How the FWBO Presents Itself

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1. Introduction

The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) is one of the largest Buddhist movements in Britain. To be more precise it is one of the three largest movements catering principally to Westerners, the other two being Soka Gakkai and the New Kadampa Tradition each of which gives its membership as 'several thousand'. Taking the numbers affiliated and the number of FWBO centres in the UK, the FWBO may fairly be said to account for between ten and fifteen percent of Britain's non-Asian Buddhist community. There is no doubt then that the FWBO is a significant aspect of Buddhism in Britain. However it is a disproportionately significant force in the dissemination of Buddhism, and in shaping perceptions of Buddhism in British society. The FWBO has always placed a strong emphasis on teaching and communicating its message and around 20,000 people a year learn meditation at an FWBO Centre or outreach activity in the UK. Many thousands more have contact with one of the FWBO's ancillary activities, such as hatha yoga classes or arts events, not to mention going into a shop run as one of the FWBO's 'right livelihood' businesses, or supporting its social work projects in India, through the Karuna Trust fundraising charity.

In addition, the FWBO's emphasis on external communications is evident in the three magazines it publishes, in Windhorse Publications the FWBO has its own publishing house, and there are two video production companies creating FWBO-related material. The work of the FWBO Communications Office, which is the UK's only dedicated Buddhist press office, has ensured that it has a fairly high profile in the media, and that members of the Western Buddhist Order are to be heard broadcasting on UK radio. I must confess my own role in this communicative zeal as I myself edit Dharma Life, the leading FWBO magazine, and am the Director of the FWBO Communications Office.

How the FWBO presents itself is therefore an important aspect of how Buddhism is presented, re-presented and perceived in Britain. But before it is possible to discuss FWBO this, it is necessary to ask what the FWBO is.

2. The FWBO's Stance

The FWBO conceives itself as a middle way within the transmission of Buddhism to the West between the approaches of transplantation and westernisation. By 'transplantation' I mean the approach of the many representatives of traditional Asian schools in the West, whose concern tends to be the transmission of 'authentic' traditions of Buddhism. The FWBO's approach is based on a belief that it is impossible to transplant developed Buddhist traditions from an Asian society into the West without creating many problems and anomalies. One will inevitably be importing a large amount of Asian culture which

has no spiritual significance for westerners Therefore, as Stephen Batchelor argues, ‘adaptation is not so much an option as a matter of degree' for all Buddhists in the West. The question posed by Sangharakshita's writings is, on what basis does this adaptation take place, so that it makes Buddhism relevant to the new context, but does not compromise the integrity of the tradition?

At the same time the FWBO sees itself as distinct from the secularised and 'westernised' approach which understands Buddhism in the light of particular traditions of western thought, such as psychotherapy or socialism, drawing on it as a source of techniques and instruction. Those Buddhist movements that might be characterised in this way tend to me lay-oriented and to place a relatively low emphasis on affiliation. They also tend to emphasise meditation rather than engagement with the full range of the Buddhist teachings and practice. Sometimes it has been assumed that the FWBO's 'Western Buddhism' is an adaptation of this sort. However the FWBO is a very different body than, say, the Insight Meditation Society. It emphasises affiliation and tends to require a relatively high level of commitment; it teaches a systematic path that draws on a range of Buddhist practices; and it presents these in the context of the ultimate aims of Buddhism. It also stresses the roots of its teachings in the Buddhist tradition, and indeed its non-sectarian engagement with all aspects of that tradition. From the FWBO's perspective the danger of the secularising approach is that it may reduce the Buddhadharma to a set of ideas and techniques that ignore its soteriological dimension and assimilate it to a materialist worldview that is fundamentally at odds with that of Buddhism.

The premise underlying FWBO's approach is that the central insights and teachings of the Buddhadharma are extra-historical and universal, while the forms Buddhism has taken are historically specific and contingent. Sangharakshita expresses this point in his key teaching of the centrality of going for Refuge to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha). 'Going for Refuge is the essential Buddhist act,' he says. For Sangharakshita this traditional formula, which is common to all Buddhist schools, encapsulates the spirit and fundamental orientation of Buddhism and the individual's relation to it. Being a Buddhist therefore means reorienting one's body speech and mind towards the values, qualities and understanding that are represented in the Three Jewels and to following the Buddha's path to Enlightenment. Because individuals do this to differing degrees it follows that there are different levels of going for Refuge. Practising the Dharma means learning to go for Refuge more fully. This same spirit is expressed in the core teachings that are common to all schools which emphasise that Buddhism is a path to Enlightenment, rather than a set of customs or injunctions regarding lifestyle.

The FWBO seeks to adhere to these central teachings and this timeless core, but to apply them pragmatically within the cultural context of its practitioners. This makes the FWBO's praxis varied and flexible in some respects and remarkably coherent in others. At the heart of the FWBO is the Western Buddhist Order, a community of nearly 800 men and women whose commitment is described as 'effective going for Refuge to the Three Jewels'. Their ordination is described as being 'neither lay nor monastic', and is based on the principle that 'going for Refuge is primary, and lifestyle is secondary'. Some Order members lead a fully monastic life, and practice chastity; others have families. But

the commitment each has made to Dharma practice is the same, and it is for each individual to find their own way to live that out in practice. The FWBO is in one sense no more than the product of the joint efforts of those 800 people, and the flexible, adaptive forms they have developed in the FWBO are expressions of their responses to the circumstances in which they found themselves. This is the great virtue of the contingency of lifestyle in the FWBO, its middle way between monk and lay. As Andrew Rawlinson says, ‘Sangharakshita is equally critical of orthodox “cultural” monasticism and innovative “rational” non-monasticism. The FWBO is apart from - one might almost say, above - these extremes.’

From the point of view of its practitioners the FWBO is an expression of their own relation to the core of the Buddhadharma itself. 'How the FWBO presents itself' is therefore a secondary concern. Primarily its adherents are concerned with the practice and communication of Buddhism as they understand it, and with their personal Dharma practice. As Sangharakshita puts it, the work of the FWBO to spread its version of the Dharma represents 'the altruistic dimension of going for Refuge'.

It would be wrong to suggest that the FWBO has an overarching presentational policy, as particular expression of what it stands for reflect the individual approaches of particular Order members. Moreover the FWBO's distinction between the underlying principles of the Dharma and their cultural expression implies that these expressions should vary according to local cultures. The FWBO is now active in twenty countries, including such diverse cultural contexts as the Indian Ambedkarite movement and the South American bourgeoisie, and how it presents itself varies accordingly. Having said that FWBO centres follow broadly follow a common syllabus; they are based on the same core set of teachings; they attempt to co-ordinate their teaching work; and they fund collective bodies such as the FWBO Communications Office. In this paper I hope to suggest something of the variety of presentations of the FWBO, and yet also to suggest some of the principles and common concerns which structure these presentations.

As its dialectical relationship to other Buddhist movements suggests, the FWBO is built upon an awareness of the cultural and historical forces that mediate the expression of individuals' going for Refuge. Indeed it may be said that the over-arching project of the FWBO is the creation of a tradition of Buddhism that is genuinely at home in the modern world and Western culture. While Buddhists in the West may hope that an intrinsically Western Buddhism will arise naturally in the course of centuries, the FWBO sees it as something to be systematically cultivated. Sangharakshita has sought to outline the basis on which a Buddhist tradition may arise that is as much Western as Zen is Japanese, or the Nyingmapas are Tibetan.

The FWBO's role as an organisation is to make these principles manifest in institutions, ideas, lived experience and forms of practice, and these manifestations of Dharma practice are also presentations of the FWBO. Given its relationship with other forms of Buddhism, both Eastern and Western, it is natural that the FWBO seeks to avoid portraying Buddhism as an Asian tradition that is, however venerable and profound, culturally alien to the West. And it does not wish to present Buddhism as a system of

philosophy, ethics, psychology or relaxation which may be easily assimilated to otherwise unchanged western lifestyles. It wishes Buddhism to be seen as a universal spiritual tradition, that applies equally to all ages, and transcends culture. It wishes to suggest that Buddhism has great relevance to the modern world and that its wisdom, and radicalism can be re-expressed within that world and make a profound contribution to it.

3. The FWBO's Representations

The movement that has grown up over the last 30 years as a result of this project is complex and multi-faceted, and the question of 'how the FWBO presents itself' is accordingly complex. I want to consider a few examples of FWBO activity to suggest this complexity a mediation class at the London Buddhist Centre; pieces of work by three visual artists; and Dharma Life magazine.

(i.) The London Buddhist Centre.

The principal way people encounter the FWBO and learn about its approach to Buddhism is through the activities of its urban public centres. Of these the London Buddhist Centre (LBC) is the largest and most fully developed. Several thousand people pass through its doors every year, and it has become a well-know landmark in East London.

The main teaching work of the LBC consists of meditation classes. Each week it holds one main introductory class on Wednesday evening, plus one or more six week courses, and a class every lunchtime. These teach two samatha meditation practices, anapanasati, or the mindfulness of breathing, and mettabhavana, or the development of loving-kindness which are typically taught in a single session. There are also follow-up sessions or courses that address topics such as how to work with the difficulties encountered in meditation, and the relationship between ethics and meditation. On average about fifty or sixty people attend the evening class, and those who decide to pursue what is taught there continue to attend for a maximum of nine months before moving on to a 'Friends Class', on Tuesday evenings.

The first point to note is the emphasis on meditation as the medium through which Buddhism and the FWBO are introduced. The implication is that the FWBO's teaching is related to personal experience, and especially to the experience of personal change. Thus Buddhism is not presented initially as an intellectual discipline, a movement for social change, or a devotional discipline in these introductory activities, although the FWBO contains all of these dimensions. Devotional practices are not taught at introductory level, and chanting and mantras come later too. When concepts from the Buddhist tradition are introduced in talks their practical import, and experiential significance is usually stressed, as opposed to their philosophical interest.

Secondly neither the anapanasati nor the mettabhavana requires any prior knowledge of, or assent to specifically Buddhist teachings. In this sense they differ from Theravadin Vipassana practices or Tibetan tantric practices, and this makes the FWBO's meditation teaching less overtly 'Buddhist'. However, there is no attempt to disguise the Buddhist

origin and orientation of the meditation practices that are taught at the LBC. Classes are led by Order members who wear a kesa (a brocade indicating their membership of the Order), use their Pali or Sanskrit names, and take place in a shrine-room that is dominated by a large Amitabha rupa, albeit one with a Western face.

Similarly no expectations are placed on individuals that they will affiliate to the FWBO, or even that they have an interest in Buddhism. Peggy Morgan has contrasted the FWBO's approach in this respect to that of other groups in being both out-going and non-coercive. 'I have found something of a middle way in the styles referred to above in the activities of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, who do actively initiate contacts and discussion, and seek to inform people, but who have never been accused of putting any undue pressure on people.' However activities are carefully structured to allow a clear path of progressive involvement in the LBC, which also involves engagement in more specifically Buddhist practices such as puja (worship).

It might be said that at the LBC's introductory classes makes meditation is explicit while Buddhism is implicit. However the environment in which the class takes place gives an additional message. Around 25 people live in the building above the Centre in residential communities. Next door, and open before classes, is a co-operatively run vegetarian restaurant, and in the surrounding streets are several Buddhist-run shops, a café, the London Buddhist Arts Centre, and Bodywise Natural Health Centre. Indeed the LBC is the focus for a community of several hundred Buddhists. The shops, communities and so on are outward manifestations of the decisions of the people involved to live in an overtly Buddhist environment. These activities have been described as the seeds of a 'New Society', which offers an alternative to conventional social forms and is informed by and supportive of Buddhist practice. Their proximity suggests to the people attending meditation classes that the practice they are learning has social and economic implications over and above the purely personal benefits that meditation brings.

Many people attending the LBC's meditation classes have no interest in the FWBO, and perhaps none in Buddhism – they just want to explore some of the benefits of meditation. The Centre's teaching meets this interest on its own level, yet introduces other aspects of its teaching and practice which people are free to pursue if they want to. Buddhism is communicated as something that is not culturally alien, has a universal relevance, is accessible to people's lives and experience, and yet which implies a radical alternative. This tried and tested approach underlies all of the FWBO's teaching work.

(ii.) The Dynamics of Cultural encounter – Envisaging a Western Buddha

The second aspect of the FWBO's representations I want to explore is the visual arts, and this in turn suggests a further aspect of the FWBO project: it aspires to create a Western Buddhist culture, making links between the western artistic heritage and Buddhist practice. I will look at work by three Order members, Chintamani, Aloka and Dhammarati, and for the sake of simplicity I have chosen three treatments of Buddha or Bodhisattva images in three different media: sculpture, painting and graphic design. Each of these men is a senior member of the Western Buddhist Order, Chintamani was

ordained in 1973 while Aloka and Dhammarati were ordained in 1976). Each of them produces distinctive work that attempts to articulate a visual language for Western Buddhism.

(a) Chintamani's Amitabha

A bronze Amitabha rupa (cast in 1996 from an original in the Essen Buddhist Centre in Germany) dominates the main shrine room at the Manchester Buddhist Centre. It is in full-lotus posture, and rather than the traditional dhyana mudra, its right hand holds up a lotus. In other respects it follows the principal iconographic conventions that have been used for two millennia. But the eyes are rounded and its strong-featured face has a distinctly European cast.
Dharmachari Chintamani is the Chairman of a charity called FWBO Arts, which seeks to encourage engagement in the arts within the FWBO, and for a number of years it has run the London Buddhist Arts Centre in Bethnal Green where Chintamani is based. His early training was in theatre design, and his rupa is dramatically conceived as a focal point within a public space, which arrests attention and provide the room with a dominating presence.

This rupa, like others by Chintamani which are to be found in several FWBO centres, is based on a synthesis of Buddhist and Western influences, as well as an element of personal interpretation. If one were to relate it to an Asian tradition it would be most associated with Japanese Amitabha sculpture. In a western context the musculature and face connects it with Greek and Roman classical statuary and the tradition of heroic sculpture that derives from it. The drapery is more realistic than the stylised cloths of Asian sculpture, and less so than the super-realism of Hellenistic art and much sculpture of the classical Greek period. The result is a reduced realism that connects it with western traditions, yet emphasises the archetypal quality of the image. Similarly the musculature is based on the western tradition of anatomical observation, but it is less pronounced than in classical models, reducing the heroic quality of the piece, and softening its lines. In this respect it differs from another Amitabha rupa by Chintamani that presides over the principal shrine room of the London Buddhist Centre (1978). This rupa draws on the artistic traditions surrounding Amitabha and, more discreetly, those around Apollo. It therefore suggests an iconographic synthesis and a mythological analogy, which enables it to be seen in ways that draw on both oriental and occidental modes.

As a matter of policy FWBO public centres only have images of Shakyamuni or Amitabha on their principal shrine. Because Shakyamuni stands behind the entire Buddhist tradition, taking him as an object of devotion does not imply affiliation with one school in particular. It also relates to the FWBO's desire to follow the central teachings of the Buddhist tradition, and to define these through an emphasis on the teachings of the historical Buddha, so far as these may be discerned from textual records. The use of Amitabha images is an extension of this, in that the two are so closely connected iconographically. Additionally Amitabha is connected with the Western direction, so his use suggests a connection between him and Western Buddhists. This round-eyed Amitabha therefore expresses the essential stance of the FWBO. Some might take 'the

Buddha with a Western face to be a symbol for the FWBO's project.

Is this, then, an example of a truly western Buddhist Art; the expression of a genuinely Western Buddhism? Although stylistic elements have been combined, what cannot so easily be synthesised are the meanings of these elements in their traditional contexts. Perhaps the most notable aspect of this rupa is the flower held in Amitabha's hand. The inspiration behind this is a vision of Amitabha described by Sangharakshita in his first volume of memoirs, The Rainbow Road

One night I found myself as it were out of the body and in the presence of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who presides over the western quarter of the universe. The colour of the Buddha was a deep, rich, luminous red, though at the same time soft and glowing like the light of the setting sun. While his left hand rested on his lap, the fingers of his right hand held up by the stalk a single red lotus in full bloom…

But how is one to interpret this new depiction of Amitabha? In Tibetan sculpture the artist may not change the principal details of the Buddha or Bodhisattva's form, and Buddhist art in general does not encourage alteration of such details for simply pictorial ends. The authority of a Tibetan sculpture as an object of devotion rests on a belief that in some sense it depicts the Sambogahakaya form of the Buddha, as perceived by a Lama in visionary experience. What then is the status claimed by Chintamani's Amitabha rupa? What is the status of the form of Amitabha it depicts? And what does this imply about Sangharakshita's own status?

Chintamani has made no claims for this image, just as Sangharakshita has never made any claims for his vision. Indeed Sangharakshita has questioned the Tibetan account of iconography and points to the variety of ways iconic imagery is understood in Buddhist cultures. But these questions are implicitly raised by Chintamani's Amitabha because of the proximity it retains to the conventions of Asian iconography.

(b) Aloka's Manjushri

The second image I have chosen is a depiction of Manjugosha by Aloka, painted in oil on wood.While Chintamani's Amitabha rupa is a public image, Aloka's thangka is in the personal possession of an individual, and similarly, Aloka's lifestyle is that of a solitary artist. At times Aloka has played a prominent role in the Western Buddhist Order, but then he has been drawn back to his art. He lived for many years in a disused railway carriage on a Norfolk farm, which slowly filled with an immense output of paintings and sculpture on both Buddhist and non-Buddhist subjects.

Manjusri is seated in full lotus posture, and carrying his sword, yet the imagery and treatment has been interpreted in the light of Aloka's response to Manjusri, and also that of the person for whom it was painted, whose daily meditation practice revolves around the visualisation of Manjusri. The face is personalised, the background detail is greatly reduced, and the image as a whole is flecked with white, as if it were seen in motion, or through snow. There is a dynamism to the composition – as if the sword were about to e

wielded – quite different from Asian forms.

Aloka's work is manifestly a personal response to a bodhisattva, which breaks many of the iconic conventions of Asian tradition. In this sense it suggests an analogy with post-Renaissance depictions of Christian imagery, which place previously conventionalised figures in dramatic contexts using new resources of form, perspective and figuration.

Aloka consciously stands outside the Asian traditions of iconography, and feels compelled to re-evaluate them:

'There are traditions of "Buddhist" art, that western Dharma practitioners are heir to, but, removed from their cultural settings and in relation to each other, they can be a source of inspiration only if one can resonate with the spirit of their significance rather than getting side-tracked by the cultural forms displayed…'

This is clearly an analogue, not to say an expression, of the project of the FWBO as a whole. Yet it would be wrong to see his painting in programmatic terms, as an attempt to depict Western Buddhas because the FWBO requires them. Rather it is an exploration of what the Buddha's Wisdom, Compassion and so on might look like, when envisaged by a Western psyche. For Aloka image-making is not a specialised activity called 'art', but a universal human impulse, an aspect of perception:
'Our desires take concrete form. The transformation of desire (the essential work of the creative/spiritual life) must consist in the transformation of what we find to be compelling images… We need images that attract us beyond our immediate appetites, that compel us to deal with the realities of life and do not distract us with novelty.'

Aloka is dismissive of the artistic merits of his work with traditional Buddhist imagery, which he calls 'painting by numbers', and does to commission. His view of the iconography of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as contingent on an imaginative engagement implies that the best expression of their qualities may dispense with traditional Buddha images altogether and his primary interest now is in non-Buddhist subjects. None the less, the exploration of the inner landscape of his imagination infects his depictions of Bodhisattvas. His paintings imply a new relation to these figures reconciling them as articulations of aspects of the mind, and spiritual experience which elude conceptual expression. Other images he has created are far less conventional than this one; in some cases traditional figuration and iconography is entirely deconstructed, and refashioned according to formal principles that grow from the artists response to the Buddha.

Having questioned Asian modes, the resources on which an artist may draw expand to include the traditions of western art. Both in his Buddhist and non-Buddhist work Aloka shows formal influences from the major figures of Twentieth Century Western art. But perhaps most important is the influence of the tradition of English visionary painting, especially figures such as Stanley Spencer and Eric Gill. These modern painters make no ontological claims for their images, but have an interest, mirrored in Aloka's work and writing, in the nature of the image per se and the mode of perception and experience to which it relates, and which it may express.

The link is Sangharakshita's discussion of the imagination, a concept he draws from Coleridge and the Romantics, and the Imaginal, which he draws from the work of Henri Corbin the scholar of Iranian Sufism. This approach potentially frees the Western Buddhist to engage deeply with the artistic traditions of Buddhist cultures in a way that is not defined by the artistic conventions of those cultures. If Buddhist art is understood as an articulation of an imaginal realm it opens the possibility that they may be conceived within the same context as western arts; and indeed that they may help provide a symbolic language for an individual's spiritual life, without necessarily defining that life in a particular conceptual structure. As Sangharakshita says:

'The imaginal faculty is, in reality the man himself, because when one truly perceives an image, one perceives it with the whole of oneself… one is transported to the world that image inhabits… Truly to perceive an image is to become that image, so that when one speaks of imagination… what one is speaking of is image perceiving image . That is to say, in perceiving an image what one really perceives is, in a sense, oneself.'

(c) Dhammarati's Graphic Design

One of the most significant influences in shaping the image of the FWBO to the general public is the design of its publicity leaflets, the covers of Windhorse Publications' books and the pages of Dharma Life magazine. Most of this work is done by one individual, Dharmachari Dhammarati, who has been a full-time graphic designer for the FWBO since stepping down as Chairman of the London Buddhist Centre in 1994. In my view his work is based on an awareness of the semiotics of Buddhist imagery in a post-modern context as sophisticated as that of anyone working in any visual medium whatsoever.

The example of his work I have chosen is the cover of Sangharakshita's What is the Dharma?. The principal element of the design is an image of Manjugosha taken from an Tibetan thangka. On this is superimposed a title, subtitle and the author's name. Yet the effect of the cover is an intriguing mix of traditional and modern. Firstly, while the image has been treated respectfully it has been cropped, and furthermore it is placed off-centre, presumably for compositional reasons. The title has been superimposed on the Buddha's arm and body while the author's name appears across his legs. Such effects have only become possible with the advent of graphic design technology, so the image as a whole is based on the contrast between the traditional image and its treatment. This suggests the encounter of the Tibetan iconic tradition with a modern - not to say post-modern - sensibility. These tensions are reflected in even the smallest details of this design: the title is in a Times Roman typeface, which is a long-established typographic form, somewhat old-fashioned, and typically used where print needs to be read as authoritative and reliable. However, the subtitle, 'the essential teachings of the Dharma', is in the modern serif typeface, printed white on black, and super-imposed somewhat unconventionally, perhaps even iconoclastically, upon the Buddha's waist.

Dhammarati's work sends a message about the book, which also establishes a stance in relation to the Buddhist tradition - respectful and yet unable to take the tradition on its

own terms; needing to make a new sense in a fresh context and to find a fresh harmony that is built precisely on the tensions between traditional and modern, content and treatment. It is the fluidity of the elements and the sophistication with which they are combined that suggests the sobriquet 'post-modern'. This is yet another version of on the FWBO's relation to the Buddhist tradition: deeply engaged, and yet not defined by traditional modes. It speaks to a sophisticated western audience in its own language while also growing from the resources of the Buddhist tradition.

These three visual engagements with Buddhist iconography differ greatly from one another, yet are all expressions of the FWBO's project of practising and expressing Buddhism in the context of our culture as Westerners: Chintamani's Buddha with a Western face; Aloka's free and fluid reworking of Tibetan iconography in the light of modern art in the West and post-Romantic notions of the Imagination; and Dhammarati's post-modern use of Buddhist imagery, employing the freedom afforded by graphic design technology. Each represents a modern Western engagement with Buddhism, and each has achieved some measure of success.

This diversity says something about the variety and fluidity of the Western culture to which the FWBO seeks to introduce Buddhism. It also suggests something of the breadth of the FWBO's project when it is translated into practice, its experimental character, and the creativity to be found among its members. Each of these images represents a version of a Western Buddha, and by extension a somewhat different version of the Western Buddhism the FWBO is seeking to develop and to present. The criteria for evaluating their success from the perspective of the FWBO's project is two-fold. First there is the pragmatic question of whether they create objects that are significant to Westerners and enable them to establish a relationship with the Buddhist tradition. But more important is the question of whether they are adequate expressions of the Buddhist meanings that underlie these iconic forms. Which of them best expresses the qualities of Buddhahood, given the conventions and modes of perception that are available to us as Westerners? The unanswerability of this question suggests the open-ended aspect of the FWBO's project.

(iii) Dharma Life Magazine

My final case study is Dharma Life which is the principal magazine of the FWBO, taking as an example Issue 9, Autumn 1998. I must first declare an interest as I founded Dharma Life in 1996 and have edited it subsequently, but hope these reflections point to broader issues in considering the FWBO.

Dharma Life's predecessor was called Golden Drum, which was produced for ten years, and before that came The FWBO Newsletter. As might be expected there has been a steady progression in length and production values from one magazine to the next, so that Dharma Life is 68 pages, while Golden Drum was 32 (although Dharma Life is published three times a year, while Golden Drum was quarterly). Thanks, once again, to Dhammarati, Dharma Life is designed to a very high standard.
Dharma Life also represented an editorial shift. Golden Drum was intended at its launch

to be more than simply an in-house magazine, which the Newsletter had happily remained. It sought to address a broader Buddhist community and to offer a voice on issues in Western society. As Nagabodhi, Golden Drum's editor, wrote in the editorial of the first issue:

'The FWBO has, in a sense, come of age. And now it is time to speak out with a new voice. That voice is Golden Drum'
In practice that Golden Drum's features were expositions of aspects of Sangharakshita's teachings, in addition to which there was news of FWBO activities, book reviews, and editorial comment on current affairs. The magazine sought to present the 'FWBO's stance' on various subjects, and the relationship it established with its readers was essentially pedagogic, while its relationship with Buddhists outside the FWBO was polemical.

When I was asked to take on the editorship of Golden Drum, I knew I wanted to change the magazine dramatically - a change symbolised by the new name. In my first (and only) editorial I wrote:

'Western Buddhists are coming of age. It is time for them to speak out in their own voices. Those voices can be heard in Dharma Life.

However the magazine needed to remain based on the principles of Sangharakshita's exposition of Buddhism, and on the core values of the FWBO. Indeed there has always been a tension at the heart of Dharma Life's editorial policy , the tension, as it were, between 'Dharma', with all the clarity and comprehensiveness this implies, and 'Life', with its complexity and irreducibility. As I continued in my editorial:

'I am personally more interested in difficult questions than easy answers. And in Dharma Life I hope to publish writers who are able to express their Buddhist values by speaking up for what they believe to be the truth. I want to find Buddhist writing that is new true and considered.'

The magazine has gradually evolved, but most of the elements in the first issue remain. At the front end of the magazine is a section of short features called Real Life, which deals with news and cultural aspects of Buddhism in the modern world. It starts with a visually based spread and short pieces around the influence of Buddhism with popular culture - in Issue 9 this is based around Richard Gere's photographs. In the rest of Real Life there are news stories about Buddhist activism East and West, here including pieces on the growing recognition of the Tibetan independence struggle in western countries; and the suppression of Buddhism in Vietnam. Real Life has also given detailed coverage to stories in Western Buddhism, such as the dispute over Dorje Shugden, the FWBO's own difficulties with the press, and so on. The feature articles are mostly themed, and in Issue 9 the theme is 'Freeing the Heart: the Buddhist Path of Love'. This is a broad subject, which enabled me to draw on a wide range of contributors. An opening sequence on five aspects of loving-kindness includes a piece by a Buddhist prisoner on death row in America; an interview with Aung San Suu Kyi; and advice on friendship from a Sufi text, as well as a short interview with the Chairman of the London Buddhist Centre.

There are three other themed articles. One is on the South African Truth and Justice Commission, by an FWBO mitra who is a TV director and had interviewed Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and others while making a documentary. Another article, by an Order member, is about maternal love; and the final piece is about erotic and romantic love, by a writer who is involved in the FWBO, and wrote a PhD on the subject.

These examples should suggest something of Dharma Life's approach . Implicit in the breadth of the contributors and subject matter is an attempt to present the FWBO as a part of the Buddhist world, engaged with the issues and personalities who are at its cutting edge, and relevant to and interested in the world beyond Buddhism. I defined the broad subject of the magazine as 'the encounter of Buddhism and the modern world', and I wanted to draw on the breadth of that engagement as it is occurring in fields such as science, psychotherapy, poetry, social action, philosophy, and so on, as well as trying to make sense of the burgeoning Buddhist world outside the FWBO. This breadth grew partly from a desire to reach an audience outside the FWBO, but it was also born of a desire to open the FWBO's internal discourse to broader influences.

There is a tension between the desire for breadth and the desire to stay true to Sangharakshita's teachings and FWBO's values and this tension is one of the most important factors that defines Dharma Life editorially. The need to ensure that the version of Buddhism that Dharma Life expresses is broadly in line with the FWBO's means that most of its writers are from the FWBO itself. Behind the emphasis on coherence is Sangharakshita's concern that the version of Buddhism presented by the FWBO is as clear as possible, and based on what he considers to be 'right views' with regard to the Dharma. The problem with the diversity and sometimes confusion of the western Buddhist world is that it can obscure confusion or misunderstanding about Buddhism itself. Thus Sangharakshita is insistent that Buddhist teachings should not be conflated with and reduced to prevalent attitudes and ideas within western culture. Indeed it might be said that the FWBO as a whole faces a tension between having a distinctive stance within western Buddhism, and being a part of it.

An implication of saying that the magazine should stay true to the teachings of the FWBO is that there is indeed a unitary FWBO position. While individuals are always free to hold whatever views they may wish the core teachings of the FWBO are defined by Sangharakshita and his senior disciples, rather than by consensus or democracy. But where, does that leave an individual who differs on a particular point, and wishes to discuss his or her views in a public context such as Dharma Life? To what extent is the magazine taken to define and uphold the FWBO's stance; and to what extent can it include diverse views? These are questions with which I have had to contend as editor, but they may be extended to any presentation of the FWBO. While it may appear as a single movement to outsiders, it is in fact very diverse, and there are disagreements and debates on many issues within the Western Buddhist Order. A presentation of the FWBO such as Dharma Life must do justice to this diversity whilst also communicating the factors that bind it together.

A similar tension is that between the need for Dharma Life to service the FWBO, and the

need to reach a wider audience. Golden Drum's News section was dropped, and there is now no publication that gives news of FWBO activities (although Clear vision produces a video 'newsreel' of such activities biannually, and there is a plethora of local newsletters). The question of how to service the FWBO is complicated by the diversity of the FWBO audience - which ranges between people attending introductory classes in FWBO centres, to people who have been practising for several decades. The choice of such an accessible theme in Issue 9 was an attempt to appeal to the wider audience, while it seeks to retain the interest of more experienced readers through the diversity of the subject matter in the articles.

Although as editor I am often aware of the incomensurality of some of these aims I think that where Dharma Life has been successful it is because it has been prepared to take on wholeheartedly the issues that face any attempt to present the FWBO. Modern society, the Buddhist tradition and Buddhism in the West are all complex phenomena and so is the FWBO. A magazine, or indeed a Buddhist movement, that seeks a coherent and spiritually significant approach to all of these, does not have an easy task, but may yet be worthwhile and illuminating if it makes the attempt with integrity.

Conclusion

Expressions of the FWBO are extremely varied. Alongside the discussion of the London Buddhist Centre's meditation class, I might have placed Buddhafield, the collective that teaches meditation at Glastonbury and other festivals in Britain, as well as running camping retreats for people from the travelling and alternative scene. I might also have discussed the very different issues facing people teaching the FWBO's version of Buddhism in the slums of Western India. Alongside the discussion of depictions of Buddha images, I might have discussed artists who treat non-religious subjects; or else the work of some of the composers, poets or choreographers who practice within the FWBO. Alongside the discussion of Dharma Life, I might have discussed the work of Clear Vision Education, which is the leading provider of educational materials on schools, and advisor to RE teachers on the teaching of Buddhism. Indeed it is hard from my position within the FWBO to perceive the particular characteristics of the FWBO's presentation as opposed to others.

In this paper I have attempted to suggest something of the scope of the FWBO's project. It is in the nature of this project that it requires interpretation, and any such interpretations must encompass the subtlety of Sangharakshita's teaching; the diversity of FWBO praxis; and the exploratory nature of its engagement with its project. Without such an effort of interpretation the ways the FWBO presents itself will most likely be characterised as either bewilderingly diverse, or blandly homogenous. Practitioners within the FWBO take many years to start to comprehend the overarching vision that informs its work, and as they do so, they are able to contribute to its work in not just presenting Western Buddhism, but also helping to create it. It is the FWBO's very combination of underlying coherence and varied expressions defines its own, particular character.