

Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras

Year Three

Module 3: Sangharakshita and the History of the FWBO/Triratna

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Introduction

This module is different in nature to the other modules in that its aim is just to give you the opportunity to explore the history of the FWBO/Triratna, i.e. the spiritual community that you are involved with. There are no particular learning outcomes from this module but hopefully it will give you a richer appreciation of Triratna and its founder, Sangharakshita.

Every spiritual community arises in particular historical circumstances and is conditioned by them. Triratna is no different in this way. So using Suryaprabha's four DVD films of the early history of the Movement (covering the mid-1960s to 1980), you will have a chance to explore the particular conditions out of which Triratna has arisen.

Alongside Suryaprabha's DVDs, the other key text is *The Triratna Story* by Vajragupta exploring our own history and telling some of the stories that constitute it. Published by Windhorse, it brings the story more up to date and should help you contextualise what you see around you as you get involved in the unfolding story of the FWBO/Triratna Buddhist Community. It is after all your (or rather, our) Sangha!

There is also the opportunity to follow up material illustrating other aspects of Sangharakshita and the history of Triratna e.g. Sangharakshita's photo archives; other video footage of the FWBO/Triratna, particularly the Newsreels; various DVDs of Sangharakshita in question-and-answer sessions or giving lectures; and Sangharakshita's personal memoirs and poetry which give an insight into different sides of the founder of Triratna. References are also provided for people who might want to explore some of the controversies Sangharakshita and the FWBO/Triratna have faced in its 40-year life.

Finally, there will be an opportunity to focus on the history of your own local Sangha which will have its own story to tell as well as its own heroes and heroines to rejoice in.

Planning your group's approach

Because this module is intended to give participants the opportunity to explore freely, and because Triratna's history is rich and multi-faceted, the suggestion is that before the module actually starts each group gives some time to thinking through what areas it would like to look at. Different groups could choose to use their time in very different ways, ranging from an almost entirely project-based approach to enjoying a series of six movie nights (followed by discussion, of course!).

A suggested scheme for the module follows, listing topics that could be looked at over 6 evenings - but it's emphasised a group could choose to arrange their time completely differently.

This suggested format adopts the following pattern:

1. *Sangharakshita 1: A Life for the Dharma.*
2. *The Movement 1: Early Days.*
3. *Sangharakshita 2: Other aspects – Poetry, Character, Controversy.*
4. *The Movement 2: Creating a New Society.*
5. *The Movement 3: India.*
6. *Your Local Sangha.*

In general, for the projects, it would be great if participants followed up a particular aspect of FWBO/Tiratna history of their choice, whether local or otherwise.

Week 1 – Sangharakshita: A Life for the Dharma

The main purpose of this week is to introduce Sangharakshita and gain an overview of his life. You may want to spend some time developing a sense of the key elements in his life, even coming up with a chronology of the most important events. There should also be plenty of time to discuss your responses to him.

Resources

Video

VideoSangha have a selection of clips where people describe their first meeting with Sangharakshita:

www.videosangha.net/search/?search=Bhante

Audio

Sangharakshita speaks about his early life in a talk delivered at the Sheffield Buddhist Centre. This is available to download at Free Buddhist Audio:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC110>

It includes some interesting reflections on the topic of rebirth.

An Autobiographical Sequence of Poems at:

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=P03

Sangharakshita's informal talk *My Eight Main Teachers* is at:

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=176

where he introduces (at rather variable length) his eight main teachers.

If there is someone in your local Sangha who has a strong personal connection with Bhante, they could be invited to your group to talk about that.

Written

1. Sangharakshita's memoirs, in chronological order, are:
2. *The Rainbow Road* (also published in two separate volumes entitled *Learning to Walk* and *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*).
3. *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*.
4. *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel*.

5. *Moving Against the Stream*.

He has also written two thematic memoirs as follows:

1. *From Genesis to the Diamond Sutra* details his encounters with Christianity.
2. *Precious Teachers* deals with his meetings with his Tibetan teachers in Kalimpong.

Many of them are available on his website:

http://www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html

including *The Rainbow Road* at:

www.sangharakshita.org/_books/rainbow-road.pdf

They can also be purchased from Windhorse Publications:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/>

Some of the key moments from the memoirs are included in the Appendix below:

- His reading of the *Diamond Sutra* aged 16.
- His Going Forth; his vision of Amitābha in the cave.
- His ordination in Kusinagar; the conflict (and eventual resolution) between Sangharakshita I and II and III.
- His working for the good of the Dharma in Kalimpong.
- His decision to found the FWBO.

These are short extracts that give a flavour of the memoirs as a whole.

A transcript of Sangharakshita's Sheffield talk (referred to above) is available at:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=FBA141&at=text>

Subhuti – *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=377>

Chapter 1 is a short summary of Sangharakshita's life and is included in the Appendix below. The rest of the book is an authoritative account of his main teachings (and is one of the recommended books for the *Dharma Training Course* as a whole).

Subhuti – Bringing Buddhism to the West (available from Windhorse Publications or your Centre library) is a more detailed one-volume account of Sangharakshita's life up to the early 1990's:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=376>

Some suggested questions

1. What particular aspects of Sangharakshita's life strike you most strongly? Is there anything from his life that has particular resonance for you?
2. What do you think have been the formative influences upon Sangharakshita?
3. What were your initial impressions of Sangharakshita? Have they changed as your involvement with the Sangha has grown? Have you met him yourself?

Week 2 – The Movement: Early Days

Probably the best resource we have for the early days of the FWBO are a series of four films made by Suryaprabha. The films give a good sense of the times in which the FWBO came into being. They also introduce you to many of what might be called the founding generation of the FWBO, i.e. those people ordained in the late 1960s and 1970s who helped turn Sangharakshita's nascent vision of a new spiritual movement into some kind of reality. These particular people are now what you might call our elders (not just in the biological sense!). A key aspect of this history is that the FWBO might not have survived those early days and it is only through the dedicated efforts of this relatively small group of people that we have a Movement to be involved in at all.

Resources

Video

Suryaprabha's *History* DVDs:

1. An Opening of the Heart.
2. Kindling the Flame.

Hopefully these are in your Centre library. They can be ordered from *Lights in the Sky* at:

http://web.mac.com/surya4/Lights_In_The_Sky_Films/History_Films.html

They are a much-loved and very evocative series of DVDs exploring the early history of the FWBO.

Photos

Clear Vision has an extensive photo archive of the early days of the F/WBO and TBMSG on the web at:

www.clear-vision.org/Pictures/Default.aspx

Check those flares!

Several thousand more current photos are on Triratna Photos site at:

www.flickr.com/photos/fwbo/sets

Written

A new 'history' of the Triratna Buddhist Community, *The Triratna Story*, by Vajragupta, was published by Windhorse Publications in early 2010. It evokes very well the idealism, magic, naivety, determination and difficulties of the Movement over its first 40 years.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=743>

Subhuti's *Buddhism for Today: A Portrait of a New Buddhist Movement* (Element, 1983) is long out of print but well worth exploring as a confident exposition of the 'architecture' of the F/WBO.

Some suggested questions

1. What have you learnt about the Movement from watching the first two of Suryaprabha's DVD's?
2. What do you think should be our relationship to our 'elders' – the founding generation of our own Movement?
3. What are your own memories or impressions of the late 1960's and early 1970's – the time when the Movement was born?

Week 3 – Sangharakshita 2: Other Aspects – Poetry, Character, Controversy

Having been introduced to Sangharakshita in Week 1, we now have an opportunity to explore some other aspects of his life and work. This is where you will need to sort out the particular interests of your group so as to choose what to focus on.

You could explore his poetry through some of the resources listed below. Sangharakshita considers his poetry a very important aspect of his work and whether or not you like the particular style of his poetry, it certainly conveys a different side of the man and can help us to avoid a too literal or rational approach to his teachings.

Alternatively, you could watch some video footage of Sangharakshita. There are numerous of his talks captured on video but *The Taste of Freedom* is particularly interesting for being the earliest video footage of him teaching (when he was still in his full vigour). It is also one of his great talks.

Or, if you wish to explore what you might call the more controversial aspects of his life and character, there are plenty of other references listed below.

Resources

Video

YouTube has a vast range of clips from interviews with Sangharakshita, which you'll find at:

www.youtube.com/results?search_query=fwbo or
www.youtube.com/user/clearvisiontrust

So lots of choice here.

The earliest talk of Bhante's on video is *The Taste of Freedom* which is not otherwise studied in the course; that would be good to watch just to get a stronger sense of him actually teaching. It's available to purchase at:

www.clear-vision.org/videos/publicbh.aspx

Clear Vision has a number of 'double acts' by Padmavajra and Bhante reading poetry. They used to be available on video but have not yet been released in other formats. Watch out for them! They are called: *Message of the Bowl: Going Forth in the Poetry of Sangharakshita*; *Entering the Greater Mandala*; and *Four Gifts*.

Audio

Bhante reads an autobiographical sequence of poems at:

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=P03

Glimpses of the Mythic Life of Sangharakshita is a talk by Padmavajra from the Sheffield Buddhist Centre, available to download at:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC183>

Bhante lays out the main ingredients of his relationship to the Order in his classic 1990 talk *My Relation to the Order* available at:

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=172

Written

My Relation to the Order was updated and in part superseded by his recent ‘Message’ to the Order, available on his website at:

www.sangharakshita.org/What_is_the_Western_Buddhist_Order.pdf

Peace is a Fire:

www.sangharakshita.org/_books/peace-fire.pdf

A collection of Aphorisms from the 1960s and 1970s.

Complete Poems:

www.sangharakshita.org/_books/complete-poems.pdf

or via Windhorse Publications:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=347>

Some of the best known are included in the Appendix below.

Especially recommended as a glimpse into the inner life of the young Sangharakshita in India is his long poem *The Veil of Stars*.

The little-known *1970: A Retrospective* can be found at:

www.sangharakshita.org/a-retrospect.html

It’s a very frank account of an extraordinary year in Bhante’s life, very early on in the life of the Order.

Old Diary Leaves is at:

www.sangharakshita.org/a-olddiaryleaves.html

Controversy

In Retrospect: A Conversation with Sangharakshita is a relatively recent video of Sangharakshita in interview with Nagabodhi where they speak about many sensitive subjects: sex, mistakes, regrets. You can listen to the audio here:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=IV02>

FWBO Discussion: www.discussion.fwbo.org

This site contains a variety of thoughtful articles by Order Members exploring their personal responses to Sangharakshita and some of the controversies that have at times surrounded him.

Especially recommended are Vishvapani's two articles *A letter to Norman Fisher* (and Norman Fisher's reply) and *The Order's Relation to Sangharakshita*.

The FWBO Files, a long, anonymous, and inaccurate document full of allegations and accusations against the FWBO and Sangharakshita, is still available on the internet. We believe it was written by a fundamentalist practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism outraged at Sangharakshita's innovative approach to founding the Order and Movement. There is an equally long and detailed 'response' to it at <http://www.response.fwbo.org>, which does an excellent job of explaining why the Order and Movement are perfectly orthodox.

Some suggested questions

1. Does the fact that Sangharakshita writes poetry and takes a strong interest in the arts have any particular significance for you?
2. What affect do you think Sangharakshita's character has had on the Order and Movement that he founded?
3. What do you think has been learned from the various controversies surrounding Sangharakshita and the FWBO? Do you think there are things that you personally and we collectively still need to learn from our past?

Week 4 – The Movement 2: Creating a New Society

In the 1970s, as the Movement started to take root, there was much emphasis on creating supportive conditions for the deepening of spiritual practice within the Movement. This took the form of community living (which became single-sex as people learnt from their experience); of establishing new centres, especially Sukhāvātī in the east end of London but also in other cities and countries; and of setting up right livelihood businesses. During this period, Sangharakshita also started to talk of creating a New Society supportive of spiritual practice and aspirations. And he gave many of his key lecture series, often drawing inspiration from some of the great Mahāyāna sutras.

To explore this rich period in the Movement's history, you may well want to watch the concluding two parts of Suryaprabha's early history of the FWBO which go up to 1980. But you could use some of the other resources listed below and you may want to come more up-to-date with our history.

Resources

Video

Suryaprabha's *History* DVDs

3. A Time of Fire.
4. A Circle of Friends.

Hopefully these are in your Centre library. They can be ordered from 'Lights in the Sky' at:

http://web.mac.com/surya4/Lights_In_The_Sky_Films/History_Films.html

Many Triratna Centres will have archive copies of old FWBO Newsreels. These are videos and hence may not be easy to play; however they provide great glimpses into the past of the Movement during the 1980s and 90s.

Audio

Some of Sangharakshita's lectures in the very early days of the FWBO vividly evoke his vision for our Sangha: he was almost literally talking the Movement into existence. The following two, given during the time mentioned in Suryaprabha's DVDs, are particularly relevant:

A Blueprint for a New World (1976):

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=134

The Nucleus of a New Society (1976):

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=133

Here Sangharakshita describes the events of his life that led him to found the WBO, and explains how an individual can join it. He then discusses its relation to the FWBO/Triratna.

Ask your local Order Members! The Order is a network of friendships; many Order Members will have stories to tell of the Triratna Buddhist Community around the world, based either on their own adventures or their friends’.

Written

Likewise many Triratna Centres will have archive copies of old FWBO Newsletters, Golden Drums etc. These may be especially useful for projects if you want to explore something in more depth.

Many past issues of *Dharma Life* and *Madhyamavani* are available on-line at <http://www.dharmalife.com> and <http://madhyamavani.fwbo.org> respectively.

Photos

Triratna Photos (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/fwbo/sets>) has a huge collection of photos from around the world of the Triratna Buddhist Community, including several sets of archive photos. More are welcome: please email <mailto:news@fwbo-news.org> for info.

Some suggested questions

1. What do you make of the relationship of the sexes (and the single-sex principle) as portrayed in Suryaprabha’s DVDs?
2. What is your response to the idealism of the Movement in the 1970s? Do you think we could do with more or less of it nowadays? If more, how could that be expressed?
3. Do you think there is enough emphasis on the role of the ‘New Society’ (and the importance of creating supportive conditions for practice) in the Movement that you have become involved with? How can a spiritual community thrive amidst our heavily consumerist and materialist society?

Week 5 – The Movement 3: India

It is important to realise that the particular Sangha you are involved with is an international one and that it has centres across the world and members that speak many different languages. Perhaps the most important branch of our Sangha is that found in India. Certainly more people are involved there than anywhere else and before too long, it will have the largest number of Order members in any one country. It also connects with our own roots as a Movement in that Sangharakshita spent much of his time in India on teaching tours in Maharashtra, doing all that he could to support the nascent movement of mass conversion to Buddhism initiated by Dr Ambedkar.

To get a feel for the Indian wing of our Movement, you could use any of the following resources.

Video

In this talk from the 2007 Order Convention, Subhuti speaks with passion about the urgency he feels for his work in India:

www.videosangha.net/video/Subhuti-about-his-work-in-Ind

Recurring Dream, from Suryaprabha's *Earth Rising, Heaven Descending* series, is a sympathetic look at some of India and TBMSG's quirks and contradictions.

For an up-to-the-minute checklist of India-related video try:

www.videosangha.net/search/?search=india

Audio

For some atmospheric background to Dr. Ambedkar and the work of TBMSG in India, try Subhuti's 2005 talk 'Dr Ambedkar and the Dhamma Revolution' at:

www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM733

Written

The classic introduction to TBMSG and Dr. Ambedkar is *Jai Bhim* by Nagabodhi. It's out of print but available at:

www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/jaibhim.pdf

Sangharakshita's *Ambedkar and Buddhism* gives a more thorough and detailed account of the links between Ambedkar and his own approach to the Dharma.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=360>

There are two excellent articles by Lokamitra from the *Features* area of *Triratna News*, one describing his first experiences of India and one looking back after 30 years of work helping to create TBMSG.

The Day That Changed My Life is at:

<http://tinyurl.com/yllsoru>

And *Thirty Years in India* is at:

<http://tinyurl.com/yhbknzu>

Some suggested questions

1. Why do you think it is important that Triratna is an international Sangha? What can we learn from Buddhists of other nationalities and cultures?
2. What are the implications of the Indian Dhammakranti (Dharma Revolution) for us in the West? Are there things you could do to support Dhammakranti work in India?

Week 6 – Your local Sangha

In this last week, there is a chance to focus on the history of your local Sangha. Obviously, this will vary from one situation to another in terms of the length of history involved and the amount of resources that might be available to explore this area. Much of it might be what you would call oral history, i.e. it is only recorded in the memories of those involved. So you may wish to invite long-standing members of your own Sangha to the group to talk about their experience or you could interview them and record it in video or audio format for future reference. You could also gather photos of your Sangha together and make an online album or display at the Centre. The potential for your own initiative as an individual or as a group is large. We hope that over a number of years, if different mitra groups work on this module, a set of resources for your local Sangha may develop that will provide a sense of its history for others in the future. Obviously your projects could be linked in with this particular week.

Resources

Video

This could be your chance to make something on your local Centre...! If you do, upload it to YouTube and tag it ‘Triratna’ – VideoSangha will then find it and it’ll be there for the rest of the Movement to see.

Audio

We all have our stories. One way of doing this week would be to invite an experienced local Order Member to the group for this evening to share their reminiscences and or tell some stories of the local Sangha.

Written

There are various internet resources to help you connect with the latest developments around Triratna:

Triratna News: www.fwbo-news.org

On-going news stories from around the world of the Triratna Buddhist Community, both the West and India.

Triratna People: www.people.fwbo.org

Around 200 websites created by Order members and Mitras – a glimpse into the colourful worlds of the people that make up the Movement!

Facebook: Many Triratna people are on Facebook, where you’ll find a number of groups (e.g. a special one for *Young People in the Triratna Buddhist Community*) and the main Triratna ‘page’:

<http://www.facebook.com/triratnabuddhistcommunity?ref=nf>

Young People in the Triratna Buddhist Community:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=49821059114>

Some suggested questions

1. Who are the founders of your own particular Sangha? And who has helped it to grow and develop over the years?
2. What has been learned from the development of your own particular Sangha? What successes have there been and what mistakes have been made?
3. Do you think there is enough rejoicing, appreciation and gratitude within your own Sangha for all the efforts people have made to establish it?
4. What would you like to see develop in your own Sangha over the coming years? What could you contribute to that development?

Appendix

Included here are the excerpts mentioned above from Subhuti's book and from Sangharakshita's memoirs. A selection of his poems follows the biographical material.

A Brief Biography of Sangharakshita

What follows is a brief biography of Sangharakshita taken from Subhuti's book *A New Voice*. It should give you a place to start in terms of reading about his life. It is followed by some short extracts of key episodes from Sangharakshita's own memoirs.

From *Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* by Subhuti (Windhorse Publications):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=377>

Chapter One – The Translator

'Hammer your thoughts into a unity.'

This line once read

The sound came clangingly

Of golden hammers in my head

Beating and beating sheet on sheet

To make the figured foil complete.

Religion, friendship, art

Were hammered there

On the cyclopean anvils of my heart

Into an image bright and fair.

Under the strain the forge-floor split;

Nerveless the arms that fashioned it.

(*'Stanzas'* from 1967)

Modern Buddhism is in crisis. The Buddhist tradition, like so many others, is being challenged by a world radically different from the one in which it has flourished for two-and-a-half millennia. Technological development is changing ever more drastically the way people live - even the way they think about their lives. In most of the lands where it has been established for centuries, Buddhism is in disarray and retreat, unable yet to adapt its old message to new circumstances. Curiously, it is in the West itself, the very heartland of technological development, that it is beginning to communicate itself most successfully to the modern world and is expanding most rapidly. But that too presents its problems. What should Buddhism in the West bring from Buddhism in the East? Which form of Buddhism is appropriate to the West? How is modern Buddhism to relate to Western culture? How is one to live the Buddhist life in the modern world? What really is Buddhism? More properly, as Buddhists themselves would prefer to say, what is the Dharma? What is the 'Truth', the 'Path', or the 'Teaching'?

Sangharakshita is one of those who has confronted these issues most directly. In a favourite image, he is a translator. He is a translator between the East and the West, between the traditional world and the modern.

‘One who is a translator metaphorically brings a discipline, or set of ideas, or a culture, from the obscurity and darkness of unfamiliar terms into the light of terms that are familiar. I myself am a translator because I elucidate, that is, elucidate the Dharma.’

(My Relation to the Order, p.22).

Above all, he is a translator between principles and practice. From his earliest contact with Buddhism, he has sought to discover its essential principles. It has been his life's work to give those principles expression, both in ideas and in institutions and practices.

For Sangharakshita, the essential insight of the Buddha is beyond words and finds expression in different forms in different circumstances. The many schools, formed in Buddhism's 2,500 years of history and its diffusion throughout Asia, have to a greater or lesser extent kept alive that original insight. Each has elaborated it further and explored its various aspects in diverse ways. Whether it is the rich exuberance of Tibetan Vajrayana or the austere simplicity of Japanese Zen, all schools carry the same intrinsic message. Sangharakshita has striven to discern the fundamental Buddhist experience behind these many forms and to communicate it to the modern world. He has embodied his understanding in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, the new Buddhist movement he has founded.

Since its initiation in 1967, Sangharakshita has devoted himself mainly to clarifying the many issues that have arisen during the establishment and growth of that movement. As his disciples have engaged more deeply with the Dharma, they have come up against innumerable problems and conflicts. What place does work have in spiritual life? Is homosexual activity a contravention of Buddhist ethics? How should Buddhists relate to the wider world? Do Western art and literature have anything to offer the Buddhist practitioner? How is one to work with the various feelings that arise in meditation? How should a residential community organise itself? As issues have arisen, Sangharakshita has elucidated the underlying principles on which a resolution depends. He has thus evolved a philosophy of active spiritual life, embracing every aspect of human affairs: community, work, sexuality, art and culture, social action, meditation, ceremony, personal relationships, and more. All have received his attention and, if he has not exhausted each topic, he has laid bare its essential principles so that his disciples can continue to live the Buddhist life in an ever-changing world.

Although Sangharakshita has devoted many years to the creation of an organised Buddhist movement, his ideas are relevant outside the circle of his own disciples. Buddhists everywhere, whether in the East or West, are moving into a new world, to which traditional forms are increasingly irrelevant. If they are not simply to become fossils, interesting relics of a bygone era, all Buddhists must look beyond the forms of their own schools. They must recognise the timeless core that each, perhaps, still conveys. They must let go of whatever in their own tradition is merely the unreflecting

propagation of a culture long since dead or is simply of local significance. They must rely only on the essential Buddhist experience in their own spiritual lives. They must let the fundamental Buddhist message speak out to the men and women of the present. Since Sangharakshita has faced these issues in a particularly radical way, all Buddhists will find that he has something important to say to them. They will discover much in his teaching that will help them in their own task of spiritual renewal.

Sangharakshita's teaching has wider relevance yet. A great many people today sense that humanity has a higher purpose than mere material advancement. They are seeking some new vision to give their lives greater meaning and purpose. Many are strongly drawn to Buddhism's non-theism and to its teachings of nonviolence and of universal fellowship. However, they are not attracted to its present cultural forms. If they are to respond at all it will be to a presentation like Sangharakshita's: clear and intelligent, taking into account modern concerns and susceptibilities, and free from cultural anachronism. Sangharakshita's appeal is broad, for he points to something beyond type to be found in all human beings. His disciples already include people of very diverse backgrounds and temperaments: illiterate peasants and sophisticated professionals, ex-Christians and ex-communists, Indians and Americans, intellectuals and devotees, hermits and activists. Sangharakshita's ideas can surely help more people understand the real significance of their lives.

It is Sangharakshita's ideas that we will now set out to explore. While we are contemplating Sangharakshita's thought, we should not forget the perspective within which he himself functions. He is a bold and original thinker and, at the same time, a faithful follower of the Buddha. To some this has seemed paradoxical: I remember the poet Allen Ginsberg pondering, after a visit to Sangharakshita, why one so unconventional and revolutionary in his outlook should write poetry so traditional in form. When I reported this to Sangharakshita, he laughed and reflected that he is but a reluctant revolutionary. Really he is a complete traditionalist, forced by circumstances to take to revolution. His tastes are thoroughly traditional, and he says that, if circumstances had allowed it, he would have found fulfilment living in a very traditional Buddhist monastery in a very traditional Buddhist culture: studying, meditating, writing. But circumstances have not allowed it. He has been called upon to give new life to the old truths, not only through ideas but through practical guidance and new institutions. All his work is entirely fresh, revolutionary even, yet completely faithful to the original insight and teaching of the Buddha. His own teaching consists essentially of restating that insight within the modern context or else working out its unexplored implications.

So that we can better appreciate the significance of Sangharakshita's ideas, we must learn more about their author. It is, however, not easy to get a full impression of the man. Sangharakshita is a complex figure who has lived a singular life and has a very individual intelligence. He has formed himself under rather unusual conditions and speaks with a particular voice. Thinker, poet, communicator, mystic, organiser, scholar, guide: it is hard to comprehend so many-sided and unique a character.

'Who am I? I must confess I do not know. I am as much a mystery to myself as I probably am to you. Not that I am a mystery to everyone, apparently. Quite a lot of people know exactly who and what I am (I am speaking of people outside the

[FWBO]). Quite a lot of people 'see' me. But they see me in different ways. This was very much the case when I lived in India. According to who it was that did the seeing, I was 'the English monk', 'a rabid Mahayanist', 'a narrow-minded Hinayanist', 'the Enemy of the Church', 'a Russian spy', 'an American agent', 'the Editor of the Maha Bodhi', 'an impractical young idealist', 'a good speaker', 'the invader of Suez', 'the guru of the Untouchables', and so on. More recently, here in England, I have been, 'a good monk', 'a bad monk', 'the Buddhist counterpart of the Vicar of Hampstead', 'the author of A Survey of Buddhism', 'a crypto-Vajrayanist', 'a lecturer at Yale', 'the hippie guru', 'a first-class organizer', 'a traditionalist', 'a maverick', 'a misogynist', 'a sexist', 'a controversial figure', and 'An Enlightened Englishman'.

All these different 'sightings' have at least some truth in them, even though the people doing the 'seeing' may have looked at me from the wrong angle, in the wrong kind of light, through tinted spectacles, or through the wrong end of the telescope. They may even have had spots floating before their eyes. The reason why all these different sightings have at least some truth in them is that I am a rather complex person.'

(My Relation to the Order, pp. 26-27)

His life is immediately striking for the number of modern myths it embodies. To begin with, Sangharakshita is a 'self-made man'. He was born in relatively humble circumstances with few material or cultural advantages, without much benefit of formal education, and with little or no religious background and no effective spiritual mentors. Yet he has become a man of formidable learning, with a penetrating and creative mind, one of the leading Buddhist teachers of his age. Further, Sangharakshita made the 'journey to the East' and he made it well before the era of the package-deal spiritual trip. He did not merely drop in on oriental culture for a few weeks, but lived in the immemorial traditions of Indian asceticism and immersed himself in Indian culture. He met Indian gurus and Tibetan lamas and studied at first hand the great spiritual riches of the East. Sangharakshita made the 'return journey'. He 'came back home', bringing back to the land and culture from which he sprang the wealth that he had found while he was in India.

In India he began his career as 'helper of the oppressed'. He devoted himself to teaching hundreds of thousands of ex-Untouchables the true significance of the Dharma. Their recent conversion to Buddhism was of immense social significance since it gave them a basis for dignity and confidence. Later he encouraged his Western disciples to continue that work, supplementing the teaching of Buddhism with social action. Here, Sangharakshita reverses the modern myth: for he is a Westerner who brings wisdom to the East! In a certain sense, Sangharakshita is a 'rebel', the 'individual against the group', a gadfly to the herd. He has often found himself at odds with 'establishments', whether the authorities of the Maha Bodhi Society in India or the leaders of Buddhist organisations in London in the sixties. However, he has no psychological compulsion to rebellion: he has often shown he can co-operate well with others. The 'establishments' have found him inconvenient because of his fearless and uncompromising adherence to spiritual truth and his willingness to speak out when he sees hypocrisy and confusion.

The variety of the myths exemplified in his life illustrates the breadth and complexity of his character. He is a man with the inclinations of a hermit, preferring the peace of his hermitage and the company of a few close friends: yet he functions on an increasingly large stage, before the thousands of people who consider him their spiritual teacher and the many more who are interested in what he has to say. He is by nature a scholar and an artist: but he has shown himself to be a formidable organiser who has founded a movement of great flexibility and effectiveness. He is a witty and charming conversationalist, a sympathetic listener and counsellor, and a firm and faithful friend: yet he can be a fierce polemicist and a few of his works have aroused some controversy and even hostility.

Many who meet him for the first time are astonished that this man should be so ‘ordinary’ in appearance. His spiritual perspicacity shines out from his writing and speaking and he is honoured and respected by many - yet he is entirely lacking in ‘charisma’, as popularly understood. Several tell of first meeting Sangharakshita at an FWBO centre without realising who he was. He lacks, even disdains, that animal magnetism that gains many a guru his following. Yet, if one attends closely when one is with him, one will feel the force of his presence. He has a great stillness and self-possession, a mindfulness of every movement. In his eyes there is an extraordinary watchfulness, betokening a deep awareness and an exceptionally penetrating mind. Yet those detached and watchful eyes that can make him seem somewhat Olympian can suddenly spark with humour, flash mischievously, or even blaze with a kind of angry fire. For, although he is invariably kindly and considerate in his dealings with people, and although he has always shown outstanding patience and perseverance in the face of some considerable difficulties, he has that underlying confidence, vigour, and determination that alone makes possible the successful completion of worthwhile tasks.

A self-made man

Sangharakshita's origins offer few clues to how he became what he now is. Dennis Philip Edward Lingwood, as he was first known, was born on 26 August 1925 in South London of working-class parents. Though his mother and father had little education themselves, they were upright and sensible people, providing a happy and loving home for the young Dennis and his sister. It was obvious from an early age that he was exceptionally intelligent, but life went on normally enough for him until he was eight years old. He was then diagnosed as having a serious heart condition that demanded he be kept completely immobile and calm at peril of his life. For two years he was confined to bed, seeing only his parents and the family doctor. What might have been an oppressive disaster was, for so lively a mind, a singular opportunity. Guided by a surprisingly mature sensibility, the eight-year-old boy kept himself occupied by reading: mainly the classics of English literature and all sixty-one parts of *Harmsworth's Children's Encyclopaedia*, several of which he read many times. In this way he gained an introduction to literature, philosophy, religion, and art.

Two years later, the original diagnosis being overturned by a pioneering doctor, Dennis was liberated from bed and eventually allowed to return to school. However, he himself asserts that he never learned anything useful from his formal education, particularly as it

was further interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. He has acquired his considerable learning almost entirely by his own efforts. From the time he was confined to bed he has read several books of solid merit every week, absorbing the contents of each with keen discernment and an excellent memory. From that time also dates his love of art: indeed, so great was his early ability that it was assumed he would become a painter. But painting gave way to a new and greater love. At the age of twelve, on reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he discovered a passion for poetry and began writing verse himself - as he has continued to do throughout his life.

With the coming of war and the threat of air raids, most of London's children were evacuated from the city. Dennis left for Devon in 1940, in the second wave of evacuations, where he continued his self-education, spending many hours in public libraries. As soon as he could persuade his parents, he left school and took a job in a coal merchant's office. During this period he came across Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, a seminal work of the Theosophical movement. Reading this convinced him that he was not a Christian 'and never had been'. He returned to London in 1941, for the next two years living at home with his parents once more and working as a clerk for the London County Council. This was a very turbulent period, during which he fell in love, began to have psychic and mystical experiences, composed much poetry, and wrote a novel – never published and now lost.

In 1942, in his insatiable scouring of the London bookshops, he purchased copies of two important works of Mahayana Buddhism: the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita* or *Diamond Sutra* and the *Sutra of Wei-lang* (otherwise known as the *Sutra of Hui-neng* or the *Platform Sutra*). These had a decisive impact, convincing him that he was a Buddhist - and that he 'always had been'. He became a member of the London Buddhist Society, contributing an article to its journal, *The Middle Way*, and attending its meetings. Here he encountered Christmas Humphreys and most of the leading figures in English Buddhism of that time. The full-moon day of May 1944 saw his formal accession to Buddhism, during the Society's celebrations of Wesak - the anniversary of the birth, Enlightenment, and parinirvana of the Buddha. On that occasion, he recited for the first time the Refuges and Precepts after the Burmese bhikkhu, U Thittila.

The journey to the east

By this time, he had been conscripted into the army and had been trained as a signalman in the Royal Corps of Signals. In August 1944, he was sent with his unit to Delhi in India. He could hardly believe his good fortune, for here he was in the land of the Buddha, which he had never expected to see. However, there being little Buddhism to be encountered there, he secured a transfer to Colombo in Sri Lanka. Though now in a 'Buddhist country', he made no effective contact with Buddhists. It was among the Hindu swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission that he found some genuine spiritual companionship. Indeed, with the strong encouragement of the swamis, he discovered an urgent desire to renounce the world and become a monk. On his next transfer, to Calcutta, he continued his association with the Mission, without ever losing his basic loyalty to Buddhism. In 1946 a final transfer took him to Singapore and here he did make contact with Buddhists and began the practice of meditation. Hearing that his unit was to be demobilised in England, he checked in his equipment and left camp, technically a deserter.

Back in Calcutta he worked briefly with the Ramakrishna Mission and then with the Maha Bodhi Society, the leading Buddhist organisation in India. Both these experiences convinced him of the corruption of religious bodies and strengthened his determination to renounce the world. In August 1947, at the age of twenty-two, he took one of the most important steps of his life. With a young Indian friend he burned his identification papers, gave away his possessions, and, dressed in an orange robe, 'went forth' as a wandering ascetic, as the Buddha had done before him. He even left behind his name, from now on calling himself Anagarika Dharmapriya. The two friends spent the next two years mainly in South India. For periods they settled in one place, meditating and studying. At other times they wandered, always depending on alms for their food and shelter. They also visited the ashrams of various Hindu teachers, such as Anandamayi, Swami Ramdas, and Ramana Maharshi. While staying in a cave near the Maharshi's ashram he had a powerful vision of the Buddha Amitabha. This he took as confirmation that he should now seek ordination as a Buddhist monk.

Ordination did not however prove easy to come by. Their first request received a rather unceremonious rejection from the monks of the Maha Bodhi Society's vihara or monastery at Sarnath. The two friends next approached the Burmese bhikkhu, U Chandramani, then the senior-most monk in India, and with some difficulty persuaded him to give them the samanera, or novice, ordination. It was at this ceremony, in May 1949, that he received the name Sangharakshita: 'Protector of (or Protected by) the Spiritual Community'. His full ordination as a bhikkhu took place at Sarnath in November of the following year, with another Burmese bhikkhu, U Kawinda, as upadhyaya or preceptor, and Ven. Jagdish Kashyap as his acarya or teacher. After their samanera ordinations, he and his friend travelled briefly into Nepal to minister to the disciples of U Chandramani, begging all the way. He then spent seven months living with Ven. Jagdish Kashyap, one of the foremost Indian Buddhist monks of the twentieth century, studying the Pali language, the Abhidhamma, and Logic. This idyllic period ended when he and his teacher went on pilgrimage through the Buddhist sites of Bihar and up into the Himalayas. In the small hill-station of Kalimpong, on the borders of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Tibet, Ven. Kashyap requested him to stay and 'work for the good of Buddhism'. In fulfilment of his teacher's wishes, Kalimpong was to be his base for the next fourteen years.

From his arrival in Kalimpong at the age of twenty-five, Sangharakshita worked very actively for the revival of Buddhism in the border regions, which contained a large proportion of nominally Buddhist peoples. Finding the existing Buddhist groups too factious and sectarian, he started a new organisation, the Young Men's Buddhist Association. The Association not only offered Buddhist teaching and practice but also cultural and social activities – even tutorial classes to help the young men pass their all-important examinations. It quickly established itself as a valued part of the life of the town, appreciated alike by young and old, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Three years later, it became a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society, gaining thereby a small grant and affiliation with the major Buddhist organisation in India. Sangharakshita was however careful to ensure that it lost none of its autonomy.

During his first seven years in Kalimpong, Sangharakshita lived and worked in rented or borrowed accommodation. Despite the small grant from the Maha Bodhi Society for the

branch's activities, he himself had no regular income. He lived entirely from the donations of well-wishers, small payments for articles and poems published in various journals, and fees for English lessons - many of which, however, he gave free of charge. There were times when he quite literally had no money at all - although he says that this never worried him. In 1957, through the generosity of the King of Sikkim and of an English Buddhist friend, he was able to purchase his own vihara.

A few months after his first arrival in Kalimpong, he commenced the publication of *Stepping-Stones*, 'a bimonthly journal of Himalayan Buddhism'. This very soon attracted an impressive list of contributors such as Lama Govinda, Dr Herbert Guenther, Dr Edward Conze, and Prince Peter of Greece. Although the journal had to cease publication after two years through lack of funds, it had achieved a wide circulation, bringing the young English bhikkhu to the notice of many in the English-speaking Buddhist world and introducing him to some prominent scholars and teachers.

Over the years he spent in the town, Sangharakshita managed to unite the Buddhist community in a quite unprecedented way. He arranged the joint celebration by all local Buddhist groups of various important Buddhist festivals. He even organised the commemoration of Tsongkapa's birthday by all the Tibetan Buddhists in the town together - a feat that brought the Dalai Lama's personal congratulations. His activities were not confined to the town: he gave lectures and held meetings all over the region. During regular visits to Sikkim at the personal request of the royal family and of the Indian Government's representative, he did what he could to revitalise the rather degenerate Buddhism of the kingdom, drawing up a scheme of studies for the monks of the royal monastery. So much a leader of the Buddhists in the region did he become that the Indian Government specifically asked him to stay on in the town, at a time when there were rumours of a Chinese invasion of the border regions, to help discourage the mass flight of its Buddhist inhabitants.

His association with the Maha Bodhi Society began in 1952 when he was invited by its General Secretary, Devapriya Valisinha, to write a biographical sketch of the Society's great founder, Anagarika Dharmapala. Through this work, he came to have great admiration for Dharmapala and sympathy for Valisinha, his dedicated, if less capable, successor. He had, however, serious criticisms of the Society's present organisation: its governing body was dominated by caste Hindus, one member being openly hostile to Buddhism. He therefore took care never to compromise himself by becoming a member. Nonetheless, he was for many years the principal editor of its organ, *The Maha Bodhi*, and often lectured at its premises in Calcutta and elsewhere.

Helper of the oppressed

Though Kalimpong was his base from 1950 to 1964, he had a much wider sphere of operation. Most years he would spend some months away from the hills, lecturing in many parts of India. A very able speaker, he was much in demand at branches of the Maha Bodhi Society, as well as at various non-Buddhist organisations. He came to know a great variety of people: Buddhist monks of many different nationalities and schools, Western scholars who flocked to the Himalayas to study Tibetan culture and religion, Theosophists, Christian missionaries, politicians, even Raj Kapoor, the 'Clark Gable of

India'. One of his most significant encounters was with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. This formidable man was among the foremost Indian politicians of the day: it was he who had headed the commission that drafted the constitution of independent India. Himself born an Untouchable, he had become the unrivalled leader of his people in their struggle for social justice. Dr Ambedkar eventually concluded that the only way out of the oppression of the Hindu caste system lay in leaving Hinduism altogether. After long and careful deliberation, he decided to become a Buddhist. This was to be one of the most significant events for Buddhism in the twentieth century, initiating the conversion of millions of people. Sangharakshita was able to advise him what conversion really meant and how it was undertaken. At Dr Ambedkar's invitation, he began teaching his followers the significance of the religion they were about to espouse.

Sangharakshita was not able to attend the ceremony in October 1956 at which Dr Ambedkar converted to Buddhism with nearly 400,000 of his followers. However, six weeks later he visited Nagpur, the city where the conversions had taken place, to be greeted with the news that the great leader had died just a few hours before. He had arrived at exactly the time he was most needed. Over the next few critical days he worked tirelessly to rally the grief-stricken multitudes, earning himself a secure place in their affections. Nearly every year from then until he left India he would spend several months touring among the new Buddhists of Western India, teaching them the tenets of their religion. He personally conducted the conversion ceremonies of more than 200,000 people.

Active as he was, both in Kalimpong and beyond, Sangharakshita did not neglect spiritual practice. He meditated at least every morning and evening, continued with his studies, and reflected on the Dharma. Each year he would observe the traditional 'rains retreat', remaining within his vihara compound for three months and devoting himself entirely to meditation, study, and writing. His situation in the border region gave him the opportunity to study Tibetan Buddhism at first hand. Many leading lamas were now escaping the Chinese invasion of their country and Kalimpong was often their first stopping-place. In 1956 he received initiation from Chetul Sangye Dorje, a highly respected, if rather unconventional, lama. He later received initiations and teachings from Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche, Dudjom Rimpoche, and Khachu Rimpoche, all of whom functioned within the Nyingmapa tradition, and from Dhardo Rimpoche, a Gelugpa whose previous 'incarnations' had all been Nyingmapas. From Dhardo Rimpoche, who became a close friend, he received, in October 1962, the Bodhisattva ordination, thus giving him ordination and initiation within all three yanas of Buddhism.

Throughout his stay in India he continued to write. Despite burning most of his poetry in 1949, he continued to pour forth verse, some of which appeared in various journals, including the widely-circulating *Illustrated Weekly* of India. In 1954 a volume of his poems was published, *Messengers from Tibet and other Poems*. Besides many articles and editorials for *Stepping-Stones*, *The Maha Bodhi*, and other periodicals, he wrote *Flame in Darkness: A Biographical Sketch of Anagarika Dharmapala*, and his major work, *A Survey of Buddhism*, both of which were published while he was in India. Two other works written at this time, *The Three Jewels*, an introduction to Buddhism that began life

as contributions to an encyclopaedia, and *The Eternal Legacy*, a survey of Buddhist canonical literature, were not published until some years later.

The return journey

He had followed with sympathy the fortunes of the Buddhist movement in the West, particularly through correspondence with some of his English Buddhist friends. In 1964 he was invited to London for six months to help restore harmony in the already factious British Buddhist world. Realising that, for many reasons, he could do little more for Buddhism in India, he decided to see what opportunities awaited him in the West and accepted the invitation. He soon breathed new spirit into the rather staid atmosphere of English Buddhism, plunging into a vigorous round of classes, lectures, and meetings. He was clearly very popular and numbers at meetings began to mount. It was obvious that Buddhism had great potential in the West. Six months stretched to eighteen, and finally he decided that he would say farewell to his friends in India and then return permanently to London.

While he was in London he had been incumbent of the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, and it was to the Vihara that he intended to return. However, his nonsectarian approach and refusal to fit narrow expectations of what a Buddhist monk should and should not do turned some of the Vihara's trustees against him. While he was on his farewell tour of India he received notice that he would not be allowed to take up his former post. Despite the outcry of the greater part of those attending the Vihara, by a narrow majority the trustees had voted to exclude him. Sangharakshita's first response was one of relief. He was free to start again, free from the confusion and disharmony of the present British Buddhist world. With the full blessings of his teachers and friends in India, he returned to England. Just a few days after his arrival, in April 1967, he founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order with a small band of his disciples from the Vihara. One year later he ordained the first thirteen men and women into the Western Buddhist Order itself.

The rest of Sangharakshita's life is so closely bound up with the development of the FWBO/Triratna that it is difficult to reduce it to a simple account. Broadly, he completely devoted himself to the movement, which grew, on the whole, very steadily and surely. The first five years or so proved intensely creative. He had, so to speak, served his apprenticeship in the traditional Buddhist world: he had thought deeply about the Dharma and had practised it intensively. He was now on his own and must bring Buddhism to life in an entirely new environment, basing himself only on its fundamental principles. Step by step, Sangharakshita formed his new Buddhist movement.

Each week there would be three or four classes. At first, activities were held in a rented basement in central London, then in borrowed rooms at a macrobiotic restaurant and 'new age' centre, and finally in a disused factory in an area of North London scheduled for redevelopment. Not only was Sangharakshita taking all the classes but he personally did much of the organisational work, gradually training his disciples in the tasks of running a Buddhist movement. He gave several important lecture series in which he set out the essential teachings of Buddhism, drawing on all schools and traditions. Twice a year he led major retreats, and throughout the year there were weekend or day seminars and workshops. Much of his time was spent in personal interviews with the many people who

wished to see him - for he was not merely a teacher and leader to his disciples but a friend.

By 1973 it seemed that the new Buddhist movement was firmly enough established for its founder to withdraw from daily involvement. Not only was it possible, it was desirable. Order members needed the opportunity to take more responsibility themselves, and Sangharakshita himself needed to function in new ways. The movement now had two centres in London and two in New Zealand, besides substantial groups in Glasgow and Brighton and smaller ones elsewhere. Sangharakshita was the leader of a growing movement and could not remain involved in one centre alone. He moved first to a small chalet overlooking the sea in Cornwall and then to various cottages in East Anglia. He completed the first part of his memoirs, published in two volumes as *Learning to Walk* and *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, and wrote several articles and papers.

Although he was no longer involved in daily organisation, he still kept a close eye on everything that happened, being particularly concerned with new developments. As the movement expanded and deepened, he elaborated his teaching ever more fully, thinking out the principles that underlay its evolution at every stage. He continued, over the next fifteen years, to give several important lectures, and conducted seminars for small groups of his disciples on various Buddhist texts, modern accounts of the Dharma, and a few works from other sources.

Each year he would visit several centres and groups, both in Britain and abroad, meeting people, giving lectures, and talking with Order members. London was still the main focus and here he was a frequent visitor, particularly after the opening in 1979 of the large London Buddhist Centre, where he had a small flat. In 1977 he had shifted his principal residence to a country house in Norfolk, which became the Padmaloka Men's Retreat Centre. Here he gathered around him a small community, some of whom functioned as his secretaries, forming the nucleus of the Office of the Western Buddhist Order. By the end of the seventies the movement consisted of some fifteen centres, several of which had communities and businesses attached to them. The FWBO no longer offered only teachings and practices but a new and radical way of life, developing under the personal guidance of the founder.

In 1977 one of Sangharakshita's leading disciples made contact with some of his followers in India and, with their help, began to establish the FWBO there – where it was known as the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana (TBMSG). It was soon clear that Sangharakshita was not forgotten and that the principles of his new Buddhist movement were as applicable in India as in the West. Very quickly many thousands of people became involved with the movement. Sangharakshita himself visited India two years later, and conducted the first ordinations of Indians into the Order. He has visited India periodically since then and has interested himself closely in activities there, which are growing far more rapidly than anywhere else in the world. At his urging, his disciples in the West began to raise money for social projects among the new Buddhists of India. They formed what has now become a substantial fund-raising charity, the Karuna Trust.

By now Sangharakshita had an extremely heavy workload. Simply keeping himself informed of what was happening and maintaining contact with all those he had ordained

occupied much of his time. By virtue of strong self-discipline, he kept at his literary work while also visiting centres, giving personal interviews, lecturing and leading seminars, and dealing with the many questions and problems that flowed in from all parts of the movement. In 1981 he instituted an annual three-month-long retreat for men who were nearing ordination in a former Catholic monastery in Italy, himself leading many activities and supervising study. For the next eight years these retreats, though still demanding, were an opportunity to stand back from the regular duties of the ever-expanding movement. He also spent some time each year attending women's ordination retreats.

Fortunately, his senior disciples were maturing. In 1985 and 1986 he delegated the conferring of ordinations in India to teams of men and women Order members, and in 1989 he handed on responsibility for ordinations in the West. There were by now some capable teachers and leaders among Order members, well imbued with the principles he had been clarifying over the last twenty years. He decided that he needed to concentrate yet more on his literary work, as much as possible leaving others to direct the movement. Since 1989 he has been living in his flat at the London Buddhist Centre, paradoxically finding seclusion in the midst of the city. He retains several important central responsibilities, although he is in the process of handing these over. Besides his writing and organisational responsibilities, Sangharakshita keeps contact with his many disciples, seeing several each day and corresponding with others. From time to time he visits Triratna centres, taking a particular interest in places where the movement is newly taking hold.

The movement has grown now to the point at which the great majority of those involved have had little or no personal contact with its founder. Whilst there is no 'cult of personality' in the Triratna Buddhist Community, Sangharakshita is very much appreciated and his influence pervades every aspect of the movement. But he has always been keenly aware that his disciples must learn to carry on the work without him. From the outset he has engaged in a conscious process of stepping back, so that others have to take up the responsibilities he leaves behind. As he approaches his seventieth year he hopes to hand over his final duties to his senior disciples. He will then devote himself fully to his writing, through which he can clarify the principles and practice of the spiritual life to future generations.

Such is the bare outline of Sangharakshita's life. Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about it is that he has seldom premeditated what he is going to do. Opportunities have simply arisen and he has taken them. His thinking too, as perhaps all thought should, has arisen in relation to his experience. He himself has come to the conclusion:

‘That the course of my life has been determined by impulse and intuition rather than by reason and logic and that, for me, there could be no question of first clarifying an idea or concept and then acting upon it, i.e. acting upon it in its clarified form. An idea or concept was clarified in the process of its being acted upon.’

(The History of My Going for Refuge, pp.18-9).

The circumstances of his thinking are therefore important if we are to gain a full understanding of his ideas. We must then look more closely now at some aspects of his life as we explore the leading themes of his thought.

(End of excerpt)

Excerpts from Sangharakshita's Memoirs

Reading the Diamond Sutra

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.79)

Return to London meant, almost as much as a return to Sonia, a renewal of acquaintance with the bookshops of Charing Cross Road. Expanding my sphere of operations, I began penetrating into two or three little courts which opened from it on the right. In one of these I discovered the oriental bookshop which, though well known to all serious English students of Eastern philosophy and religion, had been until then unknown to me. Unlike the other bookshops with their sixpenny and shilling boxes on either side of a wide open door, it was an aloof, reserved, almost mysterious place. In a single box outside the empty window on the left were some damaged specimens of the lighter sort of theosophical literature. The window on the right contained expensive books on the occult sciences. The door between was shut fast. Only after I had several times stopped to thumb the damaged volumes did I venture inside. The interior of the shop was even less like that of a bookshop than the exterior. Through a door at the back of the shop could be seen an octogenarian gentleman, in very powerful spectacles, sitting at a desk. Above the mantelpiece behind him hung a life-size photograph of Mme. Blavatsky. At John Watkins, which thereafter I visited frequently, I bought the two books by which I have been most profoundly influenced. These were the *Diamond Sutra*, which I read first in Gemmell's then in Max Müller's translation, and the *Sutra of Wei Lang* (Hui Neng). If, when I read *Isis Unveiled*, I knew that I was not a Christian, when I read the *Diamond Sutra* I knew that I was a Buddhist. Though this book epitomizes a teaching of such rarefied sublimity that even Arahants, saints who have attained individual nirvana, are said to become confused and afraid when they hear it for the first time, I at once joyfully embraced it with an unqualified acceptance and assent. To me the *Diamond Sutra* was not new. I had known it and believed it and realized it ages before and the reading of the sutra as it were awoke me to the existence of something I had forgotten. Once I realized that I was a Buddhist it seemed that I had always been one, that it was the most natural thing in the world to be, and that I had never been anything else.

...The realization that I was a Buddhist came in the later summer or early autumn of 1942. At about the same period I had for the first time experiences of the type which are generally known as psychic. Whether these started before or after reading the *Diamond Sutra* I do not remember.

Sangharakshita's Going Forth

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.217ff)

There was only one way out. Religious societies, organizations, and groups, far from being a help to spiritual development were only a hindrance. However lofty the ideals with which they were founded, they had a natural tendency to degenerate, in the hands of selfish human beings, into instruments for the acquisition of money, position, power, and fame. Instead of trying any longer to work with them we would follow the example of the

Buddha and sever at one stroke our connection with an incorrigible world. We would renounce the household life and go forth into the life of homelessness as wanderers in search of Truth. For the last few months we had only sat hesitantly on the shore of the vast ocean of the spiritual life. Now, casting aside all fear, we would plunge boldly in. Having made this resolution, we lost no time putting it into effect. With the help of a handful of geruamati, the reddish-brown earth used since time immemorial by Indian ascetics, we dyed our shirts and sarongs the traditional saffron of the world-renunciant. Suitcases and watches were sold, trousers, jackets, and shoes given away, identification papers destroyed. Apart from the robes that we were to wear we kept only a blanket each and our books and notebooks. As for the last three months hair and beard had been allowed to grow we did not need shaving tackle.

...Next morning, after joyfully donning our saffron robes, we walked feeling shy and rather conspicuous through the bazaar to Dr Gurukipal Singh's house. Lalla Pyarelal and other friends, though regarding our aspirations with sympathy, did not feel at all happy about our decision, which in their opinion was rash. Only Dr Singh wholeheartedly approved. With him, therefore, we had agreed to take breakfast before leaving Kasauli. Apart from one of his sons, a stalwart youth who accompanied us part of the way, our worthy Sikh friend, whose deep emotion when he wished us success in our quest both humbled and heartened us, was the last person to whom we spoke before setting out on foot along the ten-mile road that led to the plains.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that the appearance of a rainbow is one of the most auspicious of signs, and the biographies of their saints and yogis are replete with references to this phenomenon. Whether our going forth on 18 August 1947 may be considered an auspicious event I cannot say, but it was certainly signaled by the appearance not of one but of scores of rainbows.

As we left Kasauli it was raining, but, as in the course of our descent we emerged from the clouds into the bright sunshine below, we saw arching the road, at intervals of a few dozen yards, not only single but double and triple rainbows. Every time we turned a bend we found more rainbows waiting for us. We passed through them as though through the multicoloured arcades of some celestial palace. Against the background of bright sunshine, jewel-like glittering raindrops, and hills of the freshest and most vivid green, this plethora of delicate seven-hued bows seemed like the epiphany of another world.

On the afternoon of our second day of freedom, Satyapriya and I reached New Delhi, where we caught the first train to Madras. Our plan was to study Buddhism in Ceylon. Throughout the whole of the 1,000-mile journey the third-class compartment into which we had fought our way was so densely packed with passengers and luggage that each night, when we wanted to sleep, my friend and I had to scramble up on to a luggage-rack of such narrow dimensions that even one of us could hardly have slept there in comfort. What with the glare of ceiling-lights, the suffocating closeness of the atmosphere, and the slamming of doors, shouting of coolies, shrieking of passengers, and blowing of whistles at every station - not to speak of the excruciating discomfort of our position - we slumbered but fitfully, so that when on the morning of the fourth day we reached Madras, great was our relief.

Though they had not been unaware of my inclinations, the swamis of the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, to which we went straight from the station, were astonished to see the young Englishman who, only eight months earlier, had visited them in a white tropical suit, now reappearing in the saffron robes of an Indian sadhu. Whether they were pleased at the sight of this sudden transformation or not they were too subtle to allow me to discern. But they received us kindly, and after showing us round the library and dispensary attached to the Math, which Satyapriya had not seen before, left us to sleep off our weariness in the guest-house in a manner that suggested we were their guests for the next few days. We had time, therefore, to visit the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, only a mile from the Math where, from the wooded river bank, we watched the sun go down over the estuary as well as the famous Mylapore beach, a flat two-mile stretch of firm sand up and down which we strolled until long after nightfall with one of the younger swamis, now discussing questions of religion and philosophy, now pausing to listen to the hiss of the breakers as with moonlit white crests they raced far up the beach.

Amitabha: the Vision in the Cave

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.337)

Despite frequent changes of abode, during the previous few months Satyapriya and I had not neglected our own practice of meditation. Wherever we might happen to be, we sat without fail morning and evening. While we were at Anandashram this had led, in my case, to some interesting side-effects. One afternoon I discovered I had a temperature. Though it was alarmingly high, so high that Satyapriya, on feeling me with his hand, at first wanted to call the doctor, I did not feel the least unwell. Indeed, I felt blissful, almost ecstatic, while the heat itself seemed to envelop the whole body in a melting sensation of infinite warmth, comfort, and security. The experience lasted two days; when we told Ramdas about it he pointed out that tapasya, the ancient Sanskrit word for spiritual practice, literally meant the generation of heat, and said that the experience signified the burning up of all impurities. Now that we were staying at the Virupaksha Guha, and devoting most of our time to meditation, even more extraordinary experiences were only to be expected, nor was it astonishing that some of them should seem to indicate the course of future developments.

One night I found myself as it were out of the body and in the presence of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who presides over the western quarter of the universe. The colour of the Buddha was a deep, rich, luminous red, like that of rubies, though at the same time soft and glowing, like the light of the setting sun. While his left hand rested on his lap, the fingers of his right hand held up by the stalk a single red lotus in full bloom and he sat, in the usual cross-legged posture, on an enormous red lotus that floated on the surface of the sea.

To the left, immediately beneath the raised right arm of the Buddha, was the red hemisphere of the setting sun, its reflection glittering golden across the waters. How long the experience lasted I do not know, for I seemed to be out of time as well as out of the

body, but I saw the Buddha as clearly as I had ever seen anything under the ordinary circumstances of my life, indeed far more clearly and vividly.

The rich red colour of Amitabha himself, as well as of the two lotuses, and the setting sun, made a particularly deep impression on me. It was more wonderful, more appealing, than any earthly red: it was like red light, but so soft and, at the same time, so vivid, as to be altogether without parallel. In the course of the next few days I composed a series of stanzas describing the vision. Contrary to my usual practice, I failed to write them down afterwards, with the result that they gradually faded from my mind. But the experience itself never faded. Nearly a quarter of a century later, the figure of the red Buddha is as clear to me, in recollection, as it was the next morning in the Virupaksha Guha.

With the approach of summer, the atmosphere of the cave had by this time not only lost its freshness but become quite stuffy. Satyapriya and I therefore decided to move to a square stone-built shrine that stood lower down, at the very foot of the hill. Better ventilated than the cave, and extremely cool, it consisted of a single chamber about six foot square divided into two sections. One section was occupied, from wall to wall, by a low stone platform, on which one of us slept at night, while in the other a lingam of polished black stone, eight or ten inches high, had been set into an anvil-shaped yoni sunk in the middle of the floor. Though involving such a short distance, our removal from the higher to the lower slopes of Arunachala was not without significance. The vision in the cave had convinced me that our two-years' apprenticeship to the holy life had come to an end, and that we must now retrace our steps to North India and seek formal ordination in one of the Buddhist centres there. My desire for ordination had indeed become unbearably intense.

Ordination

At Sarnath

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.79)

Suddenly we saw above the tree-tops, about a mile away, the pinkish-grey pinnacle of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara, the new Sinhalese temple constructed about twenty years earlier. We were there! After a few hundred yards the road turned sharply to the right and as though in a dream we saw before us the park-like prospect of Sarnath. The next few days were among the pleasantest and the most painful of my entire existence...

Rarely in the history of Buddhism can two candidates for admission to the Sangha have been more quickly or more cruelly disappointed. Though we were allowed, rather grudgingly, to stay in the vast, empty Rest House, from the very first the attitude of the five or six resident monks towards us was clearly one of incomprehension, suspicion, and hostility. Our going barefoot might have been overlooked, and even our interest in meditation excused, but to be altogether without money was, we were made to feel, the unforgivable offence. Indeed, when we confessed that we had been trying to practise the precept of not handling gold and silver, the observance of which was of course incumbent on shramaneras and bhikshus alike, and that for the past few months we had not

possessed as much as a single anna between us, they reacted rather as though we had told them we had leprosy. From that moment our fate was sealed. In the eyes of these representatives of 'Pure Buddhism' we were no better than beggars, and it was clear they wanted nothing whatever to do with us. They were even unwilling to give us a little food. When, in response to the bell, we turned up at the dining-hall, we heard one of them murmur angrily, "Why do they come without being asked?" After the open-handed hospitality of the Hindu ashrams we had visited, such an attitude came as a shock indeed.

Nevertheless, we decided not to be discouraged. In the case of a step so important as the one we now wanted to take, difficulties were bound to arise, and the best thing we could do was to treat them as tests. Accordingly, at the first opportunity, we acquainted the monks with our religious history and made the formal request for ordination. After listening to our account in silence, they said they would consult among themselves and let us know their decision. It was not long in coming. They were all members of the Maha Bodhi Society, they explained, and in view of the fact that the Society would be responsible for the maintenance of monks ordained under its auspices, they were not permitted to ordain anyone without the consent of the General Secretary. Since the Society was at present very short of funds, they were sure that in our case this consent would not be forthcoming.

Though we had known what the verdict would be, the shock when it came was none the less acute. All our plans were laid in ruins, all our hopes destroyed. Bitterly disappointed, we returned to Benares.

At Kusinara

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.397)

When the moon that rose every night above the shadowy dome of the Maha Parinirvana Stupa was almost full, U Chandramani called us to his room and with his customary affability told us that he was prepared to accede to our request. We would be ordained immediately after breakfast on the morning of the Vaishakha Purnima Day. It would have to be clearly understood, however, that in giving us the shramanera ordination, he would not be accepting any responsibility for our future training, nor would it be possible for us to stay with him at Kusinara. As we could see for ourselves, the resources of the Vihara were limited, and he was not in a position to support two more disciples. But if it was only ordination we wanted, he said, with evident warmth and sincerity, then he would ordain us with the greatest pleasure and we could have his blessing, too, into the bargain.

Ex-brahmin that he was, Satyapriya was at first shocked by the idea of our being ordained after breakfast, and not before it, while still fasting. But after breakfast it was definitely to be. Buddhism attached no importance whatever to ritual purity and impurity, we were reminded, and an empty stomach was no more holy than a full one. At nine o'clock on Thursday, 12 May 1949, therefore, after we had eaten our breakfast in the old Vihara, we received the long-expected summons to the Chapter House. Here U Chandramani handed us our robes, tied up in a bundle, and told us to go and take a bath and put them on. Our heads had already been shaved the previous day. The robes for which we now exchanged the informal saffron of the last two years were of the regulation size, shape, and colour,

and along with the rest of the permitted articles - girdle, water-strainer, needle, and razor had been presented to us by Mother Vipassana and the other anagarikas, who in order to have them ready in time for the ceremony had, in fact, sat up stitching the complicated seams until late at night. U Chandramani himself had presented us with our begging-bowls. On our returning to the Chapter House, duly 'robed and bowled' as the texts have it, we were made to squat on our heels with our elbows resting on our knees and our hands joined together at our foreheads. This was an extremely difficult and uncomfortable position. Indeed, after a few minutes the pain in various parts of my body became excruciating. As I afterwards realized, the position we were made to adopt was that of the child in the womb, for the ordination represented the process of spiritual rebirth, and 'at the birth of a child or a star, there is pain'.

Having to remain in such a position throughout the ceremony was by itself ordeal enough, but for me at least the difficulties of ordination were by no means over. The Three Refuges – the Refuges in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha – had not only to be repeated thrice each but repeated in both Pali and Sanskrit. This was to make sure that the novice monk was able to distinguish between the two kinds of pronunciation, for in the early days of Buddhism, when the Buddha. Message was pre-served and transmitted exclusively by oral means, the slightest carelessness in matters of phonetics could in the course of time result in a serious distortion of the letter of the Teaching leading, perhaps, to eventual loss of its spirit. Try as I might, however, my English tongue could not manage to reproduce the elusive Indian sounds. U Chandramani, for his part, was determined that the requirements of tradition should be scrupulously respected. Time and again he intoned the sacred formulas, patiently coaching me in the production of aspirated consonants, nasalized terminations, and palatal sibilants. After much effort on my part, and much exercise of patience on his, I eventually succeeded in repeating the Refuges to his complete satisfaction in both Pali and Sanskrit and we were able to pass on to the next part of the ceremony, which consisted in the taking of the Ten Shramanera Precepts. This time reciting in Pali only, and with less regard to pronunciation, Satyapriya and I undertook to abstain from injury to living beings, from taking the not-given, from unchastity, from false speech, and from intoxicants, as well as from untimely meals, from song, dance, instrumental music and indecent shows, from garlands, perfumes, unguents and other worldly adornments, from large and lofty beds, and from handling gold or silver. All these precepts we were already observing, but the kindly, simple, and good-humoured manner in which U Chandramani explained each one gave them a fresh significance, and we felt that we would die rather than be guilty of the smallest infringement. The more formal part of the proceedings ended with the Maha Thera solemnly adjuring us in the last words which the Buddha had addressed to his disciples, as he lay on his deathbed in the Sal Grove, only a few hundred yards away: 'With mindfulness strive on!' We were now fully-fledged shramaneras! The desire of our hearts had been fulfilled! We had been spiritually reborn! The ordination ceremony was over!

But not quite over, it seemed. Having been born anew, we had to be given new names. As we relaxed our cramped limbs, U Chandramani asked us on which day of the week we had been born. Neither of us knew. Well, well, murmured the old man, mildly astonished at such ignorance, but evidently not disposed to be over-strict about a matter of secondary importance, he would have to manage as best he could without the information. In Burma each day of the week was associated with certain letters of the alphabet, and a monk's

name had to begin with one of the letters belonging to the particular day of the week on which he had been born. In our case, since it would not be possible for him to follow this procedure, he would have to name us at random, as he himself thought best. Satyapriya would be known as Buddharakshita. Dharmapriya would be known as Dharmarakshita. With these names, which placed us under the protection of the first and the second Refuges, we were well content. Whether on account of the forgetfulness of old age, however, or for some other reason, U Chandramani had overlooked the fact that he already had a disciple called Dharmarakshita. This disciple was the same Indian monk whom we had met at Sarnath, the one who had given us our letters of introduction, and he was even now in Kusinara, having arrived shortly before our ordination. On hearing that I had been given the same name as himself he came rushing over to the Chapter House. If there were two Dharmarakshitas, he protested, there would be endless confusion. People would not know which of us was which. My letters would be delivered to him. What was worse, his letters would be delivered to me. Neither of us would ever know where we were. 'Oh well,' said our preceptor, dismissing all this fuss and bother about names with a gesture of good-humoured impatience, 'Let him be Sangharakshita!'

In this unceremonious manner was I placed under the special protection of the Sangha, or Spiritual Community, rather than under that of the Dharma, or Teaching. Even before the matter of names had been sorted out, however, Mother Vipassana and the other anagarikas were thronging round us not only to offer congratulations but to salute our feet in the traditional manner, just as we had already saluted the feet of U Chandramani and the other monks. These symbolic acts served to remind us that our ordination had not only an individual but also a social significance. As shramaneras we belonged to a community, to a spiritual community, the community of the spiritually reborn. In this we had a definite place, and our relationship with other members of the community, lower or higher than ourselves in the hierarchy, was not only clearly defined but governed by a strict protocol.

Sangharakshita I and II and III

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.435)

Academic interlude

As might have been expected, during the whole of the time that I was with him Kashyapji made no attempt to restrict my freedom, in particular my freedom to read and write what I pleased. All his books, as well as his ticket to the University library, were at my disposal, and he never questioned the use I made of them. Indeed, it did not seem to occur to him to question it. When not occupied with Pali, Abhidhamma, and Logic I therefore read more widely than I had done for several years. As the mood seized me, I also wrote. After being confined to works that I had come across more or less by accident, it was delightful to be able to range at will through all the fields of literature, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, sacred and profane. But delightful though it was, such freedom was not without problems of its own. More clearly than ever before, it brought out into the open a conflict in my interests, perhaps a conflict in my nature itself, which the circumstances of my wandering life with Buddharakshita had tended to obscure. The

nature of this conflict was well illustrated by two letters which I received during the second half of my stay at Buddha Kutti. One was from the redoubtable Bhikkhu Soma. He had already taken me very seriously to task for gadding about instead of settling in one place and getting down to serious work, and having seen some of my recent contributions to the Buddhist magazines of Ceylon he now wrote to put me to rights as regards my literary work. When I could write such excellent articles on Buddhist philosophy, he demanded, why did I waste my time writing those foolish poems? By a strange coincidence the other letter, which was from a Sinhalese Buddhist laywoman, arrived on the same day, and expressed exactly the opposite point of view. When I could write such beautiful poems on Buddhism, she asked, why did I spend so much time writing those dry, intellectual articles? The truth of the matter was that I agreed - and disagreed - with both correspondents. The conflict was not so much between the philosophically-inclined monk and the poetry loving laywoman, as between Sangharakshita I and Sangharakshita II.

Sangharakshita I wanted to enjoy the beauty of nature, to read and write poetry, to listen to music, to look at paintings and sculpture, to experience emotion, to lie in bed and dream, to see places, to meet people. Sangharakshita II wanted to realize the truth, to read and write philosophy, to observe the precepts, to get up early and meditate, to mortify the flesh, to fast and pray. Sometimes Sangharakshita I was victorious, sometimes Sangharakshita II, while occasionally there was an uneasy duumvirate. What they ought to have done, of course, was to marry and give birth to Sangharakshita III, who would have united beauty and truth, poetry and philosophy, spontaneity and discipline; but this seemed to be a dream impossible of fulfilment. For the last two and a half years Sangharakshita II had ruled practically unchallenged. Aided and abetted by Buddharakshita, who strongly disapproved of poetry, he had in fact sought to finish off Sangharakshita I altogether, and but for the timely intervention of Swami Ramdas, who firmly declared that writing poetry was not incompatible with the spiritual life, Sangharakshita I might well have died a premature death in Muvattupuzha.

However, despite the bludgeoning that he had received he had not died, and after leading a furtive existence in Nepal he was now coming into his own again at Buddha Kutti. Kashyap-ji's dealings were of course mainly with Sangharakshita II, but he had no objection to Sangharakshita I being around, and even spoke to him occasionally. Soon Sangharakshita I was feeling strong enough to demand equal rights. If Sangharakshita II devoted the afternoon to *The Path of Purity*, Sangharakshita I spent the evening immersed in the poetry of Matthew Arnold, which for some reason or other exerted a powerful influence during this period. When the former wrote an article on Buddhist philosophy, or edited the second edition of Kashyapji's *Buddhism for Everybody*, the latter composed poems. Sometimes, while one self was busy copying out extracts from the books he had been reading, the other would look idly out of the window and watch the falling of the rain. One day there was a violent clash between them. Angered by the encroachments of Sangharakshita I, who was reading more poetry than ever, and who had written a long poem which, though it had a Buddhist theme, was still a poem, Sangharakshita II suddenly burned the two notebooks in which his rival had written all the poems he had composed from the time of their departure from England right down to about the middle of their sojourn in Singapore. After this catastrophe, which shocked them both, they learned to respect each other's spheres of influence. Occasionally they even collaborated,

as in the completion of the blank verse rendition of the five paritrana sutras that had been started in Nepal. There were even rare moments when it seemed that, despite their quarrels, they might get married one day.

**Facing Mount Kanchenjunga:
Working for the Good of the Dharma in Kalimpong**

(from *The Rainbow Road*, p.456)

But much as Nepalis and Indians, Bhutanese and Sikkimese, Europeans and Tibetans, contributed to the colourfulness of the scene, it was not simply on account of their presence that Kalimpong was a new world. The whole atmosphere of the place was different. Coming as we did from the plains, where only too often life stagnates in its accustomed channels, we experienced everything as being not only fresher and cleaner but more sparkling and alive. It was like drinking ice-cold champagne after warmed-up soup. People went about their perfectly ordinary affairs in a perfectly ordinary manner, but whether on account of the altitude, or for some other reason, there was a sense of exhilaration in the air, as though it was the festive season, or as though they were all on holiday. Missionaries alone excepted, there was a smile on every face, and while it would be an exaggeration to say that there was a song on everybody's lips we could hardly put our head out of the window without hearing, loud and clear in the distance, the cheerful melody of the latest popular film song. And the colours! On account of these alone Kalimpong would have been a new world. From the blues and purples of the mountains to the reds and yellows of the flowers in the Nepali women's hair, they were all preternaturally vivid, as in a Pre-Raphaelite painting. Sometimes, indeed, they glowed with such intensity that everything seemed to be made of jewels. And all the time, above the mirth and the music, above the life and the colour, above the steadfastness of nature and the security of civilization – above everything – there were the snows.

On the morning of our arrival they had been veiled, and we had seen nothing of them, but since then they had shone forth every day, and often for the whole day. With the blue of the valleys at their feet and the blue of the sky above their heads, the shimmering white masses stretched from end to end of the horizon majestic beyond belief. Since the building where Kashyap-ji and I were staying faced north, we had an uninterrupted view of Mount Kanchenjunga, the second highest peak in the entire Himalayan range and the third highest in the world. In the early morning it was particularly beautiful. Looking out of the window just before dawn, I would see it glimmering ghostly in the blue twilight, more like ice than snow. Then, as the sun started rising, the bluish tip of the summit would be flushed by a fiery pink that, in a matter of minutes, had travelled all the way down the peak. Soon the whole range would be a mass of pink embers glowing against the pale blue sky. Pink would change to crimson, crimson to apricot, apricot to the purest, brightest gold. Finally, as the sun cleared the horizon, gold would change to silver and silver to dazzling white. On particularly fine days the mountain wore a white plume, almost like a plume of smoke. According to the experts, this was caused by a strong wind blowing the loose snow from its summit. But whether it wore its plume or not, and regardless of the time of day, I was never tired of looking up at Mount Kanchenjunga as it sat enthroned in the sky. Totally absorbed in itself though it was, and utterly oblivious of

my existence, the great white peak nonetheless seemed to speak to me. What it said, I did not know, but perhaps, if I stayed in Kalimpong long enough, and looked hard enough, I would come to understand.

Though I did not then know it, I was to stay there for the next fourteen years. After weeks of indecision, Kashyap-jihad finally made up his mind not to return to the Benares Hindu University. Instead, he would spend some time meditating in the jungles of Bihar, where a yogi whom he knew had a hermitage. Perhaps, as he meditated, it would become clear to him what he ought to do next. Meanwhile, I was to remain in Kalimpong. 'Stay here and work for the good of Buddhism', he told me, squeezing himself into the front seat of the jeep that was taking him to Siliguri, 'The Newars will look after you'. There was little that I could say. Though I did not really feel experienced enough to work for Buddhism on my own, and though I doubted whether the Newars were quite so ready to look after me as Kashyap-ji supposed, the word of the guru was not to be disobeyed. Bowing my head in acquiescence, I paid my respects in the traditional manner, Kashyap-ji gave me his blessing, and the jeep was off.

I was left facing Mount Kanchenjunga.

Meeting with Dhardo Rimpoche

(from *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, p.488)

...it was obviously incumbent upon me to do everything in my power to prevent the dispute from developing into an actual breach between the two Buddhist communities.

The following morning I therefore set out for Sherpa Building, on the upper floor of which the Incarnate Lama was again staying. Since I did not know Tibetan and since Dhardo Rimpoche, despite Joe's tuition, spoke hardly any English, I took an interpreter along with me. The interpreter was Lobsang Phuntshok Lhalungpa, the young monk-officer whom I had met two years ago at Thubden Tendzin's bungalow. He had given up the robe and married, and now lived with his wife and infant son in the upper part of the 'Manjula' guest cottage. In recent months I had helped him improve the English of a political history of Tibet he was translating from the Tibetan and we were beginning to be good friends. Recently he had told me about the Tibetan school that he and his brother officers were hoping to establish in Kalimpong. The inspiration behind the project was Dhardo Rimpoche, with whom he was closely associated, and whom he was anxious I should meet. I had not yet had the opportunity of meeting the Rimpoche, though while I was away in Nepal, Joe had brought him to 'The Hermitage' and he had consecrated the standing image of the Buddha given me by Lama Govinda. Indeed I had not, as I well knew, so much as seen him in passing. What I did not know, and was not to learn until quite a few years later, was that although I had not seen Dhardo Rimpoche he had seen me. He had seen me in Buddha Gaya in 1949. Happening to look out of his window one day he was surprised to see on the flat roof on the Maha Bodhi Rest House a yellow-robed Englishman. So surprised was he, and so astonished and intrigued that a Westerner should be interested in Buddhism, that he called his monk-attendant to come and look. 'The Dharma has gone even so far as the West!' he declared.

Now, more than three years later, the same yellow-robed Englishman was coming to see him – coming to see him, moreover, in connection with a dispute that had arisen on the very spot where the Rimpoche had caught sight of him. Strange to relate, I have no recollection of my actual meeting with Dhardo Rimpoche at Sherpa Building that morning, possibly because it is so overlaid with memories of subsequent meetings. I have no recollection of the room in which we met and no recollection of what the thirty-five-year-old Incarnate Lama looked like on that occasion, though he must have been shaven-headed and have worn the maroon robes of a member of the Gelugpa order, with a triangle of gold brocade showing above the edge of the upper robe. What I do recollect – and recollect most clearly – is the impression of sheer goodwill, candour, and integrity that I received from Dhardo Rimpoche as he gave me a full account of the dispute between himself and Dhammaloka; a dispute in which the hot-headed Sinhalese had so far forgotten himself as to use expressions no monk should use to another. So strong was this impression that when, the following day, I wrote to Devapriya Valisinha, I had no hesitation in assuring him that the Rimpoche was in no way at fault and that the blame for the dispute rested solely with Dhammaloka. Predictably, the little General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society did not agree with me and was inclined to support his compatriot and fellow Theravadin. But this did not worry me. I had heard on the monastic grapevine that Dhammaloka had decided to disrobe after the Vaishaka full moon day and leave Buddha Gaya, which he did, and I never heard of him again.

As for Dhardo Rimpoche, he was from now onwards to spend most of his time in Kalimpong, and I was to be in increasingly close contact with him for the remainder of my stay in India – in a sense, for the rest of my life.

Sangharakshita's Decision to Found the FWBO

(from *Moving against the Stream*, p, 330ff)

Kalimpong was situated 4,000 feet above sea level. Here the air was thinner and clearer than in the plains, and the sky a deeper, darker blue. On most days of the year except during the rainy season one could see, high above the foothills to the north-west, the dazzlingly white shape of Mount Kanchenjunga, the second highest peak in the Himalayan Range. I had lived in Kalimpong for fourteen years, ever since the memorable day when Kashyap-ji had left me there with the parting injunction to stay and work for the good of Buddhism. During that time I had become an accepted part of the cultural and religious life of the cosmopolitan little town. Now I had come to say goodbye. I had come to say goodbye to my friends and teachers, some of whom I might never see again. I had come to say goodbye to my hillside hermitage, with its row of Kashmir cypresses, its flowerbeds and terraces, its hundred orange trees, its bamboo grove, and its solitary mango tree. I had come to say goodbye to the shrine room where I had meditated for so many hours, to the study-cum-bedroom where I had started writing the first volume of my memoirs, and to the veranda up and down which, during the rainy season, I had paced deep in reflection. I had come to say goodbye to Kalimpong, goodbye to Mount Kanchenjunga and its snows.

But though I had come to say goodbye, my 'homecoming' was in many ways a joyful one. The first to welcome me back to the Triyana Vardhana Vihara, or Monastery Where the Three Ways Flourish, were Hilla Petit and Maurice Freedman, who had been staying there for the last few days. Hilla was the elderly Parsee friend with whom Terry and I had had lunch in Bombay, and diminutive, big-headed Maurice was her long-term house-guest. I had first met the oddly assorted pair in Gangtok, when they were holidaying with our common friend, Apa Saheb Pant, the then Political Officer of Sikkim, and in later years I had more than once stayed with them at their comfortable Bombay flat. Both were keen followers of J. Krishnamurti, and soon Maurice and I were deep in one of our usual rather inconclusive discussions as to whether Truth was really a 'pathless land' that could be approached only by way of 'choiceless awareness'. Not that I had much time for such discussions that morning, at least not as much as Maurice probably would have liked. There were letters to be opened, other friends to be seen.

One of the first letters to be opened was from the English Sangha Trust. It was dated 1st November and was signed by George Goulstone in his capacity as one of the Directors of the Trust. After assuring me in the most fulsome terms of the Trust's deep appreciation of my services to the Dharma in England, he went on to inform me that in the opinion of the Trust and my fellow Order members my long absences from the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, together with what he described as my extra mural activities, were not in accordance with the Theravada's high standards of discipline and ethics. Moreover, I had not comported myself in a manner fitting the religious office that I held in the Order. The Trust had therefore decided to seek elsewhere for an incumbent of the Vihara. As my work in India was so dear to my heart, the letter continued blandly, I might think that my allotted task was to remain and serve Buddhism in the East. Should I, on careful reflection, consider that my work lay in the East, this would be acceptable as a reasonable ground for my resignation, and notification to this effect would be made to the Buddhist Authorities in the West. Should I not feel disposed to take this step, the trustees would feel regretfully obliged to withdraw their support from me. In so doing, they felt sure of having the agreement of the Sangha authorities in England.

'Do you know what this means?' I asked Terry, when I had finished reading the letter, 'It means a new Buddhist Movement!' The words sprang spontaneously from my lips. It was as if the Trust's letter, coming as it did like a flash of lightning, had suddenly revealed possibilities that had hitherto been shrouded in darkness or perceived only dimly. Though I had long felt that the Buddhist movement in Britain might need a fresh impetus, and had even discussed with the Three Musketeers and Viriya the feasibility of my giving lectures and holding classes outside the orbit of the Hampstead Vihara and the Buddhist Society, I had certainly never considered the possibility of my taking a step so radical as that of starting a new Buddhist movement, whether in Britain or anywhere else. But I now saw that a new Buddhist movement was what was really needed, and that the Trust's letter had opened the way to my starting it. The movement I was to found some months later may have been born in London, but it was conceived there in Kalimpong on 24 November 1966, at the moment when I addressed to Terry those six fateful words.

Yet clearly as I saw that there would be a new Buddhist movement in Britain, I had no idea what form that movement might take.

Some Poems by Sangharakshita

To give you a taste of his poetry, here are some of his better-known poems. The rest can be found in the *Complete Poems*, including the much longer *Veil of Stars*. His most recent poems are also available on his website.

The Lotus of Compassion

The Lotus blooms tonight,
The great golden Lotus of the Lord's Compassion.
With white roots deep in the slime of this sad world,
And huge green leaves spread on the surface of the waters of the Lake of Tears,
And surrounded by myriads of silver lotus-buds,
Like white hands folded in prayer for succour from the miseries of the world,
That Lotus blooms tonight.
O leave the crowded shore where men buy and sell,
Shake off the soft detaining fingers of your friends,
And in a little boat,
At midnight, when the moon is full,
And glitters at you from the water,
Row swiftly to the quiet Heart of the Lake where the Lotus blooms,
The great golden Lotus of the Lord's Compassion;
And you will feel the sweetness ineffable of its-heart-fragrance
Coming on a breeze which ripples the face of the silent waters
To meet you beneath the stars.

Life is King

Hour after hour, day
After day we try
To grasp the Ungraspable, pinpoint
The Unpredictable. Flowers
Wither when touched, ice
Suddenly cracks beneath our feet. Vainly
We try to track birdflight through the sky trace
Dumb fish through deep water, try
To anticipate the earned smile the soft
Reward, even
Try to grasp our own lives. But Life
Slips through our fingers
Like snow. Life
Cannot belong to us. We
Belong to Life. Life
Is King.

The Bodhisattva's Reply

What will you say to those
Whose lives spring up between
Custom and circumstance
As weeds between wet stones,
Whose lives corruptly flower
Warped from the beautiful,
Refuse and sediment
Their means of sustenance –
What will you say to them?

That woman, night after night,
Must sell her body for bread;
This boy with the well-oiled hair
And the innocence dead in his face
Must lubricate the obscene
Bodies of gross old men;
And both must be merry all day,
For thinking would make them mad –
What will you say to them?

Those dull-eyed men must tend
Machines till they become
Machines, or till they are
Cogs in the giant wheel
Of industry, producing
The clothes that they cannot wear
And the cellophaned luxury goods
They can never hope to buy –
What will you say to them?

Or these dim shadows which
Through the pale gold tropic dawn
From the outcaste village flit
Balancing on their heads
Baskets to bear away
Garbage and excrement,
Hugging the wall for fear
Of the scorn of their fellow-men –
What will you say to them?

And wasted lives that litter
The streets of modern cities,
Souls like butt-ends tossed
In the gutter and trampled on,
Human refuse dumped
At the crossroads where civilization

And civilization meet
To breed the unbeautiful –
What will you say to them?

‘I shall say nothing, but only
Fold in Compassion’s arms
Their frailty till it becomes
Strong with my strength, their limbs
Bright with my beauty, their souls
With my wisdom luminous, or
Till I have become like them
A seed between wet stones
Of custom and circumstance.

‘Forgive me if I have stained...’

Forgive me if I have stained
Your beauty with my desire,
Or troubled your clear serene
Light with my fury of fire.
Forgive me; let us be friends.

Forgive me if I have looked
For response that you could not give,
Or raised in the deeps of my heart
This red rose too sickly to live.
Forgive me; let us be friends.
Buffaloes being driven to Market

We know when market-day is near,
For village folk to vend their store,
Because the blue-grey buffaloes
Are driven in the night before.

With long-lashed eyes, and massive horns
Low-curving from each patient head,
They shuffle sadly up the road,
Dusty, and lowing to be fed.

Their drivers, shouting from the rear,
Urge them with blows to left or right,
And, mindful of the broad red sun,
Make haste before the fall of night.

One evening, as I watched them pass,
My heart was heavy for their kind,
To see how slowly one great beast
Limped painfully along behind.

Slowly he moved, and slower yet,
Despite their whip and blood-stained goad,
Till, sagging at the knees, he dropped
On the sere grass beside the road.

He tossed his patient head; I saw
The deep blue eyes were glazed with pain.
Though shivering in a storm of blows
He could not rise and walk again.

And as the darkness fell, I mused
That simple folk who sell and buy
Could herd him to the butcher's shed,
Yet could not let him rest and die.

For the Record

You wrote four letters, one
To your parents, one
To the girl who looked after you, one
To your accountant, and one
To your best friend
Me,
Sealed them neatly.
You wrote out
Two cheques in settlement of small
Debts,
Walked around
Here and there
Came in, went out
Two or three times
Returned my typewriter
(It was early morning,
I was in bed, asleep, did not hear you)
Felt a little uneasy,
Perhaps, for a minute or two
Parked your bus
Down at Kentish Town
In front of an old brick wall
Where it would not be in anybody's way
(After drawing the faded red
Curtains) bought a ticket
To somewhere, anywhere
Rode
Down the escalator
Stood
Heron-hunched in your old black duffle-coat

Hands thrust deep in pockets
Brooding, thinking,
Meditating,
Watched, waited
Anticipated
And when the train came
Heavily lumbering along the platform
Slowly gliding along the smooth shining rails
Suddenly threw yourself under, and in a moment
Found what you had been seeking
All your life.

Four Gifts

I come to you with four gifts.
The first gift is a lotus-flower.
Do you understand?
My second gift is a golden net.
Can you recognize it?
My third gift is a shepherds' round-dance.
Do your feet know how to dance?
My fourth gift is a garden planted in a wilderness.
Could you work there?
I come to you with four gifts.
Dare you accept them?

The Six Elements Speak

I am Earth.
I am rock, metal, and soil.
I am that which exists in you
As bone, muscle, and flesh,
But now I must go,
Leaving you light.
Now we must part.
Goodbye.

I am Water.
I am ocean, lake, rivers and streams,
The rain that falls from clouds
And the dew on the petals of flowers.
I am that which exists in you
As blood, urine, sweat, saliva and tears,
But now I must go,
Leaving you dry.
Now we must part.

Goodbye.

I am Fire.
I come from the Sun, travelling through space
To sleep in wood, flint, and steel.
I am that which exists in you
As bodily heat, the warmth of an embrace,
But now I must go,
Leaving you cold.
Now we must part.
Goodbye.

I am Air.
I am wind, breeze, and hurricane.
I am that which exists in you
As the breath in your nostrils, in your lungs,
The breath that gently comes, that gently goes,
But now I must go,
For the last time,
Leaving you empty.
Now we must part.
Goodbye.

I am Space.
I contain all,
From a grain of dust to a galaxy.
I am that which exists in you
As the space limited by the earth, water, fire, and air
That make up your physical being,
But now they have all gone
And I must go too,
Leaving you unlimited.
Now we must part.
Goodbye.

I am Consciousness.
Indefinable and indescribable.
I am that which exists in you
As sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought,
But now I must go
From the space no longer limited by your physical being
Leaving nothing of 'you'.
There is no one from whom to part,
So no goodbye.

Earth dissolves into Water,
Water dissolves into Fire,
Fire dissolves into Air,

Air dissolves into Space,
Space dissolves into Consciousness,
Consciousness dissolves into – ?

HUM