

Sangharakshita on Right Livelihood

Extracts from the lectures, seminars and written material. Note that the seminar extracts are not checked or edited.

Work

Outer achievements should be expressions of inner abundance, not compensations for inner poverty.

“Work makes the companion “ says Goethe. Therefore if you have no work you have no companion. Those are not companions with whom we merely amuse ourselves.

You learn what it is you are trying to do in the process of trying to do it.

One should try to be too big to be used.

Surely we are very near to heaven if not to Nirvana, if we enjoy our work and if our work is our life.

Unless your work is your meditation, your meditation is not meditation.

Formerly one needed courage to attack institutions. Now one needs courage to defend them- and still more courage to create them.

Work should be an expression of one’s life, not simply the means to one’s existence.

Without unremitting effort nothing truly great is ever achieved. All the great artists seem to have been great workers. Perhaps this was because they loved their work.

“A load of sandalwood is still a load,” said the camel.

Ethics

Giving is the natural ,unforced interchange of one’s energy with that of others. In this sense real giving is receiving.

It is easy to forgive people their vices. What is sometimes more difficult is to forgive them their virtues.

Sometimes we think we are being patient when we are only being persistent.

The good is very often the enemy of the best.

We often think people are behaving most characteristically when they are behaving most badly. We often think the same thing about ourselves.

All skilful mental states are essentially progressive. All unskilful mental states have an inherent tendency to deteriorate.

Because one is in a minority of one, it does not necessarily follow that one is more of an individual.

One of the most important aspects of the spiritual life is that one should be aware of the consequences of one's own actions.

Jewels are produced only by the collision of immense forces.

Metta and Friendship

Metta which is freedom of heart

One can love people only as far as one understands them, and be ready to love them more when one understands them better.

It is often said that one should have the courage of one's convictions. Perhaps one should also have the courage of one's positive emotions.

The only way to avoid hating one's fellow men is to love them.

Love is no mere flabby sentiment but the vigorous expression of an imaginative identification with other living beings.

Love is a self-giving of person to person- surrender here meaning the complete abandonment of any advantage derived from the power mode

Personal development is not an easy matter for anyone, and there are times when we must bear with others, just as there are times when they must bear with us.

Honest collision is better than dishonest collusion.

We are usually able to bear much more than we and others think we can.

Sloth is the weight of one's actual existence resisting further evolving.

True time is short but that is no reason for being in a hurry

You can't really commit yourself to something that you know.

From lecture 194: Looking Ahead a Little Way, Combined Order Convention 1999

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

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

Most of you are probably familiar with these four distinguishing characteristics of the team based right livelihood businesses, but you might not be able to enumerate them if asked to do so. And that is why I have given you this little reminder. In the Dhammapada – perhaps I should mention that in the course of this convention I've got back to working on my long unfinished translation of the Dhammapada and hope to have it finished by the end of the year. Well, in the Dhammapada the Buddha says that 'non repetition is the taint of the sacred verses'. In other words, if you don't repeat them, don't go over them in your mind, perhaps even with your lips, you will, sooner or later forget them. So 'non-repetition is the taint of the sacred verses'.

From: lecture 178 (1992) - The integration of Buddhism into Western Society

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

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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-livelihood 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-livelihood business right here in the heart of Berlin. And I express my personal appreciation for their dana, which was really excellent.

Historical Spiritual Communities and RL

Sangharakshita, Tuscany 82 Q&A

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S: I have been looking more in the area of communities. Quite a lot of communities were set up, say, in America in the last century. It is quite interesting, it is quite instructive to study them. Most of them - well, it is very difficult to generalize - hundreds of communities were started up, very few lasted more than a year or two, even a few months. One thing that strikes - well, to get back to a quite basic point, so basic that I've almost overlooked it - in order to have a spiritual community - this is the message that emerges most clearly from reading about these various experiments - was that in order to have a spiritual community you have got to have a common spiritual vision. If you have got a lot of individualists all in together, all following their own ideas, going their own way, you can't possibly have a spiritual community.

So in the FWBO we have the possibility of having spiritual communities because we have a common vision. That, in many cases, was not present in the case of some of these very early experimental communities, some of which were quite large. There was no common vision, no common purpose, and individualism was rife.

Another reason for the break-up of many of the communities, as one might have expected, was that the man/woman, the male/female question, was not resolved, and there were many tensions on this score, often leading to people leaving. Another thing that emerges is - ah, there is one other thing. Some of these communities developed business enterprises, and these business enterprises were quite successful, but they

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ended up absorbing all the energies of the people involved, and the spiritual communities became, sometimes **officially** and **legally**, **business** corporations; one or two of which, I think, continue still. And the whole spiritual community side of [things was lost. Broadly, they failed because there was] no common way of life, no common spiritual practice, and no real emphasis on individual growth and development and on helping one another to grow and evolve; and no emphasis on the community as a situation with a structure which helps the individual to evolve. This is broadly the picture. I notice that in reading about the various communities and so on.

Bodhiruchi: Have any survived?

S: I don't think any have survived down to the present. The most successful survived 20, 30 - even 40 years in one or [286] two cases; but most lasted only two or three years or four or five months, six months. But there were many communities in America in the last century; some of them were quite well known, some of them were quite big. People were thinking in those terms. But they didn't seem to know how to go about it, and what the requirements were for community living.

1987 Women's Order Convention

S: I think what I did say, years and years ago was I thought that probably, only Order members should work in co-ops. (Laughter) Yes! Because what I said and what I still think is well, what does a ... taking the word 'co-op' - taking the co-op structure in the narrow sense, and some of our Right Livelihood or team-based Right Livelihood businesses are no longer based on a co-op structure in a technical sense or a legal sense, but nonetheless they are co-operative in a broader sense. If you have a co-op you've got a group of people who have equal responsibility in principle, that doesn't mean they've got equal skills, or that they're interchangeable in terms of skills, but they have equal responsibility, so that there are no employers and no employees regardless of the specific functions the individual members of the co-op are performing. So you've got a situation in which people all accept responsibility, and that isn't easy, because what one usually finds within a group of people working together, some, for one reason or another, accept less responsibility, take on less responsibility, which means that the others have to take on a bit more responsibility to take up the slack. So therefore there is at once a polarisation of those taking on more responsibility and those taking on less responsibility. Usually those who take on more responsibility are in the minority, those who take on less responsibility are in the minority (sic). Then those who take on less responsibility for the same reason that they take on less responsibility are resentful that (chuckling) other people have taken on more responsibility ...

S: Even though it's the fact that they've taken on less responsibility that obliges the others to take on more to keep the whole show going. In this way resentment develops, all sorts of criticism develops and so on. So you need really, to have a co-op at all, a group of really mature and responsible people. But you can't really expect that degree of responsibility which implies commitment from people who are just becoming involved with the FWBO, or perhaps who have even joined the co-op directly with very little experience of the FWBO at all. I know that there've been cases

where people have joined a co-op, in the sense of beginning to work for a co-op, or in a co-op, without having any real understanding of what a co-op is all about.

...

S: Also, what shall I say, responsibility within a co-op doesn't just mean responsibility for your little job - your little function, it means at the same time, keeping an eye on the co-op as a whole, and being concerned about and concerned for, the co-op as a whole, caring for the co-op as a whole. It means that too. (Pause) Maybe that's difficult perhaps for a part-time member of a co-op, but all full-time members should have that sort of concern and care for the whole business.

...

Dayamegha: I suppose it's partly I've wondered if people sometimes haven't come into Right Livelihood because they've had the thought that they must have a career, which they don't think that can provide.

S: Well if you have to think in terms of a career, well think of it as a career within the Movement as a whole. In the outside world if you joined a multinational company, you'd expect to be posted abroad sometime, so all right, if you have to think in terms of career structure think in terms of the whole Movement, and that you might be, as it were, posted to Australia, or posted to Germany, or posted to India, think in those terms. Maybe it isn't a completely positive way of thinking but some people can't help thinking in that way. I mean, you have committed yourself to the Three Jewels so that's where your career lies, within the Movement.

Windhorse Trading Right Livelihood questions

Kuladitya:....do we have to give up selling gifts? (laughter) Does there come a point when we have to, or some of us after a period of time, might have to stop working in Right Livelihood and, say, go and live at Vajraloka and meditate and reflect and...

S: Well, again it depends on this question of attitude which was mentioned. It's not just a question of what you are doing, but also the attitude. The attitude is in a way part of what you are doing. And again this is perhaps a question of balancing out. Some attention does need to be given to what you are selling. I know Kulananda was very concerned about this years ago, perhaps you still all are. Perhaps you do not need to be concerned about it quite so much. Also there is a variety of things which you sell. Well for instance if you sell recycled glass, well at least it is recycled. And no doubt you are selling some things which are not necessities, well not in the sense that food is necessary. But then again you argue well look it's good for people to give one another presents, even though the presents in themselves may not be in the best of taste and all that. But the fact that people give presents is good, and that they are able to give presents is good. Again there is a balancing of positive and negative factors, quite apart from the fact that you are making money, much of which in the form of profits, goes to support the Movement. So, again as I said there are so many factors and aspects to be taken into consideration.

...

S: So I mean, well the point I am raising is don't take it for granted that staying at Vajraloka is going to make you more mindful. You see what I mean? Because maybe you have got space to be mindful there. But as far as I can make out, in your work there is an objective check up. You're made more quickly aware if you have been

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unmindful. So it's not that well when you're on the road you are in a situation that is not conducive to mindfulness, but if you could only go to Vajraloka, well you are going to be in a situation which is going to help you be more mindful. It isn't as straight forward as that.

...

S: I think you mentioned the work drive. I think that is very important, and I think this is something that I noticed in the East with a lot of monks. In principle, in theory, in ideal situations, that there is a lack of drive. And I think in spiritual life you do need drive. And that is something that you do develop in Windhorse Trading. Well you don't succeed if you don't have it, it's as simple as that. So I think one of the important things about a situation like that at Windhorse Trading, is that there is a constant means of checking, objectively, how well you are doing. Not only in business terms, but even to some extent in spiritual terms. You may not get that in a more relaxed and, as it were, spiritual situation, unless you have a very fiery Zen type master perhaps.

...

I would say that one of the characteristics of Insight is, by its very nature, it is not dependent on any particular set of conditions. It could be that for certain people, at certain times, certain situations are more conducive to the development of Enlightenment. But in principle, by its very nature, Insight does not depend on any particular set of conditions. Because Insight arises within situations of non-Insight. Or its arising depends on situations or conditions that are not those of Insight. If you see the Transcendental as completely discontinuous with the mundane, well nothing of the mundane is any nearer to the Transcendental than anything else. So that nothing, ultimately, is more favourable to the arising of Insight than anything else. Insight being Insight into the Transcendental. So I think one needs to bear that in mind.

Satyaloka: Nevertheless...

S: Or even reflect on that. Also the general Buddhist trend of thought is that you are more likely to develop Insight on the basis of samatha meditation, on the basis of samatha. But on the other hand we have got so many case histories of, say Zen monks, say Zen masters who have developed Insight in quite different situations. I'm just saying this speculatively, I'm not sure whether maybe it is to some extent a cultural thing. In India they do tend to take things more easily, and are maybe more inclined to meditation perhaps than say the Japanese. Well then in India they developed this tradition of Insight arising in dependence on meditation. But that doesn't seem to be the pattern necessarily outside India, especially say in Japan.

So I think we can approach this with an open mind. You know not necessarily thinking that you have to have a very deep experience of meditation before any kind of Insight can arise. I don't think that is necessarily the case. It can arise in any situation, and in dependence on any set of conditions, none of which is ultimately any nearer to Insight than any other. So we find Zen monks having Insight experiences when they are chopping wood or even in the toilet, all sorts of other situations.

But having said that it does seem that Insight is more likely to arise if the situation is an extreme situation. Well if you're say in a meditative situation, the situation can take an extreme form just due to stress of personal problems, or even philosophic difficulties, or because you are being urged by a very demanding master. But without those things I think you don't get it, even in the meditative situation. If there is no

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great pressing philosophical problem that you are desperate to solve, or an acute personal problem that you have just got to get over, or a master who is standing over you with a stick. If you don't have any of those things I think the meditative situation is not very likely, just by itself, to provide a basis for the development of Insight. Other situations outside the meditative situation, if they do push you to the edge, they can be situations in which Insight could arise.

Now you'll know whether, in the course of your work in Windhorse, if you are pushed to the edge in that way. I don't know because I'm not, as everybody knows, I've not done the vans or anything remotely like that (laughter). But you would know it if there aren't situations where sometimes you are pushed to the edge. Well for instance one way in which they can be pushed to the edge, I imagine, is perhaps when things aren't going very well. Maybe there are financial problems, and you tell yourself well yes there are these problems, but what is the challenge? Not to be disturbed, and just face the possibility of total failure with equanimity. That's the challenge. That's the edge towards which you are being pushed. That you are not you know deep down really concerned, ultimately concerned, about success or failure. At least not in a personal sense. Well that is just one little example, you can probably think of others.

...

And well wisdom in the ordinary sense you need, because wisdom has different levels. You need wisdom in the prudential sense, and wisdom in the highest sense is Insight. And that you can develop in any situation anyway. Concentration, well you may not be able to develop the dhyanas when you are on the road. But you do need concentration. You need concentration even when you are driving. Well above all when you are driving.

But having said that there probably are more specialised situations which you need from time to time, just to keep your five spiritual faculties healthy. Well you need pujas from time to time. You need meditation. You may need meditation retreats, well you will need meditation retreats. You will need study. So I'm not saying that you won't need recourse to those things. But I think what I am doing is trying to point out that you can't make too absolute a contrast between your Windhorse life-style and as it were those other things. You can no doubt develop all of them within the Windhorse life-style, at least to a good extent. But that doesn't preclude, perhaps needing even, other situations outside. Or perhaps within the broader Windhorse framework. Because the Windhorse framework does provide for periods of meditation and study doesn't it. So if you take Right Livelihood in that broader sense, I suppose it can be a complete path, if you take it in that broader sense.

...

I have said in the past that the daily meditation practice, the weekly chapter meeting and the yearly one month retreat or one month of retreats [...] I take this as standard, or you might even say minimum. People could do more of different things obviously. Well there is the fact that we do live in the world. And there is the point that we don't have a full time monastic order, in the sense of a monastic order supported by others who work, which is the Theravada pattern. So of course in the case of Windhorse Trading, well in the case of all Team Based Right Livelihood businesses, there is the fact that part of the ideal is to provide a surplus for the Movement. So ideally, in theory, one could cut down, make much less money, have much more time for meditation. But you wouldn't be fulfilling that other objective.

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as a Benedictine or Cistercian monk, you took a vow of stability, which meant that you stayed all your life with one monastery. The monastery was your life, and it provided you with everything. It provided you with companionship. There was also the Liturgy. There was study for those who were able to study. They didn't do work, because they had lay-brothers to do the work, which was perhaps a weakness of the system, from a spiritual point of view. But it was a complete situation.

So you could compare Windhorse in a way with that. So perhaps you should think in terms of a vow of stability. You are not going to chop and change, and think in terms of doing other things at other times of your life. But that would presume that Windhorse really did provide you within its broad framework, with everything that a human being needed for pursuing the spiritual path. So perhaps that would mean that there was a provision for a change of work, provision for periods on retreat. But if it did provide all those things, I think there is no reason why someone shouldn't devote himself, I suppose I have to say herself also, to Windhorse Trading for life. And you would only leave it presumably when you were pensioned off. Even then probably you would be a very valued elder, in a sense non-working, in a community, and be looked after. Not this sort of shunted off into a hospital or hospice when you got a bit past it.

So one could certainly look at things in that way. Well that would assume looking at the Windhorse framework being sufficiently broad. I think these days we tend to change too much. I think there is an argument for committing oneself to, not just say the spiritual life in principle, or FWBO, or the Order in principle for life, but even to a particular situation.

...

S: There is also the whole aspect of spiritual friendship, which we have not touched upon. You are all working together. You depend on one another. You rely on one another. And the work situation is very important for developing a more virile kind of spiritual friendship. And that as we know, is a very important aspect of spiritual life itself. I mean some people have come back from meditative situations saying that they felt very lonely in those situations.

...

S: I would say that Windhorse Trading is only one kind of business. It's an export/import business with retail outlets. That's all isn't it. It's a very limited kind of business. So if people want to develop their own visions, I'd rather encourage them to go into quite different areas. We have had successes and failures in the past. I'd really like to see a thriving building business. Because one of the things that I have emphasised is that Right Livelihood needs to be related to basic necessities. And shelter is one of them. So I would like to see a bit of vision and enterprise in that area.

It doesn't have to be the limited field of import/export and retail outlets for the things which Windhorse is dealing with. I don't see the need for that being duplicated. You get on with that. Your country wide or even world wide import/export business. And leave others to develop their visions in other fields. Though I've mentioned this particular one. And one that we have never even thought of touching before, perhaps we should, is agriculture. Organic farming, agricultural communities. We've not even thought about that. Perhaps for certain good reasons. But we haven't. Can you think of

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any other businesses that might be set up? Well we have got the restaurants and whole food shops.

...

S: Well I think things are better as they are frankly. Also I think there have been in the past some illusions round about Right Livelihood, in the sense of Team Based Right Livelihood. This is what we used to call Co-ops. People used to think that they were easy options. That a Co-op was a place where you did a certain amount of work with a nice friendly atmosphere. There wasn't much pressure. You got a good bit of time off. And that was working in a Co-op.

Some people at least have learnt better. But I think it is still an idea that prevails in some quarters. So I think it is good if you have a more high powered centralised business, which keeps alive the real vision. And prevents you know the individual centres, any of them, functioning or trying to function along those sort of lines. Or encouraging people to join on that sort of understanding.

...

S: Well in view of the fact that, unless they are manned entirely by stream entrants, all organisations and Movements will have an in-built tendency to degenerate. So err on the side of adherence to the ideal, if you have to err at all.

...

S: Well according to me, the Buddha himself realised the importance of the economic side of existence. And sketched the bare outline of what Right Livelihood was. But whereas they (words unclear) elaborating the metaphysics. They never bothered to elaborate the Buddha's economics. So that you had the Indian equivalents of maybe Plato and Aristotle, or Hegel and Nietzsche. But you never had the Indian equivalent, or not the Buddhist equivalent, of Adam Smith. In the Indian tradition there was some discussion of economics under the heading of Artha Shastra.

... perhaps in that caste dominated environment, the conception of Right Livelihood couldn't really flourish. It was predetermined.

...

S: Well, I think just taking the sentence as it stands, the statement is quite valid. But I think the difficulty comes in, as you mentioned, when people start adding up, or trying to add up, what they think they need. Perhaps confusing needs with wants or desires. The word 'need' is not really adequate by itself I suppose. Because need for what? Need to live? Or what do you mean by live? Is it just need to survive, need for a decent human life etc, etc. Maybe that needs further defining.

Kuladitya: Because once someone has used that framework. And said this is the list of what I need. Then to challenge it, your challenging what they need. So there is an acceptance somewhere that they really do need those things. Well the person presenting it as their needs, so it makes it quite an emotive issue...

S: Yes, are you to tell me what I need? In other words one really has to establish that there is an objective criterion. That it isn't just subjective. In other words your needs aren't simply what you think you need, necessarily. So what is the objective criterion? I have mentioned, I think several times in the past, the case of bhikkhus... You could take this as a sort of starting point. They were entitled to expect from the lay

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supporters four things; food, shelter, clothing and medicine. The Sarvastivadins later added books. (laughter). In the Buddha's day there were no books, obviously.

...

S: But I don't think it would be good, or even very practical, to have to sit down with every single person and work out with them a list of their needs, and tot up how much it would cost. Just say that this is what we normally give people. If people do need more. And we are satisfied that it is a genuine need, well we can give you that. But you have to agree that it is a genuine need. You can't just take their word for it so to speak. Because they may have strong feelings on the matter. But the feelings may not be very rational.

Satyaloka: That's pretty much the model that we use. We do say that needs aren't worked out in isolation. There has to be a dialogue. We have a basic standard which is your rent, your food etc, etc. But when we do say well, present your needs, you do always get a list covering a whole range of items.

S: I don't think that you need to go into the whole (word unclear). Supposing for the sake of argument, you give someone a support of fifty pounds a week. Well if you take on someone, you give them that automatically. You don't go into how they are to distribute it among their various needs. But if they want more than that, then it has to be gone into.

...

S: Well when wearing your Windhorse hat, you only say what the business can afford. Because even if you have genuine needs, it isn't necessarily able to meet that, in the interest of the business as a whole. So putting on your Windhorse hat you say "well no sorry, we can't support you to that extent". Then putting on your other hat, whatever it is, your personal hat, you say "yes well I really appreciate the fact that you do need that amount of money", so on and so forth. Or you have that particular interest that you want to follow. Someone may want to do a bit of art, and might want to buy very expensive pigment and so on and so forth. You may not be able to stretch to that.

...

That it is a teaching, that we are on the cutting edge in a way, in the Movement, of developing and working out what Right Livelihood is really. I mean your teachings are....

S: ... quite sketchy. Because my expositions of the Eightfold path were very, very early. Some of them even before the FWBO was started. I had to leave something for all of you to work out. (laughter)

Kuladitya: I wonder if there isn't an important matter of principle to do with Buddhism and Right Livelihood. Right Livelihoods as a counter balance to the tendency to indifference and withdrawal.

S: That's true.

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Kuladitya: If Buddhism has tended to withdraw from the world, and especially into monasticism, [then] perhaps now, in the phase it is going [through] in the West, Right Livelihood is a way of bringing it out into the world.

S: Because if in the East, as usually happened, the serious practising Buddhist was the monk. If the monk was supported by the laity, well there would be no incentive for the monk to give thought to the philosophy of Right Livelihood. He would give thought to meditation, the nature of reality, [the] nature of perception [and] cognition, etc. But he wouldn't give thought, he hasn't, he didn't give thought to the question of economics.

1987 Men's Order Convention Questions

Do you still consider that these four factors are suitable bases on which to set up a right livelihood business?

Yes I've no reason to change my views on this subject at all. Perhaps there's one particular aspect which isn't spelled out with sufficient clarity, and that is the need for adequate skills within the right livelihood business. Perhaps that's implied by the fact that the business should generate funds for dharma projects and also should provide its workers with support. Clearly profit has to be made and that profit won't be made without very skilled management. So perhaps if anything is to be added it should be something to the effect that a right livelihood business would be one in which all the skills necessary for the success of the business were present - managerial and other skills. Perhaps - I'm not completely sure of this, but perhaps - that should also be added because we do know that in the past sometimes right livelihood businesses have been set up without adequate knowledge, without adequate equipment, without adequate managerial skills and so on, and therefore the business has not succeeded. Or for other reasons also perhaps, not succeeded as well as it might have done. So perhaps we should give consideration to adding a fifth factor which would embody that particular consideration.

...

'comment upon right livelihood in our businesses as a spiritual practice'. I think that's pretty clear isn't it. If the work is ethical it's a spiritual practice. If the business is generating funds for dharma projects, for dana, obviously that's a spiritual practice. One might even say that if it's providing its workers with support, that's a spiritual practice. It's again a form of dana. And if it provides kalyana mitrata well certainly it's a spiritual practice. It would seem to me that this is really self evident. I don't think I can comment any further on right livelihood businesses as a spiritual practice to any greater extent than that. There is of course this whole question of energy. Getting your energies going through working hard and sitting at the feet of that same great tantric guru, but we've gone over that ground so many times before that I don't think it's really necessary for me to do it all over again.

1993 Dhanakosa Opening Questions

Now, if someone became disillusioned with working in the world and if it was a practical possibility, I'd advise them to take up, I'd advise them to start or join a Team Based Right Livelihood project.

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I have sometimes said in the past that to start a public centre, an FWBO centre, is not difficult. Not very difficult. To start a community, especially a single sex community, is rather more difficult. But it's most difficult to start a Team Based Right Livelihood business. That's the most difficult and the most demanding of all. But it's also perhaps the most worthwhile of all because you, well, in some cases you not only work with other people but you live with those same people and living with them and working with them, you can develop a very close spiritual friendship. If you're living with them in a spiritual community, working with them in a Team Based Right Livelihood project, you can come very, very close to them.

...

What makes the Team is the business objective. That is what has brought you together. So it is not that you put aside the business objective, the success or whatever of the business, in whatsoever terms, in order to work on your relationships within the Team because you work best on your relationships within the Team by all of you, more and more devotedly co-operating for the fulfilment of the aims and objects of the business. The two are not really separate. You can't really distinguish. If you are separating them, to that extent you can say, it's not fully a Team Based Right Livelihood business.

...

I regard the [FWBO] housewife as, in a way, working, you might say, in a Team Based Right Livelihood project, perhaps on a rather small scale, depending on the number of children.

...

Aphorisms

Work

Outer achievements should be expressions of inner abundance, not compensations for inner poverty.

“Work makes the companion “ says Goethe. Therefore if you have no work you have no companion. Those are not companions with whom we merely amuse ourselves.

You learn what it is you are trying to do in the process of trying to do it.

One should try to be too big to be used.

Surely we are very near to heaven if not to Nirvana, if we enjoy our work and if our work is our life.

Unless your work is your meditation, your meditation is not meditation.

Formerly one needed courage to attack institutions. Now one needs courage to defend them- and still more courage to create them.

Work should be an expression of one's life, not simply the means to one's existence.

Sangharakshita on Right Livelihood

Without unremitting effort nothing truly great is ever achieved. All the great artists seem to have been great workers. Perhaps this was because they loved their work.

“A load of sandalwood is still a load,” said the camel.

Ethics

Giving is the natural ,unforced interchange of one’s energy with that of others. In this sense real giving is receiving.

It is easy to forgive people their vices. What is sometimes more difficult is to forgive them their virtues.

Sometimes we think we are being patient when we are only being persistent.

The good is very often the enemy of the best.

We often think people are behaving most characteristically when they are behaving most badly. We often think the same thing about ourselves.

All skilful mental states are essentially progressive. All unskillful mental states have an inherent tendency to deteriorate.

Because one is in a minority of one, it does not necessarily follow that one is more of an individual.

One of the most important aspects of the spiritual life is that one should be aware of the consequences of one’s own actions.

Jewels are produced only by the collision of immense forces.

Metta and Friendship

Metta which is freedom of heart...

One can love people only as far as one understands them, and be ready to love them more when one understands them better.

It is often said that one should have the courage of one’s convictions. Perhaps one should also have the courage of one’s positive emotions.

The only way to avoid hating one’s fellow men is to love them.

Love is no mere flabby sentiment but the vigorous expression of an imaginative identification with other living beings.

Love is a self-giving of person to person- surrender here meaning the complete abandonment of any advantage derived from the power mode

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Personal development is not an easy matter for anyone, and there are times when we must bear with others, just as there are times when they must bear with us.

Honest collision is better than dishonest collusion.

We are usually able to bear much more than we and others think we can.

Sloth is the weight of one's actual existence resisting further evolving.

True time is short but that is no reason for being in a hurry

You can't really commit yourself to something that you know.

1988 National Gathering

Do you have any suggestions for how to practise the Dharma if working in the outside world?

Well practise the Dharma. I'm not quite sure what 'how does one practise the Dharma' means. Practising the Dharma is practising the Dharma. Meditating is meditating. Being mindful is being mindful.

_____ : What I meant by that was I put the Dharma in brackets because really what I mean is if you're working in a co-op you've got people around you who are practising and hopefully your communication applying to everything you're trying to do is orientated towards practice, whereas if you work in the outside world that isn't the case and I wondered if you had any thoughts about that, about ways to help, if you like, integrate what you're doing as a job into becoming part of one's overall practice.

S: It may not be possible in some cases. You have to examine the nature of the work you're doing, because it may to some extent be wrong livelihood. If it's right livelihood, and I think it sometimes can be, even in the outside world, the same difficulty doesn't exist. But if for instance it is a job that involves tremendous stress, you can't really integrate that, except perhaps by doing more meditation in your spare time, in our time off, or at weekends. But I think, very often, working out in the world is in the very nature of things something of a compromise, and therefore it's very difficult to integrate that into your dharmic life. At best perhaps you can just bear it and make sure that it doesn't affect you adversely to too great an extent. I suppose mindfulness is really necessary. Mindfulness, especially with regard to the effect that the work is having on you, and determination in the sense of determination to make sure that it doesn't affect you to too great an extent. Also perhaps one should be prepared to change one's job. Not necessarily change your working in the world to working in a co-op but perhaps to another kind of job, possibly even less well paid, though in the outside world, if one has to work in the outside world.

But I think there is a limit in many cases to the extent to which you can integrate your work in the outside world with your Dharmic life. Very often of course one will be working with people and perhaps one can try to communicate with them, try to enter

Sangharakshita on Right Livelihood

into more friendly relations. That may be very difficult. There was quite a sad story, almost a tragic story, reported in 'Shabda', that is the Order journal, a few months ago where an Order member had written about his experience working on a building site, his experience of the people with whom he was working and it was really quite traumatic, and all he could do in the end was just get out of the situation. He just had to leave the job, it was so bad. So it isn't so easy to think in terms of integrating one's life in the world or one's outside job, into the overall structure of one's Dharma life. Conditions out there can sometimes be very inimical indeed to any kind of spiritual life or spiritual ideal, and this is of course one of the reasons why we do have co-ops, why we do have right livelihood situations.

So he, this particular Order member, could practise the Dharma in the outside world only by leaving that particular job. Unless he was an incarnate bodhisattva I don't see how he could have survived and practised the Dharma working in that particular job situation that he did.