uses music and drama to work with people with disabilities. She recently set up a choir at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre.*

"But what do you sing?" is the first thing people want to know when I mention the Glasgow Buddhist Centre choir. 'What does a Buddhist choir choose for its repertoire - and what makes it "Buddhist"?'

It was the ambiguities implicit in such questions that had prevented me from starting a choir before. My childhood had been suffused with the music of the Catholic church; and my first spiritual experiences were probably evoked by performances of great choral works such as Bach's cantatas. Singing and listening to sacred vocal music undoubtedly has the power to stir those mysterious depths of emotion that we call 'faith'. But we need to be clear about the direction in which these energies move - I personally would not want to praise 'God' in however beautiful a voice.

Most people love singing and choirs are a good opportunity for non-professional music-lovers to express themselves. Over the last few years several choirs have formed in FWBO local sanghas, including, in Autumn 1996, the Glasgow Buddhist Centre choir.

There are three main strands to our work. Firstly, we sing traditional four-part music, ranging from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. We have succeeded in avoiding 'God' - but we haven't been able to leave out the romantic myth! Before a recent performance of *Ca' the Yowes* in a setting by Vaughan Williams, I had to deliver a rather tenuous argument/apology for singing love songs on Sangha day! Other thematic choices for choral music include war and nature, the latter being of course the most suitable Buddhist subject.

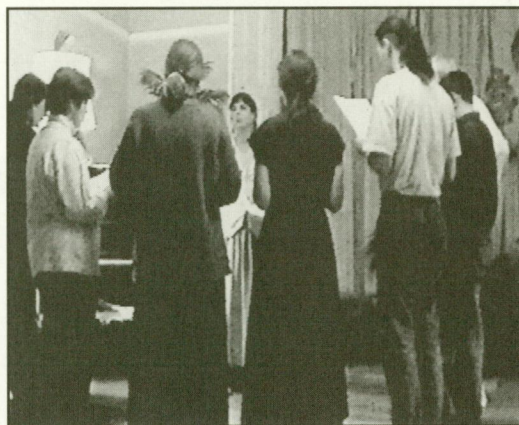
Secondly we try out compositions by contemporary Buddhists such as Vipulakirti's *Meditation* (a setting of a poem by Sangharakshita); and *Stop*, a poem of Ryokan's set to music by Bodhivajra. In this way we play a small part in the gradual emergence of a Western Buddhist Culture. This is a very exciting - and will certainly be a very long-term - process.

The third aspect of our work is particularly close to my heart: we improvise. In some ways this develops organically out of voice-training warm-ups. Awareness of how sounds are made can lead to a natural playfulness: for example, 'what kinds of sounds can I produce using only my lips?' We also use simple musical structures such as those found in all the

musical traditions of the world e.g. an improvised solo supported by a choral drone. Exploration of ancient traditions is another way of contributing to the development of modern 'Buddhist' music. I think we can learn from its simplicity.

But what makes a choir 'Buddhist' is not only to do with the choice of music. It is also about how we interact with one another. In an ordinary choir it is quite easy to hide - but not in ours! Confidence grows in fully participating when we open up to a new kind of freedom. Surrendering ourselves to the form of the composition, to the direction of the choir leader, to the whole of the collective sound experience, we can feel ourselves at times uplifted into an experience of great pleasure and joy.

Looking into the future, I hope FWBO choirs will continue to make their voices heard on festival occasions and continue to contribute to the exploration of what a Buddhist musical culture may really be. In the meantime I would be interested to hear from anyone who is pursuing similar musical developments; and I would be grateful for any suggestions as regards repertoire!



The Glasgow Buddhist Centre choir

Photo: Nancy Muir



# Friends *Favourites*

The idea for a new vegetarian recipe book arose during fund-raising discussions for what was to become Tiratanaloka, a new women's retreat centre. I set about collecting recipes from Order members, mitras and Friends from all over the FWBO, asking them to send me their favourite vegetarian or vegan recipe.

*Friends Favourites* is a compilation of 93 such recipes along with a guide to healthy vegetarian and vegan nutrition. It has original illustrations by Lottie Derricourt.

The recipes include soups and starters, bean and pulse dishes, curries, tofu dishes and desserts. There are old favourites like Macaroni cheese and Tofu Stir-Fry, as well as new, exotic concoctions such as 'Peacock Pie' (vegetarian of course!)

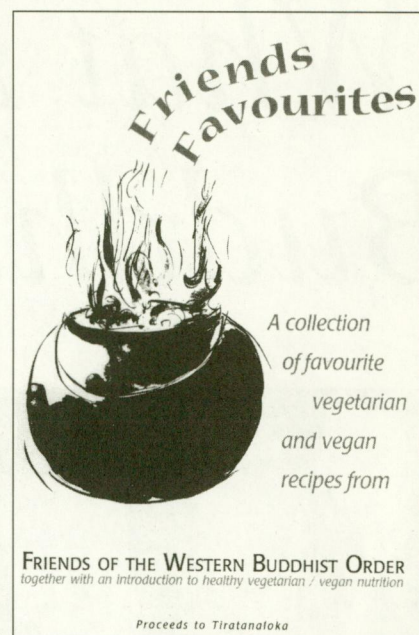
The Guide to Healthy Nutrition aims to help those new to vegetarian or vegan cooking, and well

as those who are more experienced cooks, to prepare delicious and wholesome meat-free dishes.

There is no longer any need to worry about what to cook for your community or how to entice your children to eat vegetarian food! Just order your copy of *Friends Favourites* from the address below. (Also available from FWBO Centre Bookshops.)

## Sue Lupson

*Sue is a qualified dietician and works for the British National Health Service.* ☐



## Order Form

### Friends Favourites:

Cost: £3.90 incl. p&p (UK only)  
Cheques payable to: 'FWBO sarana'  
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**JULY**

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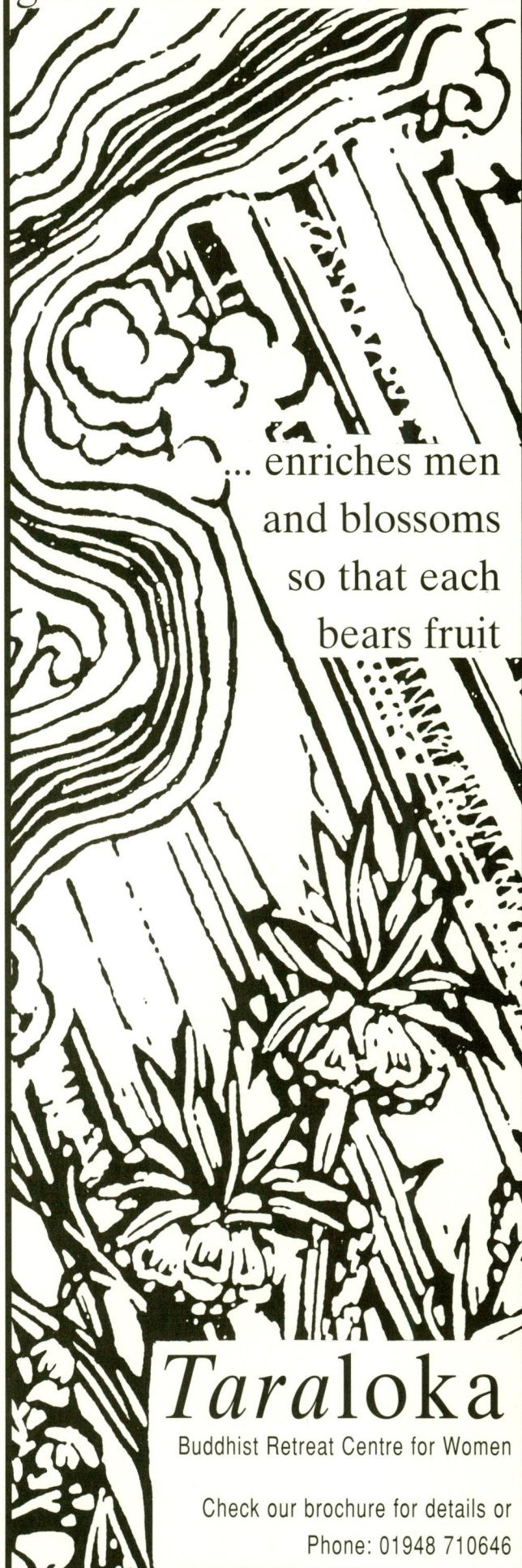
**AUGUST**

Tai Chi Retreat	1-7
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- 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: To be appointed
- BRISTOL BUDDHIST CENTRE** 162 Gloucester Road, Bishopton, Bristol BS7 8NT: Kim Murray
- CAMBRIDGE BUDDHIST CENTRE** 25 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8EG: To be appointed
- FWBO COLCHESTER** c/o 13 Chrismund Way, Great Tey, Essex, CO6 1AZ: Marja Edwards
- CROYDON BUDDHIST CENTRE** 96-98 High Street, Croydon, Surrey CRO IND: 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 Heddson 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 2LD: Dayamala

## EUROPE

- FWBO IRELAND** 23 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
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- 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

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