Looking Back – and Forward

by Sangahrakshita

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Talk given at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre, April 2007

Thank you Saraha and greetings to everybody.

About five years ago I had the unpleasant experience of partially loosing my eyesight. I think most of you know about that and, as you perhaps also know, throughout my life I've been a great reader. So to loose my eyesight even partially was quite an affliction. But even so there are always compensations, even for afflictions like that, and one of the results was that I started listening to the radio a little bit more than I had been doing. Also perhaps seeing more people than I had been seeing.

But listening to the radio over the years I noticed something. I noticed that every now and then there would be an anniversary celebrated. There seems to be quite a lot of anniversaries around. I remember the two-hundreth anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar. That was celebrated with a few programs. And more recently there's been programs around the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome and, at present, on the anniversary front we're in the midst of all sorts of programs about the Falklands war of twenty-five years ago. And, of course, looking beyond secular events to events of a Buddhist nature which have been celebrated in recent months, looking back to last October, there was the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism which, of course, was followed by the conversion of tens of thousands – even hundreds of thousands – of people in India and elsewhere. So, many anniversaries. And it does seem that anniversaries are rather important; they have a collective importance, they have an individual importance. There are collective anniversaries, there are individual, personal anniversaries. They form part of our history. They remind us of what has happened. They help create continuity, they help create a story. They help to create a collective or individual, personal identity and continuity. And so it is that today we are celebrating the fourtieth anniversary of the founding of the FWBO.

I must say that I was a little disappointed actually when I learned that there wasn't going to be the usual big national celebration here in the U.K.. I understand though that plans are afoot to give us next year a bigger celebration, not, of course, of our fourtieth but our forty-first anniversary. [Laughter] And I suppose we shall have to be content with that. [Laughter] I'm assured that it will be something rather different and very attractive and many, many people are expected to attend. But anyway, even though there isn't this year a national celebration of FWBO Day here in Birmingham, we are celebrating it and I am very glad to see and to know that people are coming to take part in this celebration from a number of other centres. And it's very good that we can all be together on this occasion.

And naturally my thoughts go back, my thoughts fly back to those very early days forty years ago. Sometimes it seems a long time ago, sometimes it doesn't seem very long ago.

I was, I think, forty-one at the time; still a comparatively young man. And as I remember those early days, there rises in my mind a quite vivid picture of just how and where we started. We started, of course, very small. We're a bit bigger now, of course, but then we were very small indeed; just a handful of people. And we didn't even have a centre of our own, not one that we actually had bought. Our first activities, our first classes were held in a very modest basement in Monmouth Street in central London. As far as I remember the basement was about twelve feet square. Twelve feet each way. Hmm? And with a bit of juggling we could get twenty chairs in, because in those days people did not sit on the floor to meditate, they all sat on chairs. That gradually changed. And when we had our inaugaral dedication we allowed a few people to stand and we squeezed in altogether twenty-four people. [Laughter] Twenty-four people. And I led, and we all recited a dedication ceremony that I'd composed only the evening before. And thus we dedicated what we called our Triratna shrine and meditation room. And that was how and where the FWBO began. Forty years ago.

The first activity we started up was meditation classes. Perhaps it has a significance of its own that we should have started there. Meditation being such an important aspect, such an integral part of the Buddhist spiritual path and the Buddhist spiritual life. So, we started with meditation classes. And we very soon had two, even three, mediation classes – there seemed to be at that time quite a demand for them. Of course, there was quite a big turnover but our meditation classes were usually quite full. We usually had eight to ten or twelve people. I must admit though that on one evening when I came along to the basement shrine, ready to take the mediation class I found only one person had come. But that's the sort of thing that does happen, as all of you who have taken classes at FWBO centres will know only too well. Only the other day I heard of someone having organised something and had taken a great deal of trouble and when he turned up to take his part in the proceedings he found nobody else had come. So it can still happen occasionally. And we hope to practice patience and optimism and not lose heart. I certainly didn't lose heart on that occasion because there were other encouraging signs.

And , of course, the meditation that I was teaching was, first of all, '*The Mindfulness of Breathing*' and then, of course, after a while I started teaching '*The Metta Bhavana*'. Both these meditations, especially I must say, the Mindfulness of Breathing, had been very important in my own spiritual life in India for quite a few years. And I know that these practices continue to be taught in all our FWBO centres. And they lay, as it were, a firm foundation for our practice of meditation in the FWBO, and the practice of the spiritual life generally. Mindfulness of breathing can take us very,very far, as I'm sure practically all of you know. From mindfulness of breathing we can go to mindfulness of the body and its movements generally; we can go to mindfulness of our feelings, our emotions, mindfulness of our thoughts; of every thought that passes through the mind, every imagination, every dream; and we can go to mindfulness of the Dharma, mindfulness of the teaching of the Buddha, even eventually to mindfulness of Reality itself. So mindfulness of breathing can take us a very long way, and we shouldn't doubt that. Similarly, the Metta Bhavana can take us a long way. Starting with the Metta Bhavana we can practice '*The Karuna Bhavana*'. We can practice '*Mudita Bhavana*'. And we can practice '*Upeksha Bhavana*', the *bhavana* of complete tranquility, within

which we find it difficult to make any distinction between how we feel towards others, and how we feel towards ourselves. And that can lead us right into the heart of the Dharma into ? and shunyata. So these two practices, seemingly so simple, so straightforward, Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana are as it were the two, twin pillars of our practice of meditation. We may take on other practices in the course of our spiritual life, and they may be very helpful, but at rock bottom we need these two practices.

So we had meditation classes. After a while there were people who wanted a more extended practice of meditation. They wanted to go deeper. And if your just sitting for a couple of hours, you can't always go very deep, especially if your coming straight from work as many people did in those days to those classes. So we started holding retreats, week-long retreats in the countryside. It was I think in West Sussex. We went to a place called Quartermain and another bigger place called Keffels. Some of you who were around in those days will probably remember those two places. And we had what has come to be, I think, a sort of standard FWBO retreat consisting of talks, meditation, periods of silence, walks and talks together, pujas, study and so on, and I have very pleasant memories of those far-off days. I can remember the day when we introduced, or rather I introduced, the communication exercises. I noticed that people didn't always find it very easy to communicate with one another. So I thought 'Well, what to do?' A bit more mindfulness might not help very much, even a bit more metta bhavana… So I bethought myself of these exercises I learnt in India many years before from an English woman who'd devised them on the basis of what she'd received from various teachers, and I introduced these exercises and they had an almost miraculous effect people: really opened up with one another. So after that the communication exercises came to be a regular part of the FWBO repertoire, and I believe they're sometimes still used on retreat when perhaps people aren't opening up with one another quite sufficiently.

So we had these retreats. I remember at the end of the week people would be loitering at the gate, waiting for their transport looking very sad, looking quite unhappy. They'd been very happy altrough the week, in fact increasingly happy, but they were very very sorry that the retreat had ended. It would be on a Sunday evening of course, and on Monday morning they were going back to work. But in the course of the retreat, I noticed such a remarkable change in people. They would arrive looking rather tired, perhaps a bit fed up, but as the days progressed, they became more happy, more positive, even more communicative and one could see with one's own eyes that the Dharma – even a little of it – did really work. And this reminded me very strongly of the fact that conditions are important. And it is a duty, as it were almost, to one's self that if one wishes to practice the Dharma, one does ones best to make sure that one creates, as best one can, the conditions, the lifestyle even, that enables you to practice the Dharma and does not get too much in the way. So I saw this very clearly, and I've remembered it. And this also reminds me, brings me back, to a time in my own life when a change in conditions made a very big difference and had a very definite effect on me, a lasting effect on me I think.

Saraha referred to the fact that we're also celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of my Going Forth. I hadn't actually intended to say anything about that. I had intended to keep

it for another occasion but this morning just thinking over what I was going to say I thought: 'Well, why not? Why not say a little bit about my going forth?' Perhaps I will give a full length talk about it at some point, but meanwhile let me say a little about it before carrying from where I'm leaving off. Those of you who've read my memoirs know how I went forth from a place called Pasali with a friend, having given away my worldly possessions and wearing the yellow robes, shaven headed, all that. I spent at least a couple of years wandering here and there, staying in different places with my friend. So I sometimes asked myself; "Why did I do it?" and "What did I learn?" Well it's sixty years ago, and it's not easy to say exactly what my motivation was. Except that I wanted to lead a thoroughly Buddhist life, as close to the life of the Buddha as I could at that time. But one of the motivations that I had was that I wanted to go forth from any civic or national identity. Of course I was in India as an Englishman, as a foreigner, and I threw away my identification papers so that I was, as it were, anonymous. I didn't have any national identity, at least in my own mind. That is one of the things I learned at that time. You may in your own mind not identify yourself with any particular group, social, national class but other people will want to identify you. You sometimes have to fight quite hard to retain your non-identity, if you see what I mean. But that was in a way my ideal; not to consider myself, in my heart of hearts as being English as opposed to some other nationality or nationalities. I understood that to be an essential part of the attitude of the spiritual life of the monk. Subsequently I discovered that most monks in the east were intensely nationalistic. This rather disappointed me. But I still uphold this ideal that we should try and see ourselves as Buddhists, as citizens of the world, and not identify ourselves too closely with any particular nationality or culture or conditioning of that kind.

So that's one of the things. And of course I was wandering in India. I came to know a lot about India in this way. At a grass roots level. I knew what village life was like, and small town life was like, and what the Indian open road was like. I had that experience and that helped to give me a great love of India and the Indian people, which deepened as the years went by. And there was something else; since I was a wanderer, I described myself in those days as a freelance wanderer. A freelance wanderer. By 'freelance' meaning I did not, at that time, belong to any Buddhist group or society or organisation or order. So a 'freelance wandering ascetic' – that's how I described myself .

Of course, not having any occupation, any means of livelihood, I was dependent on other people. And sometimes, quite literally with my friend at one stage, begging my food. Especially after I was ordained as a *sramanera* and had a begging bowl, I was dependent on other people for my food. And sometimes for shelter at night. Sometimes, of course, there was no shelter and we slept in the open wherever we could. But there was always food; that was very interesting. I don't think we ever went hungry, although we were dependent on other people for food. And this gave rise at the time, and still gives rise, to various reflections. That experience was very important for me because it showed me in a very concrete form the way in which we are dependent on other people.

Now, today I had lunch. I expect most of you did. So how was it that I had lunch? I didn't prepare it myself. It was prepared by Sanghadeva. How was it that Sanghadeva was able

to prepare lunch? Well, the vegetables and other things were all there. But where did those vegetables come from? Well there's a man who comes along once a week and brings potatoes and carrots and things, so where does he get them from? Well he gets them from the wholesaler, I think. And where does the wholesaler get them from? Well he gets them, perhaps, from the farmer, but maybe there are even more intermediate stages, so we are very dependent on other people. And not only dependent but interdependent. And sometimes we forget that. But I was very sharply reminded of that fact everyday during my wandering period.

And, of course, much of the time, wandering from place to place, I think we slept in a different place every night. Just once or twice settling down for a while. And that meant I developed a sense of detachment to place, and even after coming back to this country I lived in a number of different places; I lived in the Hampstead Vihara, then a succession of flats, I've lived at Padmaloka, I've lived at the LBC, I lived at Tattershall, and I lived in Cornwall, I lived in Castleacre, lived in London again, now I'm living here in Birmingham. So I've learnt to be quite independent of place, and quite happy to move to a new place. And I find that even now I go and stay for a few days maybe at Padmaloka or Tiratanaloka, I never have any difficulties sleeping, as some people do when they change their bed for the night. And I always feel quite at home wherever I happen to be. So that, I think, is part of the legacy of those wandering days of mine all those years ago. So I've learned those lessons, and perhaps on another occasion I'll talk at greater length about them.

But anyway, back to what I was saying about these retreats, which we had in the very early days of the FWBO. When I say 'early days', I mean the first five years when the basement in London was our headquarters. I've other recollections, some of them quite amusing. I can remember on one occasion I heard some screams coming from a part of the building, and I investigated and there were two or three women rushing up and down the passage, up and down the passage screaming at the tops of their voices; I don't know why they did it. [Laughter] Maybe they were letting off steam. I don't know whether that still happens from time to time. [Laughter] Perhaps it does. Or perhaps not. But anyway, one of my recollections.

And, of course, I started giving lectures, and they were very well attended, I must say. We had many people coming to the lectures, which were given in hired halls, and we had many coming to the meditation classes. And after a while, of course, people started living together, so our first community came into existence during that period, which was at Saram House, as it was then called in Purley. I believe there's still a community there of some kind. I'm not sure what type of community it is at present, but some people are still there, so there's an element of continuity. So in the course of those five years quite a lot happened. Quite a lot. Things happened quite regularly. It's as though we got off the mark quite quickly. There was a lot of enthusiasm, there was a lot of interest. There weren't many of us but we were all very closely connected, we saw each other very frequently, we were meeting all the time, whether it was in connection with the classes, or a lecture, or the poetry group that we started, or meeting in tea shops and cafes. I remember that Ananda in particular was a great lover of tea shops and cafes and used to

work on his poetry and novel – the first of many – sitting in a tea shop or coffee bar, and I sometimes used to meet him and we'd have a walk along the Embankment together discussing the Dharma and poetry and Zen, and the form of the novel, and all that sort of thing. So I've many happy memories of that period.

We were helped by the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. I'm talking about the late sixties and early seventies. Things were very different then, and again I'm talking about London, I suppose, mostly. Things were very different then. There was a different sort of atmosphere around. An atmosphere of experimentation and new things, changes in all sorts of walk of life. We had the Beatles, didn't we, in those days. Some of you perhaps remember them [Laughter]. And there were all sorts of other groups, that I don't remember the names of. And since there were with the Beatles, there was the Maharishi, a very colourful character that one heard on the radio. Sometimes he had this high-pitched laugh: "Ha ha ha ha". [Laughter] I'm not quite high-pitched enough. I was a very high-pitched cackle; a sort of transcendental cackle I suppose. [Laughter]. And then there was guru Maharaj, the boy guru who people flocked to. He's quite forgotten now, at least in this country. And, of course, Zen was in the air; several of our own friends were interested in Zen. Ananda was very interested in Zen. So were several others. And of course, ah yes, there was the smell of something which perhaps I shouldn't mention in the air [Laughter]. That was sometimes very much in the air [Laughter] – not in the FWBO, but if one joined a queue to watch a certain type of film well there'd be a certain pall of smoke hanging over the whole queue. It was the days of psychedelic drugs and experimenting with oriental music, new forms of literature. I remember Jack Kerouac's novels were very popular in those days and in the FWBO too. And also Eric Fromm's were very popular. So there was definitely a supportive spirit in those days. A spirit that was supportive of any new spiritual venture, rather than antagonistic to it.

Of course, not everybody was affected by this zeitgeist, as I've called it. It wasn't really a fully-fledged zeitgeist. It affected only a portion of the population, at least in London. But it did affect them, and we, as it were, were able to take advantage of this. And I've sometimes thought that if I'd returned to this country ten years earlier it would have been very difficult to found the FWBO. Had I arrived ten years later, I would have missed the bus, so to speak. So it seems I arrived just at the right time; '64 and then after a spell at the Hampstead Vihara, started the FWBO in 1967. So, in a way, we rode on the crest of a wave. There were at least some external conditions at the time, cultural conditions, social conditions which supported us rather than opposed us. There's the simple example, for instance, of the possibility of squatting. At that time, squatting was legal, believe it or not, under a law passed I forget in the reign of which king, I think it was in the reign of one of the Edwards in the Middle Ages. The law was passed to allow what we call squatting, because of the fearful de-population that had followed the Black Death when a third of the population of this country perished. So that law was still in force, under which you could squat in an unoccupied house, unoccupied premises. Of course that law was speedily repealed, but meanwhile some of our friends had that advantage. They didn't have to pay rent, and that helped. Also in those days employment was very easy for young people to get. They didn't mind giving up work for a few months because they knew quite well as soon as they needed money, as soon as they needed a job, they could

just go and get one. I believe it isn't quite like that now, so people are a bit more economically conscious. So we had the advantage to some extent of riding on the crest of this wave. It certainly did make things easier.

But of course, things have changed. It's very difficult to say exactly how they've changed. It's as though the economic imperative is stronger, perhaps materialism is more rampant, consumerism certainly is more rampant. Individualism is more rampant. And so on. All that tends to move against any attempt, collective or individual, to lead the spiritual life. We are really up against it very often, as I know from some of the people who come to see me. It isn't easy to try and lead a spiritual life nowadays. Of course, it's never been easy, it's intrinsically difficult anyway. It reminds me of two sayings. One comes from Dr. Ambedkar: at the time of his conversion he said, "Make no mistake about it, Buddhism is a very difficult religion to practice." And I heard a Tibetan proverb from some of my Tibetan friends who said, "If it isn't difficult it isn't religion." [Laughter] Which is very uncompromising indeed. Of course, the present time is not the only time in history when if you want to try to lead a spiritual life – or even if you try just to be objective and just see things as they are, even on the ordinary everyday level it's always been difficult.

And in this connection, I'm reminded of something I read or came to know about years ago, which was Sir Francis Bacons' '*doctrine of the idols*'. Sir Francis Bacon was one of the first great modern philosophers; he was, very roughly, a contemporary of Shakespeare ,and he wrote a number of very important philosophical works, which I suspect are not much read nowadays, though his essays are still read I believe. He wrote a work called '*Novum Organum*' which was meant to overthrow the logic of Aristotle and replace it by something more empirically grounded. He propounded a doctrine of what he called '*The Idols*'. The Idols were those things in the human make-up, in the human mind almost, which prevent us from seeing things truly. He was thinking more in terms of what we would call scientific truth, or what was then called natural philosophy, but what he said certainly has a wider applicability. He said there were four kinds of idols. There were the idols of the tribe, there were the idols of the cave, there were the idols of the marketplace and there were the idols of the theatre.

Now, by idols of the tribe what did he mean? By tribe he meant the whole human race: Homo Sapiens. He said, there are idols – mental limitations, so to speak, conditioning – which we share in as much as were all human beings, and which get in the way of our seeing the truth. He thought one of the biggest idols was our love of comfort, that we prefer comfort to truth, and we have a tendency therefore to believe what pleases us, what appeals to us, what we like. We're not so much concerned with truth. We're more concerned about comfort. And this of course leads to what he calls superstition. And one could even bring in here belief in a personal God. That belief gives you comfort, makes you feel safe. So people, usually I think, believe in God not because they've been argued into that belief but because they want to feel safe, comfortable, protected, even loved. So idols of this sort are common to all human beings. We're all subject to the temptation to believe something because it feels comfortable to believe.

And then of course there are the idols of the cave. The idols of the cave are the personal limitations of individual human beings. Their individual, personal conditioning, due to which they see things in a particular way, have certain prejudices, certain preferences and so on.

What about the idols of the marketplace? The marketplace is, of course, where people meet, where they exchange views, where they exchange ideas. So the idols of the marketplace, according to Bacon, are the limitations that arise due to the nature of language itself. The difficulties of using language properly, reasoning properly and being clear in our thinking, in our definitions. So that's, broadly speaking, the idols of the marketplace.

Finally the idols of the theatre. He doesn't mean theatre in our modern sense, he uses the word in a rather strange manner. According to him the idols of the theatre are simply, as we would say, 'wrong views' as systematized into erroneous systems of belief or thought.

So Bacon propounded this doctrine of four types of idols all those years ago, and I think they're still quite applicable, they form a quite useful framework, I think, for us to look at ourselves and our conditioning. It does occur to me that someone might lead, an Order member especially interested in philosophy, might like to lead a similar study of these four classes of idols of Sir. Francis Bacon. It would be quite an interesting and stimulating exercise.

We are up against it if we are trying to lead a spiritual life; up against it individually, up against it collectively. There are all sorts of ideologies around, by which we may be ensnared. I've mentioned individualism, I think that's one of the most important, one of the most lethal. There's consumerism, there's commercialism there's materialism in general, and so on. And, of course, we sometimes find that even our Buddhist thinking is affected by these other ideologies that are around. We find people trying to bring together Buddhism and Christianity, or trying to bring together the Dharma and some form of therapy, mix them up together. I remember when I was in the [United] States once – when I was at Yale – someone came to see me who was very enthusiastic abut behaviorist psychology, and he was convinced that it was more or less the same thing as Buddhism. He found it very difficult to accept from me that the two were really rather different. So we do get the danger, or the possibility, of the purity of the Dharma being adulterated by elements, ideological elements, that really have no connection with the Dharma, and I'm sure you can all think of some examples for yourselves that you've encountered, or even had to wrestle with from time to time.

In this connection I came across a quite interesting book recently. It was written by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, who is believed to be an incarnation or Tulku of one of my own teachers, Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche is a modern incarnate Lama. That is to say he is well acquainted with English, he has quite a good knowledge of western culture, and you may have heard of him as the director of a film called '*The Cup*'. That may help you to identify him. He's recently published a book, it's called '*What Makes You Not a Buddhist*'. That's quite an interesting question. And he's

had quite an extensive experience teaching the Dharma, especially Tibetan Buddhism in various parts of the western world. Not only in the [United] States and Europe, but also in Australia and New Zealand, and he must have come across some rather strange Buddhists. What one might call hybrid Buddhists: half Buddhist and half something else. As a result he has written this book, '*What makes You Not a Buddhist*'. And of course he has said that what makes you not a Buddhist is that you do not wholeheartedly accept, and entrust yourself to the four *Dharmamudras*.

So what are the four Dharmamudras? They are a quite traditional list, in fact very traditional and very well known and often mentioned in Buddhist literature, canonical and otherwise; and there are various versions, and the Rinpoche has produced his version. Some of it may sound familiar, some not.

'*All compounded things are impermanent. All emotions are pain. All things have no inherent existence. Nirvana is beyond conception*.'

So these are the four Dharamamudras. Why are they called Dharmamudras? Well, what is a *mudra*? There are many meanings of this word. The one that's relevant here is, the mudra is a seal. If a document has a seal, somebody's personal seal or an official seal attached to it you know that the document is genuine. Nowadays we don't so much use seals as signatures. But the Dharmamudras are those 'seals' as it were that guarantee that this is the teaching of the Dharma, this is the Buddha's teaching. If a teaching bears these four seals it's authentic. If it doesn't bear them, or if it contradicts them or disagrees with them, it can't be authentic, it can't be Buddhist. So this should give us a great deal of food for thought because, more often than not, we tend to ask the question 'What makes us a Buddhist?'. But Rinpoche has turned it completely around; 'What is it that makes one *not* a Buddhist?'

And you're not a Buddhist if you don't believe or accept that '*all compounded things are impermanent*'. And that means *all*. All means all. [Laughter] If there are any exceptions, if you make any little exceptions, you're not a Buddhist. Your belief does not bear the stamp of the Dharma seal.

And '*All emotions are pain*'. That's a more difficult one perhaps. Of course emotions like hatred, fear, jealousy, anxiety, uncertainty, these are quite obviously painful. But what about things like love? Some people would say there are emotions that are not painful. But if they are not immediately painful, well, sooner or later, they may become painful if you remove that emotion for any reason, and in any case no positive emotion, according to the Dharma, can give you complete and final happiness or joy. So all emotion, all emotions, are pain.

And then '*All things have no inherent existence*.' There's no permanent unchanging soul or self. That, of course, as I'm sure you all know is one of the basic doctrines of the Dharma. You've studied that quite a lot, no doubt, in the past.

And '*Nirvana is beyond conception*'. It's very easy to talk slickly about Nirvana, or about Enlightenment or *bodhi*. But do we really understand what it is? Do we really know? It's much better if we think of it as a mystery. Something beyond our conception. We could also think of the Buddha, not as that well known historical figure Siddhartha Guatama, but as a very mysterious, distant personality, if we can even use that word at all of him – personality. Someone very distant, very mysterious. Almost luminous, as it were. Rather than somebody about whom we do know quite a lot. We know quite a lot about the circumstances of the Buddha's life. We know what he did, in a sense. We know about his effect on his contemporaries, especially his disciples. But do we really know what the Buddha was like? Do we really have any understanding of what his experience of Enlightenment was? So we have to recognize that Nirvana is beyond conception.

So I think Dzongsar Rinpoche has performed a very useful service. And given us, and when I say us I mean all western Buddhists, something to think about. We as western Buddhists have to ask our selves – do we really accept, do we really believe, do we really have faith as it were in these four Dharmamudras? If we don't, we have to accept that we're not Buddhists after all, or perhaps much less Buddhist than we really thought. So I hope that Rinpoche's book will be found in FWBO bookstores, and at least some of you will read it and perhaps study it. So I think it's very good, it's very appropriate that on this day when we're celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the FWBO that we should be thinking along these lines. That we should even, in a way, go back to fundamentals asking ourselves not just what makes us Buddhists, but also what does not make us Buddhists. I think it's a very useful exercise. So, of course, the four Dharmamudras are common to the whole Buddhist world. In principle, in theory, all Buddhist accept the four Dharmamudras. We just have to be certain that that is really the case so far as we personally are concerned.

In the FWBO there is so much we have in common with all other Buddhists. We have in common the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Paramitas, the Three Lakshanas, we have so much in common, but we also have our own distinctive emphases. What I've called the six distinctive emphases of the FWBO. And I want to conclude by reminding you of those in case any of you might have forgotten what they are – and just to make sure that I haven't forgotten what they are [Laughter]. At least the order of them. I've provided myself with an 'aid memoire' in conveniently large type.

There's the centrality of Going for Refuge: Going for Refuge to the Three jewels. This is something that we have in common with all Buddhists. Going for Refuge is what makes you a Buddhist, and of course you can Go for Refuge at a number of different levels. Most of you, I'm sure, are familiar with those levels: the provisional, the effective, the real, and so on. So I won't say much about that. Perhaps not many of you need reminding of the centrality of Going for Refuge, and therefore that lifestyle is a quite secondary matter. Of course, secondary does not mean unimportant, because secondary means that if the Going for Refuge is primary and lifestyle is secondary, in that sense it is an expression, at least in part, of the Going for Refuge.

Then of course we have an Order, and that Order is a unified Order. That is to say it is an Order that is open to men and women alike on equal terms, and that in it men and women alike have equal responsibilities and equal duties. We've got so used to this in the FWBO that we take it for granted, but it's rather unusual in the Buddhist world, to say the least. Usually there is very strict, very rigid separation between monks and laity on the one hand, and men and women; bhikshus and bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas on the other. But we have this unified Order.

And then, of course, we're an ecumenical movement. Buddhist literature is so vast; there are so many Buddhist teachings developed over the centuries that we feel free to draw upon: whichever of them give us inspiration and guidance. Whether it's the Pali Suttas, where the Buddha himself is teaching, or the '*Songs of Milarepa'*, or the enigmatic sayings of the great zen and cha'an masters; we like to draw upon that entire great treasury and integrate it into our own FWBO approach to the Dharma.

Then, of course, there's spiritual friendship. In a way, this is one of our discoveries. Spiritual friendship is mentioned in the Pali scriptures and, of course, there is one particular famous place where the Buddha, in discussion with Ananda, says that "Spiritual Friendship is not even just the half or the spiritual life – the *Brahmacarya* – it's the whole of it." And we've taken this utterance of the Buddha very, very much to heart. In a way which I believe, so far as my knowledge goes, has never happened before in the history of the Dharma. There have of course been friendships between Buddhists, throughout Buddhist history but not this explicit emphasis on the almost supreme importance of spiritual friendship in the spiritual life.

Then fifthly, there's 'Team-based Right Livelihood'. Now I'm well aware that that's not quite so fashionable as it used to be, and I regret that and I hope that this phase of unpopularity, or relative unpopularity, will soon pass. But there are a sufficient number of people, Order members and mitras alike, who do have a strong faith in Team Based Right Livelihood and the possibilities of friendship and generosity which it offers, and I would say even that it's one of the most positive situations that we have in the FWBO. Especially in the form of Windhorse:Evolution which has been responsible for producing, so to speak, so many fine Order members, and which has helped to support much of the movement and its activities over the years to a very great extent.

Finally, last but not least – well, none of these is least – the importance, the spiritual importance of the arts. We've always emphasized this, and within a year or two of the establishment of the FWBO we had a poetry group. And I think we've had groups of this sort all throughout our history. There are, of course, the 'Wolf at the Door' workshops, which play a very important part in this connection, and I believe they are continuing.

So here we are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the FWBO. Reminding ourselves among other things of something of our history, reminding ourselves of what we have in common with all other Buddhists, the sort of questions we need to ask ourselves, and how we need to also remind ourselves of the six distinctive emphases of our own movement.