

## Why a *Sangharakshita Complete Works*?!

### 17 objections - and Kalyanaprabha's responses...

**Objection #1:** What's the point of a *Complete Works*? Bhante's teachings are all online for free on *freebuddhistaudio*.

**Reply:** Actually they are not all there by any means. FBA offers transcriptions of many of Bhante's lectures and seminars, but they are not edited. *Some* of Bhante's books are available as free-but-awkward PDFs on his website, and others (though not all) as paid eBooks from Windhorse. And we are discovering new pieces written by him that have never been published or which were published decades ago and have long since gone out of circulation. There is another thing you may not know about the *Complete Works* project. At the moment searching for what Bhante has said on a particular theme is quite haphazard. The *Complete Works* will be fully indexed - a huge job of course - and the digital version will be fully searchable. When someone asks 'now where did Bhante say ....' or 'what was the context in which he said....' it will be easy to find.

**Objection #2:** Well then, why not just add anything out of print or that hasn't been published to what's available on the internet? It won't cost anything and if everything is digital it makes them easily searchable.

**Reply:** Actually to prepare the texts for publishing on the internet requires much the same work as preparing them for publication as a book so it isn't free! And while we do want to have Bhante's work available digitally and searchable, we principally want to have them available as books.

**Objection #3:** But nobody reads books these days!

**Reply:** In fact lots of people still read books and prefer to read (and annotate) them to reading things on screen. But the vision for the *Complete Works* project has to extend far beyond what a few of us like doing now in 2015 here, say, in the UK. We're inviting people to really stretch their imaginations to see the significance of this project.

**Objection #4:** I can't really see its significance. Why are we making such a big deal of it?

**Reply:** OK - let's see if I can communicate the vision I can see. In the first place I am aware of how important Bhante thinks it is to publish a *Complete Works*. He has put it as a number one priority in terms of what he would like for his 90th birthday (along with translations). Of course some people might wonder in a corner of their minds whether this is merely a 'vanity project' of an old man coming to the end of his life. But I think we can rest assured, based on all we know of Bhante and the thrust of his whole life, that his concern to have the *Complete Works* published has nothing to do with vanity.

Right from the age of eighteen, there is one theme - one central theme - that never changes: to communicate the Dharma. Read what he wrote in his first published article (it's in *Early Writings*) and there it is already. His articles and lectures in India all those years, all his extraordinary output in the 1950's and

then in the 1960's until the present day in the West. Bhante is beating the drum of the Dharma and he wants it heard all over the world, not just now but far into the future as well. The internet is not as stable as books. If we are thinking of conserving and preserving, books are a far better bet.

**Objection #5:** But isn't that just Bhante - he doesn't use the internet - he's a bibliophile!

**Reply:** He certainly is a bibliophile but he also has his own website and is well aware of the internet. I don't think this is a mere matter of Bhante's personal preference. Bhante - who is very careful with money by the way - sees this project as worth putting such a large sum of money into. Bhante may be seeing something others do not yet see. We have many, many examples of Bhante having seen the importance of something which others are not at all keen on and only afterwards come to appreciate. Adhithana is one!

**Objection #6:** OK, but why a *Complete Works*? Why not just keep half a dozen of his most popular titles - surely between them they cover the basics of the Dharma. Lots of what Bhante wrote isn't relevant any more.

**Reply:** I don't agree with that! Just because something isn't popular doesn't mean it isn't relevant! And just because something isn't popular today in this place, doesn't mean it won't be relevant to some people in another place at another time. We are talking here about imagining something much bigger than we are used to, perhaps especially in the UK where it is so easy to take the Order and movement for granted as it is relatively large these days. We are talking about conserving Bhante's teaching for future generations. And one of the things that is extraordinary about Bhante's teaching is that it is so multi-dimensional. He is able to speak so many different kinds of languages, the conceptual and the mythical, he can tell stories and he can explain with the sharpest philosophical acumen. And he is able to bring the Dharma into so many different spheres of human life and make it relevant. In the Order today we still have with us the living teacher and many Order members who have had contact with him, many have had substantial contact with him. But future generations will only have his teachings and we want them to have as much of Bhante as possible because we don't know what will speak to them.

**Objection #7:** OK - but why does it cost so much? You're asking for £100,000! Surely there are far more urgent things for this money to go on.

**Reply:** It is fundraising lore that raising money for one project doesn't stop people giving to another if they are inspired by another! As to why it costs so much - well a quarter of it (£25k) is going to support editing over five years - the editors are giving much of their time for free but one of them needs some support to do this work; and then there are Windhorse Publications' costs of production, sales, marketing, customer service, storage and distribution; a subsidy of 100 hardback sets to donate to major Buddhist movements, national and university libraries round the world; and finally £15k towards translation work.

**Objection #8:** But I'm still not sure this is the project we should be concentrating on now. There are other more urgent matters for the movement.

Why not leave this until after Bhante has died - leave it for future generations who will be motivated to gather Bhante's teachings.

**Reply:** There are three very good reasons for doing it now. One: Bhante is alive and can still be involved, commenting and making editorial decisions. Two and three: Vidyadevi and Kalyanaprabha, the two editors, are also still alive. Both have both worked closely with Bhante and have his confidence - they know his 'style', they are sensitive to the way Bhante's mind works in literary matters and he is able to work directly with them.

**Objection #9:** But is it really so important for Bhante to have a say at this stage?

**Reply:** Bhante is extremely careful about what he lets pass under his name. He knows only too well how easily words can be twisted and the truth lost. While he is still able to comment it is possible to check things with him so that the *Complete Works* will be a definitive collection: this is Sangharakshita.

**Objection #10:** So really the *Complete Works* is just for future generations. It's us practising metta and dana! It's not really going to be so important for us?

**Reply:** I love the idea of us practising dana and metta towards future generations by bringing out the *Complete Works* now and sending them all over the world. But of course they are important for us too. Some people are looking forward to gathering the new, beautifully produced volumes as they come out over the next few years and making them part of their shrine, as objects of devotion - which is quite traditional of course.

**Objection #11:** Books are to be read! Not to be worshipped.

**Reply:** OK, not everyone likes the idea of books as objects of devotion. And of course books are to be read! And of course this project is for us too. As disciples of Bhante we need to immerse ourselves in his teachings. It's not a matter of read it once - or even twice. I think Aloka has been talking about this - the importance of reading Bhante over and over and over again. We forget the Dharma so quickly - we are surrounded by a sea - an ocean - of non-dharmic views - we need to come back to our teacher and enter into his world-view based on the Dharma. I think literally having his books on the shelf already helps, and then turning to them again and again and again.

**Objection #12:** But we all know what Bhante taught!

**Reply:** Do we? One hears Order members saying all sorts of things and not all of them are Bhante's teachings by any means. Few people are gifted with a memory that doesn't fade. Most of us need to go back again and again to the source: what did he *actually* say? And some will want to explore widely what our teacher said at different times in different ways - all that helps to bring us into a 'way of seeing' life and the world, which is what all his teaching is trying to communicate.

**Objection #13:** So it's all the same books being brought out in new covers?

**Reply:** Partly it's that, yes, not just new covers, but additional explanatory notes checked with Bhante, new Prefaces explaining when and where each text was written, giving the context of how it came to be, and its publication history.

**Objection #14:** And that's it?

**Reply:** No! there is also a substantial amount of new material mainly in the form of articles that were published in various magazines and journals, as well as edited lectures, especially those given in India.

**Objection #15:** Will they add anything new?

**Reply:** Yes! You might be interested in Bhante's LSD trip which he describes in *1970 - A Retrospect* (that's a memoir about his early visits to France and his year teaching at Yale university. Did you know he spent a year in the States?)

**Objection #16:** I didn't actually. That is quite interesting. Anything else?

**Reply:** There is *A Bird's Eye View of Indian Buddhism*, and several other articles surveying Buddhism in India which is going to be of great interest especially to Indian Buddhists working to re-establish the Dhamma in India.

**Objection #17:** So the new stuff is mainly lectures and articles?

**Reply:** Other things too: there will be unpublished poems - there are even poems written since Bhante arrived at Adhithana - and some short stories such as 'Two Roses' and 'The Antique Dealer'.

*Does that answer your concerns?!*

*Kalyanaprabha  
July 2015*