

**Tape DE02: The Integration of Buddhism into Western Society  
(with German translation - not transcribed)**

Madam chairman, venerable teachers, members of the Buddhist sangha, with and without robes, and friends!

The integration of Buddhism into western society is a very deep subject and it isn't really possible for me to deal with it systematically in the course of the time at my disposal. I therefore propose to deal with the subject unsystematically, not to say subjectively. I shall deal with it by telling you something about my own interaction with western society after I have spent 20 years in the east. I returned to England in 1964 and in 1967 I started a new Buddhist movement: The friends of the western Buddhist order. Thus after 20 years in the east, 17 of them as a Buddhist monk, I was interacting with western society. After 20 years that western society seemed very strange to me. Not only had I been living the simple life of a Buddhist monk, I had been leading that life within the context of a traditional culture. And western society was far from having a traditional culture. Moreover, wartime austerities had been replaced by post-war prosperity. Manners and morals had changed, not always for the better. People spoke differently, they dressed differently, and they behaved differently. So this was the society with which I was now interacting. This was the society with which, after my 20 years in the east, I was trying to integrate Buddhism, when I started the friends of the western Buddhist order.

So what was the initial point of my interaction. My initial point of interaction was meditation. In 1967 I started conducting weekly meditation classes. I conducted them in a very tiny basement room in central London. And subsequently I compared this room, in which the FWBO began its existence, to the catacombs, that is to say the catacombs in which the early Christians took refuge from persecution. We were something of an underground movement.

In these meditation classes I taught two methods of meditation. I taught the awareness of in and out breathing, known in Pali as the anapanasati, and I taught the development of universal friendliness, or metta bhavana, and these two methods are now taught throughout the FWBO. I am not going to elaborate on the subject of meditation. Other speakers have touched upon it and will be touching upon it, so I need not elaborate upon it. So I noticed that very soon the people attending these meditation classes began to experience the benefits of these practises. Their minds became calmer and clearer. They felt happier. And this of course was only to be expected. There are many different definitions of meditation, but a simple definition is that meditation is, or consists in, the raising of the level of consciousness by working directly on the mind itself. Thus the integration of Buddhism into western society involves to begin with the raising of the level of consciousness of at least some of the people who make up that society.

Now when I'd been conducting my meditation classes for a few months, the FWBO held the first of its retreats. 15 or 20 of us spent a week together in the countryside. We spent part of our time meditating, we spent part of it engaged in various devotional practices, and we spent some of it engaged in discussion, discussion of the dharma. Some of the people on the retreat had come just because they wanted to deepen their experience of meditation, and this they were able to do. But this was not all. Those taking part in the retreat found that simply being away from the city, away from their jobs, away from their families, and in the company of other Buddhists, and with nothing to think about except the dharma, they found that this by itself was sufficient to raise their level of consciousness. So here then was another point of interaction. The level of consciousness of the people who make up western society could be raised not only by meditation,

not only by working directly on the mind itself, it could also be raised by changing the conditions under which those people lived. It could be raised by changing the environment. It could be raised, at least to some extent, by changing society. The integration of Buddhism into western society therefore involves changing western society. Inasmuch as our level of consciousness is affected by external conditions it is not enough for us to work directly on the mind itself through meditation, as though it was possible for us to isolate ourselves from society or to ignore the conditions under which we and others lived. We must change western society, and change it in such a way as to make it easier for us to live within that society, lives dedicated to the dharma. To the extent that western society has not been change by Buddhism, to that extent Buddhism has not been integrated into western society. In order to change western society it will be necessary for us to create western Buddhism institutions, western Buddhist lifestyles. I shall have something to say about some of these institutions in a minute.

At the time I was conducting meditation classes and retreats, during the first few years of the FWBO's existence, I was also delivering public lectures. In these lectures I sought to communicate the fundamental ideas, or fundamental concepts, of Buddhism. I sought to communicate them moreover in a way that that was both intelligible to a western audience and faithful to Buddhist tradition. So here was yet another point of interaction with western society. The integration of Buddhism into western society involves the introduction of Buddhist ideas into western intellectual discourse. By Buddhist ideas I do not mean doctrinal refinements, or philosophical subtleties. I mean ideas so fundamental that Buddhists themselves often take them for granted, and fail to realise their full significance. Such, for example, is the idea, the concept, that religion does not necessarily involve belief in the existence of god. It does not necessarily involve belief in the existence of a creator and ruler of the universe. As well as the idea that it possible for us to lead an ethical and spiritual live and to raise the level of ones consciousness without invoking the aid of any outside supernatural power. If Buddhism is to be integrated into western society, ideas, concepts of this fundamental kind will have to become familiar to all educated Europeans and Americans.

But to return to western Buddhist institutions, to return to the institutions which we must create if western society is to be changed and if Buddhism it to be integrated into that society. When the FWBO had held a few retreats, some of the people who had taken part in them, who'd taken part in them regularly, started to feel that they wanted to prolong that experience. They wanted to live with other Buddhist, they wanted to have more time for the practise of the dharma. So in this way there came into existence what came to be called residential spiritual communities. The members of these communities meditated together every morning, they ate together, they studied the dharma together, they encouraged one another in their Buddhist live, and when necessary they confessed to each other. That was 20 or more years ago. Now the FWBO has scores of residential spiritual communities, in a number of countries. Some of these communities are small, some are large, up to 30 people. Some community members have outside jobs, that is to say secular jobs in the outside world, while others work full-time within the FWBO. The most successful, and perhaps the most typical kind of FWBO spiritual community, is what we call a single sex community. A community consisting either of men only or women only. We have had some mixed communities in the past, mixed sex communities, including those containing families, but we found that they have not worked very well as communities and have not lasted very long. However, some of women's communities contain both women and children, small children. And this arrangement does seem to work quite well. Thus we change western society, thereby integrating Buddhism into that society, by creating western Buddhist institutions, in this case the institution of the residential spiritual community.

Another western Buddhist institution is what we call the team-based right-livelihood business. Here the point of interaction with western society is economic. Some of the people who were living together in WBO residential spiritual communities, but who had outside jobs, started to feel that they wanted to work together. In some cases this was because their present job was not very ethical. And Buddhism, as I am sure most of you know, attaches great importance to what it calls right means of livelihood. Right means of livelihood is the fifth step of the Buddha's noble eightfold path. Thus there came into existence the first of what come to be called the FWBO's team-based right-livelihood business. They were team-based because they consisted of a number of Buddhists working together. They worked together along broadly co-operative lines. And they were right livelihood businesses, because they operated in accordance with Buddhist ethical principles. But there was another factor in their genesis. In 1975 the FWBO embarked on the creation of Sukhavati in east London. At present Sukhavati is the second largest of the FWBO's urban centres, and for the creation of Sukhavati huge sums of money were needed. Instead of appealing for help to wealthy Buddhists in the east, the FWBO raised the money itself. And it raised that money partly by setting up team-based right-livelihood businesses which donated their profits to Sukhavati.

As such right livelihood businesses thus came to do four things: First of all they provided those working in them with material support, they provided them with a livelihood. And secondly they enabled Buddhists to work with one another. Thirdly they conducted themselves in accordance with Buddhists ethical principles, and they gave financial support to Buddhist and humanitarian activities. Over the years, the FWBO has set up a number of team-based right-livelihood businesses. Some of which have done extremely well. One particular FWBO right-livelihood business employs more than 60 people and it has an annual turnover of about two million pounds sterling.

I should like to add something at this point, and this is to do with Hakuin. As far as I can see hakuin is a Buddhist right-likelihood team-based business and I should like to express my personal appreciation of the fact that the members of hakuin have been providing the speakers with suppers and lunches. I congratulate them on having a team-based right-likelihood business right here in the heart of Berlin. And I express my personal appreciation for their dana, which was really excellent.

We can now begin to see what the integration of Buddhism into western society actually involves. There is what we may term psychological integration, consisting in the raising of the level of consciousness of at least some of the people who make up that society, that western society. The level of consciousness is raised by meditation, by working directly on the mind itself, as well as is raised by various indirect methods: hatha yoga, tai-chi chuan, and others I have not had time to mention. I should perhaps though mention flower arrangement, because I was one who enjoyed the very beautiful and meditative flower arrangement which we were able to witness on the first evening of this convention. Moreover since the level of consciousness is affected by the conditions under which we live, we have to change those conditions, we have to change western society. And in order to change western society, we shall have to create western Buddhist institutions. We shall have to create for example, residential communities and team-based right-livelihood businesses. We shall also have to integrate Buddhism into western society intellectually, by introducing the fundamental ideas, the fundamental concepts of Buddhism, into western intellectual discourse. Unless we do these things, there can be no question of any integration of Buddhism into western Buddhism society. And all talk of such integration will be so much hot air.

But there is one kind of integration of which I have not spoken, even though it is the most important of all, the most important of all in the sense that other kinds of integration of Buddhism into western society cannot exist without it. The most important integration of all is the integration of the individual. That is of the individual Buddhist into western society. It is after all the individual Buddhist who meditates. Meditation it not just an abstract, it is people who meditate, individuals who meditate, in the same way it is the individual Buddhist who goes on retreat, who lives in a spiritual community or works in a right livelihood business or who communicates the fundamental ideas of Buddhism. So without the individual Buddhist, there can be no integration of Buddhism into western society.

But --- but what is a Buddhist? Well, first of all let me say what a Buddhist is not. A Buddhist is not someone who has merely been born into a Buddhist family in a Buddhist country. Nor is a Buddhist someone who has merely made an academic study of Buddhism and who knows all about its history and doctrines. Similarly a Buddhist is not someone who merely dabbles in Buddhism. Who has a smattering of knowledge about it, who airs purely subjective views about the subject, or who mixes Buddhism up with Christianity, or mixes it up with vedanta, or with new-ageism, as we may call it, or what not.

So, what then is a Buddhist? A Buddhist is someone who goes for refuge. A Buddhist is someone who goes for refuge to the Buddha, who goes for refuge to the dharma, and to the sangha, and who as an expression of that going for refuge, seeks to observe the ethical precepts of Buddhism. Going for refuge to the Buddha means accepting the Buddha and no other as ones ultimate spiritual guide and exemplar. Going for refuge to the dharma means doing ones utmost to understand, to practise and to realise the fundamental import of the Buddha's teaching. Going for refuge to the sangha means looking for inspiration and looking for guidance to those followers of the Buddha, both past and present, who are spiritually more advanced than one self. The ethical precepts that one observes as an expression and as a reinforcement of that three-fold going for refuge are the precept of reverence for life, the precept of generosity, giving, the precept of content, and the precept of truthful, gracious, helpful and harmonious speech, and so on. The word refuge, which is the literal translation of the original indic term, is liable to be misunderstood. It does not have connotations of running away, it does not have connotations of seeking escape from the harsh realities of life, through losing oneself in pseudo-spiritual fantasies. Rather does it represent, one, the wholehearted recognition of the fact that permanence, identity, unalloyed bliss, and pure beauty are not to be found anywhere in mundane existence, but found only in the transcendental nirvanic realm. And secondly it consists in the wholehearted resolve to make the great transition from the one to the other, from the mundane to the transcendental. Such is the Buddhist. Such is the individual, without whom, there can be no integration of Buddhism into western society.

But --- another but --- the individual, the individual Buddhist, does not go for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha alone or in isolation. He or she goes for refuge in the company of other individuals who also go for refuge. Thus he or she is a member of the sangha or spiritual community, in the wider sense. And it is this sangha, this sangha in the wider sense, not so much the individual Buddhist alone or in isolation, that raises the level of consciousness of people living in western society, that changes that society by creating western Buddhist institutions and that introduces the fundamental ideas of Buddhism into western intellectual discourse. It is this wider spiritual community that effects the psychological, social, and economic integration of Buddhism into western society.

## TAPE OVER

((translated back from the German from here ...) This brings me to a very important aspect of the integration of Buddhism into western society.(... to here)) It also brings me very nearly to the end of my talk. By the time that I started the FWBO, a Buddhism movement had been in existence in Britain for about 50 years. It was a very small movement. And one of the reasons for its smallness was that it was to a great extent controlled by people who, though sympathetic to Buddhism, were not actually Buddhist, and who therefore could not bring to the work of making known the dharma, the energy and conviction of Buddhists. A year after starting the FWBO I therefore founded not another Buddhist society. Instead I founded a spiritual community, a sangha, an order. I founded the western Buddhist order, or WBO, known in India as trailokya bauddha mahasangha. All the members of which are Buddhists, in the sense that they all go for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, and all undertake to observe the ten precepts of ethical behaviour. It is this order that directs FWBO activities and institutions in more than a dozen countries, including Germany, and which I believe offers a paradigm for the integration of Buddhism into western society. Without such an order, the common membership of which enables Buddhists to co-operate on the closest terms, there can be no integration of Buddhism into western society such as I have described. It is therefore good to know, that membership of the European Buddhist union, which together with the German Buddhist union has organised this congress, and organised it so efficiently and beautifully, is open only to Buddhist organisations, whose membership is predominantly Buddhist, and whose council or board is under the control of professed Buddhists. This is a move in the right direction and one that augers well for the future of buddhism in Europe.

But --- seem to be a lot of buts in this lecture --- but, while there can be no integration of Buddhism into western society without an order, equally that order itself must be an integrated order, in the sense of being without serious internal divisions, that is divisions between Buddhists of different kinds. It must be a unified order. The western Buddhist order is a unified order in three important respects. Firstly it is an order of Buddhists. It is an order of individuals who go for refuges to the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, and who undertake the 10 ethical precepts. It is not a monastic order, it is not a lay order, or lay movement, which is why the FWBO is neither a monastic or a lay movement, it is just a Buddhist movement, in the sense that I've defined. In the wbo and the FWBO commitment, in the sense of going for refuge, is primary and lifestyle, in the sense of living more as a monk or nun or more as a lay man or lay women, is secondary. This does not mean that lifestyle is unimportant. It only means that lifestyle is less important than commitment or going for refuge, the act of going for refuge being the central or definitive act of the Buddhist life and as such the fundamental basis of unity and union among Buddhists. Secondly, the western Buddhist order is an order of both men and women, who are admitted on equal terms. Men and women receive the same ordination, engage in the same spiritual practises, and undertake the same organisational responsibilities. Thirdly and lastly, the western Buddhist order is not a sectarian order, in the sense that it does not identify itself with any one form of Buddhism. Instead it rejoices in the riches of the whole Buddhist tradition and seeks to draw from those riches whatever is of value for its own practise of the dharma here in the west. Thus the western Buddhist order is a unified order, it is an integrated order, and because it is an integrated order it had been able to make its own contribution to the integration of Buddhism into western society, and indeed been able to offer perhaps a paradigm for that integration.

As I have observed in the beginning of this talk, the integration of Buddhism into western society

is a big subject. And I hope that by telling you the story of my own and the FWBO's in interaction with western society I have been able to shed at least some light on it. This congress is being held in Berlin, and I am addressing you not far from the area which three years ago saw the dismantling of a notorious symbol of disunion and disintegration. Happily east and west Berlin, and east and west Germany, are now unified, or, as we may say, integrated. We, the Buddhists of Europe and America, are concerned with a different kind of integration: the integration of Buddhism into western society. Let us therefore do away with our own divisions, let us do away with the division between monastic and lay Buddhists, between first class and second class Buddhists, between men and women Buddhists, and between the followers of different sects and schools of Buddhism. Let us have an integrated Buddhism and an integrated Buddhist community. Let us base ourselves firmly and unshakeably on our common going for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha.

One last word: I have spoken on the integration of Buddhism into western society because that was what I was asked to speak of by the organisers. But as my talk proceeded it will have become obvious to you that what we really have to do is to integrate western society into Buddhism. There is much in western society that needs changing. Buddhism can help us change it. May this congress be a step in that direction.