Lecture 142: Commitment and Spiritual Community

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I think that most of you know already that in the course of these talks, these three talks, we are exploring. We're exploring a new spiritual movement - exploring a new Buddhist movement. A movement known as the FWBO, or to give it its full title 'The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order', and we're simply trying to understand the nature of that Movement. And we're trying to understand the nature of that Movement through an examination of the meaning of the name - FWBO - itself, and in our first talk two weeks ago, as those of you who were present then may remember, we saw in what sense the FWBO is a **Western**, a specifically Western movement. We saw, two weeks ago, that the FWBO is Western in the sense that it arose under the conditions of modern Western civilisation, a civilisation which is now virtually world-wide. A civilisation in which unfortunately there is a serious imbalance, an imbalance between the individual and what we call the group. And the FWBO, we saw two weeks ago, in our first talk, seeks to correct that particular imbalance, the imbalance between the individual and the group, and it seeks to correct it with the help of Buddhism. And the title of the first talk was therefore *'The Individual and the World Today'*. Last week we moved on. Last week we saw in what sense the FWBO was a **Buddhist** movement. We saw that it was Buddhist in the sense that it concerns itself with the spiritual development of the individual. The FWBO is not Buddhist in the sense that it follows Eastern Buddhist culture, however great, however beautiful, that may be. In fact in the FWBO we distinguish quite sharply between Buddhism, the Dharma, on the one hand and its various Eastern cultural forms on the other. And we define Buddhism, we define the Dharma, as the Buddha himself defined it as whatever helps the individual to grow, whatever helps the individual to progress in his inner and his outer life. We also saw that in the same way the FWBO does not identify itself with any one form of Buddhism. It appreciates all the different forms of Buddhism, whether Theravada, Mahayana, Zen, Tibetan Buddhism and so on, it appreciates them all, it seeks to learn from them all, but it does not identify itself exclusively with any one of them. Our talk last week was therefore entitled 'Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism'.

Tonight we come to our third and last talk. Tonight we are going to see, or to try to see, in what sense the FWBO is an **Order**, in what sense it is also a movement of **Friends**, and this may not be quite so easy to do. So I am going to adopt tonight a slightly different approach. Tonight I am going to be just a little bit autobiographical. I'm going to tell you what it was that led me to start an Order, what led me to start a movement of Friends, rather than say another Buddhist organisation of the usual type. I'm going to take **this** as our point of departure.

As you know, as I think you were told some weeks ago, I spent altogether twenty years in the East. I spent most of them in India, I spent initially a couple of years as a wandering ascetic, of a sort of Hindu-Buddhist type, one might say, in South India, just moving from place to place, staying here, staying there, meditating, studying, meeting famous teachers, and so on. This story, or this part of the story, some of you may know is related in my volume of memoirs entitled *'The Thousand-Petalled Lotus'*. After that I spent a year in Benares. In Benares I was studying Pali and Abhidharma and also Logic, and finally I spent fourteen years in a place called Kalimpong. Kalimpong is in the foothills of the Himalayas, about four thousand feet above sea level. It's sort of sandwiched in between Nepal to the West, Bhutan to the East, Sikkim to the North, and beyond Sikkim, of course, Tibet. And from where I was staying most or much of the time I could see, I had a beautiful view of the snow peaks of the Himalayas. So there in Kalimpong I spent fourteen years. But during all this time, during my stay in Benares, during my fourteen years in Kalimpong, I kept in touch, very often just by letter, with various Indian Buddhist organisations, but although I kept in touch I did not join any of them, I never became a member of any Indian Buddhist organisation. I don't know quite why this was, but it seems as though at the time a sort of instinct held me back. I kept in touch, but I never joined. And I kept in touch with one organisation in particular and this was quite an old organisation. It was quite big, at least by Buddhist standards, and it was quite well known and in its day it had done quite a lot of good work for Buddhism in India in one way or another. So with this organisation I was mainly in touch, but I hadn't been in touch with it for very long before I started feeling quite dissatisfied with it, not to say very dissatisfied. And the more I saw of it, the more dissatisfied I became. My dealings both by letter and also from time to time in person, were mainly with the governing body of this particular organisation, including the office bearers. That governing body consisted of about forty different people. And before long I discovered that most of them were in fact not Buddhists, and this surprised me not a little. In those days you might say I was a little inexperienced, not to say naive, and I was rather surprised to find that the majority of the members of the governing body of this Buddhist organisation were not even Buddhists, but anyway I thought at first that it must be all

right, that probably they were genuine sympathisers with Buddhism, even though they were not actually Buddhists. But again before long I discovered that this was not the case. Very much to my dismay I discovered that some members of that governing body had no sympathy in fact with Buddhism at all. One might even say that in some cases they were actually hostile to it, but there they were running the affairs of this Buddhist organisation. So I started asking myself 'well, how had this happened?'. Well, they were there running the affairs of this Buddhist organisation because they'd been elected to that governing body, but then how had they been elected? Well they'd been elected at an Annual General Meeting, but how had they come to be present at that Annual General Meeting? Well, they were there because they were members, paid-up members of the organisation. And how had they become members of the organisation? Simply by paying a subscription. So this seems to me to be the root of the trouble, that these people had got where they were simply by paying a small sum of money, a subscription, plus of course a bit of string-pulling.

So this seemed to me a very strange way to run a Buddhist organisation, and no wonder it was not functioning very well. Now you might wonder why it was that people not really sympathetic to Buddhism should spend their time, should take the trouble of running the affairs of a Buddhist organisation, even though that governing body met only once a month, but it seems to me - and after many years of experience I think I know it very well - that there are some people who like to belong to organisations. They like to get on to governing bodies, whether religious, or political, or civic, social, they just like to get on to governing bodies and managing committees and so on, because it gives them a sort of feeling of power. They like to run things, and they don't mind very much what it is that they're running. The main thing is that they should be running it, and in the case of this particular organisation, this particular Buddhist organisation, there was another factor at work too. I've said that this particular organisation was quite well known, it used to organise big public meetings, for instance to celebrate the Buddha's birthday, and in India, public meetings are really very big. I don't know how things go in New Zealand, probably if you got ten thousand people you'd think it was quite a big meeting, quite a big public meeting, if you got a hundred thousand I suppose that would be considered very big, whereas in India ten thousand is nothing; you can have a hundred thousand people, you can have five hundred thousand people at a public meeting very easily indeed. So this particular organisation used to organ public meetings of this sort, and they used to invite famous politicians and prominent businessmen to preside over these meetings, these religious meetings, so that if you were a member of the governing body, there you would be sitting up on the platform, with all these people, you'd get to know them, you'd bask as it were in their reflected glory. Not only that, getting to know them would be very useful to you, useful in your own political, or your own business life, you might even get some favour in that way, because in India, after all, everything is done by personal influence. So this is what I saw happening in this Buddhist organisation, and it made me rather disillusioned with Buddhist organisations. And then after twenty years in the East I went back to England, and I thought things would be different there, so I spent two years working with the existing Buddhist organisations in England, mainly in London, but there I found things pretty much the same as in India, only of course on a very much smaller scale. I found plenty of non-Buddhists having quite a big say in the running of Buddhist organisations, and consequently these organisations too were not functioning very well, at least not very well from the Buddhist point of view. In fact they were functioning quite badly, so I decided that something had to be done. I decided that a new Buddhist organisation would have to be started, an organisation that would not be an organisation. I'd already decided to remain in England because I saw that in England, in fact in the West generally, there was scope for a genuinely Buddhist movement. So I decided to start a new organisation, a new Buddhist movement, a new spiritual movement in England, and this of course was what was eventually started as the FWBO and WBO.

However, I mustn't go on ahead too quickly. It's not so easy to start up something new, not so easy to start up a new spiritual movement, a new Buddhist organisation, as one might think. In this connection I am reminded of a story about Voltaire, the great French writer and thinker. It's said that some time in the middle of the 18th century, a young clergyman came to see Voltaire, a clergyman whose faith in the Church, in Christianity, had evidently been crumbling, so he thought it would be a good idea to start a new religion. So Voltaire being the great sage of the times, this young clergyman went to Voltaire and he asked him 'What should I do in order to start a new religion?' So Voltaire said 'It's very easy, you just have to do two things'. He said 'first of all you just get yourself crucified, and then you rise from the dead' *[Laughter]*. So it isn't so easy to start a new religion as one might think. It isn't very easy even to start a new spiritual movement, it isn't easy to start a new Buddhist organisation. It's not clear at first what has to be done, but - I think I can say this from my own experience - it's usually quite clear at first how things are not to be done, even though it's not so clear how they are, or they were to be done.

One thing that was clear to me was that Buddhist organisations could not be run by non-Buddhists. They couldn't be run simply by people who were good at running organisations, however good, however efficient they might be, and they couldn't certainly be run by people who were merely after power, or influence, or name and fame. A Buddhist organisation, it was clear, a Buddhist spiritual movement, could be run only by Buddhists, could be run only by **real** Buddhists, could be run only by those who were actually committed to Buddhism, committed to the Dharma, who actually practised the Buddha's teaching. Not by those who had merely an intellectual interest in it, and strange to say, at the time this did not seem to be generally realised. People seemed to think that a Buddhist organisation actually could be run by non-Buddhists, that a spiritual movement could be run by people who were not themselves spiritually motivated. However at that time it was clear to me that this was not so, that a spiritual movement could only be run by people who were spiritually motivated, that a Buddhist movement could be run only by Buddhists. But... But how could one know who was spiritually motivated? How could one know who was a Buddhist? What was a Buddhist in fact anyway? What was the criterion? Well, eventually the answer became clear, in fact in a way I had known it all along, but now I saw it in a new light. A Buddhist is one who Goes for Refuge, one who Goes for Refuge as we say to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, one who commits himself to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, commits himself to them with, as we say, body, speech and mind - in other words totally. And there are many examples of this sort of thing in the ancient Buddhist scriptures. When we read those scriptures, especially when we read the Pali scriptures, what do we find happening? Well, we encounter the Buddha, and the Buddha is wandering from place to place, begging his food as he goes, and in the course of his wanderings, in the course of his journeyings he meets somebody, under a tree, or in a village, and they get into conversation, they start talking. Maybe it's a Brahmin priest, maybe it's a farmer, maybe it's a well-to-do merchant, or a young 'man-about-town', maybe it's a wandering ascetic, maybe it's a housewife, maybe it's a prince, but in one way or another they get into conversation, they get talking, and sooner or later, this particular person, the priest or the farmer, whoever it is, asks the Buddha a question. Perhaps he's impressed by the Buddha's appearance, so noble, so lofty, so he asks a question. He questions the Buddha about perhaps the meaning of life, or about his teaching, or what happens after death, and then the Buddha replies. The Buddha might reply at considerable length, giving a sort of detailed discourse - after all in those days they had plenty of time for such things - or he might reply in just a few words. If he was very, very inspired he might even reply in verse, breathing out what is called an *Udana*, or he might **occasionally** reply even with complete silence. He might not say anything at all, but that would be a communication. By saying nothing he would say so much. There would be a wordless communication, and I'm sure many of you know it's from this wordless communication that the great Ch'an or Zen tradition originated. On the other hand, the Buddha might give one of his famous lion roars or *sinhanadas* as they are called, that is to say a full and frank, almost defiant declaration of his own great spiritual experience and the Path that he taught. But whatsoever the Buddha did, whatsoever the Buddha said or did not say in reply to the questioner's question, if that questioner, if that listener, was receptive the result was the same. He or she would feel deeply affected, deeply moved, deeply stirred, and sometimes there were external manifestations of this. Their hair might stand on end, they might even shed tears, or they might be seized by a violent fit of trembling, they were so stirred, so moved, so astonished, so thrilled. They would feel perhaps completely overwhelmed, and they'd have a tremendous experience, an experience of illumination. It would be just like seeing a great light, they'd have a tremendous sense of freedom, of emancipation, they'd feel as though a great burden had been lifted from their back, or as though they'd been just suddenly let out of prison or as though they could at last see their way. The questioner, the listener, would feel spiritually reborn, would feel like a new man. So at that moment, that great moment, that turning point in his life what would that person say? What would be his response to the Buddha and his Dharma? What would be the cry that broke from his lips? Well, according to those ancient Pali texts, he'd say *'Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchami'* which means 'To the Buddha for refuge I go, to the Dharma for refuge I go, to the Sangha for refuge I go', and this would be his response, this is what he would say, he would Go for Refuge, he would commit himself, because the vision that the Buddha had shown him, the vision of truth, the vision of existence, the vision of human life itself, in all its depth and complexity, was so great that all he could do was give himself to that vision, completely. He would want to live for that vision, he'd want, if necessary, to die for it. And this is how one could know who was a Buddhist, this was the criterion: a Buddhist is one who Goes for Refuge in that sort of way as his response to the Buddha and his teaching. A Buddhist is one who commits himself, gives himself, if you like, to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. So this was the criterion in the Buddha's day two thousand five hundred years ago and it remains the criterion today.

Now I had seen that Buddhist organisations could be run only by Buddhists; it was clear to me therefore that Buddhist organisations could be run only by those who had Gone for Refuge, only by those who had committed themselves wholeheartedly, to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. And there was

another thing that was clear to me, which was that a Buddhist organisation that was run by Buddhists, that is to say committed Buddhists, would no longer be an organisation. Not an organisation in the ordinary sense of the term. It would be a spiritual movement, in fact it would be what we call a spiritual community, that is to say, an association of committed individuals, freely working together for a common spiritual end. Thus we would no longer have spiritually uncommitted people running a so-called Buddhist organisation, instead we'd have spiritually committed people running a spiritual movement, running a spiritual community. In this way commitment would give birth to spiritual community, and hence the title of tonight's talk, which is, 'Commitment and Spiritual Community'. So we can begin to see in what sense the FWBO is an Order, can begin to see, perhaps, what led me to start an Order rather than yet another Buddhist organisation of the usual type. In what sense the FWBO is also a movement of friends, we shall see a little later on. An Order consists of those who have been ordained, who are ordained. In Buddhist terms ordination means giving full formal expression, that is to say expression in concrete form, to one's commitment to the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and having that commitment recognised by others already committed. One can join an organisation by paying the required subscription, but one can be received into an Order only by way of ordination, that is to say only by committing oneself.

So this was the basis on which our new Buddhist movement was founded. The basis of commitment and spiritual community, or, in more traditional Buddhist language, Going for Refuge and Sangha. This was in fact the only basis on which it **could** be founded and one might therefore wonder why it had taken me, personally, such a long time, apparently, to see this. You might wonder, in fact, why nobody else had seen it, why nobody else had thought in terms of commitment and spiritual community, why nobody else, in **recent** times at least, had started an Order instead of yet another Buddhist organisation. And so far as I can see there are three reasons for this, and we'll go into them just a little because this will help us get a clearer idea of the difference between spiritual community and religious organisation. Before doing that, however, I want to go back just a bit, I want to say something about Going for Refuge. This, after all, is the basis of everything. So what does one mean when one says 'To the Buddha for refuge I go, to the Dharma for refuge I go, to the Sangha for refuge I go?'

The word 'refuge', the English word refuge, to begin with, is not very satisfactory. It is a literal translation of *sarana*, in Pali and Sanskrit, but it doesn't give its real meaning. There's no question of running away from anything when one goes for refuge, there's no question of taking shelter with anyone. Going for Refuge really means commitment. Commit oneself to the Buddha, commit oneself to the Dharma, commit oneself to the Sangha. So what does it mean? First of all, committing oneself to the Buddha. This does not mean handing oneself over to the Buddha, as it were. It doesn't mean blindly obeying the Buddha; it means taking the Buddha as one's ideal, or if you like, taking Buddhahood as one's ideal. The Buddha, the historical Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, was a man, was a human being. And by his own human efforts he developed higher and ever higher states of being and consciousness, states that eventually culminated in what we call enlightenment, which is the highest conceivable state of moral and spiritual perfection, a state of supreme wisdom, of infinite compassion and absolute purity. Now we, too, are men, we too are human beings. We too, therefore, according to Buddhism are capable of developing higher and higher states of being and consciousness, we too are capable of attaining enlightenment. So this is what committing oneself to the Buddha means, it means recognising the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, the living embodiment of the highest conceivable state of human perfection. It means recognising Buddhahood as a practicable ideal for all human beings and also actually directing, actually devoting all one's energies to the realisation of that ideal. This is what we mean by committing ourselves to the Buddha.

And then, committing oneself to the Dharma, what do we mean by that? The Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha, and it's concerned mainly with two things: it's concerned first of all with the goal or state of enlightenment or Buddhahood, and, secondly, it's concerned with the path leading to that state. Committing oneself to the Dharma therefore means actually following the path in order to realise the goal. And the path consists of various steps and various stages and these are variously enumerated according to the particular point of view adopted. One very popular enumeration of the various stages of the path is that of 'the **three** stages', the stages of morality, concentration and wisdom. Another enumeration is that of the 'Noble Eightfold Path'. This is not really a path of eight stages as is generally thought, it's really a path of two stages: first of all a stage of vision and then a stage of transformation. The first stage, the stage of vision, represents an actual vision of the goal, not just a theoretical idea, but an actual spiritual experience. And the second, the stage of transformation, represents the gradual transformation of all aspects of one's being, from the highest to the lowest, in accordance with that vision. Then there is also the path of the Six Perfections: the six perfections being giving, or generosity, morality, patience, vigour, concentration and wisdom. So committing oneself to the Dharma means following the

path in any of these ways, it means committing oneself to the process of one's own development as an individual by whatsoever means.

And then thirdly, committing oneself to the Sangha. The Sangha is, of course, the spiritual community. It's the community of the spiritually committed. The Dharma, as we've seen, is the path. That path consists of various steps and various stages, and different individuals are **on** different steps, **at** different stages. Some are more advanced than we are, some are less advanced. Some are equally advanced. So, what is our attitude towards them? We reverence those who are more advanced, we are receptive to them, we are receptive to their spiritual influence and we assist them in their spiritual work. We help those who are less advanced than we are. We give advice and we give moral support as and when we can. And we enjoy spiritual fellowship with those who are equally advanced with ourselves. In fact we enjoy spiritual fellowship with all 'members', inverted commas, of the Sangha, in different ways in differing degrees. So this is what we mean by committing ourselves to the Sangha.

It's true each individual must develop by himself, by his own efforts, but we develop more easily, more enjoyably, in spiritual fellowship with others. We could even say that spiritual fellowship is **necessary** to individual development. In the spiritual community all help each, and each helps all, and in the end, all narrow, pseudo-religious individualism is transcended. There's only a spiritual community of individuals who are, as it were, transparent to each other. Individuals through whom the light shines, the light of enlightenment.

So much then, for Going for Refuge. It should be clear, now, what we mean when we say, 'I commit myself to the Buddha, I commit myself to the Dharma, I commit myself to the Sangha.'

So, now let's go back to the question of why nobody else had thought in terms of commitment and spiritual community, why nobody else in modern times had started an Order instead of yet another Buddhist organisation. As I said, there are three reasons, mainly, for this:

First of all, what we can only describe as inertia and force of habit. Buddhism started becoming known in the West, including westernised India, not much more than a hundred years ago. And that was a time of great expansion of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge. Societies were set up at that time for the study of all sorts of things, and it was inevitable that sooner or later there should be societies for the study of Buddhism, societies for the publication of Buddhist texts, and so on. So this is quite all right, as long as the approach remained purely scientific, purely academic. At this stage, I'm not questioning the validity of scientific approach to spiritual traditions. But such an approach is no longer suitable when we're concerned with Buddhism in a more practical sort of way; a more spiritual way, so to speak, or if you don't like the word 'spiritual', even in a more existential way. Unfortunately people did not realise this, they didn't realise that a new type of approach was required: a new type of structure, a new type of organisation. They thought that a Buddhist organisation, that is to say, an organisation devoted to **spreading** Buddhism, could have the same structure as an organisation devoted to the scientific **study** of Buddhism; that is to say, general membership, annual general meetings, office bearers and above all, entry by payment of a membership subscription. Not only that, people with prominent positions in Buddhist organisations of the usual type were very satisfied with things as they were; because, after all, the existing set up gave them a certain power and a certain authority which they didn't want to relinquish. This is why I say it was because of inertia and force of habit that nobody else in modern times thought of starting an Order rather than yet another Buddhist organisation.

The two other reasons were more traditional, so to speak; the first of these, the second of the three reasons, was what we can call the 'devaluation of the Going for Refuge'. Now what do I mean by that? Buddhism has a long history. In the course of a thousand years Buddhism has spread, or in the course of a thousand years Buddhism **did** spread, over practically the whole of Asia, and millions of people became Buddhists, millions of people committed themselves to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha; recited *'Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchami'*. So far so good; but what eventually happened? Eventually people started reciting *'Buddham saranam gacchami'* and so on simply out of habit. Not because they were real Buddhists, not because they were actually committing themselves, but simply because their parents or their grandparents had recited it. And such people sometimes consider themselves as 'born Buddhists', as though such a thing were not a contradiction in terms. How could one possibly be a born Buddhist? So this is the situation in the Buddhist countries of Asia today to a great extent. The Going for Refuge is not regarded any longer as an expression of genuine individual spiritual commitment - it's a recitation, a recitation which is simply a part of one's culture. It shows that you belong to a particular social and cultural group. And I had plenty

of experience of this sort of thing in India. I found for instance, Sinhalese and Thai and Burmese and Indian Buddhists reciting the Refuges and the Precepts on all sorts of occasions; you have a big public meeting, all right, you begin by reciting the Refuges and Precepts. You have a wedding; again you recite the Refuges and Precepts; a funeral, again you recite the Refuges and Precepts; a name-giving ceremony for a baby, again the Refuges and Precepts. So people recited in this sort of way and nobody bothered about the significance. They recited the Refuges with the Precepts just to show that they were good Buddhists or even that they were just respectable citizens. They recited them to show that they belonged **by birth** to a particular religious group. There was no question of the Going for Refuge formula being regarded as an expression of **individual** commitment to the ideals of Buddhism, and this is why I speak of a devaluation of the Going for Refuge.

The Going for Refuge is really the central act of the Buddhist life. After all, it's what **makes** you a Buddhist. But in popular, modern Buddhism it has, on the whole, become something peripheral, something formal and something of purely cultural significance. And this is why it took me such a long time to see that it was on the basis of the Going for Refuge, on the basis of individual commitment, that a new Buddhist movement must be founded. Because the Going for Refuge had been so devalued by the 'Buddhists', inverted commas, themselves, not to say degraded and debased. So far as I can remember in the course of my whole stay in India, no one ever stressed to me the importance of Going for Refuge. Some people were indeed very particular about the correct pronunciation of the words of the Pali refuge formula, but they paid no attention to what the words actually meant. And therefore I had to discover the significance of the Going for Refuge for myself. And as soon as I had done this I saw its importance. I saw that it was, in fact, the key to everything; saw that it was the basis of our new Buddhist movement. So in the FWBO tremendous emphasis is placed on the Going for Refuge. It's the simplest thing in Buddhism, but it's the most important. And it's things like the Going for Refuge that we have in mind when we speak in the FWBO of the principle of more and more of less and less.

The third and last reason why nobody in modern times had thought of starting an Order instead of yet another Buddhist organisation is an overvaluation of monasticism, especially formal monasticism. Suppose nowadays you talk to a serious minded Eastern Buddhist, especially from South East Asia. Suppose you ask him what really makes one a Buddhist, who is a real Buddhist? So what will he say? More often than not he will say that the real Buddhist is the monk. More often than not he will say that if you really want to practise Buddhism you must become a monk. A layman cannot practise Buddhism or he can practise it only to a very, very limited extent. The best thing that the layman can do is to support the monks; to supply them with food, clothing, shelter and medicine. In that way the layman can earn some merit and hopefully on the strength of that merit he can be reborn in heaven after his death. Or at least be reborn on earth in a rich family. So one can see what has happened: because the Going for Refuge has been devalued, monasticism has been overvalued, monasticism has been over-emphasised. Being a Buddhist is no longer a matter of Going for Refuge, no longer a question of **committing** oneself to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha; being a Buddhist means, in effect, becoming a monk.

Now I certainly don't want to undervalue monasticism or monastic life - that would be going to the other extreme - I've been myself a monk now for more than half my life, and I think in many ways the life of a monk is the best possible kind of life. But to be a Buddhist it is not **necessary** to be a monk. What is necessary is that one should go for Refuge, what is necessary is commitment to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. That commitment is **primary**. A particular way of life, a particular life-style is secondary. For many people of course commitment **does** find expression in leading a monastic life. This was particularly the case in the Buddha's **own** day but even in the Buddha's own day it was not invariably the case. According to the Pali scriptures some of the Buddha's followers, some of the Buddha's disciples, attained a high level of spiritual development, while continuing to live at home as laymen and laywomen. Therefore, even though a number of committed people are following the same life style, the distinction between commitment and lifestyle still holds good.

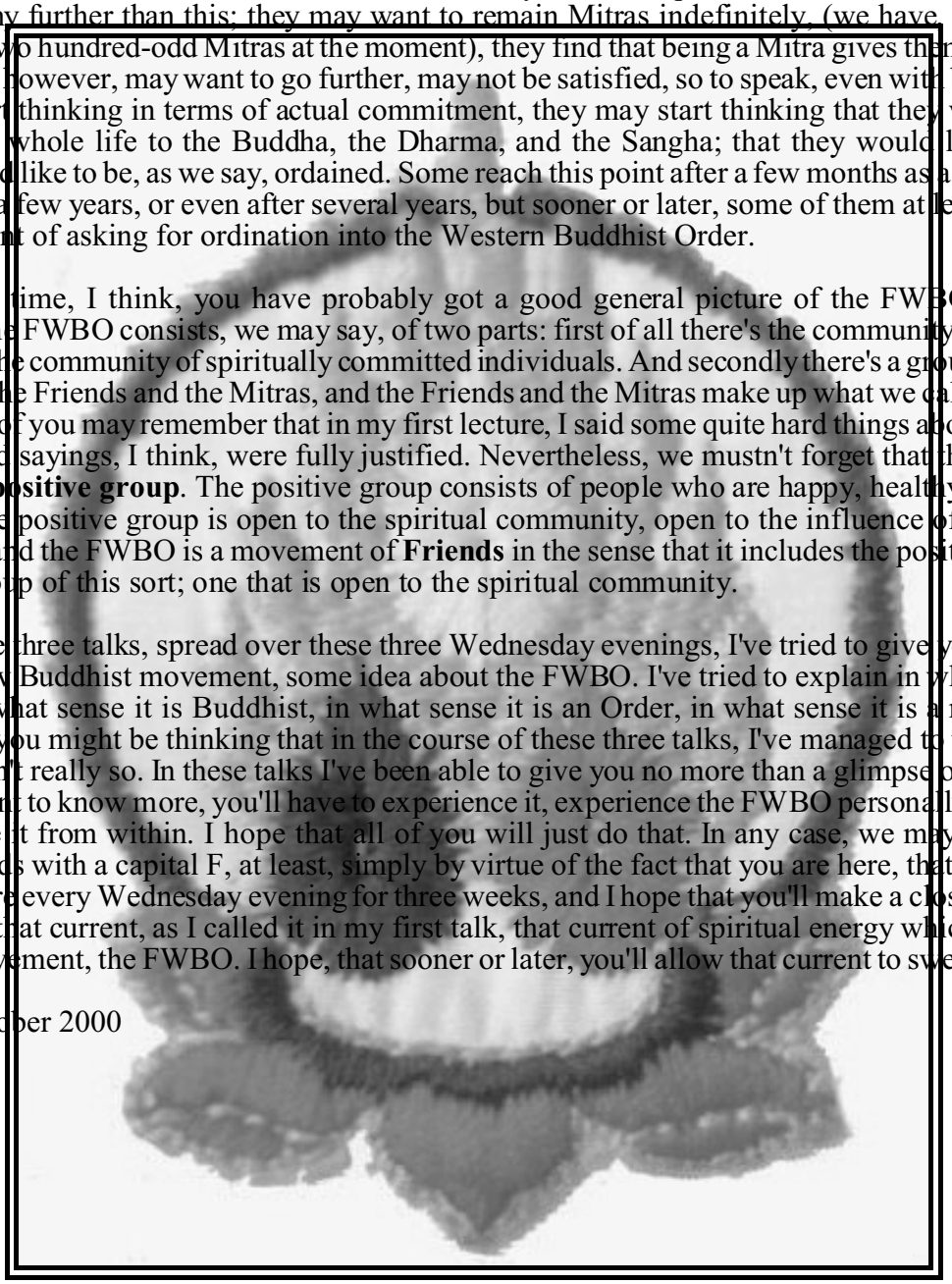
Now I've spoken of commitment finding expression in the leading of the monastic life but by this I mean leading a **genuinely** monastic life, but this unfortunately is not always the case. In many parts of Asia, commitment has been replaced by monasticism, by becoming a monk. But more often than not this is not **genuine** monasticism. More often than not genuine monasticism has been replaced by **formal** monasticism. The laity in many parts of the Buddhist world go through the motions of Going for Refuge, that is to say they simply recite *'Buddham saranam gacchami'* on all possible occasions. In much the same way the monks go through the motions of being monks, that is to say they recite the monastic rules at intervals without really asking themselves what they mean. So we can see now why nobody had thought of starting an Order instead of yet another Buddhist organisation. The reason was, from this

particular point of view, that they thought they already **had** an Order, but they did not in fact have an Order at all - they had in most places only a number of people following the same life style, following it in fact in an external mechanical sort of a way. However, as soon as you put the emphasis on Going for Refuge, monasticism is no longer over-emphasised, no longer over-valued, it takes its proper place as a possible life-style for the committed individual - the committed individual Buddhist. So it's clear that the spiritual community consists of those who go for Refuge. The **Order** consists of those who go for Refuge, consists of those who commit themselves, and of them **some** may be living as monks, some may not - that is a secondary matter. So we can now have a clearer idea of in what sense the FWBO is an Order, or rather in what sense the WBO is an Order. It's a free association of committed people, people who are committed to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, people who take enlightenment as their ideal, who try to develop as individuals, who experience for themselves, in themselves, the successive stages of the spiritual path, who enjoy spiritual fellowship with one another, and who help one another, encourage one another, and inspire one another. And some of these committed people in the Western Buddhist Order are old, some are young. To the best of my knowledge our oldest Order member is about seventy, our youngest is about twenty. Some again are men, some are women. Some live in resident semi-monastic spiritual communities, others live at home with their families. A few live entirely on their own. Some live in the city, some live in the country. Some are quite highly educated, some are not educated, or not very educated. Some have a leaning towards the arts, some towards the sciences. Some live in England, some live in Finland, some live in India, some in Europe, and some of course here in New Zealand, and some travel around all over the place. But **all** are committed to the Buddha, all are committed to the Dharma, all are committed to the Sangha, all are united in Going for Refuge. All therefore belong to the spiritual community, the same spiritual community, all are 'members', as we say, 'members', inverted commas, of the WBO, the Western Buddhist Order. All are what is traditional known as *Upasikas*, masculine, or *Upasakas*, feminine. And it is these spiritually committed individuals, and these alone, who are responsible for running the different FWBO Centres. No one else has any responsibility at all. Not that members of the Order **have** to run FWBO Centres, of course. No; it's a matter of one's own free choice. Some Order Members have nothing whatever to do with the running of centres, they get on with their own spiritual practice, get on with their own spiritual development, but they just keep in touch, in regular touch, even close touch, with other Order Members. But supposing as a Order Member you want to set up a centre of the FWBO, what do you do? You just get together with half a dozen other Order Members and you agree among yourselves to set it up. And there is an important point to be made here. There are many different FWBOs in different countries, but they are all legally and financially independent. There is no one headquarters, so to speak, for the whole FWBO movement. Orders are not coming from above, orders are not coming from anywhere. The local activities are run by local Order Members. The unity of the movement, the unity of the FWBO, is spiritual, it's not organisational. All Order Members everywhere belong to the same Order, and all the different centres are run in the same spirit.

Now at this stage a question might arise. The question being: how does one **become** an Order Member? How does one become an Upasika or an Upasaka? I'll say just a few words about this, because it will also enable me to explain in what sense the FWBO is a movement of **Friends**, we mustn't forget that, and then I'll conclude. Suppose an FWBO centre has been started up somewhere, started up with more or less the full range of activities, that is to say - meditation classes, yoga classes, lectures, study groups, retreats and so on - all the usual FWBO activities, and supposing it so happens that in one way or another - because a friend tells you or you see an advertisement in the papers - you get to know about that FWBO centre, so what do you do? You just come along, you just want to try it, you just want to sample it, you come along. Well, as soon as you come along, as soon as you attend something, you're reckoned as a Friend, capital F, of the movement. And you can come along as frequently or as infrequently as you please. You're not asked to join anything, you're not given any responsibility; you can just make whatever use you please of the Centre facilities - you're a Friend. So the great majority of people in the FWBO are just Friends. There must be quite a few tens of thousands of them, and they come along every now and then. In some cases for years, they attend the odd class or lecture, maybe attend the odd retreat, but they don't want to go any further than that. Some however do want to go further, so they start attending classes regularly, they start meditating at home maybe every day, they start bringing their working life in line with the principle of Right Livelihood, maybe they help out at the Centre, do odd jobs there and so on, have a closer contact with Order Members, and in short they start feeling that they belong to the FWBO, and want to be more deeply involved, so such people can become what we call Mitras. Mitra means simply 'friend'. Mitra is a Sanskrit word, but we distinguish between friend in English, and Friend, that is to say Mitra, in Sanskrit. In India itself the Mitras are called *Sahayaks* which means helpers because there it would be confusing to have Mitras and Mitras, and there we have therefore *Sahayaks* and Mitras, whereas in English we have Friends and Mitras. So there is a simple ceremony for becoming a Mitra, that

is to say a Sanskrit Mitra, and the ceremony simply consists in offering a flower, a lighted candle and a stick of incense to the Buddha image, and the ceremony usually takes place at the centre, or, perhaps, away on retreat. It takes place in the presence of Order Members, Mitras and Friends, takes place in the context of Puja, that is to say a sort of devotional ceremony and usually on the occasion of a Buddhist festival, and this ceremony having been performed, **you** having performed this ceremony in a way, you are then a Mitra.

Now some people become Mitras after just a few months as Friends, others wait for two or three or four years, and there are special study groups in the FWBO and special retreats for Mitras, and they have closer and closer contact with Order Members, intensify their own practice and some of them may not want to go any further than this; they may want to remain Mitras indefinitely, (we have, by the way, I think, about two hundred-odd Mitras at the moment), they find that being a Mitra gives them all that they need. Others, however, may want to go further, may not be satisfied, so to speak, even with being Mitras, they may start thinking in terms of actual commitment, they may start thinking that they would like to commit their whole life to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha; that they would like to go for Refuge, would like to be, as we say, ordained. Some reach this point after a few months as a Mitra, others reach it after a few years, or even after several years, but sooner or later, some of them at least reach this point: the point of asking for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order.



Now, by this time, I think, you have probably got a good general picture of the FWBO. As a total movement, the FWBO consists, we may say, of two parts: first of all there's the community, the spiritual community, the community of spiritually committed individuals. And secondly there's a group of Friends, that is to say the Friends and the Mitras, and the Friends and the Mitras make up what we call the positive group. Some of you may remember that in my first lecture, I said some quite hard things about the group, but those hard sayings, I think, were fully justified. Nevertheless, we mustn't forget that there is such a thing as **the positive group**. The positive group consists of people who are happy, healthy and human. Above all, the positive group is open to the spiritual community, open to the influence of the spiritual community, and the FWBO is a movement of **Friends** in the sense that it includes the positive group, or a positive group of this sort; one that is open to the spiritual community.

Now, in these three talks, spread over these three Wednesday evenings, I've tried to give you some idea about our new Buddhist movement, some idea about the FWBO. I've tried to explain in what sense it is Western, in what sense it is Buddhist, in what sense it is an Order, in what sense it is a movement of Friends, and you might be thinking that in the course of these three talks, I've managed to tell you quite a lot, but it isn't really so. In these talks I've been able to give you no more than a glimpse of the FWBO, and if you want to know more, you'll have to experience it, experience the FWBO personally, you'll have to experience it from within. I hope that all of you will just do that. In any case, we may say, you are already Friends with a capital F, at least, simply by virtue of the fact that you are here, that many of you have been here every Wednesday evening for three weeks, and I hope that you'll make a closer and closer contact with that current, as I called it in my first talk, that current of spiritual energy which is our new Buddhist movement, the FWBO. I hope, that sooner or later, you'll allow that current to sweep you away.

Checked October 2000