

FWBO & TBMSG News

News and views from around the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG).

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FWBO and TBMSG News:

Collected stories February-March 2008

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Thursday, March 20, 2008

Plans afoot at Sarnath, India

Vishvapani has recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Places of the Buddha, part of his research for writing a full-length biography of the Buddha. He reports -



"Each of the pilgrimage places associated with the life of the Buddha has its own atmosphere. Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha gained enlightenment, is a vibrant focus for practice and devotion for Buddhists from around the world; Vultures Peak, the site of many

important discourses, remains a remote and beautiful spot; and Sarnath, where he first shared his teaching, has an atmosphere of quiet concentration. Several ancient stupas mark the spots where his former disciples first saw him approaching; where he gave his first discourse; and where he later taught others who had come from the nearby Hindu holy city of Varanasi.

"Across the road from the main site and set back a little is land belonging to the FWBO/TBMSG. To date, only a small building has been erected on here, but it hasn't been unused and plans are afoot to create an international study centre. There's another, separately administered, plot of land in Bodh Gaya".



As well as conducting research for his book, Vishvapani was in Sarnath to support his friend Manidhamma, recently returned to India after six years in UK, and about to begin

establishing an international study centre at Sarnath. While there Vishvapani gave a talk on the land on 'The Unity of Buddhism', which was attended by around fifty people, mostly local Dalit followers of Dr Ambedkar, tens of thousands of whom became Buddhists in the 1960s. Sadly however, they have seen little follow-up in the following years, despite the presence of many Buddhist teachers in Sarnath. Two years ago Dhammachari Shantighosha moved from Pune (in the TBMSG heartland, many hundreds of miles to the south) to look after the land and work with local Buddhists. The people attending Vishvapani's talk had gathered as a result of Shantighosha's work, and over the next three days Vishvapani and Kamalagita led a retreat for ten local dhamma-mitras.

Vishvapani's report continues: "I was very impressed by their appreciation of Shantighosha and by their enthusiasm for the Dhamma. Asit, one of the mitras on the retreat, collects scrap metal, and whenever he visits a locality he gathers people around and he tells them whatever he has just learned about Dr Ambedkar and Buddhism."

Manidhamma will be working with the [Dhammaloka Trust](#), which intends to develop the Sarnath site into an international study centre. Their ambitious plans include a pilgrim's guest house, a shrine room, library and study centre that will host courses and retreats for people visiting from around the world. He also hopes to develop contacts between Sarnath's cosmopolitan Buddhist community and the local Ambedkarite Buddhists.

The project has Sangharakshita's blessing, but it will depend on donations from outside India. If you would like to learn more about the project or help support it - or if you have an interest in Buddhist pilgrimage - you can [email Dhammaloka](#).

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

"The British Buddhist Landscape – Transplantation and Growth"



In June Sangharakshita will be speaking at a major UK conference entitled "The British Buddhist Landscape – Transplantation and Growth"; bookings have now opened and the organisers are advising "book early to avoid disappointment".

Speakers so far include Sangharakshita, Stephen Batchelor, Dr John Peacock, Dr Helen Waterhouse, Ajahn Laow, Rev. Prof. Sato, Peggy Morgan, Colin Ash, Rev. Saido, Ven Sumana, Tony Kemmer, Phil Henry, Keith Munnings, Sharon Smith, Yann Lovelock, Munisha - plus others to be confirmed. It's a chance to get a real overview of Buddhism in Britain from many different points of view.

Click for [more details](#) or a [provisional program](#), these links include full booking details.

The conference is being organised by the [Network of Buddhist Organisations](#) (UK) & The Institute of Oriental Philosophy-UK, and will be held at Taplow Court, Taplow, Nr Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 0ER – the very splendid headquarters of Sokkai Gakkai UK. Taplow Court is a beautiful Victorian mansion in Taplow village, set in 85 acres of grounds and overlooking the River Thames, between Slough and Maidenhead

Accommodation is not provided, though there are many local Bed-and-Breakfasts— or some shared dormitories at Taplow – these are on a first-come-first-served basis so early booking is recommended.

The dates are –

Fri 27th June 2008 5.30pm - 9.30pm

Sat 28th June 9.30am-6.00/9.30pm.

Sun 29th June 10.00am-2.00pm

The costs are full conference £65.00, concessions £45.00 + Saturday eve buffet £15.00, plus the cost of your chosen accommodation.

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

FWBO International Retreat - update; special offerings needed



The first FWBO International Retreat is coming up at the end of May. Vajragupta, the main organiser, sent FWBO News this update – and a couple of requests –

“The bookings are coming in steadily and it looks like it will be a big event. We’ve got groups coming from FWBO

Centres in Germany, Belgium, Eire, Holland, France, Spain, and two people from New York, even we hope, some from India - so it’s looking sure to live up to its name as an “International FWBO

Retreat”. Groups from Berlin and Essen are hiring a bus that will travel across Europe, picking up people from Amsterdam and Gent on the way, and meeting up with the Parisians on the ferry! They will then drive the last leg of their journey up to Taraloka. Bookings are coming in fast with only a few dormitory places left - book soon! - though still plenty of room for campers.

“On the retreat we’re going to be exploring some of the themes and stories of the Buddha in the period immediately after his Enlightenment. This will culminate on the last evening with a puja, on the theme of compassion / responding to the cries of the world / beating the drum of the Dharma, which will be lead by [Parami](#).

“One element that we’d like to have in this puja is offerings from as many FWBO projects (Centres, businesses, communities, family groups, outreach groups etc. etc.) as possible. The offerings would symbolise how each offers the Dharma to the world in some way, in the puja they’d build up all together into a inspiring evocation of the work and vision of the FWBO. We’re envisaging that perhaps most of the offerings will be “physical” offerings that can be placed on the shrine, but we are also open to other suggestions and ideas - e.g. musical offerings, dramatic offerings... let people’s imaginations fly!! Please talk about this at your centre or community and promote and co-ordinate the making of offerings. If you could [let me know](#) if and how you’d like to participate this would also be appreciated.

“Lastly, just a reminder of the post on FWBO Jobs about [volunteers for the event](#). If you know anyone who might be interested in being on the team for 10 days, and having a free place on the retreat, do encourage them to contact me.

And if you’ve not already done so, please think about arranging collective transport to the event, so that a group from your sangha can travel together. To make it easier for lifts offered and needed to find each other, we’ve created a [special page](#) on the Freewheelers international lift-sharing site.

Monday, March 17, 2008

'Broken Voices' book launch continues in UK, US



Last month FWBO News reported Vimalasara, an African British Order Member, was on tour in India, launching her new book showcasing stories of Indian 'Dalit' women. The title, 'Broken Voices: 'Untouchable' Women Speak Out', speaks for itself, the book presenting a series of moving stories gathered by Vimalasara on an extended visit to India in 2007. Click [here](#) to buy the book on Amazon.

Back in the UK an extended book launch tour is about to begin, with the following schedule - catch it if you can!

Monday March 31st - [London Buddhist Centre](#) (LBC) regulars night
Tuesday 1st April - [Birmingham Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Thursday 3rd April - [Manchester Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Thursday 3rd April - [Cambridge Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Friday 4th April - [Norwich Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Saturday April 5th [Nottingham Buddhist Centre](#) – special evening
Sunday 6th April – [Sheffield Buddhist Centre](#) – special afternoon event
Monday 7th April - [Bristol Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Thursday 10th April – [Cardiff Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Saturday 12th April – [Croydon Buddhist Centre](#) – mid day event
Monday 14th April - University of East London - 5pm
Tuesday 15th April – [Brighton Buddhist Centre](#) – regulars night
Friday April 18th [Glasgow Buddhist Centre](#) – special evening event

And finally, the OFFICIAL LAUNCH -

Thursday April 17th – Borders Bookstore, Charing Cross Road, 6.30pm

Each evening will consist of a talk followed by panel discussion and questions.

They will be hosted by the film maker/producer Pratibha Parmar; panellists include Sharmilla Beezmohun (Deputy Editor [Wasafiri](#)), Malati Wankhede (from the ex untouchable community of India), Karunamaya (member of the [Arya Tara Mahila Trust India](#)), and Vimalasara (aka Valerie Mason-John, the author), who says – “We hope you will be able to join us at one of these events”.

After the UK comes the American launch, with a couple of dates arranged so far and more to come -

Saturday 26th April - 6pm [San Francisco Buddhist Centre](#) - everyone welcome

Monday 28th April - 6pm - Modern Times Book Store - the Mission San Francisco

Again a great opportunity for American Buddhists and others to learn more about their brothers and sisters in India.

The book itself is attracting positive critical reviews - '*one of the few books to write about casteism and the situation of Dalits in India impartially*' Professor Bhau Lokhande (india); '*these stories break the heart and stir the passions. Rage against this injustice is long overdue*' Yasmin Alibhai-Brown.

Vimalasara has asked FWBO News to mention that all royalties are being donated to the work of the uplift of Dalit women in India.

Sunday, March 16, 2008

Padmaloka's Twenty Four Hour Garland of Mantras



Padmaloka, the FWBO's retreat centre and home of the men's Ordination Team, has long been known as the home of a series of wonderful paintings by Aloka, the FWBO's most prolific and much-loved artist. Over a lifetime of painting, he has pioneered a unique fusion of Buddhist iconography and

Western artistic styles, yet his health is not good and he knows his time left for painting is limited.

Last year Padmaloka began commissioning Aloka to produce a series of large paintings to fill their shrine room with images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas – adding to the three already there. In order to do this they are aiming to raise around £10,000 per year for the next few years.

All men involved with the FWBO are therefore invited to join the Padmaloka community for a unique weekend fundraising event - the **Twenty Four Hour Garland of Mantras**. This will take place over the UK's August bank holiday weekend, ie 29 Aug - 31 Aug 2008.

The weekend will begin with a talk by Padmavajra, after which the core of the event will consist of an intensive 24-hour period of mantra chanting. During this those present will alternate between chanting, meditating, sleeping, eating etc. Samudradaka, Padmaloka's Chairman, says "This will be a fantastic opportunity to deeply immerse yourself in the mysterious world of mantra and help call forth the paintings yet to come!"

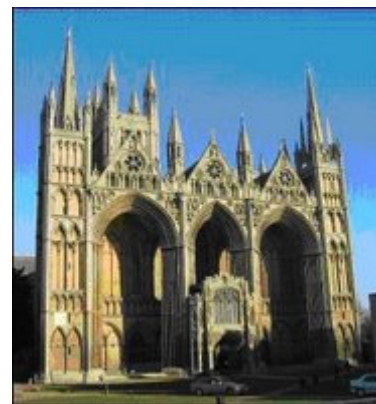
He goes on to add, "When booking for this event you will receive a sponsorship form. The challenge then is to find people to sponsor you to take part in the 24-hour mantra chant. If you are able to raise at least £108 worth of sponsorship before coming you can attend the weekend for free. Otherwise Padmaloka will ask for their usual weekend rate".

The weekend is open to all men – but numbers are limited to 108!

To book please **contact Padmaloka** in the usual way. If you'd like to donate directly, please go direct to the **Padmaloka appeal**.

Friday, March 14, 2008

New FWBO groups in Peterborough, UK - and beyond



The FWBO's **Cambridge Buddhist Centre** is about to extend its Buddhism and meditation outreach activities to the city of Peterborough, UK. The Cambridge Centre currently runs activities in the surrounding towns of Bedford, Letchworth and Milton Keynes.

The new Peterborough group is open to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike and will offer drop in classes in

Buddhist meditation followed by discussions around Buddhism and

issues relevant to contemporary life.

Jayasiddhi who is involved in helping to set up the class said: “it’s very exciting starting a new group like this. You never know how it is going to develop. We have already received some strong interest and I’m looking forward to making new connections in the Peterborough area. Unfortunately the photo isn’t of the new centre - it’s Peterborough’s marvellous cathedral. But one day - who knows?!”

The first meeting is on Monday 24th March at the Friends Meeting House, 21 Thorpe Road, Crescent Bridge in Peterborough and the group will meet on Monday nights thereafter. Classes start at 7pm. All welcome.

More details at the [FWBO Peterborough group website](#) . The FWBO groups in Brazil (Sao Paulo) , South London (Brixton) and South Bristol also have new websites - check them out at [Sao Paulo](#), [Brixton](#) and [South Bristol](#) respectively.

*As, one by one, we make our own commitment,
An ever-widening circle, the Sangha grows...*

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

New Buddhists in Hungary: two people's stories



FWBO News is pleased to present interviews with two new Buddhists, both unusual in that they are Hungarian gypsies, part of a growing Buddhist sangha within the gypsy community.

To give a little background, a little over four years ago a group of Hungarian gypsies made contact with Subhuti and others from the FWBO. They had heard about the work of Dr. Ambedkar and had been deeply impressed by what they had read of his work and the suffering of his people, the Dalits, or ‘untouchables’ of India. They had in fact come to feel a deep connection with the Dalits of India, even, to see themselves as the Dalits of Europe and Dr Ambedkar’s message of social transformation as being deeply relevant for them.



Since that time Subhuti and others have made many visits to Hungary, most recently earlier this month, and some of Hungary’s new Buddhists have visited both the UK and India.

In his latest visit to Hungary Subhuti interviewed two of our Mitras there, covering a wide range of topics including their personal histories, the general situation of Gypsies in Hungary and how they came to connect with the Dharma and the FWBO. Below is a

short excerpt from Janos' story, if you'd like to read more please follow the links at the bottom -

“After one month in India, I came back convinced that I was a Buddhist. On a very big retreat in Nagpur for 5,000 people, in January 2006, I had become a Dhammamitra, publicly declaring that the Buddha is my teacher, that I will practise the five precepts, and that TBMSG/FWBO is my spiritual family.

“But back here in Hungary, there were only Hungarian Buddhists, and I could not identify with them. However, people from the Western Buddhist Order/Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, both Europeans and Indians, came to stay with us and they were completely different from the Hungarian Buddhists.

“It took me some time to work out what kind of a movement the FWBO in Europe is, because these were white intellectual people who took to Buddhism for reasons that I could not really understand. But they were different from the Hungarian Buddhists I had met, because they were genuinely concerned with social questions. When they come to Hungary they spend time with us, which Hungarian Buddhists don't do. They have become our friends and the connection between us is very good.”

. excerpt from interview with Orsos Janos

The first, longer, interview is with [Janos Orsos](#), who tells in some detail of the conditions of life for gypsies in Hungary and how he came to become a Buddhist. The second, with [Benu](#), speaks of his personal struggles for a better life. Click on either to read their story.

If you would like to know more about the FWBO's work in Hungary or contribute in any way please contact subhuti.secretary@gmail.com. You can read previous stories from FWBO News [here](#) or on the Dharmaduta blog [here](#).

Tuesday, March 11, 2008



The [FWBO in Finland](#) have recently been given ownership of Abhayaloka, their much-loved retreat centre about an hour or so north of Helsinki. It is a very beautiful place, set in archetypal Finnish countryside, in a pine and birch forest and next to a lake - which is complete with traditional wood-fired sauna, rowing boat and more.

At this time of year, Finland is in the depths of winter and the light is dark and magical, the land covered in snow and the lakes frozen over. There is a natural imperative to reflect and turn one's energies restfully inward. The retreat centre is an old wooden school house which is a delightfully quiet, contained and warm practice space.

To cover the running costs they need to hire out the place a few times a year. They would be very keen to see FWBO groups or teachers from outside of Finland make use of the place and can offer very reasonable rates for hire. If you're interested contact [FWBO Helsinki](#).

Sunday, March 09, 2008

Sangharakshita in 2007 - part 2



Part II of Sangharakshita's activities in 2007 –

Bhante's daily routine: Whilst at home, in Madhyamaloka, Bhante continued his daily routine of 'reading' correspondence (all correspondence is now read to him), dictating replies, dealing with any other business, taking his daily morning walk and receiving

personal visitors. Over the year he saw 245 people individually at Madhyamaloka. If we include people he saw during his many trips during the number of individuals he met with would be approaching 300.

Bhante's Health: As mentioned above Bhante's general health continues to be good. At the beginning of the year he was able to read large type, and smaller type with the help of a magnifying glass. Unfortunately, from about the middle of the year there was a return of the macular degeneration to one of his eyes. A course of treatment of Avastatin intraocular injections was started in October. This will only arrest further deterioration and his eyesight is unlikely to improve. He continues regular acupuncture with Rosie Roper.

August: He travelled to Padmaloka staying there during the combined Order Convention and for the first weekend of the Men's Convention. There he attended a number of events and gave talks. He had lunches with groups of Order members from India, Australasia, US and Canada and the Spanish speaking world.

September: He attended the Meditation forum at Madhyamaloka and visited the Glasgow and Edinburgh centres giving a talk on one of his 'Precious Teachers' at both centres, plus a Q&A for Order Members in Glasgow.

October: He attended a seminar led by Subhuti entitled 'Sangharakshita as Teacher'. He was visited by a group of Hungarian gypsies and led study on the Heart Sutra at Taraloka for the Women's Mitra Convenors.

November: This began with a visit Germany, again accompanied by Nityabandhu, where he first went to the Vimaladhātu retreat centre, then the Essen centre where he gave a Q&A session for Order Members and a talk on another of his 'Precious Teachers'. He concluded the trip to Germany with a visit to the new centre in Dusseldorf. He visited the Cambridge Buddhist centre where he gave a Q&A session for Order members and a talk and book launch on 'Precious Teachers'. The month was concluded with a trip to the Bristol Buddhist Centre where he also gave a Q&A session for Order members and a talk on his 'Precious Teachers'.

December: He spent at home but was visited by Dayaratna's chapter from Cambridge.

At each of the centres he visited, apart from talks and Q&A sessions, he met with small groups for meals and people individually. Bhante made the comment that wherever he visited FWBO centres he saw them to be in a very healthy state.

Recent News and Future Plans: At present, Bhante is working on a new Spoken Word book with the help of Samacitta. The book is based on a seminar he led many years ago on Nagarjuna's Ratnamala or Precious Garland. Samacitta reads the transcript to him, which has already been lightly edited by Vidyadevi, and he dictates to her any corrections or alterations. They have already completed more than two-thirds of the work. The book will probably be published under

the title 'Mahayana Ethics'.

Bhante has also been having read to him a very interesting online book called 'In the Shadow of the Dalai Lama' by Victor and Victoria Trimondi.

And finally, a few weeks ago, Bhante received a visit from two members of the Rigpa centre near Montpellier in France. The purpose of their visit was to interview him about his connection with Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche. They are creating a film archive of interviews with people who had been so fortunate as to have personal contact with this great Lama. In particular they wanted to interview the two westerners who had known him, namely Bhante and John Driver. Bhante, as far as he knows, was the only westerner to have received initiations from this eminent Lama. They spent four hours over two days conducting film interviews with Bhante.

By the time this report goes to press, Bhante should have been to Tiratanaloka to lead study with the community on the Ratnagunasamcayagatha. Dates have already been set for visits to the Manchester and Amsterdam centres, and a meeting with Windhorse Trading in Cambridge. Future plans for the year includes trips to Sheffield, Berlin, Leeds, Liverpool and Brighton, plus the '[British Buddhist Landscape](#)' conference hosted by the Network of Buddhist Organisations at Taplow in Buckinghamshire. As well as all these he will be attending various events for Mitra Convenors, Chairs and Preceptors. So as you can see Bhante really has been getting 'out and about' and long may it continue!

On a personal note the thing I have noticed, since becoming Bhante's secretary, apart from the great energy as illustrated by this report, is his care, concern and love, not just for the movement he initiated, but each and every Order Member.

I hope to continue these reports every two months. Please also see [Sangharakshita's website](#), where many of his books are available

for free download.

Dharmamati (Bhante's secretary)
Madhyamaloka, 18th February 2008.

Saturday, March 08, 2008

Sangharakshita in 2007 - part 1



FWBO News is delighted to present this report from Dharmamati, secretary to Urgyen Sangharakshita, founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order but a relatively rare visitor to these pages. The report will be in two parts, together covering the main features of Sangharakshita's life and activity in 2007.

"In the last year Bhante has been more active than for quite some time, and encouraged by Lokabandhu I thought it a good idea to report on Bhante's activities over the last year. My apologies for any errors or omissions.

"Bhante is now 82 and apart from his suffering from macular degeneration to the eyes, rendering him unable to read and write, he is in very good health. This report will be a brief overview of his activities in 2007 concluding with some of his plans for 2008. If you are interested in a more detailed account from the various places he visited please contact the local centre concerned.

January: Bhante attended the Men's Mitra convenors meeting at Padmaloka where he led study on 'The Taste of Freedom'. He was also visited at Madhyamaloka by a group of Order members and Mitras from Essen.

February: He met up with members of Windhorse Trading and attended a Q&A session with the Dharmadhuta students.

March: He made a number of appearances at the College of Public Preceptors meeting at Madhyamaloka. He gave a talk to the private preceptors at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre. A group of Order members from the 'Lowlands' (Holland and Belgium) met with him.

April: On FWBO day he gave a talk at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre, attended by more than 200 people. People came from all over Britain to attend. He also met two groups - a 'Death and Dying' group from Manchester and the Buddhafield team. He also had a meeting with the UK Chairs.

May: May started with a visit to Sweden, accompanied by Nityabandhu, whilst there he gave a public talk in Stockholm on Wesak and met the local Sangha. He also visited and named the Stockholm centre's new retreat centre, calling it 'Dharmagiri', meaning the Hill of the Dharma. Later in the month he visited Taraloka to bless their new Tara shrine cabin.

June: He travelled to Paris, also accompanied by Nityabandhu, where he visited the local Sangha and gave a Q&A session for them at the Paris Buddhist Centre.



July: This month saw him attend a very lively gathering at the Buddhafield Festival where he gave a talk on 'Freedom'. Listen to it here on [FreeBuddhistAudio](#). Later in the month he gave a Q&A

session for Order members at the LBC and visited the Colchester centre where he gave a talk based on his latest volume of memoirs, '[Precious Teachers](#)', which was about to be released. He also visited Nottingham where he gave a Q&A session for Order members.

Thursday, March 06, 2008

Dispatch from Nagpur

FWBO News is happy to present the second dispatch from Saul Deason, a mitra from the FWBO's North London Centre, presently in India for an extended period with two projects teaching English. The first instalment saw him in Delhi with the [Amida Trust](#), this comes from Nagpur and the many [TBMSG projects](#) there.



"Arriving by train at Nagpur I hit a seedy hotel mattress and stay on it three days recuperating. This is the lowest point: I begin to think I'll give up and go home. At that instant things begin to happen. I am visited by two Indian Order Members and re-accommodated at [Nagaloka](#), the out of town Buddhist training

centre. I lay on another bed surrounded by a sea of Hindi voices. I venture out at what I think is mealtime and eat incredibly monastic food.

"Reflecting on the finiteness of my energies I start to work. Three days teacher training at [Mitraloka](#), TBMSG's language school in the city centre, goes well. I start speaking classes for advanced students at Aryaloka, a computer training centre also run by the TBMSG. Finally I start teaching speaking skills for basic level Dhamma trainees at Nagaloka. The enthusiasm of the learners is so great that I

find myself forgetting my afflictions and work becomes an antidote to my sickness.

"Countless communication breakdowns at Nagaloka help me map out learner needs for speaking skills. I begin to get a fumbling cognizance of cultural sensitivities. Slowly my teaching strategies begin to become more cogent. In the Aryaloka class – in an all-Buddhist part of town - it goes from strength to strength. We start discussing personal development issues –how to meditate, how to kill fear - only to grind to an apathetic halt when we discuss political issues. At Nagaloka the programme is a more basic one for learners with less English: shopping, booking a rail ticket, describing a friend so somebody can meet them at a station, answering questions at job interviews, talking about qualifications and experience... Things threaten to break down under a vocabulary overload so I switch to carrying out numeracy operations (plus, minus, times, into, equals) with students going up to the board and calculating out loud (so their numeracy improves even if their English doesn't!) Trying to break down boredom I get the karate experts showing basic blocks, kicks and punches at the front of the classroom. We even get round to doing Black nationalist poetry: "Play it cool and dig all jive". After class trainees taunt another trainee for liking Kung Fu movies which are hardly non-violent, "I just dig Jackie Chan!" he exclaims. I begin to feel I'm getting somewhere.

"There are features of Hindi discourse that I know I haven't mastered although I teach the functions of insisting, refusing, expressing failure to understand, requesting clarification. Many Indians were taught in English so they often have considerable passive knowledge of English but they all, basic or advanced, have an enormous need for actual speaking practice. I often meet someone who ploughs through a Sangharakshita text but does not understand elementary English requests and cannot tell when he is being told "No!" It strikes me that the more advanced the student the greater the scope for self delusion!



At dawn I walk towards the meditation shrine into the rising sun. In the evening a motorbike picks me up and takes me into town. We drive into the setting sun. My life is both monastic and worldly. From Amida's Delhi Project the advice of Sahishnu echoes in my mind, "if you are not careful you'll end up teaching advanced English to middle class students who can afford tuition anyway." I turn my back on my classes and do walking and chanting invoking Vajrasattva to cleanse me of egotistical motives. I resolve to check out the classes being taught in the slum districts of Nagpur. I reflect on the prospect of recruiting English teachers and have them stay at Nagaloka before sending them on outreach classes that don't burn them out as I had done in Delhi. Foreign funding flows into bricks and mortar but not into staffing so we'd have to train locals to help us run the outreach classes. The Ambedkar movement needs new initiatives and younger leaders say my students but how do we do that when we fail to educate the coming generation? I plant my meditation cushion on the shrine room floor and admit to myself that I just don't know".

You can find a full introduction and background to Nagaloka and many of TBMSG's projects on TBMSG's [Jambudvipa website](#).

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

Families Overnight at Aryaloka

Megrette Fletcher has sent us this report from [Aryaloka](#), the FWBO's snow-bound retreat centre in New Hampshire, USA -



"From Saturday evening to Sunday noontime during the recent school vacation, a small group of children aged 5-11 were formally introduced to the Dharma at the Aryaloka

Buddhist Retreat Center. Entering the shrine room, these curious youngsters started to explore the purpose of meditation, different sitting positions, making offerings, and sharing Buddhist stories.

"Each parent had a chance to connect with all of the children, sharing



with them how the Dharma has opened the parents' thoughts and hearts. Other activities included visiting outside shrines, yoga, coloring Buddhist images, and reading stories. These were woven into more traditional kid play like coloring, sledding, and sharing a snack. The parents also had a

chance to talk with each other about how they would like to share the Buddha's teachings with their children. Parents acknowledge that there isn't any one way to introduce the Dharma to youngsters, but whatever way is used - including incorporating curiosity - creativity and fun are important strategies to include.

"The emphasis on spiritual friendship that is central to the FWBO was also considered when planning this mini-retreat. The overall structure was purposely left flexible in order to encourage the growth

and development of free play and connections among the children.

"After the event, each youngster was given an opportunity to offer feedback. The older children were interested in more formal instruction in meditation and more chances to work together. Parents thought a walking meditation with chanting might be good for the younger kids. All the children wanted to return to Aryaloka. When asked why, the answer was an enthusiastic: 'It is just really fun to be here!'"

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

Wildmind: Waking Up...



Wildmind's on-line meditation newsletter has a new edition out. The theme is

'Waking Up'.

It's what practising the Dharma is all about!

There's articles by Sunada, one of Wildmind's principal teachers; Vimalasara, currently on tour in India; Vajradaka, long-time chairman of Vajraloka (the FWBO's meditation retreat centre in Wales); the multi-faceted Parami; and Suvarnaprabha, Director of the San Francisco Buddhist Centre - as well as Bodhipaksa himself, Wildmind's founder and director.

Besides their on-line teaching courses and free meditation instruction, Wildmind's site hosts a variety of different blogs - you might like to try Ask Auntie Suvanna for some less serious but still deeply profound advice on meditation and much, much more...

Sunday, March 02, 2008

Rijumati's travels



FWBO News is pleased to present these excerpts from the travel diaries of Rijumati, an Order Member who for many years was one of the pillars of Windhorse:Evolution, the FWBO's large Right Livelihood business in Cambridge, UK. The Western Buddhist Order has always contained great diversity of people, who have always been able to move freely between a wide variety of different lifestyles, based on their spiritual needs and Sangharakshita's dictum

"commitment is primary, the observance of the Ten Precepts secondary, and life-style tertiary, by which one would mean that although all three are of importance, the second is important as an expression of the first, and the third important as an expression of the second."

Rijumati's diary is living proof of this. The letters were originally published in Shabda, the Order's monthly journal.

Enjoy...

Setting out

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

By the time you read this I will be somewhere in the Arabian Sea on a freight ship bound to Sri Lanka.

This is the start of a period travelling around the world which will last a year or more and marks the end of an era of living in

Cambridge. I've decided to travel without using any aeroplanes, hence the freight ship travelling to Colombo. This is partly because I want to avoid the carbon emissions implied in long haul air travel, and partly because I dislike the mode of travelling that ties one into airline deadlines and schedules.

As I got on the train from Cambridge it really felt like I was leaving - after 24 years of living there. Of course many of my friends, people I love, and my possessions are still there, but somehow leaving for an open period with no definite commitment to return felt like a parting. I leave behind a lovely girlfriend, a great community, dear friends and a meaningful job - and yet in the end I felt caged by the nice life that I had in Cambridge. It's crazy to give all that up, and yet I know in my guts that I'm doing the right thing, although I can't explain why. It's as if some part of me was pining away, despite all the wonderful things in my life. So I am cut adrift, wandering in the open sea of possibility.

Read the rest at http://fwbo-news.org/features/rijumati_travels.html

Thursday, February 28, 2008



Taking Buddhism to the Himalayas?

Munisha reports from Bhutan...

Last August I spent a very interesting three weeks in Bhutan. As the education officer at The [Clear Vision Trust](#), I'd been asked by the Bhutanese Ministry of Education to come and put the finishing touches to their draft Framework for Values

Education - which overlaps with the curriculum areas known in the UK as Religious Education, Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural Education, and Citizenship Education. I asked Joyce Miller to accompany me; she's a Theravadin laywoman and recently retired Bradford (UK) Local Education Authority officer for Diversity and Social Cohesion.



Bhutan straddles the eastern Himalaya. It's about the size of Switzerland, with a population of 600,000 mostly subsistence farmers, mostly Buddhists. Sandwiched between two superpowers, China and India, its survival as a sovereign nation relies on the maintenance of its distinctive culture, traditions and landscape, whilst meeting modern, global culture. Bhutanese are among the millions who have jumped straight from no phone to mobile phone; from almost no TV to cable. They're also moving from 100 years of absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy: March 2008 sees Bhutan's first elections.

Perhaps the most valuable thing Bhutan has given the world is the concept of [Gross National Happiness](#) (GNH): the notion that the true wealth of a nation is to be measured not by its industrial and commercial output but by the all-round wellbeing of its people. All public policy is formed with GNH in mind, and education is part of this.

Our visit began with a presentation demonstrating our understanding of Values Education, and something of Bhutan's present spiritual and political culture. With the vice chancellor of the new university as Chair the officials sat in rank order down a long table. All in national dress, as he entered they bowed in turn, stroking the backs of their fingers across the floor towards their feet. During the discussion following our presentation, we noticed they contributed also in rank order. They'd specifically requested a PowerPoint presentation, which unfortunately became a PowerCut presentation. I won't forget their insistence on hearing some of the new Clear Vision CD of

meditations for young people: the entire room in silence, most of them probably meditating for the first time, led by the voice of a female western Buddhist - me!

After that there were four fascinating days of visits to schools and teacher trainers, assessing the current teaching of Values. And further meetings, and work on the Framework - except that they kept taking us out sightseeing in office hours, so that eventually there were just four days for our work on knocking the Framework into shape,



drawing up tables of exactly what values could be taught through what themes and activities, across all the years of school; all without explicitly mentioning Buddhism. The school system is secular (even if every day begins with lengthy whole-school prayers to Jampelyang, God of Wisdom - aka Manjushri - see photo) and up to 20% of Bhutanese are Hindu.

So, why did the government of a more than thousand year-old Buddhist culture consult a pair of British convert Buddhists? The Bhutanese educationalists we met love the Dharma and are exasperated at the lack of Dharma teaching for laypeople. Many of these educationalists are highly educated at western universities; one said he had learned all his Dharma from an Eastern Religions course at a Canadian university. Many are reading western Dharma books. We heard of school teachers sent abroad on Goenka retreats, much to the annoyance of Bhutanese monastics. "Well!", commented the vice-chancellor - "What are THEY doing?"

I saw in senior educationalists a desire to introduce young people to what I'd call a "useable Buddhism". Most Bhutanese lay Buddhists never learn to meditate or study even basic teachings, because Himalayan Buddhism is esoteric and traditionally the preserve of monastics, whom laypeople support out of a respect for tradition. But across Asia (and among British Asian Buddhists) many young people

are no longer inspired by tradition. They want to be modern, western. If they become interested in Buddhism, it will be because someone teaches it from scratch, as we would do in the Religious Education classroom, with teaching materials such as Clear Vision's, and they find it makes sense.

Our hosts were keen to invite us back to train the country's headteachers in the new syllabus, which is planned to start in January 2009. However, the elections mean that the country's tiny civil service is entirely preoccupied with voter education. Add to this the coronation of the new king in May and I doubt we'll be hearing from them for some time!

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

'Broken Voices' book launch in India



Vimalasara, an African British Order Member, is currently on tour in India, launching her new book on the stories of Indian 'Dalit' women. The title, 'Broken Voices: 'Untouchable' Women Speak Out', speaks for itself, the book presenting a series of moving stories gathered by Vimalasara on an extended visit to India in 2007. Click [here](#) to order it on Amazon.

The book is presently being launched in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Pune, and Nagpur, and in most places the evening will include panel debates on the theme of "Caste - Does it

still Exist?" Click [here](#) for more details of her itinerary – all are welcome to attend.

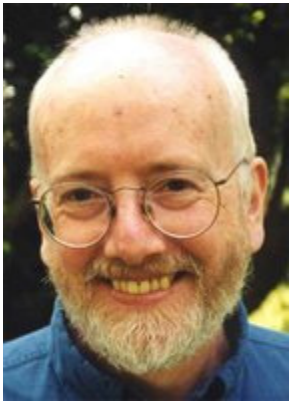
Another book with equally moving stories has recently been published, this time by Baby Kamble, a Dalit woman, whose writings were accidentally discovered by American sociologist Maxine Berntsen. Her book is titled "The Prisons We Broke", and you can read a moving interview with her [here](#) - beginning with the chilling words "I hid everything I wrote for 20 years". She goes on to acknowledge her debt to Ambedkar - 'Dr Ambedkar had said, "You believed in god. You gave away generations to him. Now give me a chance. Give me this generation! Make sacrifices for 20 years. Enroll your children in schools. Go hungry if you must! But educate your children. After twenty years, you yourselves will come and tell me what is better— god or education?" These words of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar touched the hearts of our women'.

It is the first autobiography by a Dalit woman in Marathi, probably even the first of its kind in any Indian language. The book itself can be ordered [here](#).

After her Indian tour, Vimalasara will be heading for San Francisco to take part in a pioneering conference organised by the FWBO's San Francisco Buddhist Center. The conference is 'Buddhism: Beyond Race and Caste' and will be held on April 26th, click [here](#) for more details.

Saturday, February 23, 2008

New article on FWBO News Features – Kamalashila on community



Following on from Akasati's article on Climate Change, "[Community, Nature and Buddha Nature](#)" is a new and thought-provoking article on the Features section of FWBO News. It's by Kamalashila, and looks at possible – and necessary - new patterns and paradigms for Buddhist communities in the light of insights gained during his 18-month-long solitary retreat at Tipi Valley in Wales.

It is also a call for people to come forwards and join him in establishing a new, large, ecological, practice-based Buddhist community in the West of England that would be large enough and spacious enough to include a wide diversity of practitioners – men and women, celibates and couples, children and elders, mechanics and musicians...

Kamalashila is currently on a four-month retreat at Guhyapati's mountain retreat centre in Spain, but is returning in March. You can contact him via [FWBO News](#), who will be pleased to forward messages to him for his return.

Friday, February 22, 2008

Free Buddhist Audio News – Launch of New Version!



Welcome to the news from [Free Buddhist Audio](#), the free download, podcast and streaming service from the Dharmachakra audio and text archives. To receive more regular updates on the site, you can always [subscribe](#) to our own blog.

Well, we've been absent from the FWBO newsblog for a while but it's great to be back. And we're absolutely delighted to be able to announce here the launch of [Free Buddhist Audio – Mark II!](#)

Since the service first began in December 2006, we've been listening to feedback on the site, dreaming up ways to improve it, and working away behind the scenes to bring you a whole host of new features. Today is just the start of a planned cycle of improvements you should see happening throughout the next year, but there's lots to tell you about right now...

The Sparkly Bits

If you're familiar with the site, you'll notice we've made some changes to the menu structure, introducing **three new sections**:

[series](#) [community](#) [study](#)

These kind of speak for themselves! Come and play... We'll be building on these foundations a lot in the next few months. Here are some highlights of what's in store:

- Search and download whole series of talks at once!

- Re-developed 'local' section for talks uploaded by FWBO communities all across the world
- Social bookmarking (sharing) added throughout the site – tell your friends about your favourite talks with one click!
- New social network presences on MySpace, Facebook and Second Life
- Hosting of study materials for the new FWBO Dharma study course for Mitras, including content produced for use by people with restricted vision

Under The Hood

The changes aren't all glossy! We've also done some real engine work. Search engine, that is...

You'll notice, for instance, a [re-designed audio search facility](#). Results come faster – and they're a lot prettier to look at.

And did we mention the beautiful, mysterious '[Rainbow Coloured Tag Cloud](#)'?

We're also very happy to let users of our [text](#) service know that we've [completely re-written the search facility](#) for this too!

The new engine is fast, and extremely precise. There are lots of fancy options for those who need them. And we've integrated all the material too: so now you can search – and read online – all 17.5 million words by [Sangharakshita](#) and the [many other members of the Order](#) whose transcripts we are steadily gathering together. Give it a spin...

Into The Future

You'll find lots of other nice little tweaks and features around the new site. We hope in the next while you'll enjoy getting to know us all over again...

Keep an eye out for more news here in the months ahead – and watch

for imminent transformations as we spring clean any and all dusty corners (hint: [meditation](#))...

And if your Centre would like to know more about how to upload talks to your own special pages on our site, please [get in touch](#)!

Thursday, February 21, 2008

FWBO News ranked no.2 Buddhist blog



FWBO News has been ranked second in the Buddhism section of [Blogged.com](#)'s worldwide catalogue of blogs – and a respectable 18 out of 4,153 in the overall '[spirituality](#)' group. According to Blogged, “we evaluated your blog based on the following criteria: Frequency of Updates, Relevance of Content, Site Design, and Writing Style. After carefully reviewing each of these criteria, your site was given its 8.7 score, “Great”. Please accept our congratulations on a blog well-done!!”

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

FWBO International Retreat update



Here's a short update on arrangements for the upcoming FWBO International Retreat - May 22-26th, at [Taraloka](#), in Shropshire, UK. Vajragupta, the main organiser, has sent FWBO News this report -

"The bookings for the FWBO International Retreat are now flowing in. We've just booked the local village hall in order to be able to provide more accommodation, and we've also heard that one group are going to arrive by barge, and moor it on the canal side near to Taraloka!

The programme is continuing to come together with talks, groups, workshops, and rituals led by Dhammarati, Kamalasila, Padmavajra, Parami, Maitreyi, Ratnadharini, Ratnaguna, Sona, Vessantara, and Vidyamala - with more to be announced nearer the time...

Children most welcome!

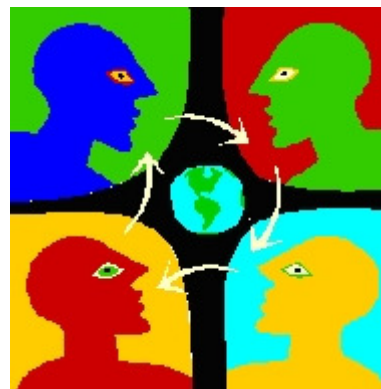
There will also be facilities for children and families, and special facilities for those travelling from beyond the UK.

The event is sure to be an inspiration for someone on his or her first retreat. Likewise, for those who've already been on many retreats, this will be a



great opportunity to experience the magic of practising together in large numbers and to experience the greater FWBO Sangha.

Translations and non-UK Visitors



We'll be able to provide some simple translation facilities for those who don't speak English. During the big talks we will have headphones on which people will be able to listen to simultaneous translations in Dutch, German, Spanish, and possibly other European languages (depending on the numbers in each language group).

Some of the study groups and workshops will also be run in two languages e.g. English and German, or English and Spanish. So, although this means that non-English speakers will have less of a choice of groups and activities to attend, there will always be at least one group in their language.

Rituals will mainly be in English, but we will be bearing non-English speakers in mind, and will sometimes have sections in other languages. Hearing the Dharma in many languages during rituals can actually be very inspiring!

Lastly, we can also offer first priority for dormitory accommodation to those who've travelled from abroad, provided they book before **22nd April**. If you could book even earlier, this will help us with planning.

For more details of what's on offer, please [contact your local Centre](#) or check the [FWBO International Retreat website](#).

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Day retreat in Guelph, Canada



For some years Harshaprabha, an Order Member from Ipswich, UK, has been regularly visiting Guelph, in Ontario, Canada, to pursue his dream of establishing an FWBO centre there.

Harshaprabha has sent this report to FWBO News -

“I made another visit to Ontario, Canada from 31 January till 7th February. The weather was real winter, with a big snowstorm which brought 300 mm of snow to Toronto and 250 mm to Guelph where I was staying. This was the third time it had snowed in the week I was there – but even though temperatures dropped to minus 16 with the wind-chill factor I never felt the cold there as much as I do in England!

“I led a day retreat on Sunday 3rd at a Yoga Studio in downtown Guelph. There were 16 of us for the first half of the day, slightly fewer after lunch. I was pleased to see that there were 3 new faces there including a woman who’d come because she met a friend who used to attend the FWBO's [Colchester Centre](#) at a conference near [Vancouver](#). She teaches history at the University of Guelph.

“Duncan, Sue, Kerry and I worked out after the day that we could

have had 26 people there if everyone who had an interest in the day and/or the FWBO turned up.

"The potential for a Sangha in Southern Ontario including Toronto is a real one. If you feel for this and / or would like to support my 7 monthly visits then do get in touch - [email me](#), Harshaprabha. At present I fund it from my wages and savings. It would also be lovely to fund some of the friends to go on FWBO retreats as many have very little money.

"I keep in touch with my friends there by e-mail and the occasional phone call. Quite a few know each other from AA, therapy groups or [Laugher Yoga](#)! We're a great little Sangha.

Monday, February 18, 2008

Ty Brethyn - a new type of FWBO community



Ty Brethyn – the "House of Cloth" - is a large old wool mill set in the hills behind the Welsh town of Llangollen. The old mill wheel was partly destroyed in the Second World War by a bomb, and since then it has hosted many people and many

businesses. There is one large house, part of which was the weaving mill, and several outbuildings with lots of potential for future development.

Now it has been purchased and is being renovated by a group of Order Members, and has become a new type of FWBO community. The house lends itself to being divided up into separate units but with connecting doors and some communal space. The property feels secluded, though it's only a 10 minute walk into Llangollen, which is on the A5 almost equidistant between the two FWBO retreat centres [Vajraloka](#) and [Taraloka](#).

It is new for at least two reasons. First, it is a new style of FWBO community, with families and single people living together with a mixed population of men, women, and children – seven people in all so far, with more still to arrive. Given that everyone has had to move, sometimes hundreds of miles, to Ty Brehin, the residents have had to consider carefully how to earn their livelihoods – and have come up with some innovative solutions. Tejapushpa, mother of Jaya, is an acupuncturist, still practicing part-time in Manchester and she has just set up a new practice in Llangollen; Satyavadita (Jaya's dad) is busy renovating the property (the cost of this was built-in to their initial budget); Kalyacitta has recently qualified in garden design and has set up a new gardening business; Kathryn and Vibhuti are parents of Phoebe, and Kathryn is a Career Coach, working mainly by phone and Vibhuti a mental health nurse.

Second, it is new because it has a well thought-out ownership structure based on standard co-operative rules - which have, however, been carefully modified to suit their particular needs. They hope this may become a template for other similar groups around the FWBO. Legally it is known as the 'Ty Brethyn Housing Coop', but enshrined in the constitution is a short 'mission statement' and some 'secondary rules' which aim to ensure that the ethos and values remain Buddhist in the years to come. This has required some careful thinking-through of rights and responsibilities, with many complex

issues having to be considered, eg what happens when children grow up or if one or more residents cease to be Buddhists. One ingredient in their formula is the role of 'mentors', or 'Guardian Members', who are people who will be non-resident guardians of the ethos of Ty Brethyn.

The property, and the five acres of land surrounding it, has been purchased using a mixture of capital contributed in the form of loanstock by the residents and a short term loan from a friend (or supporter) which will be repaid after 18 months by taking out a mortgage. This too has necessitated careful consideration, in particular considering how people might get their money back should they wish to leave.

After much discussion the 'exit terms' have been clarified - members wishing to leave will get their capital back plus appreciation at a level set by the UK's RHPI (Retail House Price Index) but capped at 8%. This and many other details took extensive homework and meetings spread over many months, the final details are still being thrashed out even though the property has now been bought and occupied. An important ingredient in their success was five days consultancy, paid for by a grant they obtained, from [UpStart](#), a cooperative based in Somerset, who provided invaluable advice on how to modify the standard coop rules. They would be happy to provide further details of their legal structure - please contact FWBO News if you are interested.

FWBO News wishes them every success in their new life.

Sunday, February 17, 2008



Ordination at Sudarshanaloka, New Zealand

On Sunday 17 February 2008, at Sudarshanaloka Retreat Centre in New Zealand, Pierrick Parigot was publicly ordained. His new name is DRIDHAMATI (Sanskrit with a dot below the 'r' and a dot below the second 'd'). 'He who has a firm, resolute or persevering mind'.

Purna was the private preceptor and Buddhadasa the public preceptor.

Sadhu!

Friday, February 15, 2008

Parinirvana Day



Today, February 15th, FWBO Centres across the world will be observing Parinirvana Day, the anniversary of the Buddha's entry into final 'Parinirvana'.

FWBO News is pleased to reproduce some excerpts from 'Between Twin Sala Trees', a

talk given by Sangharakshita in 1983, in which he outlines the significance of the day and suggests some ways in which it might be observed.

Sangharakshita says –

“The first of my suggestions is that, if at all possible, we should observe the Parinirvana Day as a whole day's celebration. We should read the Mahaparinibbana Sutta and chant the Vajrasattva mantra. The [Mahaparinibbana Sutta](#) is part of the Pali Canon, the sixteenth sutta of the Digha-Nikaya, and it gives an account of the last few months of the Buddha's life, and especially it gives an account of the last day, or rather, the last night of the Buddha's earthly existence.

“Perhaps it's not necessary in the course of our celebration of Parinirvana Day to read through the whole of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. We can perhaps make a selection and read only those parts, only those sections which have a direct bearing on the Parinirvana itself or on the events leading up to the Parinirvana itself.

“The Mahaparinibbana Sutta could be read aloud in the shrine room, perhaps people could take it in turns to read, perhaps Order Members could take it in turns to read. And of course one must remember to read slowly, by which I don't mean very, very slowly - I simply mean don't rush it. And mindfully, paying attention to what one is reading and to the meaning of what one is reading, and also loudly, and clearly, and distinctly, so that everybody can hear you.

“The second of my suggestions for observing Parinirvana Day is that in the evening, during the performance of the Sevenfold Puja, we should make our observance of the Parinirvana Day also an occasion for remembering other deceased persons - not just the Buddha's Parinirvana all those centuries ago, but also other deceased persons, especially Order Members, Mitras and Friends, who've died in the course of the previous year or so. We can place, perhaps, their photographs on the shrine, below images or pictures of Buddhas,

Bodhisattvas and gurus.

“And their full names, and the dates of their death should be read out either during or before the Sevenfold Puja. We can not only remember, not only commemorate Order Members, Mitras and Friends, in this way, but also the friends and relations of such if anybody wants to bring along the photograph or the name of anybody, near and dear to him or her, who has died, especially in the course of the last year. All should be remembered, on that occasion with metta”.

Sangharakshita goes on to highlight some of the more significant episodes in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta: the Episode of the Mirror of the Dhamma; the Episode, or Teaching, of Subjective and Objective Refuges; the Episode of the Untimely Flowers; and the Episode of the Last Disciple. There are also some very interesting reflections on the different characteristics and ‘moods’ of the Buddhist Holy Places: Bodh Gaya, Kusinagar, Lumbini, and Sarnath.

‘Between Twin Sala Trees’ is available on FreeBuddhistAudio as either [audio](#) or [text](#).

FWBO News would be very pleased to hear from readers around the world how they chose to mark this anniversary, either individually or in company of others at Buddhist centres. Simply click the ‘Comment’ link below and send us your comments.

Thursday, February 14, 2008

FWBO Johannesburg launches website



The FWBO and TBMSG have some 80 Buddhist centres world-wide, on four continents – but very little presence in Africa. However, a little-known fact is that for some three years now the FWBO has had a centre in Johannesburg - a large and peaceful house situated in the suburb of Emmarentia. It is called Shantikula, which translates as 'Peaceful Tribe', and is run by a small but dedicated team: Ratnajyoti, Vajradhara and Wayne.

They are celebrating the new year with the launch of a website, the first time they have had one – and even if you don't plan to be in Johannesburg any time soon you can now find out about their meditation and dharma classes, their courses for stress, anxiety and depression, their macrobiotic cooking, and even the organic vegetable garden! Find it at <http://www.fwbojohannesburg.co.za/> – and go visit if you're ever passing!

We're hoping more photos will appear on their site over time – among other things they have a very special Buddha rupa, carved specially for them following the traditional conventions of African carving – this makes it possibly unique in the Buddhist world.

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Report from Chairs meeting at Dhanakosa, January 2008



Last month some 40 Chairmen and Chairwomen from most of the FWBO's European Centres gathered at Dhanakosa for the twice-yearly week-long meeting of the European Chairs Assembly. The meeting is a place where those taking responsibility for our Buddhist centres can come together for

practice and friendship, besides discussing a very wide range of topics. This report, by Lokabandhu of the FWBO Development Team, aims to give a flavour of the meeting and to note some of the topics discussed.

To begin with, there were a good number of people to say farewell to, and an equal number of 'hellos'. It's a tradition of the meeting to give both these a good deal of time so that people can be properly welcomed when they arrive and properly rejoiced-in when they leave. It was noteworthy that six of the seven new faces at the meeting were women; the present overall ratio among the Chairs is approx 2:1 men:women. As usual, most of the FWBO Development Team, who are employed by the European Chairs Assembly, were also there.

The meeting got off to an adventurous start due to snowstorms: the coach from Glasgow was not willing to risk the last few miles along the lochside in the dark and we had to be ferried into Dhanakosa in a series of cars.

The topics covered in the many discussions included –

A thought-provoking paper by Dhammarati with his thoughts on how to ensure coherence across the many facets of the F/WBO. He has posted this on his [blog](#).

The need for us to find ways of telling our 'story' in ways that were open and did justice to the multi-faceted nature of our history. As part of this it was agreed to commission a fairly short pamphlet covering the main areas, specifically including links to other sources for those who wanted more detail. Many of these are already on-line at [FWBO Discussion](#).

A progress report on the [FWBO International Retreat](#), coming up this May 22-26th. This is an ambitious new venture to replace FWBO Day, its looking good so far.

The proposed 'Virtual Buddhist Centre' was mentioned but not discussed in much detail, it was agreed instead to conduct a more wide-ranging review of our main websites and how they could be better coordinated – there are now over 300 different FWBO sites! Click [here](#) for an early (and now discarded) prototype, it does however illustrate some of the breadth of sites available.

A workshop on Team-Based Right Livelihood, highlighting in particular people's expressed needs for (i) adequate support and long-term financial security, (ii) ongoing training and learning, and (iii) work as practice; as part of it we were led through a much-appreciated self-assessment of our own training needs. See the excellent resources on the FWBO Centre Support website [here](#).

The lack of youth at our centres was discussed: according to the Order Address List,) there are now only 4 Order Members outside of India under 30! Click [here](#) for some graphic charts from the Order Survey illustrating this. In November we will host a weekend of 'interested parties' later in the year to explore ideas to address this;

please contact FWBO News if you would like to be kept informed of this.

Results from the Order Survey itself were made available, click [here](#) to access them.

Last but not least there were centre presentations by Glasgow and Newcastle; these are a regular feature of the meeting and are always fascinating glimpses into the past and into the nitty-gritty heroism involved in taking the Dharma to a new city. Glasgow's was particularly interesting due to the long history of the Glasgow Buddhist Centre – we were, among other things, treated to a rare slide of an Upasikaa's red kesa!

Monday, February 11, 2008

New opportunities on FWBO Jobs; other changes to FWBO News' website



Several new jobs have been posted recently on FWBO Jobs; readers are invited to visit the [FWBO Jobs site](#) to check. These include posts at Windhorse:Evolution, the FWBO's largest and most successful Right Livelihood business, as well as volunteers needed for the upcoming FWBO International Retreat. In the past three months the site has had over 1,000 visitors from over 30 countries.

There have been significant changes recently to the [FWBO News website](#); regular readers who use our Feedblitz news-feed service are invited to take time to visit the site itself.

Among other things three separate search facilities have been added to make it possible to easily find any reference to specific people or events across the FWBO's extensive and somewhat sprawling network of websites. You will find these on the [Resources page](#); they cover, respectively, the FWBO News archive; **or** all FWBO centre websites (over 100 to date); **or** the 170+ personal websites listed on [FWBO People](#). A rich and, now, very accessible resource!

A tag listing facility has also been added giving one-click access to all stories on particular themes: clicking (for instance) the '[Engaged Buddhism](#)' tag brings up all previous FWBO News stories on that theme.

We have added two 'volumes' of previous stories from FWBO News, each covering a two-month period and arranged in an easily-printable PDF document form. Taken together they reflect the remarkable diversity of events and projects going on around our Sangha. You can find these too on the [Resources](#) section of the site; we envisage adding further volumes every couple of months.

Finally, by visiting the site itself you'll also be able to admire our visit counter, which shows the number of visitors and which country they come from – we have had over 10,000 visitors from 99 countries since November...!

Suggestions for further enhancements are of course welcome.

Saturday, February 09, 2008

Dispatch from Delhi



Saul is a mitra from the FWBO's North London Buddhist Centre. Last month he travelled to India to team up with the [Amida Trust](#), who have for some three years now been running English classes in Delhi under their 'Buddhist voluntary service overseas scheme'. He sent FWBO News this report -

"I've recently finished two weeks teaching very large classes of children from slum areas in Shahadhara in east Delhi. At first I couldn't cope with it, or I felt I couldn't cope with it. Then I became rather accustomed to it and I've missed it on leaving.

Classes were hectic affairs with anything from 45 to 70 children there. Shabbily dressed with big open smiles and irrepressible enthusiasm. I say hectic because children were coming and going from the classroom during the class. When I commented on this I was told that it was better than before!

These classes were usually conducted in half built Buddhist viharas in the slum districts. The conditions were extremely basic. Blackboards, when there were any, were crude and basic. Power cuts would frequently plunge the vihara into darkness. Equipment minimal. Paper rare and books next to non-existent.

We travelled to these outreach classes on rickshaws or in auto-rickshaws "tuk-tuks" through the chaotic Delhi traffic. All manner of traffic: bicycles, motor bikes, ox carts all vied with lorries, buses and cars. The rules were pretty minimal, nobody worried too much about traffic lights or the right of way, not everyone even drove on the same side of the road. I confess I found it all rather exciting.

Outside the vihara there was the seething mass of humanity: beggars and street vendors, endless stalls and tiny stores; incessant activity and the omni-present smell of sewerage. Sometimes our classes were conducted in order to increase the harmony in conflict torn communities. Occasionally they were in relatively harmonious Buddhist communities. Their poverty was what they all had in common.

After two weeks' I was used to it! The classes were led by two spirited individuals – Shiasnu (Joy) and James Goodman – who against all odds managed to maintain their teaching. We were working for ADEPT – the Amida Delhi Education Project Team. At first I can't say I really warmed to their approach, which involved lots of song and movement. Then I realized that actually it did really work because it motivated and enthused the young learners. Mostly I've been used to teaching adults so it was a bit of a culture shock. The sessions with the children didn't seem like 'real lessons' but then I'd been thrown into a situation where they didn't necessarily have blackboards, only occasionally notebooks, and so on. Use of movement motivated them and they clearly enjoyed the classes. Whenever someone did well Joy would call out 'give that child a sticker' and they would proudly walk out to the front of the class to get their sticker. The teachers refused to allow any smacking to discipline the children and they tended to get overexcited and classroom control seemed problematic. Then I started to realize that they were actually succeeding in increasing the confidence and self-esteem of these children.

At first I found it all rather exhausting and overwhelmed by these classes. Delhi in midwinter was a hard way to start in India, not even the food would stay in my stomach! Everything, just everything had changed. But I got used to my little room on the roof of the block, even when the cold North West winds blowing off the Himalayas tried to invade it. My tolerance of noise shot up, and later, as I started taking tea at roadside cafes with the workers, neighbours started to

recognize me, little routines started to take over – and then, so quickly, my stay there was over and it was time to take the train south to [Nagpur](#) and more English teaching with the TBMSG's many projects there...

Friday, February 08, 2008

Change to wording of Heart Sutra



Following some months of consultation, Mahamati, the International Order Convenor of the WBO, has announced a small change to the wording of the Heart Sutra as recited in the FWBO.

The new wording is

*All things are by nature void
They are not born or destroyed
Nor are they stained or pure
Nor do they wax or wane.*

These replace the well-known line "all things are the primal void" and the section immediately following. A full copy of the text of the new version can be downloaded from the Resources section of FWBO News [here](#).

The change was approved by Sangharakshita in order to avoid the danger of referring to "the void" i.e. making sunyata into a 'thing', while keeping the rhythm and flow of the original.

Windhorse Publications will be reprinting the English Language edition of the FWBO Puja book soon, with the new version of the Heart Sutra included.

Those of a nostalgic disposition are reminded that the 'primal void' lives on in Kavyasiddhi's beautiful rendition of the Heart Sutra – sung at last summer's International Order Convention and posted on [Videosangha](#).

Wednesday, February 06, 2008

New feature article - "Climate Change: towards a Buddhist Response"



FWBO News is pleased to present another article in its occasional series of Feature Articles. '[Climate Change: towards a Buddhist Response](#)' is by Akasati, a long-standing member of the Buddhafield team. Her long and thoughtful piece includes – among other things – the following sections

- climate change: causes, evidence and impacts
- some objections & arguments
- offsetting?
- sustainability: 'the third revolution'
- the great turning
- climate change in the context of traditional buddhist teachings (a detailed look at ethics, the notion of 'hidden dukkha', the teaching of 'no separate self', emptiness and compassion, and finally, revisiting the simple life)
- levels of action
- further reading
- other resources

Highly recommended!

NVC and Sociocracy in the FWBO



Shantigarbha is an Order Member living in Cambridge, UK, where he has founded a training business '[Seed of Peace](#)'. He specialises in '[Non-Violent Communication](#)', or NVC, and has recently returned from a six week trip running NVC trainings in India and Sri Lanka, including a live interview introducing it on Sri Lankan TV. Several Order Members have qualified in NVC and are actively involved in training worldwide – [Aniruddha](#) and Kumarajiv in India, [Locana](#) in the UK, among others.

Next in his schedule is a weekend introduction to 'Sociocracy', which is a system for designing (or redesigning) organisations that he feels may be particularly suitable for groups such as the FWBO.

Shantigarbha writes -

"We've arranged for Philip Seligmann, a Sociocratic consultant from the Centre in the Netherlands, to come over to lead a weekend at the [Cambridge Buddhist Centre](#). Philip is on the Board of the Sociocratic Centre, and has brought Sociocracy into several organizations, including the Dutch Buddhist Broadcasting Corporation. The dates are: February 22-24; the Friday evening will be a free Introduction, open to all, and will form the first part of the training for those who stay on for the Saturday and Sunday (10am to 5pm both days)".

Sociocracy was first introduced to the Order last summer on the biannual Order Convention, after which this report appeared in the Order's journal 'Shabda':

"Sociocracy is a structured way for groups to make decisions & interact with other groups. As such it may be relevant to many situations in the F/WBO and we were interested to hear the NVC community are considering adopting it for much of their internal organisation. It is particularly suitable in situations where everyone needs to be taken into account and where each person needs to be valued equally. More specifically, it is suitable for groups which are interacting regularly and united in aim.

Sociocracy started with an attempt to bring Quaker principles into a Dutch engineering laboratory. Hence the language is technical and the procedures fairly precisely structured. It is something which needs some effort to learn but which, once learned, becomes more and more fluent and flexible. It was noteworthy that Sociocracy can work alongside any conventional leadership system and can be introduced to only one part of an organization or for only one issue.

Some of the basic governing principles are –

- In meetings, some people are elected to temporary roles eg a facilitator
- All organizational processes are seen in terms of circles, with discussion proceeding in 'rounds' eg rounds for clarification/nominations/objections/consent
- All decision-making is by consent (with consent defined as the absence of 'paramount objections' ie no absolute "Nos", ie, a solution which is within everyone's "range of tolerance")
- Different levels of the organisation are 'double-linked' to ensure smooth information flows up & down & across.

There's lots more information available on the sociocracy website www.governancealive.com. Personally we were impressed with the clarity of the process and the care taken to ensure everyone has a chance to be heard. However everyone involved in a sociocratic meeting would need to make a significant investment to learn how it

works, and while this is happening, meetings could seem slow or cumbersome. Since Shantigarbha wanted us to have some real experience of sociocracy in action, our session could be summarised, not unfairly, as nine Order Members taking an hour to discuss who was going to make a report into Shabda!

Anyone interested in the Cambridge weekend is asked to contact [Shantigarbha](#) as soon as possible.

Monday, February 04, 2008

FWBO International Retreat update



The FWBO's first International Retreat is taking place in May, at [Taraloka](#), in Shropshire, UK. Vajragupta is the overall organiser and recently sent FWBO News this update – including a request for help!

“The bookings are now starting to flow in - I'm optimistic it is going to be a big event. After some hitches, the [International Retreat website](#) can now take on-line bookings in no less than five languages – [English](#), [German](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), and [Dutch](#). Of course people can also download the postal booking form or use the brochures which should be available at all FWBO Centres.

The programme is coming together, based round the themes of Wisdom, Absorption, and Compassion, with talks, pujas, and groups

led by some of the FWBO's best teachers - [Padmavajra](#), [Ratnaguna](#), [Parami](#), [Ratnadharini](#), [Sona](#), [Vidyamala](#), [Maitreyi](#), [Kamalasila](#), [Vessantara](#) - with more to be arranged!

Capacity is 500 people, so book soon...

A team of volunteers is needed to set-up, run, and set-down the event. Volunteers will need to be available from Sunday 18th May and, after the event, until 28th May. Anyone interested would need to be willing to camp and work hard, including physical work – however work duties won't be so heavy as to stop you taking part and enjoying it too. There will be a retreat-like programme and teaching during the set-up. See [FWBO Jobs](#) for more details.

Newcomers and children welcome

The programme and teaching for the adults will be aimed predominantly at those who have been meditating and attending an FWBO Centre for at least a few months. However, anyone who'd like to bring a family member who is new to the FWBO, or who does not meditate, is welcome to, and there will be some basic meditation instruction available.

Children are welcome on the retreat. There'll be a talented and experienced crew on hand to help parents make the most of the retreat. We are not providing a crèche, but there are a variety of facilities available for children - a toddler's tent where you can take your young one to play in a safe environment, with toys and games provided; for older children there'll be arts, craft, sports, bushcraft and other activities laid-on for a couple of two-hour slots each day (one slot in the morning and one in the afternoon). In the evenings there will be storytelling and ritual suitable for both children and adults.

The retreat is free for under-3's and 3–16 year olds can attend for half-price. Check the [children's page](#) on the website for updates.

FWBO & TBMSG News

News and views from around the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG).

[News](#)[Jobs](#)[Features](#)[Reviews](#)[Resources](#)[FWBO](#)[Links](#)

About us:

The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) www.fwbo.org was founded in 1967 by Sangharakshita.

It is now an international movement with activities in more than 20 countries, including India, where it is known as the TBMSG, the 'Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana'.

At its heart is the Western Buddhist Order, a community of over 1,500 ordained men and women of all ages and from all walks of life, united by their common commitment to the Three Jewels of Buddhism.

The FWBO/TBMSG is a non-sectarian Buddhist movement which seeks promote the practice of Buddhism in a form appropriate to the modern world.

FWBO News

FWBO News aims to present a selection of stories illustrating some of what is going on across our network of centres, businesses, communities, arts events, and individual projects.

Many stories are linked to other websites, to access these please visit www.fwbo-news.org and connect from there.

Previous posts by topic:

Africa, Ambedkar, Arts, Aryaloka, Australia, BBC, Berlin, Birmingham, Bodh Gaya, Breathworks, Brighton, Bristol, Buddhafield, Cambridge, Canada, Cardiff, Carers retreats, Children, China, Clear Vision, Croydon, Death, Delhi, Dhammakranti, Dharmaduta, Dublin, Education, Engaged Buddhism, France, Fundraising, Germany, Health, Holland, Hungary, India, INEB, Interbuddhist, Interfaith, Ireland, Jobs, Johannesburg, Karuna, Kerala, LBC, Malaysia, Manchester, Meditation, Mumbai, Nagpur, Nepal, New Zealand, Newcastle, North London, Nottingham, NVC, Obituaries, Ordinations, Parents, Paris, Pilgrimage, Poland, Preceptors, Prisons, Radio, Right Livelihood, San Francisco, Sangharakshita, Schools, Scotland, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudarshanaloka, Sweden, Taraloka, TBMSG, Tiratanaloka, USA, Veganism, Vegetarianism, Video, Wildmind, Windhorse, Women, Yatras, Youth...

Also including:

FWBO Jobs, Feature articles, FWBO Resources, email subscriptions, search facilities, and extensive links.