

Buddhism for the Modern World:

The Vision of the FWBO

The main theme of this term is the FWBO. It comprises two short lecture series' and one individual lecture. It begins with *Buddhism For Today and Tomorrow* - a series of lectures Sangharakshita gave in Brighton in 1976 in which he identified four things that the F/WBO has to offer the world (published with the same title.)

A New Buddhist Movement: The Meaning of the FWBO is a three-lecture series Sangharakshita gave in New Zealand in 1979 where he clarifies the distinctions between the individual, the group, and the spiritual community (published as *New Currents in Western Buddhism*.)

The Five Pillars of the FWBO is a lecture that Sangharakshita gave in Manchester on the occasion of FWBO Day, 1991.

Primary Study Material

The primary study material can be found in the following publications - *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow* (units 1-4, Windhorse) and *New Currents in Western Buddhism* (units 5-7, Windhorse), and the lecture 'The Five Pillars of the FWBO' which has been transcribed in the Mitrata *What is the FWBO?* Alternatively, the various lectures are available from www.freebuddhistaudio.com .

from *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*

- 1. A Method of Personal Development.**
- 2. A Vision of Human Existence.**
- 3. The Nucleus of a New Society.**
- 4. A Blueprint for a New World.**

From *New Currents in Western Buddhism: the Inner Meaning of the FWBO*

- 5. The Individual and the World Today**
- 6. Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism.**
- 7. Commitment and Spiritual Community.**

- 8. The Five Pillars of the FWBO**

Suggested Further Reading for Term 4

What is the Sangha? by Sangharakshita
Buddhism for Today by Subhuti (Windhorse)

Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition by Subhuti (Windhorse)
The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism': An Affirmation and a Protest (Windhorse)
Buddhism and the West (L176), Windhorse booklet
Extending the Hand of Fellowship (Windhorse)
 The following lectures by Sangharakshita -
 'A Vision of History' (L136)
 'Authority and the Individual in the New Society' (L137)
 'Buddhist Dawn in the West' (L165)
 'Individuality: True and False' (L85)
 'The Individual and the Spiritual Community' (L89)
 'The Individual, the Group, and the Community' (L91)
 'The Meaning of Spiritual Community' (L122, also found in *Human Enlightenment*)

Study Questions

Unit 1 A Method of Personal Development

1. Why may the responsibility we have for our lives seem like an 'intolerable burden'? Do you experience it this way?
2. In what ways do lower and higher states of consciousness differ?
3. What are the implications of the phrase "His [a person's] fate is in his own hands". How does fate in this sense differ from that associated with a creator deity or 'fatalism'?
4. "When we are truly happy, we tend not to think more than is necessary." Reflect on this remark. Is this your experience? Why do you think this happens?
5. How does "too much thinking" express anxiety? How can meditation address this?
6. What is meant by the terms 'horizontal' and 'vertical' integration?
7. How important do you think the experience of dhyana is in spiritual life? What function does it serve?
8. Reflect on the importance of inspiration in the spiritual life.
9. Each of the stages of the Metta Bhavana involve cultivating positive emotion. In what ways are the stages easier/harder than one another? What are the potential pitfalls in each stage?
10. What is the difference between 'calm' and 'insight'? Why are they both necessary?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of seeing Buddhism as a "method of personal development"?

Unit 2 A Vision of Human Existence

1. a) What are the pros and cons of being a 'faith' or a 'doctrine' follower? Which do you tend towards? Or b) Reflect on the psychological model that divides people into faith and doctrine types. How accurate is it?
2. According to this unit, how are wrong and right view to be distinguished?
3. What is the difference between a prithagjana and an arya?
4. What is the significance of the Buddha's apparent reluctance to teach?
5. Reflect on and summarise the four methods of communication used by the Buddha according to this unit.
6. Give a brief exposition of the principle of universal conditionality. Why is it so important?
7. What is the difference between cyclic and spiral conditionality? Give some examples.
8. Reflect on the twelve links of cyclic conditionality. Can you come up with a contemporary model of the same process? What aspects of experience would you include in it?
9. What is special about the space between the 7th and 8th segments on the wheel of life?

Unit 3 The Nucleus of a New Society

1. Why did Sangharakshita establish the FWBO?
2. Do you think that one must be a vegetarian to be a Buddhist?
3. What are the criteria for joining the Western Buddhist Order?
4. 'Going for Refuge is the central act of the Buddhist life.' What does this mean?
5. What is the significance of the private ordination into the WBO?
6. What is the significance of the public ordination into the WBO?
7. 'Thus it is no longer possible to call the Western Buddhist Order a lay order, any more than it can be called a monastic order.' Why is this?
8. What are the differences between a 'group' and a 'society of individuals'?
9. Why do you think the FWBO has been set up as a collection of autonomous charities?
10. Why did you ask to become a Mitra? What do you the significance of this level of involvement is?

Unit 4 A Blueprint for a New Society

1. Is cultivating dissatisfaction a good or bad thing?
2. "Buddhism delineates general principles but leaves the specific application of the principles to the individual." What qualities does this imply the 'individual' must have?

3. What factors of modern life are conducive or detrimental to "right livelihood"?
4. 'The spiritual community is not a power structure. It is not based on coercion, or on the authority of one person over another.' What then is it based on? What holds it together?
5. What kind of political system would best favour spiritual development? Give some reasons for your conclusion.
6. How should an embryonic "New Society" relate to its surrounding "old society"?
7. What might the spiritual benefits of a team-based 'right livelihood' venture be?
8. Do you believe the creation of a new society is realistic? Explain your view.

Unit 5 The Individual and the World Today

1. What are the distinguishing features of a 'group'? Which are positive and which are negative?
2. Identify and comment on the contrasting qualities of the 'individual' and the 'group member'.
3. What issues are likely to determine the relationship between 'the group' and 'the true individual'?
4. Ideally, how should the group relate to the individual?
5. In what way is it "very difficult for the individual to survive nowadays". What dangers threaten the individual?
6. How is the individual to be protected? Why can political and economic initiatives not resolve this problem?
7. The Buddha's 'Going Forth from the group' was very literal. What does 'going forth' mean for us today?
8. What is the significance of the Buddha's statement that 'I am only a shower of the way'?
9. Why is there 'no such thing as heresy' in Buddhism?

Unit 6 Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism

1. What is the difference between being an individual and being an individualist?
2. Does the notion of 'the individual' contradict the doctrine of anatta/anatman? Explain your response.
3. What are the implications of The Buddha's answer to Maha Prajapati's question? What are the positive and negative aspects of such criteria for identifying the Dharma?
4. Reflect and comment on the meaning of The Parable of the Rain Cloud.

5. If artists such as Mozart and Blake are not Enlightened, how can they be of value in our spiritual lives? Should we rely only on directly Buddhist teachings for inspiration?
6. If the FWBO draws inspiration from all sorts of non-Buddhist sources, why does it retain the label Buddhist?
7. Reflect and comment on the distinction between Eastern culture and Buddhism. Please offer examples.
8. Identify some of the potential dangers in adopting Eastern forms of Buddhist practice.
9. The FWBO draws from many different sources. Why then is it not eclectic?
10. Is the FWBO trying to create a Western Buddhism? If so is this a good thing?

Unit 7 Commitment and Spiritual Community

1. 'Going for Refuge is really the central act of the Buddhist life.' Reflect and comment on this statement.
2. What are the principal characteristics of a spiritual community? How is a spiritual community different from a group?
3. Examine the reasons given as to why those with an interest in Buddhism did not think in terms of commitment and spiritual community before the founding of the WBO.
4. In what way does having an 'Order' at the heart of the FWBO make it different from other organizations?
5. How are we to prevent the 'devaluation' of Going for Refuge in our time?
6. Why is commitment primary and lifestyle secondary? Examine some of the implications this might have for one's approach to spiritual life.
7. How is *genuine* monasticism different from formal monasticism?
8. What is the 'positive group'? Can you think of examples?
9. All the individual FWBO Centres are autonomous. Why do you think this organisational structure has been chosen?
10. Within the FWBO, what does becoming a Mitra represent? Please answer from personal experience.

Unit 8 The Five Pillars of the FWBO

1. In this unit, Sangharakshita identifies five pillars of the FWBO but suggests there may be more. If there were a sixth pillar what do you think it would be and why?
2. What does Sangharakshita mean by 'ideas', and how/why are they important? Give examples of 'ideas' in Buddhism.

3. Why does Sangharakshita suggest that we need to emphasise Ideas more? Do you agree?
4. Why, in addition to ideas, do we need practices? Reflect on and then explain how spiritual practices work.
5. In terms of practices, what do you think our strengths/weaknesses are in the FWBO? What could be done about it?
6. Identify and reflect on some of the differences between mundane and spiritual institutions.
7. Why are Institutions important in the FWBO? Give examples.
8. Why is experimentation an important part of spiritual life?
9. What conditions are necessary to conduct a meaningful experiment in a spiritual context?
10. What is imagination? What is the purpose/role of this Pillar in the FWBO?

This material was originally compiled by Nagapriya for the distance-learning version of the Mitra Study Course and has subsequently been edited and updated by Saccanama.