

Tape 194: Looking Ahead a Little Way
Sangharakshita

Combined Order Convention 1999

Introduction by Subhuti

Well we know very, very well what place Bhante has in our lives, what place he has for us. After all, today, and in fact for the Dharmacharini's for the last ten days, we've been prostrating ourselves in front of him many times, each morning. And we've been putting him above our heads in the afternoons, and we've been welcoming him into our hearts. So in these ways we've represented what Bhante is to us, what Bhante means to us. But now we're not just going to be placing him on the Refuge Tree in front of us or putting him in the sky above us, or even bring him into our hearts. We're going to have him in flesh and blood, here in front of us. And what a pleasure that is for us, to be able to contemplate, to take the darsan of our precious friend, Ugyen Sangharaksita, Bhante Sangharaksita, who means so much to every one of us and on whose vision our own ordinations rest.

Bhante's going to be speaking to us tonight on the theme of 'Looking Ahead a Little Way'. Well, I've been looking back - when I heard the title of Bhante's talk I knew I was going to have to find some way of introducing him and I just found myself looking back and I was thinking back to what seemed to me to be the beginning of our Order, what is it which is the point at which our Order really came into being, the point at which it was really germinated so to speak. And what I thought was that that origin is to be found way, way back. And I'm going to read you a passage from Bhante's - I was going to say 'Learning to Walk' but of course it's 'The Rainbow Road' - in which I think that origin is to be found.

'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 epitomises a teaching of such rarefied sublimity that even Arahants, saints who have attained individual nirvana, are said to have become confused and afraid when they hear it for the first time, I at once joyfully embraced it with an unqualified acceptance and assent. For me the Diamond Sutra was not new. I had known it and believed it and realised it ages before and the reading of the Sutra as it were awoke me to the existence of something I'd forgotten. Once I realised that I was a Buddhist it seemed that I'd always been one, that it was the most natural thing in the world to be and that I had never been anything else.'

It's that vision of Bhante's which really is the basis for our Order. Bhante saw the nature of the Dharma, he tried to live out that vision, and that led him eventually to the foundation of our Order and to witnessing the commitment of each and every one of us to realising that vision. So our Order has its origins not, in a sense, in time at all. Yes, I said I was looking back, but what we look back to is a point when Bhante had a glimpse outside time, a point outside time so to speak from which our Order unfolds.

So tonight we're not going to be looking back, we're going to be looking forward, we're going to be seeing a little way into the future and I for one am fascinated to know what it is that Bhante has got to say. I'm fascinated to hear, I want to hear him 'Looking Ahead a Little Way'.

Looking Ahead A Little Way

Thank you Subhuti.

Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis: as Subhuti has just indicated, I've been here at Wymondham College, on the Convention, for the last ten or eleven days. I've been on Convention of course with the Dharmacharinis. And I must say it has been for me a very, very happy and very, very exceptionally positive experience those ten days with so many Dharmacharinis. I believe I've had lunch or dinner with some one hundred and fifty six of them, which is one of the advantages of being the founder of a spiritual movement! And I've seen, I am told, a couple of dozen of them also individually. Apart from that I didn't really do very much with them, apart from reading some poems. But I was very aware of them as I was getting on with my own work. I was very aware of them meditating and studying and doing their prostration practice and doing their kalyana mitra yoga. I was very conscious of the positive, serene and happy atmosphere that was being generated. And I think that other Order members, the Dharmacharis, are very fortunate to have been able to come, so to speak, into that prepared atmosphere.

So for the last ten, eleven days I've been, as it were, living in quite another world. The other world, the outside world has seemed rather distant, even a little dream-like. I haven't heard any news, haven't seen a newspaper, haven't listened to the radio, so that other outside world, the world, has seemed rather different, rather distant, rather remote. But of course I do have some recollections of it, I do have some memories of it, I do have some recollection of things which had been going on before I came here and which no doubt are still going on. I have been very aware of certain issues that have been and still are no doubt in people's minds, here in Britain and in other parts of the world. And one of the things that I've been conscious of, one of the things that I've been conscious of for quite a long time, a year, two years, maybe more, is that here in Britain, as elsewhere, people are preparing to celebrate the millenium. You can't escape the millenium, even on this Convention you're not going to escape the millenium! It seems it's quite impossible to escape the millenium.

People in Britain, as elsewhere, are preparing to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the alleged birth of Jesus Christ. I say alleged because even those who believe he did actually exist seem now generally to accept that he was born at least four years before the generally accepted date. So I say alleged birth of Jesus Christ. They are preparing, in other words, to enter upon the third millenium of the Christian era. And I think it's important that though we're aware of all this going on I think that we as Buddhists don't allow ourselves to be carried away by all the excitement, by all the hype. I think it's important that we should remember that this millenium is not our millenium.

I'm not of course saying that you shouldn't go to see that famous dome on which so much energy, time, skill and of course money, has been expended, and in any case of course the exhibitions within the dome are or will be in no means entirely Christian. Some Christians have in fact complained quite vociferously that Christianity has not been allocated within the dome sufficient space. It seems they're being squeezed into some little corner of some multi-faith or multi-cultural exhibition and they're not very happy about that and in a way one can understand it. It is after all their millenium. But anyway, that's another matter.

Buddhists of course celebrated a half millenium of their own more than forty years ago. That was

in 1956 to 1957, May 1956 to May 1957. They celebrated two thousand five hundred years of Buddhism. And I was of course in India at that time, and I took part in those celebrations, and I remember them very well indeed. I not only took part in them I helped to organise a small part of them. And as I said, I remember them very, very well. It was a highly eventful year, a very colourful and emotional year for all Buddhists.

Christians of course see the birth of Jesus Christ as constituting a turning point in history, and we all know if we read our standard textbooks, at least old ones, history is divided into what happened BC and what happened AD, though non-Christian historians don't always nowadays follow that particular usage. They've suggested that if there is to be any such distinction then it should be thought of in terms of 'the Common Era' and 'Before the Common Era'. Scholars moreover have suggested that if there is to be a turning point in history it's to be found not in one particular year but in a whole period; it's to be found in the years centering around 500BC. In other words the period from about two hundred to eight hundred years BCE. And this period has been termed, as most of you I think already know, the Axial Age. And according to Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, in those years the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid, simultaneously and independently, in China, in India, in Persia, in Palestine and in Greece. It was the age of the great Individuals, Individuals with a capital I. It was the age of Confucius and Isiah, of Socrates and Plato, of the Upanishadic sages and of the Greek tragic poets. And of course, most importantly for Buddhists, it was the age of the Buddha.

Buddhists certainly see the appearance of the Buddha on the stage of history as constituting a turning point. But they don't see the appearance, the life, of the Buddha as a turning point in quite the same way as Christians see the appearance of Christ as constituting a turning point. For Christians Christ is absolutely unique. He is the incarnate logos, the incarnate son of God and His sacrificial death on the cross is the central event in the history of the whole world, of all human beings. That history, according to Christian tradition, begins with the creation and ends with the last judgement, when the trumpet sounds in the heavens and the entire human race is summoned before the throne of God to be judged by Christ.

For Buddhists however, the Buddha is not absolutely unique. Shakyamuni, Gautama, is not absolutely unique. He is, we may say, relatively unique, if one can in fact use such an expression. He is relatively unique in the sense that he is unique within a certain world period, a certain kalpa. According to Buddhist tradition there have been other Buddhas before him and there will be other Buddhas after Him again in future world periods. A Buddha as such, a Samyaksambuddha as such, is one who re-discovers the path of enlightenment after it has been lost to humanity.

Christianity and Buddhism thus have two different versions, two different visions of history, of the historical process. The Christian vision, we may say, is a linear vision. It begins with creation and the fall of man and it reaches it's climax in the life and death of Christ, and ends with the last judgement. Before the creation and after the last judgement there is, so to speak, there is only eternity. This linear vision of history has dominated Western thought at least since the rise, since the time of the rise, of Christianity, and in modern times that same linear vision finds expression in Marxism.

Marxism can be described, in fact has been described, from a certain point of view as a secularised version of the Christian linear vision of history. And this linear vision, this linear vision of history, underlies modern notions of indefinite progress. Certain happenings in the

present century however have rather undermined those notion of the indefinite progress of the human race, the indefinite progress of civilisation. We are less confident now than we used to be, say a hundred years ago, that the history of mankind is the history of uninterrupted progress on all fronts. We realise now that there can be regression, there can be a falling back to an earlier, primitive, even less civilised state of development.

So this linear vision of history is also shared by Islam. For Islam too, history is a single story so to speak, with a definite beginning and a definite end. Its' climax is not of course the life of Jesus Christ, even though Muslims do have the greatest respect for Jesus Christ, short of recognising him as the incarnate son of God. For Muslims the climax of the historical process is the life of Mohammed and the revelation of the Koran six hundred years after the appearance of Christ. For Muslims the turning point in history is the Hijra, Mohammed's departure from Mecca to Medina in 622 of the Common Era.

Of course both the Christian and the Muslim visions of history have roots in Judaism. One may therefore speak of the linear vision of history as the Semitic vision. It is the vision common to all three Abrahamic religions, or Abrahamic faiths, that is to say, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as to Marxism and much of modern thought.

The Buddhist vision of history is, on the contrary, a cyclical vision. Buddhism sees history as proceeding not in a straight, or relatively straight line, certainly not in a single line. It sees it as proceeding in a succession, a series of cycles. Within each of these cycles there is a process of growth, maturity and decay, and this cyclical process Buddhism sees as applying not only to human history - Buddhism sees this process as applying to the whole world. It sees it as applying in fact to the whole universe. It sees it indeed as applying to the whole of phenomenal existence, or to what Buddhists traditionally call samsara. It sees phenomenal existence, it has, so to speak, a vision of phenomenal existence as being like a great ocean, an ocean without beginning and without end, an ocean without limit, without boundaries. And upon this great ocean, this infinite ocean, millions upon millions of waves are constantly rising and constantly falling, and these waves are universes or worlds. And upon these waves that are universes, that are worlds, there are millions upon millions of smaller waves, rising and falling. And these waves are civilisations, or empires or religions or nations or individuals. These too are constantly rising and falling, these too are undergoing the process of growth, maturity and decay.

Now here there is a remarkable point: Christianity and Islam both see themselves as continuing, triumphantly, or perhaps not so triumphantly, to the end of time, that is, to the last judgement. Judaism presumably sees itself as continuing until the coming of the Messiah. Buddhism however sees itself as an organised religion, as the sasana, as an institution, as subject to the same cyclical process as everything else. Buddhism too, as an organised religion, is born, develops, matures, declines and dies. Many Buddhist texts predict or purport to predict this decline, and indeed in many parts of the Buddhist world it has come to pass, this decline has come to pass.

It has come to pass centuries ago in central Asia, in India and in Indonesia, which once had thriving Buddhist cultures and civilisations. In all these areas Buddhism has passed through the complete cycle. In more recent times Buddhism has seriously declined in China and Tibet, as well as elsewhere in the East to an extent. In the Buddhist East as a whole we may say, Buddhism has been in decline for at least a thousand years, which is a very sobering thought. This is not to say that individual Buddhists and even perhaps small groups of Buddhists, here and there, have not passed, have not pursued the path to Enlightenment, have even pursued it to the very end. But

there have been fewer and fewer such individuals and little groups, and Buddhism itself has had for centuries less and less influence on the surrounding civilisation and culture.

But the cyclical process is a complex one. As I've said, there are waves upon waves, there are smaller waves upon bigger waves, there are cycles within cycles. and upon the back of a larger wave which is falling there may be a smaller wave that is rising. Within a cycle of decay, within what is overall a cycle of decay, there may be a cycle of growth. In other words we see arising within Buddhism, declining Buddhism, we see movements of revival and reform. And those movements usually are associated with the life and work of a great, prominent, outstanding individual. Thus in Tibet we have the outstanding figure, the outstanding achievement of Atisha, the founder of the Kadampa tradition. In Japan there is Hakuin, the revitaliser of Rinzai Zen. In more recent times in China there is the remarkable figure of the abbot Tai Tsu(?), who did so much for the revival of Buddhism in that country after the collapse of the Manchu(?) dynasty. So much indeed that he is known to Chinese Buddhists as Bodhisattva Tai Tzu.

During the present century, Buddhism has been on the whole in decline. We all know what has happened in China and in Tibet. There it has been openly attacked by the forces of militant Marxism. And elsewhere in the East it has been undermined by the process of industrialisation and urbanisation. It's also been weakened by the inroads of Christianity. To such an extent indeed that some of the Buddhist leaders in some of the traditionally Buddhist countries have become seriously alarmed. Thus in the present century the wave of Buddhism in the world on the whole has been falling. But on the back of that wave there are smaller waves, some of them very small indeed, and those waves are rising. Two of those waves are, I believe, of particular importance and significance. One of these waves has arisen in India, where Buddhism has been virtually dead for nearly a thousand years, and the other has arisen in the West, in Europe and the Americas, where Buddhism was unknown until very, very recently.

The FWBO, including the WBO, is part of that wave. It is also part of the wave that has arisen in India, where of course it is known as the TBMSG. One could say also that the two waves, the Western wave and the Indian, are made up of a multitude of smaller waves. The FWBO/TBMSG would then be one of those smaller waves. We would be one of those smaller waves. Of course, we would not be one of those waves in any 'collective' (with single inverted commas) sense because the FWBO/TBMSG is itself made up of hundreds, even thousands of waves. Those waves are the different chapters, city centres, country retreat centres, communities, team based right livelihood businesses, choirs etc. There are even the individual Order Members, mitras, friends, all of whom are I trust, undergoing on the whole a process of growth and upward development, or are making, in other words, some progress up the spiral path. That progress will be made of course by their consciousness, their citta for want of a better term - their physical body may be in a process of decline. If that is the case, and it will be the case sooner or later for all of us, our attitude should be that of the poet William Butler Yeats who says:

An aged man is but a paltry thing

A tattered coat upon a stick

Unless soul clap its' hands and sing

And louder sing for every tatter of its' mortal dress.

As Buddhists, as men and women who have Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we have every reason to clap our hands and sing, both literally and metaphorically, whatever the state of our mortal dress may be.

But to return to my image of the wave. There are big waves and small waves, and very small waves, but they are all composed of water. All the waves of the ocean are composed of water, just water, H₂O, without salt! And in the same way, all the different sects and schools and traditions and forms of Buddhism are composed of - well, Buddhism. Composed of the Dharma. They are all expressions, under different conditions and circumstances, of the Dharma. Some of them are comprehensive in scope, some are more limited. Some are one-sided in one way or another, but all are manifestations of the Dharma, all are part of the great wave that we call Buddhism. All have the taste of liberation.

And the FWBO/TBMSG is part of that wave. Or rather is part of a part of that wave. It is part of a wave that is rising. Rising that is in the West and in India. As such, it has a lot in common with those waves, both the large and the small. It has teachings and practices in common. Among those teachings are those of the three marks of conditioned existence, the four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the twelve or the twenty four nidanas, the six paramitas, and many others. And among the practices that we have in common are meditation, ritual, worship, chanting, pilgrimage, observance of the precepts, study, and many others. And then of course there are symbols, like the Buddha image, the rupa, the Wheel of Life, the mandala - all these things, and many more, we share with the rest of the Buddhist world.

But the FWBO/TBMSG also has its own distinctive features, its own distinctive emphases, and its these which give it its particular individuality - an individuality which has developed as a result of us trying to practice the Dharma under the conditions of modern, industrialised, urbanised, secularised, living; conditions which are fast becoming world wide.

I sometimes summarise these emphases of the FWBO under six headings. I don't necessarily always give them in exactly the same order, but let me run through them briefly just to remind you of them.

In the first place, the FWBO/TBMSG is an ecumenical movement. Ecumenical is not really the best word in this connection but there seems to be no other, at least not in English. The word signifies that in principle we accept the whole Buddhist tradition as it has developed over the centuries in the East. It means that we do not identify ourselves exclusively with any one Eastern sect or tradition. We learn from all, we appreciate all, and we are inspired by all. We study as you know, Pali texts, like the Sutta Nipatta, the Dhammapadda and the Udana. We also study the great Mahayana sutras as well as works like the 'Songs of Milarepa' and the 'Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava'. At the same time we study them critically. We do not accept necessarily as gospel everything, every word that they contain. We try to understand what they are getting at. We ask ourselves what they really mean, what they are trying to convey, what they are trying to communicate. And we try to apply that meaning, to the extent that we are able to understand it, to the living of our own lives as Buddhists.

We have the same attitude towards the Buddhist tradition as a whole, that is to say, towards the Eastern sects and schools. Our attitude is one of critical appreciation. We do not necessarily accept them on their own terms and we certainly do not confuse the Dharma itself with the various national cultures in which the various Eastern Buddhist sects and schools happen to be

embodied. Above all perhaps we try to see what those sects and schools have in common with each other and with ourselves. This in brief is what I mean by what I call the ecumenical attitude of the FWBO/TBMSG.

Secondly, we are a unified movement. We are a unified movement in a general sense and in a specific sense. In a general sense, membership of the FWBO/TBMSG is open to all. It's open to all regardless of nationality, race, colour, education, class or caste, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, or age. I hope I've covered everything, otherwise someone is sure to find fault! All are accepted, all are welcomed, all have a place. All are seen and valued, by themselves and by others, primarily as individuals.

In a specific sense we are a unified movement in that membership of the Order, which is the heart of the movement, is open to both men and women on equal terms. We don't always realise how revolutionary this really is within the context of Eastern Buddhism. In traditional Eastern Buddhism, ordination (or it's equivalent) is not open to women. This is true of the Theravada, it is true of Tibetan Buddhism and it is true of Zen. Only in very recent times have some very small changes been made in fact made on the periphery in this respect. In the case of our own Order it has been one of our basic principles, one of our fundamental emphases, from the very beginning. And we should be proud of the fact. In fact I sometimes think that it's ironic that we, the FWBO and the Order in particular, should be criticised for our single sex retreats and single sex communities by people who do not give ordination to women on the same terms that they give it to men, perhaps don't give it at all. Such criticism I find extremely ironic coming from such quarters.

Thirdly, the centrality of the act of Going for Refuge in the Buddhist spiritual life. It is the Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels that makes us a Buddhist. To the extent that we Go for Refuge, to that extent we are a Buddhist. Going for Refuge is of course found in all forms of Buddhism, at least, references to it are found. But unfortunately it is often spoken of, at least in English, as Taking Refuge. This not only contradicts the plain language of the scriptures, where the word is gaccami, 'I go', it also has the wrong sort of connotation, a connotation of appropriation and possession, even of grasping. So let us be careful never to speak of Taking Refuge.

But though Going for Refuge is found in all forms of Buddhism, it rarely, if ever, has a central place in them. That place is taken more often than not by something else – either by monastic ordination for example, or by a particular kind of meditation or some other spiritual practice. In our own tradition however, Going for Refuge is central. We seek to place the Three Jewels at the centre, at the heart of our lives and to orient all our activities towards them, directly, or at least indirectly.

And all this is of course very well known to you, there's no need for me to enlarge upon it. But I'd like to remind you of the four levels of Going for Refuge. There's first of all the ethnic or cultural Going for Refuge, then secondly there's provisional Going for Refuge, thirdly there's effective Going for Refuge, and fourthly there's real Going for Refuge. An understanding of these four is absolutely fundamental. Ordination represents a recognition, by our spiritual friends, that we are effectively Going for Refuge, at least effectively. But Ordination is not enough. We must not rest on our laurels. We are not as Order Members effectively Going for Refuge unless we also are making a serious effort to achieve real Going for Refuge, that is to say to gain Stream Entry or to achieve the arising of the real Bodhicitta. I shall have something to say about the Bodhicitta a little later on. We must therefore ask ourselves if we are really making that effort,

really keeping alive the flame of that aspiration. Because if we do not go forward, inevitably we shall slip back, perhaps into a merely provisional, even a purely formal Going for Refuge. A convention obviously is a good time to think about such things. A good time to make an extra effort, to make our Going for Refuge real. It is not simply a time for socialising, or for catching up with the news, even FWBO news, though that has of course a place, to a limited extent, especially if you haven't seen someone, some fellow Order Member for a long time.

And then fourthly, fourth emphasis, the importance of spiritual friendship. This is the fourth of our distinctive emphases. Friendship is a basic human need. Relations between friends is one of the six basic Buddhist relationships dealt with by the Buddha in the Siggavada Sutta where the Buddha has quite a lot to say about the subject, especially how to distinguish the good friend from the bad friend. Without friends, good friends, one is hardly human, and without spiritual friends one can hardly be a practicing Buddhist. Spiritual friends help us to make spiritual progress. They encourage us when we're downhearted, challenge us when we're slack, inspire us when we lose touch with the ideal. They also help us in practical, even mundane ways.

In fact spiritual friendship, kalyana mitrata, is itself a means of spiritual progress, itself a spiritual practice. In spiritual friendship we learn to forget ourselves, our petty self-interest and concern. We begin to transcend the difference between oneself and others. Perhaps we get a glimpse of the Bodhicitta. Again all this is well known to you, you've all benefitted at some time or other, very likely are benefitting now, from spiritual friendship, and perhaps you've all at times felt the lack of that spiritual friendship. So you all know what it is, so I'll say no more about it.

Our fifth emphasis is on team based right livelihood. Team based right livelihood businesses are one of the fundamental institutions of the FWBO/TBMSG, together with chapter meetings, public centres and residential spiritual communities. Recently I discovered that in the UK, the UK alone, there are thirty one team based right livelihood businesses, with two hundred and thirty two and forty eight part-time workers between them. This is quite an impressive figure. It represents quite a magnificent achievement, especially when one considers how difficult it is to establish and run a business of this kind, and all those involved, whether Order Members or mitras are to be heartily, to be warmly congratulated on their efforts. They are pioneers, not only within their own movement but within the context of the wider society. They are pointing the way towards the development of a more ethical economic order.

Team based right livelihood businesses have four distinguishing characteristics. One, they provide those who work in them with a means of support. They do not pay wages or salaries, and they give each worker what he or she needs according to their individual circumstances. Two, they engage only in such activities that are ethical, ie. in accordance with the precepts. Moreover, the team based right livelihood businesses are run in an ethical manner, and the workers treat one another ethically. Three, they provide opportunities for the development of spiritual friendship within the work situation. This is particularly the case where the workers not only work together, but live together in a community. Fourthly and lastly profits of the business are distributed as dana, for the benefit of FWBO/TBMSG activities of various kinds.

Most of you are probably familiar with these four distinguishing characteristics of the team based right livelihood businesses, but you might not be able to enumerate them if asked to do so. And that is why I have given you this little reminder. In the Dhammapada – perhaps I should mention that in the course of this convention I've got back to working on my long unfinished translation of the Dhammapada and hope to have it finished by the end of the year. Well, in the

Dhammapada the Buddha says that ‘non repetition is the taint of the sacred verses’. In other words, if you don’t repeat them, don’t go over them in your mind, perhaps even with your lips, you will, sooner or later forget them. So ‘non-repetition is the taint of the sacred verses’.

Some Order Members have big gaps in their knowledge of the Dharma, even big gaps in their knowledge of the movement. It’s not only important that we should learn. It’s important that we should not forget what we have learned. We should therefore repeat what we have learned, turn it over in our minds and reflect upon it, whenever we get an opportunity. We should make it, as it were, a part of ourselves.

Sixthly and lastly, in the FWBO/TBMSG we emphasise the importance of the Arts for the spiritual life. We emphasise the importance of culture, great music, literature, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture - all help us to broaden our sympathies and extend our experience. They enlarge our imagination, they refine and direct our emotions. At their best and greatest they may be bearers of spiritual values, values which are in principle identical with those of the Dharma, values which can help us to transform our lives.

And while I’m on this subject of the part that the Arts can play in the spiritual life, I must say how very, very much I appreciate the stupa which has been created by Cintamini, with I believe the help of some others for our shrine room and which stands in the centre of our shrine room. I’m sure that everybody who has seen it and meditated in its’ presence has felt very, very inspired and very grateful to Cintamini and the others responsible for the creation of such a magnificent facility for our Convention.

So these then are the six great emphases of the FWBO/TBMSG. We are an ecumenical movement; we are a unified movement, especially a unified Order; we see the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as central to the Buddhist spiritual life; we recognise the vital importance of spiritual friendship; we seek to transform economic life through our team based right livelihood businesses; and we give an important place in the spiritual life to the Arts. These six great emphases are what differentiates the FWBO/TBMSG from other Buddhist traditions, what differentiates us, that is to say, from the rest of the Buddhist world. It is therefore important that we should have a thorough understanding of these particular emphases, to be able to explain them to newcomers and to other Buddhists, a reason for the faith that is in us. At the same time we should remember that we have a great deal in common with other Buddhist traditions, we should remember that we are a part of the Buddhist world.

Now among our six great emphases, the most important is the third, the third in my present enumeration, that is to say our emphasis on the centrality of the act of Going for Refuge in the Buddhist spiritual life. It is the most important, both practically and theoretically. Everything else flows from that, either directly or indirectly. And as I’ve already reminded you, there are four levels of Going for Refuge: ethnic or cultural, provisional, effective and real. And within the FWBO/TBMSG, Order members are those who are at least effectively Going for Refuge, or at the very least effectively Going for Refuge most of the time.

Acceptance into the Order, or Ordination, is the ritual recognition that a man or woman is effectively Going for Refuge, and that he or she intends to continue so doing. The final word with regard to someone’s readiness for Ordination rests with the public preceptors, ie. with the senior Order Member who conducts the Ordination ceremony. Originally that responsibility rested solely with me. I was the only public preceptor. I conducted all the public ordinations and the

private ones too. A few years ago however, I started handing on that responsibility, as you all know. I handed it on to a number of senior Order Members and at present there are seven of these senior Order Members. And in Order of seniority within the Order they are: First of all, Dhammadinna, ordained in August 1973; then Subhuti, ordained in November 1973; then Sona, ordained 1974; Srimala, ordained 1975; Padmavajra, ordained 1976; Sanghadevi ordained 1977, And Suvajra, ordained 1978. So they've all been ordained more than twenty years, they've all been associated with me for more than twenty years, which is quite a long time, quite a big slice of anybody's life. And these seven people are crucially responsible between them for the ordination process, or processes. Together with the presidents of certain centres they make up the Preceptors College and Council of the Western Buddhist Order, Trailokya Bauddha Mahasanga. Particulars of the different functions and duties of the preceptors and presidents are set out, in tabular form, very conveniently, in the first issue of Madhyamavani, and no doubt you have all familiarised yourselves with them. So I need not go into them now!

I just want to emphasise one thing, which is that the responsibility I have handed on to the public preceptors is a very weighty one. I know just how weighty it is, because I bore it alone for more than twenty years. It is they who are responsible, in the end, for admitting new members of the Order. Which means that it is they who determine, to an extent, the character of the Order, even determine the future of the Order. Not that all other Order members do not have a part to play, even an important one, but the public preceptors have a very special part to play. I would therefore like to take this opportunity of declaring that I have complete confidence in them, both individually and, so to speak, collectively. I am sure that they will fulfill the responsibility that I have entrusted to them with complete fidelity and integrity. Confident they will be, however, able to fill it properly only with the support and co-operation of each and every one of you, and I therefore call upon you to give that support and co-operation to the people I have named, to give it sincerely and wholeheartedly.

But though I've handed on my, handed on many of my responsibilities, above all, that of giving Ordination, public and private, I've not quite handed on all my responsibilities. I'm still it seems head of the Order, but that too I want to hand on. After all, I'm now very nearly seventy four, and by the time I'm seventy five, I want to have handed on the headship of the Order too. How, or to whom I shall hand it on, I have not yet decided, but I hope to make an announcement regarding the matter in, say, a year's time, around my seventy fifth birthday – if of course I live as long. In the meantime I trust you will all carry on deepening your Going for Refuge. So at last, I'm looking ahead a little way.

The fact that I'm doing so means that I believe that the Order, that the movement, has a future. This is not to say that you will necessarily have an easy time. You may well encounter a good deal of opposition. Buddhism itself may well encounter a good deal of opposition, not just the FWBO. In the Buddhist world as a whole, Buddhism is on the decline. It's been on the decline for nearly a thousand years, as I've already explained. Only in the West and in India, broadly speaking, is it part of a rising wave. But if that wave is to keep on rising, whether in India or in the West, it will have to struggle, it will have to work very hard. The FWBO will have to struggle, will have to work very hard, and in particular the Order will have to struggle, will have to work very hard. You will have to struggle, will have to work very hard. In India you will have to struggle against the all pervading influence of Hinduism, against the relentless pressure to Hindu-ise Buddhism, or at least to Hindu-ise Buddhists. Struggle against the pressure to put you back into the caste system. In the West you will have to struggle against what I've called pseudo-liberalism, against some aspects of New Age ideology, against the attempts to mix

Buddhism with Christianity. You will have to struggle against materialism and consumerism, and this means that often you will have to stand alone. You will have to risk unpopularity, perhaps even persecution. But people don't like unpopularity. People like that others should like them, they want to be in with the crowd so they are tempted to compromise, tempted to compromise their principles, their ideals, even their Buddhist ideals, and you, very likely, will have to face that temptation. Perhaps you are sometimes having to face it even now, in the present, from time to time.

But if the Order, if the movement, is to have a future, you will have to resist temptations of that kind. You will have to be true individuals, not afraid to be in the minority as Buddhists, not afraid to stand alone as Buddhists. You will have to have the courage of your convictions, the courage of your experience and your insight.

So far I've spoken only of opposition from without, but there is another kind of opposition to be faced, another kind of danger, one that is even greater than the dangers coming from outside, and that it's the danger from within, that is to say, from within the Order. And that danger is, in a word, disharmony. It's not enough that the Order is a unified Order, it has to be a united Order. It has to be spiritually united Order, united in its common commitment to the Three Jewels.

Human beings being human beings, there will always be differences of opinion. There will always be personality clashes, but these should be resolved as soon as they arise. Resolving them should be an absolute priority, which does not of course necessarily mean that we should just go on talking about them. Talking sometimes merely prolongs the conflict. Sometimes it is best simply to intensify our practice of the Dharma and leave the problem to look after itself.

As Order members you are in any case making an effort to rise from effective Going for Refuge to real Going for Refuge, and that is the real solution to the problem. If a sufficient number of Order members achieve a real Going for Refuge, or even make a genuine effort to achieve it, there will be harmony in the Order. If Order members are in harmony, if you are in harmony, the Order will be strong. It will be able to resist both the dangers from without and the dangers from within.

But more than that, if the Order is spiritually united, if it is in harmony, then a truly wonderful thing will happen. The Order then will be the locus for the manifestation of the Bodhicitta. As you all know we sometimes liken the Order to the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara. I believe Subhuti referred to that great figure, that great symbol last night. But, so to speak, it's not just a manner of speaking, it's not just a figure of speech, we should take it very seriously, even take it literally.

Let us go back for a moment to the four levels of Going for Refuge. Order members Go for Refuge effectively, that is, they're making a whole hearted effort to achieve real Going for Refuge, in other words to achieve Stream Entry. When that happens there takes place a radical transformation in the nature of the Going for Refuge. The Going for Refuge ceases to be 'my' Going for Refuge, 'I' (in single inverted commas) cease Going for Refuge. Something else takes over, at least to an extent. In Mahayana terms this something, this something else, is the real Bodhicitta.

There are four levels of the arising of the Bodhicitta. Corresponding to the four levels of Going for Refuge. In the first place, there's an ethnic or cultural arising. This is not really an arising at

all. It consists in the formal acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal, simply as part of one's Mahayana Buddhist cultural heritage. Secondly, there's provisional arising of the Bodhicitta, and this occurs when one tries to act in accordance with the Bodhisattva Ideal, that is to say, to act altruistically, even if only very intermittently. And thirdly there's the effective arising. Here one is wholeheartedly committed to acting in accordance with the Bodhisattva Ideal, and makes a serious effort to practice the six paramitas. But there's still the possibility of back-sliding, one may even give up the Bodhicitta altogether. Fourthly there's the real arising of the Bodhicitta. Here one has achieved at least a degree of real Wisdom and is therefore actually practising this and the other paramitas as paramitas, and practice of them is therefore a transcendental practice and there is no possibility of falling back.

As you know I have spoken of the arising of the Bodhicitta as the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge. Strictly speaking this applies only to the first three levels of the arising. In the case of the real arising, the distinction between self and others has begun to be seriously eroded. The real Bodhicitta is therefore neither individualistic nor altruistic. There is therefore no question of the arising of the real Bodhicitta being 'my' arising. 'I' do not develop the real Bodhicitta, 'I' am not a Bodhisattva, any more than it is 'I' who really Go for Refuge, or any more than it is 'I' who gain Stream Entry. In both cases what we can only describe as a non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy, and perhaps even consciousness, has begun to take over. The Hinayana does not have much to say about this. Perhaps the Buddha himself did not have much to say about it, perhaps He was content simply to demonstrate it in His life. But the Mahayana has a great deal to say about it. The Mahayana sutras have a great deal to say about it, especially in their teaching about the Bodhisattva ideal. I'm not going to go into all that now. I touched upon it elsewhere, for instance in my 1967 or 1968 lectures on the Bodhisattva Ideal, which will soon be appearing in book form.

I just want to focus on what happens when a number of people achieve this non-egoistic Going for Refuge, this non-egoistic arising of the Bodhicitta, when that stream of non-egoistic spiritual energy starts manifesting through a number of people simultaneously. Those people will be literally hands or arms, even faces of Avalokitesvara. There will be no question of any conflict between them. They will function in perfect harmony. They will be something for which we have no expression in English. It will be a true Sangha, it will be an Arya Sangha, and the Western Buddhist Order, Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, has a future only to the extent that it is such a Sangha, or to the extent that it contains such a Sangha as its nucleus. It is therefore imperative that each and every one of you should seek to transform your effective Going for Refuge into a real going for Refuge, should seek to attain Stream Entry or the arising of the real Bodhicitta. It is up to you. The future of the Order, of the movement is in your hands.

I need hardly say how much the world needs the Dharma, needs such an Order, such a movement as ours. I have done what I can. I have started the Order, started the movement. As I've already stated, next year I shall be handing on the headship of the Order. I shall then have no formal responsibilities. This does not mean that I shall be going out of circulation. I shall still be happy, more than happy, to see people. And no doubt I'll be putting in appearance at centres from time to time, as the mood takes me. Of course, I shall be doing, I hope, some writing. Whether I shall be at the next convention I cannot say. In any case I am very happy indeed to be at this convention, in fact, happy to be attending all three conventions. I'm happy to have had the opportunity of sharing with you some of my thoughts, happy to have had the opportunity of looking ahead a little way.

Conclusion by Subhuti

Bhante, there's no doubt about it, you're still the master. What a wonderful talk you've woven for us. Absolutely fascinating starting a talk on looking a little way ahead by going back two thousand five hundred years. But you could see what Bhante was doing, he was weaving so many different things together, so that by the time he did look just about a year ahead, and not really tell us what he was seeing, well it had a tremendous impact and we saw very clearly, very deeply where he was tending, where he was going. There's just no doubt about it, Bhante, that you opened up to us again, as you've done so many times before, the spiritual vision that animates us. I'm not going to attempt any sort of summary or bringing out points, or anything like that, it would be quite otiose (?). I think all I can say is that we really need to go through that talk again. We've heard it but Bhante put so much into his talk, he wove together so many strands, many of the strands were quite familiar to us, but because they're woven together in the particular way that he did, I think there's a great deal for us to get from them. So I very strongly recommend that everybody takes the opportunity to go through that talk and to discuss it, to think about it, maybe its something we should be doing in chapters. Bhante speaks to us so rarely now but when he does he puts such weight into what he has to say. And even though he took us back so far and look such a short distance ahead clearly what he had to say in that regard was of the greatest importance to us.

I think what rings in my ears more than anything is those words about the struggles to come. I suppose, well, we've all been learning that lesson for many years but even more over the last years. And there's little doubt that what we're doing is going to arouse great opposition. In India we're finding, especially at the moment, we're finding that that opposition is getting greater and it does take tremendous courage and I'm very grateful to Bhante for giving us that exhortation to face the situation that comes, and that exhortation to face it in the only way we can, which is moving from effective to real Going for Refuge.

So thankyou very much indeed Bhante for a wonderful talk, so rich, so full, one which we will, I'm sure, think about, reflect upon, and practice. So it is quite late now, and it takes quite a long time for everybody to get to the shrine room, so we'll let Bhante leave, if he wants to, and I'm going to ask some of the Indian Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis to come forward, lead us in the recitation of the Refuges and Precepts in the style in which it's done in India and then conclude with the last Vandana. So please everybody just stay here. Let's give Bhante one last hand and see him out of the room.

So I'm going to ask all the Indian Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis just to come forward, (I'm sorry!), and Sudarshan, who's the Eastern Order Convenor (he's responsible for everything East of Suez) to lead us all in the chanting of the Refuges and Precepts. So, Sudarshan.

Refuges and Precepts

Last Vandana

Jai Bhim!

Jai Bhante!