

## **TAPE 168: Twenty Years on the Middle Way Sangharakshita**

Note: K = Kalimpong

**(SIDE 1)** Dhammarati and friends. While thanking Dhammarati for that introduction, I have to introduce just one little correction which was, or which is, that I founded the Triyana Vardana Vihara seven years after my arrival in K, and the year following my arrival in K I established the Young Men's Buddhist Association of K. It's nice to get the little biographical facts exactly right, because I sometimes find it necessary to check the growth of what might be called the Sangharakshita Legend. Because I have heard it, and even seen it in print, that during the war I was in the RAF, and that I was a fighter pilot. I can assure you that I have no such pretensions, my style of piloting is of quite another nature. So facts are facts, and legends are legends.

Well, whether it may be considered as a fact, or whether it may be considered as a legend, or whether it may be considered even as the mixture of the two, this evening we're celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that legendary body, the FWBO. That is to say the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. Yes, the FWBO has been in existence for exactly 20 years, and sometimes I must admit it doesn't seem like that at all. But, as I think it's already been mentioned, its actual date of establishment was the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1967, a day - or rather an evening - which I remember very well indeed. In terms of our average human lifespan, 20 years is not really a very long time at all, but nonetheless in the course of 20 years quite a lot can happen. And indeed in the case of the FWBO, quite a lot has happened in the course of these last 20 years. In the course of these last 20 years FWBO centres have sprung up in many different parts of the world. As have spiritual communities, and team-based right livelihood projects or businesses. And in this way through, or by means of, these centres, these communities, and these right livelihood projects or businesses, there has come into existence over the years, the nucleus of what we call, borrowing the current expression, the New Society. Or at the very least the nucleus of that nucleus.

Now compared with some of the newer religious movements, the FWBO is not very big, but certainly the FWBO has grown more quickly than at least some of us expected, especially when we consider the nature of our ideals and when we consider how difficult those ideals are to implement, as most of us I expect find almost every day.

So as we look back over the last 20 years, we experience quite a variety of emotions, perhaps we experience quite strong, quite powerful emotions. We experience for example emotions of thankfulness that a spiritual and cultural movement like the FWBO actually exists. We experience thankfulness that there is a situation in which we can develop as human beings, in which we can become true individuals. We experience thankfulness that we can form, that we can develop, spiritual friendships. And thankfulness that we can deepen our spiritual experience. Thankfulness even that we can put all our old problems well and truly behind us.

We may also experience a certain amount of pride, pride that is in the positive sense. Pride that we could help build up something like the FWBO, pride that we could be the means of bringing the Dharma, bringing the teaching of the Buddha, bringing the

possibility of personal development, with other people with whom we come into contact. But at the same time that pride may be mingled with disappointment, disappointment that we have not been able to do more, disappointment that the FWBO is not bigger and better than it actually is, disappointment that it has not been able - that the FWBO has not been able - to exercise a deeper and a more extensive influence than it does, especially when one considers how badly the world needs the kind of influence which the FWBO represents.

Speaking personally, and perhaps on an occasion like this I should speak personally, speaking personally as I look back over the last 20 years, the last 2 decades, my own feeling, my own emotion, is more one of wonder than anything else. Wonder that is to say that the FWBO should have come into existence at all because perhaps only I know how very nearly it didn't come into existence. And wonder also that having come into existence, it has survived and grown. After all it was a very small child you may say, it was a very weak little shoot. Someone referred to it in the course of the afternoon as a sapling, well it certainly wasn't a sapling to begin with, it was a tiny little shoot with all sorts of cold and discouraging blasts blowing upon it. Or it was like a little flame, one might say, which I was trying to shelter between my two hands, and again there were all sorts of cold and discouraging blasts coming upon it, and trying to blow the poor little flame out. But of course they didn't succeed in blowing that little flame out, and the little flame is now a moderately big flame.

In other words not to speak so metaphorically, as many of you know, the FWBO started in really a very small and very insignificant way. It started, and I'm not going to start reminiscing - not really - in a tiny basement room in Monmouth Street in central London which noone I'm sure is in any danger of forgetting. I believe we've even got a photograph, or even 2 photographs, of it in this hall this evening just to remind us, just to make sure that we won't forget. I'm not actually going to start reminiscing about the old days, the good old days as some of our friends call it. The good old days, that is to say, when Bhante had to do everything himself, and nobody else did anything - well, hardly anybody else did anything. And I certainly don't look back on that aspect of our early days, as good old days - I'm quite happy to live in the bad old days, or the bad new days one may say, when lots of other people are doing things that I used to do and I can sit back relatively speaking. So I'm not going to yield to the temptation of reminiscing about these days, good, bad or indifferent - probably I've yielded to that temptation quite enough already.

Instead of reminiscing, I'm going to consider what the FWBO has been actually doing these last 20 years, that is to say what we have been doing these last 20 years. What we have been doing that is to say in principle. I'm not going to give you details of centres and activities and things like that, but what the FWBO, what we have been doing in the course of the last 20 years in principle. Now as most of you know the initials FWBO stand for Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. So here, as the grammarians present will tell you, we have two nouns and two adjectives, and the two nouns and the two adjectives are probably of equal importance. So far as this evening's talk is concerned, the emphasis falls on one of the adjectives, the emphasis falls on Buddhist. The FWBO is a Buddhist movement, or if you like a Buddhist organization. It belongs to, and is part of - an integral part of - the great spiritual tradition, which in the West we call Buddhism, but in the East it's simply called the Dharma, or just Dharma, or Dhamma, or chon in Tibetan. And that great spiritual

tradition which we call Buddhism looks for its ultimate inspiration, and of course the FWBO looks to its ultimate inspiration, to Gautama the Buddha, the founder as we call it, the founder in single-inverted commas of Buddhism, the Discoverer, the Re-discoverer, of those spiritual truths which we call the Dharma. Now it's at this point there naturally arises, there inevitably arises, the question: what is Buddhism? Quite a number of answers could be given to this question and I'm sure you've heard quite a number of these answers on various occasions already, perhaps in the course of lectures at the LBC and elsewhere, perhaps in the course of Mitra study groups, or retreats, and so on. And in the course of the last 20 years, well in fact in the course of the last 40 years, I myself have given quite a number of answers to this question of 'what is Buddhism?'. The answer that I'm going to give this evening to the question 'what is Buddhism?' is quite a short and simple one. I'm going to say simply that Buddhism is the teaching of the Middle Way. The Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, Siddhartha, Sakyamuni, followed this middle way himself, he exemplified it, we might say he embodied it. And he also taught others to follow this middle way as he calls it, the *madhimapatipana* ?. And since the FWBO, since the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, is a Buddhist movement, it therefore follows that the FWBO is a movement of the middle way, it follows that the FWBO is on the middle way, and since the FWBO has been in existence for 20 years the FWBO has been 20 years on the middle way. We have been 20 years on the middle way, because the FWBO doesn't exist apart from its members.

So what is the middle way? This is the further question that arises. And I remember that in the course of my 20 years in India, I gave quite a number of lectures on this particular topic, usually I spoke of the principle of the middle way as having three aspects, or three levels of application. There was what I called the middle way in ethics, the middle way in psychology, and the middle way in metaphysics. The middle way in ethics is of course - well no - it consists of the fact that one should avoid the extreme of self-mortification on the one hand and self-indulgence on the other. Or if you like the extremes of asceticism and hedonism.

The middle way in psychology is not quite so well-known. Here also there are two extreme views. According to one of these extreme views, Man has, Man possesses, an unchanging soul and that this soul unchanged survives bodily death. That is one of the extreme views in psychology. According to the other view, the opposite view, Man possesses no soul, unchanging or otherwise, and there is therefore nothing of him that survives bodily death. These two extreme views were very well represented in the time of the Buddha by different thinkers. Here the middle way is the view that there is not an unchanging but a changing soul and that this changing soul continues to exist after death, in the same way as it existed during life. Of course after death it may again become connected with a physical body, whether gross or subtle, and this is what is popularly known as rebirth or reincarnation.

So much then for the middle way in psychology as I explained it in India all those years ago. The middle way in metaphysics is somewhat more abstruse. One may think, as some of the thinkers in the Buddha's day did, one may think of ultimate reality in terms of existence, in terms of Being. Or one might think of it in terms of non-existence, non-Being. The middle way consists in thinking of it in terms of Becoming, that is to say consists in thinking of it in terms of *sunyata* or Voidness. Now in India this threefold explanation of mine of the middle way, was very popular

with my various audiences, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Here in England, as in the West generally, it forms part of our standard FWBO teaching, but this evening I'm not going to enlarge on these three aspects of the middle way. I'm going to take them, so to speak, as read. I'm going to speak instead of the middle way and of our being on the middle way in more directly practical terms, terms which moreover have particular relevance to us here in the West.

I've emphasized that the FWBO is a Buddhist movement. Now I want to emphasize that it is a movement the heart of which is an Order, that is the Western Buddhist Order. The FWBO was established 20 years ago with a view to the establishment of the WBO, that is to say the Western Buddhist Order itself which came into existence almost exactly a year later in 1968. Being a Buddhist Order, the Western Buddhist Order, the WBO, naturally follows the middle way, it is on the middle way. But the question arises: in what way specifically is the Western Buddhist Order on the middle way? In order to understand this we shall have to take a look at the eastern Buddhist world as exists even today, and especially at the Theravada Buddhist world which we find in Sri Lanka, in Thailand, Burma and so on. In the East the Buddhist community is divided, in fact rather sharply divided, into two major sections. On the one hand there are the monks, on the other the lay men and lay women. Some of you may be wondering, well what's happened to the nuns, but I have to explain that nuns, bhikkunis only exist in some of the Mahayana countries and even then only in very small numbers, but that is another story, I'm not going into it this evening. Not only is the Buddhist community in the east divided into 2 sections, 2 major sections, the monks on the one hand, the laity on the other, in the east usually it is only the monks who are regarded as being the real Buddhists, the true followers of the Buddha. It's only the monks who are regarded as practising Buddhism. So, in the east if you really want to practise Buddhism you have to become a monk. The function of the laity is generally considered to be to support the monks, so that the monks can practise Buddhism. In other words, the laity tend, though there are exceptions, the laity tend to practise Buddhism indirectly, tend to practise it at second-hand. In a way the monks practise it for them. And this is really from a Buddhist point-of-view self-contradictory, quite opposed to the fundamental teachings of the Buddha himself. According to the Buddha, the Dharma is something that you have to practise yourself, because it's only if you practise it yourself that you'll develop, just as it's only if you eat food yourself, that you'll be nourished and will grow.

At this point perhaps I should mention that the division between the monks and laity is not equally sharp in all parts of the Buddhist world. In the Mahayana countries of Asia, that division - the sharpness of that division - has been modified in varying degrees by the emphasis on what is known as the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Bodhisattva Ideal is something that can be practised by both the monks and the laity, and thus the Bodhisattva Ideal acts as a unifying act. Nonetheless, the division between monks and laity remains at least to some extent, and in the Theravadin countries of course it remains very sharp indeed since in those countries the Bodhisattva Ideal is not emphasized.

So how did this division, this quite sharp division in some cases between monks on the one hand and the laity on the other, come about? How is that the monks, the yellow-robed monks, perhaps even the red-robed monks, has come to be regarded as the real Buddhist? How is it that the layman or the laywoman has come to be regarded

simply, or at least mainly, as the supporter of the monk? What is the source of this confusion, as it actually is? In order to understand this we shall have to make a very important distinction. A distinction with which we in the FWBO have become familiar in the course of the last 20 years but which is not always recognized by other Buddhist groups. And this is the distinction between what we call commitment and what we call lifestyle. By commitment we mean spiritual commitment, that is to say commitment to the three Jewels, to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. By lifestyle we mean the particular way, the specific way in which we express that commitment, manifest that commitment in our ordinary, daily living.

Now being a monk is a matter of lifestyle, being a layman or laywoman is a matter of lifestyle, and in neither case does the lifestyle as such necessarily express spiritual commitment though it may do so. In the greater part of the eastern Buddhist world however, the monastic lifestyle has come to be identified with spiritual commitment. If you are a monk you are automatically committed, if you are committed you are automatically a monk. In the FWBO and the WBO however, we do not see things in this way. In our case whether you are a monk or a layman or a nun or a laywoman is of secondary importance. What really matters is whether you are spiritually committed, whether you are committed to the three Jewels, whether you are committed to the path of spiritual self-development, and other development, whether you are committed to the path of supreme Enlightenment - that is what really matters. And this attitude of ours has found expression in a little saying that is widely current in the FWBO, and which most of you must have heard at some time or other, and the saying is: Commitment is primary, lifestyle is secondary. This little saying can however be misunderstood, as most little sayings I've found can be misunderstood whether mine or anybody else's. It can be misunderstood as meaning that lifestyle is not important, that it doesn't really matter from the Buddhist point of view, it's just how you live. You can live any old fashion. The misunderstanding consists in thinking that any lifestyle can be an expression of spiritual commitment. But the fact is that lifestyle is very important indeed, but it is of secondary importance. That is it is of importance only as an expression of commitment. So we can now begin to see in what way the Western Buddhist Order as such follows the middle way, in what way it is on that middle way. It is on the middle way in the sense that it avoids the extreme of rigid, perhaps formalistic, monasticism on the one hand, and lax laicism, as we may call it, coining a term, on the other.

The individual member of the Western Buddhist Order is first and foremost simply a Buddhist, simply one who is committed to the three Jewels, whether he or she lives more or less as a monk or more or less as a member of the laity, so-called, depends on the particular nature of his or her spiritual needs. And those needs are not always necessarily the same, not the same so to speak from one year to the next. It's not easy to be simply a Buddhist, it's not easy to be committed to the three Jewels. In the east a monk, that is to say one who has been ordained as a monk, often assumes himself to be committed, assumes himself to be leading a spiritual life, simply because he's shaved his head, wears the yellow robe and observes various rules. Similarly the layman often assumes, in the east, that he is not committed because he is not doing any of those things, that is to say not shaving his head, not wearing the yellow robe and so on. Indeed in the east, the layman can often be heard to say 'how can I be expected to practise Buddhism, I'm only a layman or laywoman' as the case may be. Thus most of the so-called monks and most of the so-called laymen are able to evade

in fact the demands of the spiritual life. But in the case of a member of the Western Buddhist Order no such evasion is really possible, or at least not really possible for very long. In one way or another he or she, a member of the Western Buddhist Order, is constantly being brought up against the question 'am I deepening my commitment to the three Jewels, and is my lifestyle - whatever it may be - giving ever more adequate expression to that commitment?'. For this and other reasons therefore, it is not easy to be simply a Buddhist, not easy to be a member of the Western Buddhist Order, in fact it's not even easy to be a Mitra. I sometimes say that it's much easier to go to the east and become a fully-ordained monk than it is to become a Mitra in the FWBO. If you went to almost any eastern country well this week, probably next week you could be a monk, that is if you are a man. If you wanted to be a nun that would be much more difficult. But it might take you years and years before you were considered to be ready to become a Mitra in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

Even though it's not easy to be a member of the Western Buddhist Order, not easy even to be a Mitra, nevertheless quite a number of people do make the effort or they're making the effort in increasingly large numbers, not only here in England but in a number of other countries as well. Because they make that effort, because they try to deepen their spiritual commitment, and to bring their lifestyle more and more into harmony with that commitment, they change. Or rather they don't just change, they develop, they grow as human beings, spiritually, and sometimes they change a very great deal, and change very quickly. And this is something that I have certainly seen in the course of the last 20 years, and it's certainly one of the most rewarding aspects of my own personal association with the FWBO: just to see people change, certainly from year to year, sometimes even from month to month, from week to week, especially when people are on retreat. So one concludes that the Dharma really does work, the Buddha's teaching really does work, the different methods of practice about which we heard in the afternoon really do work. That is to say they work if you practise them. I've absolutely no doubt about that, in fact I might say that the evidence for the fact that the Dharma works is right here before me. And I'm sure that each and every one of you has changed for the better due to your contact with the Dharma as mediated by the FWBO.

This is a very imperfect world, and in this imperfect world even change for the better, even spiritual development may bring it's own little problems along with it. When you develop spiritually even to a small extent, you not only develop, not only grow, you grow away from. You grow away from your old friends and associates, you grow away from your relations, and you grow away from them because you no longer share their ideas and their attitudes. It's not that you necessarily want particularly to grow away from them, the growing away from them is simply the natural result, the inevitable result, of your own process of development. And in particular perhaps you grow away from your parents, your mother, your father, and of course there is, as you all know, in any case the generation gap as it's called. In modern Western society, relations between parents and children are often not easy, are often a very strained, very difficult, painful, for various reason. Now here too the FWBO follows the middle way. Here too we have been on the middle way for the last 20 years. In this connection I'm speaking of all of us: order members, mitras and friends alike. The middle way is by definition a middle way between extremes, between two extremes, so what are the two extremes so far as our relations with our parents are concerned?

What are the two extremes? We can call them submission and rejection, though these terms are not particularly good ones. Perhaps conformative and rebellious would be better.

By submission I mean accepting your parent's point of view in all things, or at least in practically all things. Accepting their ideas, accepting their attitudes, and so on. And therefore not doing anything of which your parents would disapprove, even if you want. I remember when I was in my teens I heard about a woman, a good enough woman, married woman with a family, who didn't dare to mend a stocking on the Sabbath because her old father who was living with them disapproved of that sort of thing. I was about to say that this sort of submission is becoming increasingly rare, but then I remembered that there is also what we may call the internalized parent. Now the internalized parent is often as powerful, or even more powerful than the actual parent ever was. Be that as it may, in the FWBO we neither submit to our parents, nor do we reject them. Here too we follow the middle way, we are on the middle way. The mere fact that we are changing, that we are developing spiritually, means in most cases as I've already said that we are moving away from our parents, so there is no question of our submitting to them. Indeed we may have moved away from our parents both literally and metaphorically long before we had any sort of spiritual development, long before we came into contact with the FWBO, so we are not in much danger really of falling into the extreme of submission.

What about the extreme of rejection? We're in a much greater danger I think of falling into the extreme of that, the extreme of rejecting our parents. For various reasons in fact society often seems to encourage us to reject our parents, seems to accentuate the differences between us, seems to widen the generation gap.

**(SIDE 2)** Not only that, there are some extreme religious groups which do in fact encourage us to reject our parents, encourage us to cut off all contact with them that is if they do accept our new belief, but this most emphatically is not the attitude of the FWBO. In the FWBO we actually encourage our members to keep up contact with parents, with our parents, we encourage them to improve their relations with them, though without compromising our own independence. So why do we do this? Why is this the FWBO's attitude? For what reasons does the FWBO adopt this attitude? The reason is very simple and it is a Buddhist reason: when one rejects one's parents, when one rejects anybody in fact, the rejection is almost always the expression of a negative emotional attitude. In plain English it's an expression of anger, or ill-will or even of hatred. Now negative emotions, as I'm sure practically all of us know only too well, negative emotions are one of the biggest obstacles to the leading of a spiritual life. They're one of the things that really get in the way, that really do prevent us from making progress. Hatred in fact is one of the five mental hindrances, as they are called, that prevent us from entering into higher states of consciousness, or prevent us, in a word, from meditating properly. It is important therefore, in fact it is of the utmost importance, that we get rid of our negative emotions, and particularly that we get rid of our negative emotions if we have any towards our parents.

Now you may be wondering, why is it particularly important that we should get rid of our negative emotions towards our parents? Well the reason is I think sufficiently obvious. Under normal circumstances it is after all our parents who bring us up, and we therefore have a longer connection with our parents than with any other human

being, with the possible exception of our siblings. Because we are so closely associated with our parents and from such an early period, from such an early date, our emotional tie with them are naturally very strong indeed - sometimes we don't realize how strong they are, in fact they are probably stronger than our emotional ties with anybody else, and may even determine the pattern of all our subsequent emotional relations. Thus a great deal of emotional energy is invested in our attitude to or relationship with our parents even though we may not be aware of the fact. So what does it mean, what does it add up to? It means that if our emotional attitude towards our parents is negative, then our emotional attitude is very negative indeed. It means that our whole emotional life is seriously disturbed, even distorted, may even mean that we have difficulty in relating to other people in a positive manner and it certainly will mean that we find it more difficult to develop spiritually than we otherwise would have done. It therefore is of the utmost importance that we should get rid of our negative feelings towards our parents. It's important that we should establish positive, friendly relations with them. Important that we should not reject them. Now the establishing of positive, friendly relations with one's parents may not be easy, may not be easy either for them or for us. But we should persevere, we should be patient, what has taken a long time to do will probably take a long time to undo, I'm referring of course to the development of negative emotion. Our parents may actually disapprove of our way of life, of what we're doing, they may be disappointed that we're not living up to their expectations - and parents have all sorts of expectations of their children very often - they may not be able to understand why we have given up a good job, or sacrificed a promising career for the sake of what they see as a passing whim, namely Buddhism or the FWBO. And these matters may make our task more difficult. But as I said, we should persevere, we should explain to our parents what we're trying to do, to communicate ourselves as fully as possible, and in the end if we persevere usually they will understand, at least to some extent. Even parents aren't totally stupid. They may not understand why you have gone, or want to go, for refuge to the three Jewels, but at least they have come to understand that Buddhism really is important to you, really does matter to you, and perhaps they'll even see that you've become a better and happier person since you became part of the FWBO. Even if they don't understand however, you at least will have cleared the air so far as you are concerned. Your attitude towards them will be emotionally positive, whatever their attitude towards you may be. You will feel metta for them, even though they may not feel metta for you, and in this way you will avoid the extreme of rejecting your parents, even as we avoid the extreme of submitting to them also. Like the rest of the FWBO, you will be following the middle way, you will be on the middle way so far as relations with your parents are concerned.

Though parents loom so large in our life especially when we're young, they're only part of a larger scene... part of a larger whole. Part of a particular society, and that society has it's own customs, it's own traditions, it's own culture, so the question arises: what should be our attitude towards those customs, those traditions, in particular perhaps what should be our attitude towards that culture? And once again we find the FWBO on the middle way, find ourselves I hope on the middle way. So what is the FWBO's attitude towards culture, that is to say it's attitude towards Western culture, the culture into which we are born, we have been born, and which constitutes our heritage? Once again we have to distinguish between two extreme views or two extreme attitudes. But before we do that, let me say something about the meaning of culture. According to a modern dictionary, the word culture has ten



different meanings, quite distinct. But this evening, we're concerned with the first and the fourth of these meanings, and especially the latter, the fourth. The first and primary meaning of the word culture is, and I quote: "The total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared basis of social action". One could say quite a lot to be said about culture in this sense, but we'll have to wait until some other occasion... time is short, we have to press on. The fourth meaning of the word culture, which is the one we are really concerned with this evening, is, and again I quote: "The artistic and social pursuit, expression, and taste valued by a society or caste, as in the arts, ??, ?? et cetera." Culture in this sense finds of course concrete, objective embodiment. In particular it finds embodiment in what we usually call works of art, that is to say by the embodiment in paintings, sculptures, musical composition, poems, plays, novels and so on. Finds embodiment in the masterpieces of such people as Turner, Michelangelo, Mozart, Shakespeare, Milton, Tolstoy, to name only a very few of the very greatest. So we could put our original question in more acute form, we could ask: what is the FWBO's attitude towards Turner, Michelangelo, Mozart, Shakespeare, Milton, Tolstoy and so on? That is what is its attitude towards the masterpieces which they've produced, which they've created, masterpieces which are among the supreme achievements of Western culture and which are an integral part of our heritage? As I've already indicated, here too we find the FWBO on the middle way, here too therefore we have to distinguish between two extreme views or attitudes. We may call these extreme views unthinking acceptance, and unthinking rejection. Once again the terms are not very satisfactory, but what I mean by them will I hope emerge as we proceed. Unthinking acceptance of Western culture by a Western Buddhist consists in the acceptance of it in the same way, and for the same reasons, as it is accepted by non-Buddhist Westerners. It is unthinking because it makes no attempt to link Western culture to Buddhism, to the Dharma. This I may say was very much the attitude of western Buddhists towards western culture when I returned to England in 1964 after my 20 years in the East.

And especially it was the attitude of western Buddhists, English Buddhists, towards western culture in the first and primary sense of the word culture, that is towards culture as the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared basis of social action. Culture in the higher sense did not usually come at that time into the picture. It was as though western Buddhists in those days divided their lives, almost divided their lives, into two separate, watertight compartments. In one compartment they kept their Buddhism, such as it was, and in the other they kept everything else. The contents of the two compartments were never allowed to meet, and to interact. In those days when you attended a Buddhist meeting, a Buddhist lecture, or read a Buddhist book, you were a Buddhist, but on all other occasions you were just like everybody else, that is everybody else of your particular social class, educational background and so on. In fact in those days you prided yourself in being just like everybody else. Sometimes people used to come up to me and say after a lecture 'well yes, I'm a Buddhist, but of course I'm really just like everybody else'. You lived in the same kind of house, worked in the same kind of job, and had the same kind of family. You even went to see the same films and hung the same kinds of pictures on your walls - and in this way you accepted western culture. Your acceptance of it was an unthinking acceptance because you made no attempt to relate it to Buddhism, and this kind of attitude is still quite common among western Buddhists outside the FWBO, especially when their connection to Buddhism is rather tenuous or predominantly theoretical.

What about the other extreme view or attitude, that is to say the unthinking rejection of western culture, it's time we came on to that? Here western culture is rejected root and branch, even in it's sublimest manifestation, it's rejected as totally irrelevant to the practice of Buddhism in the west. This extreme attitude was exemplified quite recently by the utterance of a western Theravadin monk. In a lecture I think it was, this monk declared that he saw no point in visiting art galleries since the paintings in these galleries were simply the product of greed, hatred and delusion. So here Buddhism and western culture are not just kept separate, they're seen as completely opposed to each other, completely antithetical, and being a Buddhist therefore means giving up western culture.

Such a rejection of western culture is however, an unthinking rejection, and it's unthinking because it does not actually examine and experience individual works of art. It does not ask itself what effect does this painting, or poem, or piece of music, have on me, it doesn't ask that question, and that is based on pure assumption, even on prejudice. Interestingly enough the Theravadin monk in question was asked - I think it was by a member of the FWBO - whether the works of Michelangelo and William Blake were the products of greed, hatred and delusion. And he replied that they were only of peripheral importance. Though one cannot help wonder how close was the monk's acquaintance with the culture he so confidently rejected.

However the unthinking rejection of some of the loftiest products of the human spirit is not very pleasant to contemplate, so let's pass onto the FWBO's attitude towards western culture. But before we do so, just one point. Those western Buddhists who reject western culture are of two kinds. There are those who reject culture as such in total, that is to say they reject western culture because they reject all culture - of the East, of the West, of the south, of the north, they just reject all culture. They believe that all one has to do is just follow that Noble Eightfold Path, or practise vipassana looking neither to right nor left, never visiting an art gallery, never looking at a picture, never listening to music, and so on. And then there are those who reject western culture only to replace it, to the extent that they can, by some form of Eastern culture, for example Japanese culture or Tibetan culture. In the early days of the FWBO, those who did try to replace western culture by Eastern culture, usually tried to replace it with Japanese culture, but nowadays I think Tibetan culture seems to be the favoured culture. No need for me to give examples of this, I'm sure they'll occur to many of you. Most of you are in case sufficiently familiar with the thing I'm talking about. But now for the FWBO's attitude towards western culture, probably it's already obvious from what I've said what that attitude is. It's an attitude of neither unthinking acceptance nor unthinking rejection. Here as elsewhere the FWBO applies the great criteria that the Buddha gave Mahaprajagotami, his aunt and foster-mother and faithful disciple. Here as elsewhere, we ask ourselves, does western culture, does this or that painting or poem help us to practise the Dharma or does it hinder us? Does it help us to develop spiritually or does it not help? If it helps we're free to accept it, to look at it, to read it, to expose ourselves to it's influence. And if it does not help us, well, we reject it, or at least we put it to one side and in this way we accept and reject thinkingly, we discriminate. But here perhaps a question arises, at least for some of us. How can culture, how can a work of art help us to develop spiritually? A clue to the answer is found in the 5<sup>th</sup> of the ten definitions of culture to which I have referred, and this definition reads: "The enlightenment" - that is enlightenment with a small e - "the enlightenment of refinement resulting from these pursuits, ie from the artistic and

social pursuits mentioned in the preceding definition." Culture refines us, and in particular it refines our emotions. The visual arts refine, Turner refines them, Michelangelo refines them, music refines them, Mozart refines them, Beethoven refines them, and especially the arts refines them in their nobler forms. And that is why the FWBO encourages the appreciation and enjoyment of the fine arts. This appreciation and enjoyment refines our emotions, refines our emotional life, makes our emotions more positive. And without positive emotion there is no spiritual life, no spiritual development. But we find the FWBO following a middle way with regards to it's attitude towards western culture and in this respect too we have been on the middle way for the last 20 years.

Now western culture is part of world culture. And culture itself is part of social and public life, in other words, culture is part of the world, part of what Buddhism calls the samsara, what then is the FWBO's attitude towards the world? How does it relate, or not relate, to the world? Once again we find the FWBO following the middle way, once again we find it avoiding two extreme views, or two extreme adjectives, and this time I'm not going to try to find special terms for these extremes. Simply going to describe them.

The first extreme consists in accepting the world on it's own terms, it consists in immersing ourselves in the world, immersing ourselves in the existing social, political and economic order, even in the existing cultural and religious order, and here we experience ourselves, in this case we experience ourselves as wholly belong to the world, as being part of the world with nothing left over so to speak, nothing left over for ourselves as individuals, indeed there is no Self, that is to say, no self-conscious, responsible, autonomous individual. We are simply a member of the group, whether the group is small or large. We don't really question the values of the group, don't really question the values of the world.

The second extreme is of course the exact opposite of the first. Here we reject the world, not only reject it, we try to get away from it, to escape from it, at least to some extent, at least for the time being. And different people try to escape in different ways, into different things. Some try to escape into rural life, into the sticks, into the countryside. That was the dream of the 60s - to get away to that beautiful little stone cottage in Wales and have wood fires, and smoke, and grow your own food, and make your own shoes, and weave your own cloth. So escape into the countryside, into wet Wales. Others escape into mystical or aesthetic experience, as did the hero of Tennyson's poem 'The Pallors of Art'. Others again escape into dreams, including day-dreams, into fantasies, and even into madness. In one way or another, they do their best to ignore the world, to wipe out the world as it were so far as they are concerned. But though they do their best to ignore the world, usually of course the world refuses to ignore them, but that is another story often quite a sad story.

So how does the FWBO avoid these two extremes? What is the FWBO's attitude towards the world, in which way does the FWBO... in what way do we follow the middle way where the world is concerned? The answer is very simple. The answer is to be found in a single word and that word is transformation. The FWBO's attitude is that it wants to transform the world, it does not accept it on it's own terms, at the same time it does not reject it or try to escape from it, in the long run indeed of course it's impossible to escape from the world. The FWBO therefore seeks to bring the world

more and more under the influence of those moral and spiritual principles that are signified by the word 'Dharma'. Tries to bring the world more and more under the influence by what we've come to refer to as the Golden Light. In other words the FWBO seeks to create a new society, a society which is conducive to the spiritual development of the individual in the fullest sense of the term. As I mentioned in the beginning, the nucleus of that society is to be found in the FWBO centres, spiritual communities, and team-based right livelihood projects or business, that have sprung up in different parts of the world in the course of the last 20 years. In this respect too therefore we can speak of 20 years on the middle way.

It's time to look back and to conclude. In the course of the last 20 years, the FWBO has been on the middle way in many different respects. This evening I have mentioned only some of the more important of them. We're on the middle way inasmuch as we avoid the extreme of rigid monasticism, formalistic monasticism and lax layism. We emphasize that this commitment to the three Jewels is primary, lifestyle secondary. When we are on the middle way in respect of our attitude to our parents, that attitude is neither one of submission, nor one of rejection. We try to relate to our parents as one human being to another, we try to develop an emotionally positive attitude towards them. Again we neither unthinkingly accept nor unthinkingly reject our western cultural heritage, that part of which which helps us to develop spiritually we accept and utilize. And that part of it which does not help us, we reject or at least we put aside for the time being. Finally we neither accept the world on it's own terms, nor do we seek to escape from it into a private world of our own. Instead we seek to transform the world. These then are some of the ways in which we have been 20 years on the middle way. These are some of the ways in which we are on the middle way.

I am glad that we have been on the middle way together, many of us for so many years, and I hope we shall be on the middle way together for many more years to come. I hope that one day the FWBO will be able to look back not just on 20 but on 30, 40, 50 even a hundred and more years on the middle way.