

Analysis of Criticisms Levelled at the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, with Particular Reference to Claims Made in Relation to Activities at the FWBO's Dublin Buddhist Centre

Since the publication of the Guardian article and the 'FWBO Files' in 1997 (<http://www.fwbo-files.com/>), the FWBO have been the subject of frequent suspicion and criticism. In response to this, the FWBO have stated at various places that safeguards have been put in place so that abusive behaviour perpetrated by a number of senior figures in the past cannot again be replicated¹. This document will analyse the content of recent correspondence received by Dialogue Ireland, a trust set up by representatives of the various Churches in Ireland to help inform people about the activities of cults and new religious movements in the country (See appendix 1). The correspondence which makes reference to the Order, in particular its Dublin Buddhist Centre, is analysed to determine whether those safeguards are extant and effective. Where relevant, it will also compare behaviour cited in the correspondence to a list of characteristics associated with groups and organisations that demonstrate cultic behaviour set out in a US publication, 'Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships' by Janja Lalich and Madeleine Tobias², along with Steven Hassan's 'Combating Cult Mind Control'³, as well as the 'FWBO Files' itself.

Section 1: An explanation of the disassociative process used to facilitate abuse in the FWBO

The 'FWBO Files' makes the assertion that the process of abuse in the FWBO was facilitated by familiarising adherents with a thought process, purportedly Buddhist, (though not locatable in any of the orthodox Buddhist traditions), which gradually leads adherents to break away from extant social mores and subsequently conform to behavioural patterns peculiar to the FWBO and, particularly, to facilitate sexual abuse by its senior members.

In order to disassociate prospective members from their existing social context and to facilitate sexual abuse, the Files alleged a four stage process of indoctrination was fabricated by Sangharakshita and his subordinates, in the guise of Buddhist doctrine. These four stages are:

- Adherence to the idea of the existence of Higher and Lower Beings;
- Acknowledgement of the spiritual inferiority of women;
- Belief in the inferiority of the family as a ground for the development of those qualities necessary for progress on the Path to Enlightenment;

¹ See for example, Kulananda's letter of response to the Guardian article at <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/Guardian.htm>

² (Berkeley: Bay Tree Publishing, 2006).

³ (Vermont: Park Street Press, 2001)

- Engagement in the homosexual act with elder ‘mentors’, so as to transcend ‘conditioning’ and lead one to the enlightened state⁴

Higher and lower beings: the theory of higher and lower evolution

The Files and the ‘Response to the FWBO’s Response’ (‘R2R’) argue that, on the basis of a scant understanding of Buddhist philosophy, a penchant for the works of Nietzsche, and a knowledge of the Nazi interpretation of the term ‘Arya’, Sangharakshita misconstrued the concept of Arya Pudgala⁵ and, on the basis of this misconstruing, has formulated a pseudo-Buddhist philosophy.

This philosophy is based on ideas of beings evolving through a ‘spiritual hierarchy’ (a term unheard of in Buddhist circles), in an ‘evolution’ from lower to higher states of being. As the Files pointed out, this is not reminiscent of any Buddhist ideology, since the Buddha's teaching advocates the transcendence of consciousness rather than its transformation and the idea of higher beings is in fact a replication of Nietzsche’s concept of *ubermensch*.

Such concepts, if assimilated, create a state of mind remarkably akin to that outlined in Hassan⁶. Under the heading ‘Elitist Mentality’ Hassan states:

‘Members are made to feel part of an elite corps of mankind... being special...As a community, they feel they have been chosen to lead mankind...into a new age of enlightenment...’

‘The rank-and-file member is humble before superiors and potential recruits but arrogant to outsiders’.

This sense of being a member of a select group facilitates the withdrawal of potential recruits from their normal social context, so as to become members of that new elite. Lalich and Tobias observe:

*Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group’.*⁷

Acknowledgement of the spiritual inferiority of women

Both stage 2 and 3 of the indoctrination process are designed to disassociate male recruits from their normal sexual and social context. Stage 2 in the indoctrination process is to alienate male recruits from female associates. This first part involves developing a sense

⁴ <http://www.fwbo-files.com/FWBOFiles/fwbofiles.htm> See: The Doctrines of Sangharakshita and the FWBO

⁵ The Tibetan translation of this phrase is. ‘Phags pa'i Gang zag’ which actually *does* translate as ‘higher being’, though signifying something far beyond dualistic concepts of ‘high’ and ‘low’. For a full explanation see <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/fwbofiles.htm#hilow>

⁶ Above cit (3) p80

⁷ http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm

of the inferiority of women and the creation of an image of them as holding one back from achieving one's spiritual goals.

In 1995 the FWBO published 'Women, Men and Angels'⁸ by Subhuti. The controversial work, which outlined Sangharakshita's views on women, and which was publicly denounced by FWBO seniors soon after the FWBO Files highlighted its content, (though it still remains available), asserts that:

- Women are anchored in a "*lower evolution*" than men;
- Women have less "*spiritual aptitude*" than men;
- Men are better able to actualize their potential for enlightenment than women;
- Men are more likely to take up the spiritual life in a fuller sense than women;
- Men surpass women in their commitment to spiritual life;
- The domination of men by women is not historical fact but myth.

For males, such ideas, if assimilated, can clearly act as a basis for the development of misogynistic, sexist attitudes, indeed the FWBO admit in their Response that said consequences have occurred⁹. Moreover, as well as creating a negative attitude toward females, such ideas have the effect of simultaneously propelling male individuals towards the safety and sanctity of 'spiritual relationships' with other men.

It may be that, post 'Files', the FWBO have acted to prevent the 'misinterpretation' of Sangharakshita's words so as to prevent the development of further misogynistic, sexist attitudes within the Order. The following insert which appeared, somewhat briefly at the FWBO Wikipedia entry, in June 2007, before being 'edited out' by an FWBO apologist for being 'too emotionally charged' however, casts doubt over this:

*'It is worth noting that in 2007 an air of unrest remains within the FWBO. Charges of Sexism within the movement have continued to circulate, and in the UK Manchester Buddhist Center, female workers have felt the need to leave their employment at the Center due to the sexist and exclusive attitudes they feel they experienced. There are still perhaps paradoxical elements within the FWBO between the dogma of compassion and ethics, and the actual actions of its members, that are yet to be resolved.'*¹⁰

Whether Buddhism itself sees women as inferior is a moot point. Theravada Buddhist scriptures speak of the disadvantages of relationships with women solely in the context of discourses addressed to monks or 'bhikkhus'. Discourses addressed to laymen such as the Sigalovada Sutta outlined the importance of cherishing one's wife, on the other hand. Moreover, in the Tibetan tantric tradition, women are considered to be superior to men. A

⁸ Windhorse Publications Birmingham 1995 ISBN 0 904766 75 6

<http://www.amazon.com/Women-Men-Angels-Dharmachari-Subhuti/dp/0904766756>

⁹ 'This is not to say that some people might not have experienced misogyny within the FWBO, or that misogynistic attitudes have never been held by individuals in the FWBO, and there may have been those who have left the FWBO for these reasons'-<http://response.fwbo.org/fwbo-files/response25.html>

¹⁰ See the FWBO Wikipedia Page Edit History by 'Gratrix' 01:14 5 June 2007 The insert was almost immediately edited out (in less than 8 hours) by an FWBO sympathizer, 'Andkaha' for being too 'highly charged and without a cited source' The fact that 'Gratrix' may well have been speaking from personal experience was not taken into account.

root tantric vow admonishes devotees to ‘See all women as Buddha’; no converse admonition to see all males as Buddha exists.

Upon examination, it becomes clear that Sangharakshita’s approach makes two fundamental mistakes:

- It misinterprets the significance of the teachings addressed to monks as being critical solely of females, whereas, in fact, they are to aid renunciates, male and female, in the process of detaching themselves from the world;
- It then addresses those teachings towards a lay audience rather than one of renunciate monks.

Belief in the inferiority of the family as a ground for the development of those qualities necessary for progress on the Path to Enlightenment

These fundamental mistakes are carried over into Sangharakshita’s teachings on the family. The Order’s Response to the FWBO Files (‘The Response’) declares, for example: *‘The Buddha of the Pali Canon speaks of family life as ‘narrow, dusty, imprisoning’, and urges his followers to go forth from it, if they can.’*¹¹ The footnotes to the same section, inserted to justify the FWBO stance on relationships on the basis of scripture quote the Buddha as stating:

‘Bhikkhus, there are two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth... Wife and children are subject to birth... These objects of attachment are subject to birth; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them, and utterly committed to them, being himself subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth.’

The important word here is the opener; ‘Bhikkhus’, something that Sangharakshita *et al* seem to have overlooked. As stated above these teachings are *specifically* designed for monks and nuns who wish to live a renunciate lifestyle outside of ordinary society. The previous cited passage from the Pali Canon also opens with the word ‘Bhikkhus’. Had Sangharakshita sought out Buddhist teachings for his new form of ‘Buddhism’, supposedly designed specifically to help those choosing to live a Buddhist lifestyle in contemporary society in the 21st century, one would have thought he might have referred to the Sigalovada Sutta¹² or the Mangala Sutta, both discourses being addressed to those

¹¹ <http://response.fwbo.org/fwbo-files/response29.html>

¹² "In five ways, young householder, a child should minister to his parents as the **East**:

- (i) Having supported me I shall support them,
- (ii) I shall do their duties,
- (iii) I shall keep the family tradition,
- (iv) I shall make myself worthy of my inheritance,
- (v) furthermore I shall offer alms in honor of my departed relatives.

who chose to practice the Buddha's teaching without abandoning their ordinary way of life. The Mangala Sutta, for instance, declares:

*'Support for one's parents,
Assistance to one's wife and children,
Consistency in one's work:
This is the highest protection.*

*Giving, living in rectitude,
Assistance to one's relatives,
Deeds that are blameless:
This is the highest protection.'*

The Sigalovada Sutta contains a complete code of discipline for family members. It certainly does not attempt to discourage 'Householders' as they are referred to, to abandon the family way of life. Rather, the Sutta provides advice on how to create a proper basis for the practice of Buddhism while maintaining one's relationships and living an ordinary existence within society, as do the majority of people who go to the FWBO to find out how to make sense of their lives using Buddhist principles. However, these fundamental lay Buddhist scriptures are overlooked and instead, those teachings spoken to monks have formed the basis for Sangharakshita's teaching on the family.

Nowadays, the FWBO portray themselves as a 'family friendly' movement¹³ and all of the problems for the Order arising out of Sangharakshita's 'Buddhist' teaching on the

"In five ways, young householder, the parents thus ministered to as the **East** by their children, show their compassion: (Continued over)

- (i) they restrain them from evil,
- (ii) they encourage them to do good,
- (iii) they train them for a profession,
- (iv) they arrange a suitable marriage,
- (v) at the proper time they hand over their inheritance to them.

"In five ways, young householder, should a wife as the **West** be ministered to by a husband

- (i) by being courteous to her,
- (ii) by not despising her,
- (iii) by being faithful to her,
- (iv) by handing over authority to her,
- (v) by providing her with adornments.

"The wife thus ministered to as the **West** by her husband shows her compassion to her husband in five ways:

- (i) she performs her duties well,
 - (ii) she is hospitable to relations and attendants¹⁰
 - (iii) she is faithful,
 - (iv) she protects what he brings,
 - (v) she is skilled and industrious in discharging her duties.
- (<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>)

¹³ <http://fwbo.org/fwbo/children.html>

family having seemingly been resolved. In the past though, the FWBO encouraged the undermining and abolition of heterosexual, nuclear family relationships, since these keep individuals "*all very much on the animal level*" and are "*a really massive source of conditioning*". Sangharakshita believes that heterosexual couples engaged in the creation and caring for such a family are "*the enemy of the spiritual community*"; in one publication they are described as "*the enemy to be destroyed*".

Families, according to Sangharakshita's writings, are breeding grounds for child sexual abuse, which, he claims, is "*a feature of the nuclear family.*" He therefore recommends that FWBO followers create a '*new society*' of '*higher beings*' by setting up single sex communities as a direct antidote to the nuclear family since, "*the single sex community is probably our most powerful means of assault on the existing social set up*" for, "*If you set up such communities, you abolish the family at a stroke.*"¹⁴

In a response to criticisms of the FWBO's teachings on the family in the "Face to Faith" column in *The Guardian*, 28/11/97, Vishvapani commented:

'Suggesting that some conditions are more favourable for spiritual practice can be misunderstood as a dogmatic rejection of the alternatives. [This] misunderstanding gives rise to a genuine difficulty within the FWBO itself. People with families can be left feeling marginalised, or implicitly criticized, even if this is not intended —and the FWBO is currently grappling with the challenge of finding ways to include people with families while still valuing the benefits of communal living.'

In their list of characteristics associated with cultic groups, Lalich and Tobias¹⁵ identify the fact that: '*Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.*' Hassan points out that, in cults, in order to create a new identity: (a '*higher being*' ?): '*family must be abandoned...The group now forms the member's 'true' family; any other is just his outmoded, 'physical' family*'.¹⁶

While Sangharakshita's teachings on the family and relationships are still propagated by the FWBO¹⁷, they simultaneously claim to have redressed the 'misinterpretations' of his views that gave rise to the image of the Order as being anti-family in the past. It remains to be seen whether the experience outlined in the correspondence received by Dialogue Ireland will demonstrate that this is the case.¹⁸

¹⁴ See <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/fwbofiles.htm#family> for all supporting references

¹⁵ Above cit (2)

¹⁶ Above cit (3) p71

¹⁷ All of the publications and transcripts from which Sangharakshita's quotes are taken are still available via their publishing wing and/or online.

¹⁸ It should be borne in mind that, whether or not these teachings continue to be widely propagated, the issue is rather one of whether such still hold currency in the minds of FWBO seniors. Since the vast majority of senior Order members in positions of power at present, were members of the FWBO when these ideas were widely held, it would be somewhat disingenuous to suggest that such concepts have been abandoned. Some might argue that the motivation for such a radical 'change of attitude' would be more appropriately located on the benches at Westminster rather than within the upper echelons of any reputable Buddhist organization.

Engagement in the homosexual act with elder ‘mentors’, so as to transcend ‘conditioning’ and lead one to the enlightened state

Since none of the allegations expressed in the correspondence received by Dialogue Ireland concern male-to-male sexual abuse, an outline of the underlying philosophy which facilitates such abuse seems inappropriate at this point. However, in order that the reader fully understands the process of indoctrination, an explanation of the culmination of it appears here.

Subhuti’s paper to ‘The Conference on the Ordination Process for Men’, published in the Order magazine *Shabda* in September 1986, stated:

‘It seems that, within the context of the spiritual community at least, sexual interest on the part of a male order member for a male mitra can create a connection which may allow kalyana mitrata to develop. Some, of course, are predisposed to this attraction, others have deliberately chosen to change their sexual preferences in order to use sex as a medium of kalyana mitrata - and to stay clear of the dangers of male-female relationships without giving up sex. Many people do not feel able to do this - whether as a result of taboo or reluctance to give up a conditioned predisposition’.

Elsewhere, he declares ‘Some people might decide to keep clear of unhealthy attachment by happily enjoying a number of different sexual relationships’¹⁹

Again, during an FWBO study seminar on the Sutta-Nipata, Sangharakshita declared.²⁰

‘I sometimes say that there are two kinds of sexuality: neurotic and non-neurotic. The non-neurotic is when there is sexual activity, not through any need for security, - for example, through sex, or through the "relationship", - but just because you are young and healthy....Neurotic sexuality is where there is not only the actual sexual urge, but also an infantile craving for security, contact, warmth, and so on, through sexual relationship or activity.’

Setting aside any intent to prove that these ideas helped facilitate male-to-male sexual abuse, it is more relevant at this juncture to use them to demonstrate the type of sex that is being advocated: ‘casual’ or ‘committed’.

While casual sex with a number of partners leads one away from the cycle of suffering, it is committed sex based on ‘an infantile craving for security, contact, warmth, and so on’ which binds one to it. Such sex is an expression of ‘neurotic sexuality’ and has the potential to trap adherents in what the FWBO founder describes as a situation which is “all very much on the animal level”,²¹ part of the ‘lower evolution’. Thus, while committed sex maintains one’s status as a ‘lower being’ ensnared in the ‘lower evolution’, casual sex transforms one in to a ‘higher being’ dwelling in the ‘higher evolution’. As the ‘R2R’ point out these underlying concepts of higher and lower beings are mirror images of Nietzsche’s ‘unter’ and ‘ubermensch’²² and they are employed by

¹⁹ <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/Guardian.htm>

²⁰ Published in ‘Peace is a Fire’, Windhorse 1979, p 66 and also in *Mitrata* 2, p 19

²¹ Tiratana Vandana seminar, (1978) Sangharakshita, FWBO *Ola Leaves*

²² <http://www.fwbo-files.com/r2r.htm> ‘Sangharakshita and Nietzsche’

Sangharakshita and the FWBO as fundamental aspects of the philosophy underlying the FWBO's goal of the creation of a 'New Society'.²³

Combining the two doctrines, it requires little analysis to arrive at the conclusion that what is being advocated here is the idea that casual gay sex with a number of partners can help one progress along the path to enlightenment, whereas any sex motivated by 'infantile craving for security, contact, warmth, and so on' does not. 'Happily enjoying a number of different sexual relationships', according to Subhuti, helps individuals 'keep clear of unhealthy attachment', attachment or 'craving' being the very cause of all of the different sufferings associated, from the Buddhist perspective, with uncontrolled death and rebirth into the cycle of suffering.

Clearly, casual sex, straight or gay, as the path to enlightenment is not an aspect of Buddhist teaching. One can perhaps trace such behaviour back to the philosophy of pre-hedonistic Cyrenaicism (4th and 3rd centuries B.C.E); latterly, such behaviour has become associated with practice in satanic cults. Perhaps the most infamous example of such behaviour observed in recent times was in the pseudo-Christian cult, the Family²⁴. Hassan identifies such advice as an example of 'emotional control', the third of the four principal components of mind control.²⁵

FWBO seniors argue that the idea of gay sex as a spiritual path is an outdated idea that had its heyday in the 1970s and 80s and no longer holds any stead amongst Order members. Contradicting this, in June 1998, Order member Maitreyabandhu wrote:

*I wanted to talk about homosexuality and how it can have clear spiritual benefits and advantages over heterosexuality, and how such an idea is not like seventies furniture - once fashionable, now clearly silly as some Shabda reportings in have suggested - but a persuasively arguable point and in many cases true.*²⁶

In June 2007, Maitreyabandhu still held a senior position teaching meditation at the FWBO's flagship London Buddhist Centre.²⁷

Section 2: An analysis of the criticisms of the FWBO with particular reference to the perceived ethos said to pervade the organisation's Dublin Buddhist Centre

Section 1 of the present document looked at the various phases of the disassociative process that the 'FWBO Files' asserts is used to facilitate abuse in the FWBO. Section 2

²³ Above cit (2) : 'The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity)'.

'The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society'.

²⁴ <http://rickcross.com/reference/family/family47.html>
<http://www.rickcross.com/reference/family/family10.html>

²⁵ Above cit (3) p 59-67

²⁶ <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/ShabShort.htm>

²⁷ <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/HEALTH/06/11/pl.meditation.main/>

will analyse the content of two documents²⁸, one received by Dialogue Ireland and the other published on the internet.²⁹ Using the headings in section 1 as a template, an attempt will be made to show how the criticisms expressed in those two documents appear to demonstrate that the controversial ideas that the FWBO stand accused of harbouring and propagating are still influential in establishing a cult-like ethos at the organisation's Dublin Buddhist Centre (Formerly, the Dublin Meditation Centre). In some cases, these criticisms are applicable in more than one of these four categories; where such is the case, they will be repeated.

Since some of the criticisms expressed in the document do not fall within these four categories, section 2 ends with a list of miscellaneous criticisms which have been cross referenced with the two documents expressing the views of the cult awareness fraternity listed in the introduction to this document.

It should be noted that much of the language in these quotes is highly emotive. However, to expect dispassion from persons who are still in the very midst of intense emotions such as grief, to the extent that they appear to be on the verge of illness, is simultaneously cold and idealistic. The very fact that they are in this condition after recent contact with the Order could be taken as indicating that the effects of this contact have been less than helpful. The reader should attempt to draw out the significance of their comments on the basis of having understood section 1 of this document; in that way, it should be possible to discern the allegations that lie beneath the emotive language and reach a conclusion as to whether the FWBO has learned from its mistakes and changed (as its representatives suggest) or whether those attitudes which have culminated in disastrous consequences for so many in the past remain.

The FWBO and spiritual arrogance: Higher and lower beings and the theory of the higher and lower evolutions

- *'Over a two year period I was systematically marginalised and excluded from FWBO activities even to the point of being ignored in my own home as FWBO members ate our food'.*
- *'After a heartbreaking two years of lies, manipulations and clandestine activities our family was broken and dissolved with members of the order coming to our home to remove Paola's and my children's belongings'.*
- *'There is no respect for the family unit'.*
- *'Mothers and partners and children are shown no respect'.*
- *'He told me personally about the lack of respect shown to his relationship and to his female partner'*

²⁸ See appendix 1 & 2

²⁹ <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/81076> See comment entitled 'Corruption' by Brimstone.

- *'there are families and children and, in some instances, dying relatives left in very emotional states because of these self absorbed zealots'*
- *'I spoke to the brother of a young man actively involved in the Order and his family is at their wit's end. They are SO concerned about him - and they are by no means big Catholics. I do not think they are even Christian. They say his he has become emotionless and insensitive'*

FWBO Sexism and Misogyny: Acknowledgement of the spiritual inferiority of women

- *'Mothers...are shown no respect'*
- *'He told me personally about the lack of respect shown to...his female partner'*
- *'A man who had requested ordination withdrew his request after recognising how little support he got as his mother was dying'*
- *'Many women are indirectly experiencing the fallout from Sangharakshita's obvious disrespect for females'*

FWBO Anti-family doctrines: Belief in the inferiority of the family as a ground for the development of those qualities necessary for progress on the Path to Enlightenment

- *'it was immediately apparent that Sanghapala was interested in my partner and the mother of our three children.'*
- *'After a heartbreaking two years of lies, manipulations and clandestine activities our family was broken and dissolved...'*
- *'Sanghapala is currently enjoying a sexual relationship with the mother of my children, a patent ambition from the outset.'*
- *'The disregard for family values... is staggering.'*
- *'Our family has suffered a blow that it will never recover from. Unfortunately we are not the first, nor will be the last.'*
- *'...there is no respect for the family unit.'*
- *'That these men (for want of a better word) can go off on four month retreats and expect their families to be OK about this is insane.'*

- *'Mothers and partners and children are shown no respect'*
- *'FWBO practice...is not Buddhism - Buddhism promotes the family and respect for partners/spouses and children'*
- *'I am ...continuously speaking to family members whose hearts have been broken'*
- *'He told me personally about the lack of respect shown to his relationship and to his female partner whilst observing the crazy emotional distress he observed men experiencing when they were addressed with domestic problems.'*
- *'...there are families and children.... left in very emotional states because of these self absorbed zealots.'*
- *'Spiritual fulfillment and growth can be sought and found within the family unit; however, sex abuser Sangharakshita makes no mention of this - he obviously has issues with his natural family and he has poisoned hundreds of people because of this.'*
- *'I spoke to the brother of a young man actively involved in the order and his family is at their wit's end. They are SO concerned about him.... They say his he has become emotionless and insensitive and this is something I can see within my own situation.'*
- *'Many women are indirectly experiencing the fallout from Sangharakshita's obvious disrespect...for children and families.'*
- *'I spoke with a former ordained member - who has left the FWBO far behind - and he said that it is a self centred, anti-family cult... As a family member who has been very negatively affected by this cult, I empathize with the above person.'*
- *'...the lives of those closest to me have been terribly damaged by the sad faces and practices of those who think they are following the Dharma.'*

Sanghapala and coercive sex in the FWBO: Engagement in the homosexual act with elder 'mentors', so as to transcend 'conditioning' and lead one to the enlightened state

As stated previously, there are no allegations of same-sex abuse raised in the documents presently under review. However, an explanation of the methodology was considered pertinent since it may well be relevant to a particular issue highlighted in the internet document that appeared at <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/81076> , since this alleged controversy over the sexual morality of Sanghapala, presently senior-most Order member at and, indeed, founder of the FWBO's Dublin Buddhist Centre.

Sanghapala first came to public attention in 1997 when he was mentioned in the 'FWBO Files'. These told us that:

'In late 1997, Sanghapala, another long-standing disciple of Sangharakshita's who had also been extremely sexually active at Padmaloka and who had subsequently been appointed Chair of the FWBO's Dublin group, went 'into retreat' after being accused of repeatedly using his position to coerce members of his congregation into having sex with him. Having emerged from retreat, Sanghapala was immediately reinstated as Chair of the group, indeed, even while he was 'in retreat,' I was assured that he would be returning to his position.'

It is of note that there is no mention here of same-sex sexual abuse. The reason for this is that the allegations against Sanghapala concerned him using his position at the Dublin Buddhist Centre to procure women for sex, rather than men. It seems more than likely then, since Sanghapala established the DBC in 1991, that it was his behaviour that was being referred to in the FWBO's secret, internal newsletter, 'Shabda' in March 98, when Order member Prajnagupta stated:

"...there appears to be pain and confusion in...Dublin,..."

Exactly what Sanghapala was up to is not made clear here but elsewhere, another comment by Order member Devapriya in the same edition of 'Shabda' points to what the exact cause of the pain and confusion seem to have been:

*"I am a bit concerned that there seems to be a certain unrelenting attention to... anyone ...commenting on or in any way mentioning what does appear to have been quite outrageous behaviour by some Order Members. In effect this sort of thing represses open communication. I have heard of chairmen of public centres in recent times having sexual relations with married women and causing no little harm. When will the thatch be opened?"*³⁰

Sanghapala has been a close associate of Sangharakshita and senior Order member for some time; internet documents³¹ place him, with Sangharakshita, in Tuscany at an all-male retreat in 1986. Since he had already received his ordination name at this point, and since the ordination process in the FWBO can take years, it is clear that he would already have been involved with Sangharakshita and his Order for some time.

1986 was also when the sexual shenanigans at Padmaloka, a single sex retreat near Norwich had reached fever pitch. Since the Files describes Sanghapala as having been, 'extremely sexually active at Padmaloka' and since all of the ideas that facilitated sexual abuse outlined at the beginning of this document were current at that time,³² it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that Sanghapala was well versed, perhaps even well practiced, in the application of these principles.

³⁰ <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/ShabCol2.htm>

³¹ <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=SEM066&at=text&p=1>

³² Mark Dunlop, who left Padmaloka at the end of 1985, confirmed this in conversation, Friday July 6, 2007.

Brimstone states that Sanghapala demonstrated a '*patent ambition from the outset*' to seduce the former's wife, and that he felt that, '*Over a two year period...(he)...was systematically marginalised and excluded*'. He describes Sanghapala as: '*a clever and cunning manipulator*' whose '*disregard for family values and the dogged ruthlessness in the pursuit of sexual gratification is staggering*'.

It might be that Brimstone's perception of the situation is distorted, indeed it may be the case that his ex-partner and Sanghapala were simply drawn to one another as their own relationship faltered. On the other hand, it seems at least equally plausible to suggest that Sanghapala adapted the doctrines initially fabricated by Sangharakshita to facilitate same-sex sexual abuse, in order to systematically procure yet another person's partner in his pursuit of sexual gratification.

It is certainly the case that Sangharakshita's ideas can be adapted to bring about such an outcome. The idea that the practice of casual, '*non-neurotic*' sex, outside of the limitations of the '*lower evolution*' of mundane family life, can lead to one becoming a '*higher being*', might seem quite appealing to someone searching for peace while at the same time experiencing all the hardships of bringing up a large family after all, especially if they are presented as the secret and esoteric teaching of the Buddha. According to Mark Dunlop, this was how Sangharakshita portrayed his ideas before seducing him.

Conclusion: Business as Usual?

In a letter to the Guardian³³ in 1997 entitled 'The true face of Buddhism', Senior Order member Kulananda (who the Files exposed as having also been 'active' at Padmaloka and elsewhere) wrote:

'Your feature on the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (The dark side of enlightenment, October 27) makes much of difficult, indeed tragic, events at one of our centres nine years ago. However, Madeleine Bunting does not make it clear that such events have never happened at any other centre and she thereby unfairly implicates the FWBO as a whole. The FWBO has learned many lessons and instituted safeguards to prevent a recurrence, but the article does not do justice to this. It is also not made clear that the activities of the centre's chairman were based on distortions of the FWBO's teachings, and that he left the order when his activities came to light'.

Similarly, ten years later, when quizzed by the Observer newspaper in May 2007, the head of the FWBO's children's education unit, Munisha stated: 'We have learned from our mistakes and changed a great deal'.

As to the first assertion, that all of the sexual abuse took place only at one centre, the FWBO's secret internal newsletter Shabda³⁴ speaks of difficulties at at least six different FWBO centres. Publicly however, the FWBO continue to claim that the accusation of

³³ Wed 29 Oct 1997

³⁴ <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/ShabCol2.htm>

coercing people into homosexual activity is false and to convey the idea that the abuse pointed to in the Files was confined to one place.³⁵

As to the claims that the FWBO has learned many lessons from its mistakes, changed a great deal, and instituted safeguards to prevent a recurrence of abusive behaviour, Sanghapala's continued incumbency at the Dublin Buddhist Centre despite repeated warnings from both outside and, indeed, within the Order, along with his continuing 'well known',³⁶ sexually predatory behaviour, indicate that neither have the FWBO changed a great deal nor have they learned any lessons, other than to ignore criticisms and carry on regardless. If safeguards have been put in place to prevent a recurrence of the abusive behaviour that a growing number are beginning to associate with the Order, those safeguards are definitely not working. Furthermore, if Sanghapala *does* continue to facilitate his conquests on the basis of those purportedly Buddhist doctrines invented by Sangharakshita and outlined at the beginning of this document, this transforms an already thoroughly bad situation into something significantly worse.

With reference to the promotion of gay sex as the path to enlightenment, FWBO seniors argue that the idea of gay sex as a spiritual path is an outdated idea that had its heyday in the 1970s and 80s and no longer holds any stead amongst Order members. Contradicting this, in June 1998, Order member Maitreyabandhu wrote:

*'I wanted to talk about homosexuality and how it can have clear spiritual benefits and advantages over heterosexuality, and how such an idea is not like seventies furniture - once fashionable, now clearly silly as some Shabda reportings in have suggested - but a persuasively arguable point and in many cases true.'*³⁷

In June 2007, Maitreyabandhu still held a senior position within the FWBO and teaches meditation at the FWBO's flagship London Buddhist Centre.³⁸

Miscellaneous criticisms based on Lalich and Tobias' list of cult characteristics

- *'that these men (for want of a better word) can go off on four month retreats and expect their families to be OK about this is insane'*

Compare: *'Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities'*³⁹.

- *'...pseudo philosophers drummed up with enthusiasm for this apparent spiritual growth...';*
- *'...self absorbed zealots.'*

³⁵ <http://response.fwbo.org/index.html>

³⁶ See Brimstone's document penultimate paragraph

³⁷ <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/ShabShort.htm>

³⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/HEALTH/06/11/pl.meditation.main/>

³⁹ Above cit. (2)

Compare: *The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.*⁴⁰

- *'Many have given up extremely successful careers in the name of the FWBO..'*

Compare: *The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs...)*⁴¹

- From Shabda, cited above: *'I am a bit concerned that there seems to be a certain unrelenting attention to... anyone ...commenting on or in any way mentioning what does appear to have been quite outrageous behaviour by some Order Members.'*

Compare: *'Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.'*⁴²

- *The FWBO's obvious hesitation about having members from other Buddhist organisations speak at their precious little centres is another cause for concern.. How many times have I heard that stupid little comment 'stop shopping around'.*

Compare: *'Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members'*⁴³.

- *'...the crazy emotional distress he observed men experiencing when they were addressed with domestic problems...'*

Compare: *'The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion'*⁴⁴

Appendix 1

Document A July 3 2007

'There is no respect for the family unit. That these men (for want of a better word) can go off on four month retreats and expect their families to be OK about this is insane.. and this is something the FWBO facilitates !!! Mothers and partners and children are shown no respect!! It makes me sick. They need to grow up and show support for those closest to them instead of being so completely and selfishly immersed in their FWBO practice. It is not Buddhism - Buddhism promotes the family and respect for partners/spouses and children. It is the 'highest' form of devotion (for want of a better word) The FWBO is a cult with ideas stolen from mainstream Buddhism and from Sangharakshita's stolen passages from Nietzsche. It is poisonous and I am SO continuously speaking to family members whose hearts have been broken because of these pseudo philosophers drummed up with enthusiasm for this apparent spiritual growth that holds no depth !

⁴⁰ Above cit. (2)

⁴¹ Above cit (2)

⁴² Above cit (2)

⁴³ & ⁴¹ Above cit (2)

- That a former member can feel so guilty about becoming involved and about associating with abusers and those harbouring abusers that he steps down in disgust. He told me personally about the lack of respect shown to his relationship and to his female partner whilst observing the crazy emotional distress he observed men experiencing when they were addressed with domestic problems.

- Many have given up extremely successful careers in the name of the FWBO...these same ones often have little knowledge and experience of the world outside or as one FWBO critic said, they are often the young men and less young women who have had their wings broken and have SO sadly trusted the FWBO to be a safe haven for them - full of mindfulness practices and meditation and kind words. Their brand of Buddhism is so hollow and so purposeless when you recognise that there are families and children and, in some instances, dying relatives left in very emotional states because of these self absorbed zealots. And I am talking from personal experience here.

- A man who had requested Ordination withdrew his request after recognising how little support he got as his mother was dying. The FWBO's obvious hesitation about having members from other Buddhist organisations speak at their precious little centres is another cause for concern. How many times have I heard that stupid little comment 'stop shopping around'. It is SO irritating. Well, from having spoken to a member of a mainstream Buddhist group in Ireland, I know that the FWBO has through the obvious former abuses (and on-going abuse - which happens very subtly) put a bad taste in many people's mouths - and it is not going away, thankfully.

- Spiritual fulfillment and growth can be sought and found within the family unit; however, sex abuser Sangharakshita makes no mention of this - he obviously has issues with his natural family and he has poisoned hundreds of people because of this.

- I spoke to the brother of a young man actively involved in the Order and his family is at their wit's end. They are SO concerned about him - and they are by no means big Catholics. I do not think they are even Christian. They say his he has become emotionless and insensitive and this is something I can see within my own situation. This sympathetic joy, this 'empathy' and 'metta (love)' they are always harking on about is a million miles away !!

-That book Women, Men and Angels is an absolute disgrace - it is SO sexist and conceited - It is deeply troubling to think that people are reading this.

-One man after a visit to Padmaloka a few years ago stated that he would not feel safe changing his child's nappy as he believed it could be the first step towards child abuse. putting out ideas like that or even entertaining them is insane and extremely dangerous.

-Like the scientologists, if you try to confront the FWBO zealots, they are slow to show engage with you in relation to your concerns, remain very passive as if to say 'sorry for your trouble or worry' and 'i see that you are very upset...' X... is perhaps the first to respond in an engaging way and I appreciate that but he is deluding himself if he fails to realise that despite Sanghrakshita's obvious intelligence, he is an abuser, a coercer and a VERY dangerous man. Perhaps Simon has not ever suffered sexual abuse as former and current members have..he is fortunate - but the fallout from such horrendous behaviour

will be extreme and will cause much pain and suffering to many more people..And many women are indirectly experiencing the fallout from Sanghrakshita's obvious disrespect for females and for children and families. Sexual abusers are often very intelligent and very smart and appear to be 'very nice people' - yet they can do untold damage and sadly, the voices of victims are seldom heard.

'Corruption' by Brimstone - Tue Jun 26, 2007 16:30

<http://www.indymedia.ie/article/81076>

I have no difficulty supplying my birth name. The FWBOs ethos was visited upon our family by one of Sangharakshitas associates, Sanghapala. The details could be exhaustive but to be concise, it was immediately apparent that Sanghapala was interested in my partner and Mother of our three children. Over a two year period I was systematically marginalised and excluded from FWBO activities even to the point of being ignored in my own home as FWBO members ate our food. I've always had a high regard for 'Buddhism'. After a heartbreaking two years of lies, manipulations and clandestine activities our family was broken and dissolved with members of the order coming to our home to remove P... 's and my children 's belongings.

Sanghapala is currently enjoying a sexual relationship with the mother of my children, a patent ambition from the outset. The whole episode still beggars belief...

I have no doubt that Sanghapala is a clever and cunning manipulator masquerading as a Buddhist which in itself constitutes criminal behaviour to my mind. The disregard for family values and the dogged ruthlessness in the pursuit of sexual gratification is staggering. The Christians stated that the devil can quote scripture and so I find this to be true. Many can read, memorise and recite text with impressive results. I wonder when such people close their eyes and enter a meditative state whence do they travel?

My discovery that Sanghapala is well known as a sexual predator has been relatively recent. What can be done? Our family has suffered a blow that it will never recover from. Unfortunately we are not the first nor will be the last.

I have not lost my respect for Buddhism. Disappointingly, I believe that the FWBO has. I can furnish much detail to confirm this if required.

In Buddha.