

FWBONYIC

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order New York City

The FWBO was founded in London in 1968 by Sangharakshita. Having originally taken ordination as a Theravadin Bhikkhu in India, during his twenty years practicing Buddhism on the Indo-Tibetan border he went on to take initiations from a number of the Lamas escaping the Chinese occupation of Tibet. When he returned to England, he experienced first-hand the limited context in which Westerners had to practice the Dharma and his response was to found a new Buddhist movement.

Bringing Buddhism into an entirely new culture implied to Sangharakshita that we needed to go back to basics — to look at the principles underlying all forms of Buddhism and work out how best to apply them in this new context. So, the FWBO is an ecumenical movement, aligned to no one traditional school, but drawing on the whole stream of Buddhist inspiration. The FWBO has evolved new structures that allow people to live out Buddhist teachings as an authentic Buddhist way of life in the 21st century. For example, the FWBO has many public centres where meditation is taught, and promotes 'Right Livelihood' projects in which Buddhists can work together and turn their work into a spiritual practice.

In the Buddha's time there was no mass media to compete with — no television or Internet. The Buddha never had to be concerned about globalisation or global warming. But the FWBO is exploring how the Buddha's teaching of human potential is still crucially important, how Buddhists can be socially engaged and contribute to a better world.

In the last 40 years the FWBO has grown into a movement with dozens of centers all over the world. And not only in the West — the FWBO has a substantial presence in India, as well as Dharma activities in other developing countries. Sangharakshita has now handed-on responsibility for the FWBO's spiritual vitality to his followers. The FWBO is entering a new phase of growth and consolidation, learning from, and building upon its history, and developing into a broad-based, mature and experienced spiritual community. It is playing a significant role in bringing Buddhism to the West.

Over the centuries, as the Buddha's teaching reached each new country, it adapted to the prevailing culture — and often these countries had no contact with each other. As a result Asian Buddhism is extremely varied. Most of these

traditions have now come to the West and present westerners with a bewildering variety of teachings, practices and forms.

Rather than adopting one specific form, Sangharakshita, founder of the FWBO, was keen to clarify what all Buddhist schools held in common: the essential principles and practices that run through the whole tradition. He suggests the key unifying factor is the historical Buddha and his experience of Enlightenment.

All Buddhist schools aim to teach a path to Freedom that will help practitioners become more like the Buddha. The differences between them are basically a matter of means, not ends — however different they may look from the outside.

Sangharakshita's approach is based on the perception that the diverse Buddhist tradition has an underlying unity. This lies in the act of going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and in basic teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths, Conditioned Co-production, karma and so on. He believes people in the modern world are heirs to the whole of Buddhism. This is why the FWBO does not restrict itself to one form of Buddhism but draws inspiration from the entire tradition. Sangharakshita's attitude is not simply eclectic, however. He has a coherent approach to practice, which draws on particular techniques and teachings in a way that supports individual growth.

FWBO Centres teach meditation and Buddhism through classes and courses. Teaching in the FWBO is done by members of the Western Buddhist Order who are themselves experienced in the practice and study of meditation and Buddhism.

There is no expectation that people attending the centre will be Buddhists, nor that they will agree with Buddhist teachings. Classes are an opportunity to learn and test out Buddhist practices in the light of one's own experience, and in an atmosphere of friendly, encouraging, open communication.

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Useful Links

Free Buddhist Audio <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com>

FWBO-NYC Bookstore <http://www.fwbo-nyc.org/bookstore/fwbo-bookstore.html>

Sangharakshita <http://www.fwbo-nyc.org/sangharakshita.html>

FWBO Main Site <http://www.fwbo.org>