Going Forth and Citizenship

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LIKE SO MANY OTHERS, I was shocked and jolted by the Gulf War of 1991. Perhaps there has never been such a public war, where every bomb dropped was reported to a waiting world – which was then able to hear the sobbing of the victims on another channel. Despite myself, I sat in horrified fascination, listening to every news bulletin on the radio. I was shocked because I was suddenly precipitated into the very real sufferings of people so far away. I was jolted because the country of which I am a citizen was a leading party to this war: men of the British armed forces were killing and being killed in my name. I suddenly had to work out what my own position was in relation to this terrible situation. And I realised that I did not have a position. Of course, I did not want the war to be happening; I did not want people to be suffering and dying so pointlessly. But I also could not condone the annexation of one country by another. I didn't really know how to respond – I didn't know what I should do.

This forced me to think more deeply than I had ever done before about my relationship, as a member of the Western Buddhist Order/Trailokya Bauddha Maha Sangha, to the country of which I am a citizen. After all, as a member of the Order, I am trying to 'Go Forth from the Group' – to leave behind an unquestioning immersion in the values and norms of the collectivity in which I have been brought up.[1] Yet I also hold a British passport and avail myself freely of all the protection which Her Britannic Majesty affords me. I have, to some extent, Gone Forth, yet I am also a citizen. This then is my topic. I am going to explore some of the dilemmas which arise from being a member of a spiritual community as well as a citizen of a state.[2] At present it is not a subject which has been forced upon our attention very much within the Order, the countries we function in being so liberal and tolerant – and [112] predominantly at peace. Yet it is an issue which we will face, and face more and more squarely, as our Movement spreads – and especially as it grows in strength and significance. It is a very complex and broad subject, ultimately requiring the evolution of a Dharmically-based political theory. I cannot pretend to deal with it exhaustively. My comments are going to be mainly of a pragmatic nature, concerning what we should actually do about some of the problems thrown up at this stage in the evolution of the Order. This is perhaps but a prolegomenon to a more thorough and exact treatment.

When I first began to consider this question as the Gulf War progressed, I took a sounding amongst my fellows in the Order. Not a few were as bewildered as I was. However, some seemed to know immediately what their duty was, and they joined the organised marches of protest which took place all over the country, demanding of the Government that Britain withdraw from the war unilaterally, unconditionally and immediately. However, a few other Order members took a quite different position: they were convinced that it was a just war and should be supported – one even went so far as to say that he was prepared to back his conviction that the war had to be fought with readiness to fight himself if called upon to do so. Personally I found both these positions unsatisfactory. In the first place, in the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, a terrible aggression had been perpetrated by a vicious regime. The lessons of recent history have shown us unequivocally that appeasement of such bullying totalitarianism leads only to further violation.

Marching to stop the war, in effect, simply played into the hands of Saddam Hussein who did shamelessly exploit anti-war agitation in the West. Really, in the face of the Iraqi aggression, marching to halt the war could only be effective if people all over the world marched, including

Iraqis, not just against Western involvement but against Iraqi aggression too – but Iraqis were not free to march against it, even if they had wanted to. Another factor to be borne in mind was that marching for peace, however worthy one's own motives, put one in company with, and often under the banner of, people whose agenda was quite different from one's own. For instance, to take an extreme example, some small revolutionary parties of the far left particularly target peace marches and the like and are very good at diverting [113] them to their own ends. So, whilst I fully accepted the good will of those Order members who did go on those marches, I felt that demonstrating for the withdrawal of Britain in that way was, at best, a naive waste of time and, at worst, simply deepened the problem.

On the other hand, I could not join with those who felt that the war was a just war. In the first place I am very doubtful of the validity of the Christian concept of a just war from a Buddhist point of view. Who can really condone war who does the *mettābhāvanā* every day?[3] Despite the tendency to present this war as a sort of video-game with all sorts of fascinating technology, the fact cannot be disguised that war means killing people – and supporting killing is inimical to wishing all living creatures the highest well-being. Even were one to accept that there might be a case for a just war, was the war in the Gulf really a candidate for the role? It wasn't just a question of nice peace-loving nations coming to the aid of a poor innocent country which was being attacked by a great big bad bully. The Western Powers had, in many ways, created the war themselves. After the First World War they had carved up the remnants of the Ottoman Empire entirely to suit their own ends, creating artificial states of spectacular instability. From that time on, they had constantly interfered in their internal affairs, using economic domination, Secret Service manipulations and, if necessary, raw military force. The area had been shamelessly exploited commercially, and the diplomacy of the United States, Britain and France in the Gulf region for seventy years or more has been almost entirely dictated by their oil companies. One of the greatest ironies of all was that the Western Powers had by and large armed Iraq themselves and were now being shot at with their own weapons.

As if that was not enough, there were so many double standards involved. America had, with absolutely no justification in international law, not long before invaded two Central American states: Grenada and Panama. The world had remained effectively silent when China had invaded Tibet, despite a very clear set of international treaties, guaranteeing her freedom – and even today, the Governments of most Western countries will not greet the Dalai Lama officially for fear of upsetting the Chinese. Then again, the war was being fought in the name of freedom, yet the Al-Sabah regime in Kuwait [114] is a self-serving oligarchy and the Saudis of Arabia manage a repressive and, at times, barbarous state.

The reprisals in Kuwait subsequent to the eviction of the Iraqis and the Government's failure to stop them revealed the true face of the regime for which democracy went to war. The whole issue was a moral tangle. It did not seem to me to be possible, as an ordinary citizen, to make any intervention which would really help and which would not add some small weight to one side or other of the polarised situation. I felt the dilemma very keenly. I hold a British passport and am a British citizen. 'My' country was at war, supposedly in my interests and in my name. For me the situation was made yet more poignant because one or two contemporaries from my school days were in positions of command in the British Army, and I myself, if I had followed the chosen career of my youth, might well have been serving on one of the Royal Naval vessels in the area. At the same time, some of my fellows in the Order were citizens of India, a country in which, if its Government had been mildly co-operative with the US-led coalition, there was a strong popular feeling against it. Many people in India, as in other countries in the 'Third World', saw Saddam

Hussein as a plucky David standing up to the giant colonial bullies. If the political pendulum had swung another way, it could quite easily have been that the Indian government itself took this view. That would then have meant that Order members in India and Order members in Britain and America would, as citizens, have been at odds with each other.

So, in this complex situation – which was actually even more complex and terrible than I have painted it – all the blurred and fudged lines of feeling and fact about being a citizen whilst being a member of the Order were suddenly drawn sharp and obvious. I realised that I would have to become clearer on many things about which for a long time I have allowed myself to remain ignorant and fuzzy. I realised that I would have to become clearer about the relationship between Going Forth and Citizenship. On this occasion, in the end, it made very little difference what I thought and did – but another time it might.

CAN WE GO FORTH FROM CITIZENSHIP?

BUT BEFORE I GO ANY FURTHER, I must establish what it is that I am talking about: What is a citizen? What is the state? I shall be using 'country' as a rather loose and general term for the sum total of the soil, people, and culture of a particular region, within which there is a sense of political and cultural cohesion. By the 'state' I mean the sovereign authority within a particular country to which all living within its boundaries are subject and which assigns them certain duties and awards them certain rights. The 'government' is the executive policy-making body which for the time being controls the state. A 'citizen' is one who lives under the authority of a particular state, is subject to its laws and has certain rights and duties defined by it. Strictly speaking, a citizen is one who is recognised as such by the state and has specific rights, which in a democracy include the right to vote. The state may also exercise control over its legally-defined citizens even when they are no longer in its territories – although this subjection is at the courtesy of whichever state the citizen presently finds himself in. Thus a proportion of those living within a certain country are not citizens of it but are merely guests, being legal citizens of another country. However, since they too are subject to the state within whose territory they now live and have certain rights and duties assigned to them, they can be regarded as citizens for the purposes of this discussion, albeit usually with reduced rights – and sometimes greater duties. In other words, I am concerned not with the citizen as legally defined but in terms of the individual's immediate interaction with the state whose territory he finds himself in.

So, can we Go Forth from citizenship? One possible solution to the problem is to regard oneself, having Gone Forth, as no longer a citizen and no longer bound by the state or having duties to it. Going Forth is Going Forth from citizenship. This attitude does chime with a certain current in Western thinking of what one might call a post-Rousseauian persuasion. The state is an imposition and, as a true individual, one owes it nothing and can simply disregard it. To pursue this attitude consistently one must either risk constant confrontation with the authorities or keep so much out of their way, by living in remoteness or through cunning and subterfuge, as to be effectively bound by the state by the lengths to which one goes to avoid it. [116]

But let us begin this enquiry by looking briefly at the relationship to the state of the Buddha and his *bhikkhu* disciples. Had they Gone Forth from citizenship? In the context of traditional Buddhism, Going Forth appears, at first face, to have meant ceasing to be a citizen. In the Hindu tradition the *sādhu* sometimes even performs his own funeral ceremony as his act of Going Forth, thus illustrating that when one Goes Forth one is civilly dead. The *śramaṇa* or one who had Gone Forth was, it seems, released from all civil duties and responsibilities. To this day, the *bhikkhu* is not supposed to go to law – is not even supposed to bear witness in a court of law. Sangharakshita

himself, when he went forth in India in 1947, gave up his civil identity, burning all his documents. He was even refused entry to Sri Lanka because he would not reveal his nationality.[4]

However, Sangharakshita's bold attempt to live free from civil identity could not last long. In order to work for the good of Buddhism he had to register organisations, rent and buy property, and keep bank accounts – and eventually he had to get a passport. His activities were carefully watched by the police, and apparently Pandit Nehru himself gave the order that he must not be allowed to enter Tibet.[5] It seems that the state, civil society and citizenship are much more encompassing today than they were at the time of the Buddha. One cannot not be a citizen, whether one likes it or not.

A citizen is a member of a state – the state being a sovereign political power to which he is subject. Within that state the citizen has certain rights and duties. To give up one's citizenship one would have to relinquish those rights and duties and cease absolutely to be subject to its power. When one looks more closely, it is debatable whether *bhikkhu*s and *sādhu*s of Buddhist and Hindu traditions could really be said to have given up their citizenship. Actually, they were simply awarded a special kind of citizenship. The *bhikkhu*s or Buddhist 'monks' were 'partakers' or 'sharesmen' – that is the root meaning of the word. They were partakers of the common wealth of the society, entitled to a share of food and the other 'requisites' of their way of life. And this entitlement itself depended on the belief amongst the peoples of India, and now of countries where Buddhism has become widely established, that to feed wanderers was meritorious, bringing rewards both in this life and in lives to come. Their right to a share was, so to speak, awarded to [117] them by general custom and convention. In the rather loosely developed political systems of the time, such customs and conventions amounted to the prescription of the rights and duties of a citizen. Besides, the *bhikkhu*s were not exempt from the state's authority, as is witnessed by the continuous interference of the monarchs of North India in the affairs of the Sangha, Aśoka himself vigorously purging the Sangha of his time of degenerate elements. In modern 'Buddhist' states, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, that interference is brought up to date: the Bhikkhu Sangha is controlled by Act of Parliament and there is a cabinet minister whose portfolio it is to look after it.

It is really only the forest-dwelling *bhikkhu*s, both ancient and modern, living on nuts and berries in the depths of the jungle, who genuinely approach citizenshiplessness. Of course, that status too is by courtesy – the civil power simply refrains from interference but always reserves to itself the right to do so. Even that lack of citizenship by courtesy is not open to us in the modern West. The tentacles of the state are far too long for that. Nonetheless, we can at least lower our profile in relation to the state, living for a while in some relatively wild and remote place. This experience is very valuable and will give one a stronger sense of oneself as an individual. This is one of the reasons why it is important to establish monastic situations in the remote countryside – such as members of the Western Buddhist Order are establishing at Guhyaloka, in the mountains of Eastern Spain – so that people have, among other things, the chance to experience themselves for extended periods removed from the pervasive influence of the state.

We cannot live in the modern world without being counted as a citizen – that is being members of the state, subject to its power, with certain rights and duties assigned to us by it. We must have papers to travel from one country to another. In some countries, such as Spain, everyone must carry identification cards at all times. Whether full citizens or not, all within a particular country have to obey the laws of the state – one is even obliged to know the law: ignorance of the law is no excuse, says the legal maxim. One is obliged to appear in court if subpoenaed to do so and may be constrained to give evidence. One may be legally obliged to give military or civil service to the state. One is obliged to be registered before one can be employed and one is bound to make tax

returns. In Australia one is even legally bound to [118] vote and can be fined for not doing so. Even if Mrs Thatcher stood before the state, like Canute before the ocean, and saw it roll back at her command, it would still have a say in almost every department of life – it even dictates at what age we can start having sex, and limits who we can have it with and in what way! In so many ways the state counts one as a citizen and demands certain things of one, at the same time as it grants one certain rights. And it counts one as a citizen whether one regards oneself as one or not.

But our citizenship is not demonstrated merely by our being bound by the state. We cannot live in the modern world without 'benefiting' from the existence of the state – using the facilities which the state provides or makes possible. The state guarantees a certain degree of law and order without which life would be very precarious indeed. The remarkable structure of the modern economic and financial system, for all its faults, is ordered by the state so that every time we use money or a credit card we draw on innumerable processes of the state. The building of houses and cities, the provision of domestic facilities, the regulation of all kinds of communication systems: all is ordered by the state, thus preventing a chaotic free-for-all in which only the strongest would benefit.

In Britain some benefits and privileges are granted to members of religious Orders such as exemption from jury service, exemption from the notorious poll tax for those living in a community with a common purse, and probably exemption from military service in the event of a call-up. Religious organisations also benefit from the tax exemption of charitable status in many countries. But all these are privileges granted by the state and can be rescinded whenever the state chooses to do so.

So even if we are members of a religious Order, even if we Go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and even if we Go Forth, the state still considers us as citizens. And in actual practice we are citizens because our lives are completely bound up with the state. We cannot Go Forth from the state – unless we find a desert island somewhere – and of course even that will be subject to some state or other. There cannot be a Going Forth from citizenship: there must be a Going Forth within citizenship.

Given that we must accept that we, willy-nilly, are citizens, we have to consider our relationship to the state. We will find that, as citizens especially of liberal democracies, we are entitled to the exercise of a certain amount of power in determining the direction and policy of the state: how should we use it? We almost certainly have a view of life which the state will not share and may frequently find that our duty as citizens and our duty as 'Goers Forth' comes into conflict. I am going now to examine the relationship between Going Forth and Citizenship in terms of three principle questions: What should be the attitude to the state of one who is Going Forth? What are we, who are Going Forth, to do with the power which we do have within the state? What are we to do when the state acts unjustly? I will look at each of these in broad principle, giving some concrete suggestions as to what action, individually and collectively, we must take.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ATTITUDE TO THE STATE OF ONE WHO IS GOING FORTH?

THE FIRST, and principal, point is that we should have Gone Forth from conditioned attitudes to the state. We should leave behind attitudes simply inherited from our own backgrounds or picked up, like diseases, from the fashionable pools of ideas which swill around in modern culture. Broadly speaking, there are two extreme attitudes which we need to make conscious and transcend. There is 'My country, right or wrong': the attitude that we should always support the state to which we belong (here, 'country' really means 'state'), regardless of the morality of its actions. On the other hand, there is 'Agin the Government': the attitude that the state cannot be right. Both attitudes, in

rather less extreme form, are to be found even amongst Buddhists in the West – although, for obvious sociological reasons, the latter attitude predominates, certainly in Britain. Many people seem to assume that being Buddhist is automatically equivalent to being anti-establishment, perhaps even revolutionary – non-violent, of course. Many people's attitude to the state is compounded of adolescent problems of authority mixed up with third rate, third hand Marxism! Within the FWBO, for instance, there can be a facile equation of Sangharakshita's notion of Individuality with rebelliousness against all established authority. Many of us unthinkingly share in a sub-Rousseauian romanticism which views the state as enchaining and per-[120]verting the individual who, once released from its power, will stand forth, the 'noble savage', in all his pure moral glory.

Such a view is totally unbuddhistic. Buddhism teaches that moral perfection only comes from prolonged and intelligent effort upon a path of higher development. Different people are at very different stages of moral evolution, from the completely depraved to the thoroughly skilful. That spectrum might be characterised as ranging from those whose sole motive is manipulating the world to their own benefit to those who have transcended themselves to the point at which they live only for the highest benefit of all. In the terms that Sangharakshita has defined, the spectrum stretches from those who operate solely by the 'power mode' to those whose every action exemplifies the 'love mode'.[6] In general, most people are to be found towards the lower end of the scale, functioning mainly on the basis of power.

This being the case, some organisation of our common life is necessary. There is, of course, the simple need to make practical arrangements concerning the details of life: distribution of food and land and so forth. But, more pertinently, there must be some framework of law and order to protect each citizen from the depravity of others, and there must be some system for the distribution of power within the community so as to prevent its abuse by some at the expense of the rest. We cannot avoid the fact that if there is to be some measure of justice in society and some protection of the weak against the strong there must be an organisation of our common life. There must be a system for the use of power which guarantees that it will be used, by and large, in accordance with basic moral principles. Without such a moral ordering of society the existence of the spiritual community would itself be rendered almost impossible because it members would be almost exclusively preoccupied with the mere preservation of life. At the present stage of human evolution, it is the state which provides that ordering of society.

In Buddhist tradition the necessity for some kind of state has never, to my knowledge, been questioned and the ideal of good government is upheld in the notion of Dharmarājya, the rule of Truth – kingship or government subordinated to the Dharma. In traditional discussions of the topic, the Dharmarāja is a monarch[7] – but what is said about the Dharmarāja could apply to any form of government. The Dharmarāja rules in accordance with moral [121] principles, understood from the perspective of the Dharma. He upholds the moral order by encouraging the practice of the precepts throughout his state, so that all may behave towards each other on the basis of consideration and justice. He listens carefully to the wishes of his people, thus ensuring that all interests are taken into account in determining the policy of the state. And he promotes the welfare of all, thus making sure that power is not used in the service of any single faction.

The Ideal of the Dharmarāja is the bridge between citizenship and Going Forth. The state exists because most people are not able to function on any other basis, most of the time, than that of power. The state itself embodies power but, when the Dharmarāja is governing the state, it is a power which is subordinated to moral principles. One who has Gone Forth has gone forth from power to love. He or she will try at all times to relate to others solely on the basis of love. Yet it is only with others who have similarly gone forth from power to love that one can expect to relate

entirely on the basis of love. Those who are outside the spiritual community have not given up power and so there is likely to be some element of power in all their dealings. Members of the spiritual community cannot therefore completely abandon power when relating to them. It is only within the spiritual community that the power-mode can be finally eschewed, since the spiritual community, when it truly is the spiritual community, operates according to the love mode. The state and its citizens operate largely on the basis of the power mode – they are 'the group'.

This then determines the relationship of one Gone Forth to those around them. In relation to others who have Gone Forth one is a member of the spiritual community. In relation to those who have not Gone Forth one is a fellow citizen and member of the state. If the state does genuinely subordinate power to love then one Gone Forth has no difficulty in recognising its necessity and supporting its efforts to uphold the moral order – in being a good citizen. Naturally, the final aim of the Goer Forth is to bring all into the spiritual community so that love alone guides relations between all humanity. This 'withering away of the state' is the ultimate dream of the Dharma which finds expression in the image of the Pure Land.[8] [122]

So, whilst there is a clear need for the regulation of power, that power of the state must be exercised in accordance with the love-mode for the one Gone Forth to be able to fully accept and approve it. The Buddhist ideal of good government, summed up in the Dharmarāja, offers us criteria which we can apply in evaluating the performance of the state. For, rather than having a conditioned response of automatic approbation or rejection of the state, having accepted that some sort of state is necessary for the ordering of our common life and the upholding of justice between its citizens, we must be able to decide whether the state is doing its work properly or not. So, we may ask, does the state uphold the moral order? Does it attend to the needs and wishes of all? And does it promote the welfare of all?

Of course, modern life is so complex and the state is involved in so many different departments of that life, that evaluation is not easy. In some areas a particular state may be fulfilling its duties and in others not. Overall one may judge that it could do better. Sometimes one will feel that it is definitely not up to the mark and one may feel constrained to condemn the state on its present performance. But we must be careful that our criticism of the state does not affect our feeling for the people as a whole. We must distinguish the state from the community. The state is not identical with the people. In fact the state is controlled by a remarkably small body of people who ultimately wield its power, whether they derive that power from democratic elections or not. Whilst we need to have an appreciative yet critical attitude to the state, we must also have a sense of empathy and goodwill for the people in whose midst we live.

Here we could distinguish nationalism from patriotism. Nationalism is an identification with the state and its actions, whereas patriotism is the love of the people of one's country and of all that is best in its history and traditions. Nationalism is a love of power: patriotism is a love of people and of value. Thus in nationalism one loves one's country's triumph over others because it increases its power: in patriotism one loves the countryside because it is beautiful, the literature because it is truly expressive of human values and the people because they are the ones amongst whom one lives – it is they who have supported and nurtured one, directly and indirectly, from one's birth. Nationalism is in opposition to other nations and cannot abide the assertion [123] of pride in other countries: patriotism is not exclusive and can allow others to love their countries. Patriotism will not prevent one from loving any other country one comes to live in.

Within the Buddhist spiritual community we need to work at transcending nationalism, which still rears its head from time to time in petty squabbles, misunderstandings and antipathies. Most Buddhists probably need to spend some years living outside their own country in order to

transcend their nationalism and national conditioning. The Dharma is needed in so many countries where Buddhism has not penetrated, yet so many of us are still stuck in our native places – perhaps many more of us should seize the opportunity to overcome our conditioning and to spread the Dharma at the same time! Wherever we live we need to make a strong effort to go beyond our nationality and to be aware of the spiritual community as a purely spiritual body in which all national identity is transcended. We must be aware of Buddhists from other countries, appreciating their very different perspective on the world. Even if we cannot Go Forth from citizenship, we can and must Go Forth from Nationalism. We are individuals who Go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha first and citizens second.

Nonetheless, we do not Go Forth from patriotism. It is a natural and spontaneous sympathy for the place and people our own life has been associated with. There is something wrong if one does not feel it – in the same way that a lack of a positive relationship with one's parents reveals that there is something fundamental awry in one's psyche. One will not only feel patriotism for the country in which one was born and grew up, but love and gratitude will begin to grow for whatever country one spends any time in. Patriotism is a very healthy, positive and necessary feeling. Just as *mettā*[9] must start with ourselves before it flows out to our friends, from whom it radiates out wider and wider to include all beings, so we need to love and appreciate those we are most closely connected with before we can love mankind in general. Such patriotic love does not prevent love of mankind: it is its basis and prerequisite.

To sum up the attitude to the state of those Going Forth: we must appreciate the need for some sort of state; we must judge the state from a moral standpoint; we must go beyond nationalism; we must learn to love the coun-[124]try and people in whose midst we have been reared; and we must begin to widen that love out towards all humanity.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THE POWER IN THE STATE WE DO HAVE?

IT MIGHT NOT be obvious to some that we actually do have some power in the state – but clearly we do. In the first place, in all the countries where the FWBO now flourishes, we have a vote if we are full citizens and can play our part in choosing government at all levels. In effect, since we have that power assigned to us by the state, we cannot not use it – even not voting affects the final outcome! Not only do we have a vote, we have a voice: governments engage in public consultations on various issues – for instance in Britain there are from time to time public hearings organised by the Ministry of the Environment on major town-planning proposals. Then, democratic governments are susceptible to the pressure of public opinion and will not for long ignore voices raised if they think that votes are at stake. So we do have power, albeit of perhaps a rather marginal quantity. Should we use it and, if so, how? Very briefly, yes: if the state is to be governed well and in accordance with a moral perspective then those who have that perspective must be heard. Both out of our concern for the well-being of the spiritual community which functions within the state and from our feeling for our fellow-citizens who are governed by it we should do what we can to influence the state for the better. We should use our power to promote what we consider to be the good and to aid the development of the individual within society in general. We should use it to urge the government in being to order the state in accordance with moral principles. We should use it in accordance with our fundamental spiritual commitment in Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

Of course, easy as it is to say that we should use our modicum of power to promote the good and to aid the development of the individual within society, it is not always easy to see what that means within specific circumstances. Situations are so complex and we so seldom have all the information. It is probably only at the local level that issues are clear-cut enough for us to be able to

involve ourselves at all confidently. It is to be [125] hoped that Buddhists will take up causes in their localities where the issues are clear and where they are not at all compromised by their intercession. On the level of national politics we must do the best we can, often having to choose between two shades of grey, voting for what seems to us to be the lesser of two evils. Nonetheless we should throw ourselves in, making a point of seeing all candidates for election, questioning their views on basic moral issues, pressing them to espouse policies such as a non-nationalistic approach to foreign relations, the abolition of the arms-trade, aid to Third World countries, the preservation of the environment, no discrimination on the grounds of class, race, or sex, the promotion of culture and education, and so forth. When they are up for election, they have to listen to us! So we must take advantage of that and lobby them hard.

Whilst we must surely use what power we have for the good, we must be careful not to oversimplify complex issues and pitch in on one side or other of an argument which we do not really understand and which is being carried out for quite other purposes than those the parties to it profess. One of the worst dangers here is that it may lead to polarisation within the spiritual community itself, with members ranged violently on different sides of public debate. We must also be very careful not to get caught up in the parties and factions which accompany political debate. Because we agree with someone's views on a particular issue does not mean that we will agree with him on others. That is why it is important to stick to issues which are clear so that we can see quite easily when we are being led beyond our own position. Above all, in the exercise of our power, we should never forget our fundamental ideals and that we have Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WHEN THE STATE ACTS UNJUSTLY?

THE STATE DOES act unjustly from time to time. Sometimes the laws of the state themselves are unjust, sometimes agents of the state, against the state's own laws, act unjustly. For instance, in the Republic of South Africa the laws which supported the system of Apartheid were manifestly unjust. Again, in Britain recently members of the police have been found to have fabricated evidence to force convictions. No doubt in every country there are many examples of both kinds of injustice by the state.

We cannot simply overlook such injustices, on the principle, 'My country, right or wrong' – or of 'rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's'. In the first place we must apply what pressure we can to right what has been done wrong. There are legal channels of protest open to us and in modern democracies the machinery of state is to some extent designed to respond to those channels. We should use these exhaustively. Sangharakshita gave us an example in writing his paper, *Buddhism and Blasphemy*,[10] which he sent to many members of Parliament and other leading figures in British political and cultural life. The pamphlet was accepted as part of the evidence laid before the Parliamentary Commission on the blasphemy law. By virtue of that pamphlet, Sangharakshita found himself in correspondence with others who shared his concern that the common law offence of blasphemy should be abolished. Even if that lobby has not succeeded in ending the blasphemy law, the Government has indicated that it has no intention of making blasphemy a statutory offence covering disrespect to all religions, as it was under strong pressure to do. As yet no more pressing injustices have confronted us – although the injustice of the blasphemy law is not to be overlooked. At some point, however, some Buddhists in the West will be confronted by immediate acts of injustice by the state and we should be prepared to use whatever legal means we can to make sure that they are put right.

Where we can be sure that we will not be compromised we should join with others who share our concerns about specific acts of injustice. For instance there are ecological pressure groups

and groups to end the international arms trade-though here again we should beware of hidden agendas. We may, by joining certain pressure groups, be unwittingly supporting them in their drive to other ends – some left-wing revolutionaries use anti-fascist protest as a cover for their own purposes and right wing groups can be equally devious.

However, though we may use legal channels to their fullest extent, we may not be successful. The state may be too corrupt to promote justice or too weak and disorganised to ensure its enforcement. Here we are at a cross-roads. We have exhausted the rights that the state assigns to us but have not [127] turned the state towards the moral order. What are we to do next: accept what has happened regretfully and bide our time or turn to extra-legal means of pressure on the state? Before we undertake the latter course, we must realise that if we begin to engage in illegal acts, though we may gain our immediate objective of reversing an injustice, we contribute to the destabilisation of the state and thus towards more and perhaps greater injustice. 'Direct action' on behalf of justice may simply deepen chaos and lead to yet further injustice.

Many people are too quick to permit themselves illegal acts on the grounds that the state has failed in its duty. We do not realise the implications of what we are doing. For instance, agitation against the 'Poll Tax' in Britain led many people, including some Buddhists, to withhold payment of the tax. The effect of this widespread action was to clog the courts and to starve local Councils of money. It invited the spectacle of the law and public administration as ineffectual asses and buffoons. Every time the law is demonstrably unable to be upheld more people will be tempted to break it. That is what such action brings about. And there is little doubt that many who did not pay failed to do so not for political reasons but were simply taking advantage of the chaos engendered to save themselves money. In the end, the Government was forced to withdraw the tax because it threatened its electoral chances – the legal channels of protest were quite adequate to bring about the desired end.

Nonetheless, circumstances may be such that acts of protest which have no legal sanction may be necessary. Particular actions of the state may be so intolerable that they must be resisted. Sometimes the state itself is so intolerable that it must be forced to change – as has been the case perhaps in Eastern Europe. For instance, Dr Ambedkar, the leader of the 'untouchables' of India in their fight for social justice, led the march of his people to draw water from the tank at Mahad, previously only available to caste Hindus. If he had not engaged in a certain amount of such direct action it is doubtful whether the massive injustice of untouchability would have been removed. To take an example nearer to home, Bahujan Hitay, a body run by members of the Western Buddhist Order which organises social-work in India, came up against the weakness and venality of local government. Some stone-[128]crushing plants had been illegally established next to their girls' hostel in Pune, and the dust from the crushing was having a deleterious effect on the girls' health. The local authority was induced to issue eviction notices against the squatters – which were ignored. It was the authority's duty to enforce the eviction but they failed to do so. Eventually, the girls marched to the town hall and sat outside it, stopping all traffic, until the officers of the Council promised to take action. Whether or not they will do so remains to be seen – but here was a case where perhaps direct action was the only alternative to acquiescence. Fortunately, there are very few such examples in the West at present and I doubt whether illegal action can be justified in many cases, if any.

CONCLUSION

THAT THEN IS my prolegomenon to a Buddhist theory of citizenship. There is much to be thought further and deeper upon. No doubt we will begin to do so as we take our citizenship more seriously

than most of us do at present. We need to realise that we are citizens and use our citizenship for the general good. We must accept the value and necessity of the state, using the modicum of power it affords us to promote the good, and apply what pressure and influence we can on clear-cut and unambiguous issues. But we should always remember that one cannot touch pitch without being soiled. Politics is a dirty business, for it is about power – a much coveted commodity. We must be careful to remain aloof from party and faction and we must never use power for power's sake. If we do use our power as citizens at all it should be for a higher purpose, on the basis of our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels – of our commitment to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

However, many issues within the modern state are not susceptible of easy resolution. Often there are two sides to a debate, neither of which one can endorse – as was the case with the Gulf War: I could neither support the War nor act against it. A point is often reached when we have to recognise that we cannot do anything about the problem. This does not mean that we are powerless and should simply withdraw despairingly into quietism, going to cultivate our garden. We have to recognise that many political problems [129] cannot be solved on their own level – for that would be simply the victory of one faction over the other, of one side of the dilemma at the expense of the other. Such problems can only be solved by the introduction of a new and higher, moral, even spiritual perspective which places the dilemma in a context transcending factional interest. It is the presence of this higher moral perspective which turns an ordinary rāja into a Dharmarāja.

This is where we find our fundamental duty as ones who Go Forth and yet are still citizens. It is our duty to assert that higher moral and spiritual perspective within the state – and we must assert it as loudly and plainly as possible through our Buddhist centres, through the media, and by contacting people of influence and influencing them. That higher perspective is so desperately needed in the modern world but it barely enters the debate. Ultimately, that higher moral perspective is co-extensive with the Dharma. Yet the Dharma is still the concern of a tiny minority in the West – even in India its following is relatively small. We must make much more effort to put the Buddhist perspective before the public eye because it is that perspective which ultimately resolves all conflict and crisis.

And in order to assert that Buddhist perspective effectively we must live it. We must ourselves Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels more and more deeply – we must commit ourselves ever more fully to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Only if we Go for Refuge can we speak with clarity, conviction and authority from that higher perspective. Only if we live in accordance with the Dharma can we show, by the harmony of our lives together, that the Buddhist perspective is truly an answer to the world's problems.

In the end that was my answer to the Gulf War. There was nothing I could immediately do to contribute to the solution of the problem. But I felt that my work within the Buddhist movement was the only long-term solution to such horror. It is ultimately only by a radical shift in the moral perspective of many, many people in the world that wars like that will not happen again. And it is in helping people to make that shift in perspective that our work lies. I felt satisfied that, in principle, my work was a fulfilment of my duty as a citizen and was an answer to the futile waste of the Gulf War. My only doubt was whether I was really radical enough in my own practice of the Dharma. I am still caught up in so many of the things which make wars [130] happen: possessiveness, selfishness, pride, jealousy, competitiveness and so forth. The only way I can really feel completely satisfied with my citizenship is if I Go Forth more and more and more, until the sources of conflict and injustice are completely eradicated in me.

A talk originally given during the Men's Convention of the Western Buddhist Order, September 1991. Subhuti is the author of Sangharakshita: a new voice in the Buddhist Tradition *(Windhorse, 1994).*

Notes

[1] 'Going Forth' (Pāli, *pabbajana*; Sanskrit, *pravrājana*) is in traditional Buddhism the act of leaving civil life and becoming a monk – 'going forth from home into homelessness' as the full phrase has it. Sangharakshita broadens the meaning of the term beyond the original monastic context. He understands Going Forth as the act of taking personal responsibility for oneself and one's development independent of the views and conventions of the society in which one belongs. In his terminology Going Forth is the act whereby the individual separates himself from the 'group' – the group being the various overlapping collectivities to which human beings belong and which are organised for their survival, exacting subservience to norms and customs as the price of protection and aid. Going Forth from the group is therefore a key step in spiritual life, since it is only as an individual that one can develop on the path. Going Forth does not, however, mean hostility to the group – merely that one is not, or is less and less, bound by its norms and customs.
[2] A spiritual community or Sangha consists of individuals who have made a spiritual commitment – in Buddhist parlance, who have Gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The term is susceptible of various uses of which two are mainly found in this article. It can mean a specific association of individuals who have Gone for Refuge effectively and who share a framework of teaching and practice: the Western Buddhist Order is a spiritual community in this sense. It can refer to all those who are committed to the spiritual path, whether directly associated or not, especially those who do so within the Buddhist framework – or who can be understood to be genuinely spiritually committed from the Buddhist perspective even if they do not use its terminology and practice.
[3] The *mettābhāvanā* (Pāli; Sanskrit, *maitrībhāvanā*) or 'development of loving-kindness' is a basic Buddhist meditation practice, taught at all FWBO centres, in which one consciously and systematically evokes feelings of loving-kindness, commencing with oneself and finally stretching to all living beings throughout space. See Kamalashila, *Meditation*, Windhorse, 1992, p.23.
[4] Sangharakshita, *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1988, p.101.
[5] Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1991, p.218.
[6] Operating by the 'power mode' is 'to relate to other living beings in terms of violence, or in such a way as to negate rather than to affirm their being'. The 'love mode' is the opposite of this, being the product of an imaginative identification with other living beings. See Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1985, pp.53–4.
[7] Pāli, *Dhammarāja*. In the *Sutta Nipāta*, the Buddha himself says he is an unsurpassed *Dhammarāja* as he sets the "Wheel of the Dhamma" or *Dhammacakka* rolling [554-557]. However, elsewhere in the Pāli canon, the term implies a "righteous ruler" who rules, honours and reveres the Dhamma. See, for example, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* III 149.
[8] The Pure Land, a Mahāyāna Buddhist conception, is an ideal or archetypal world of great beauty which comes into being as the field of highly positive influence surrounding a Buddha. One will be born into such a Pure Land through intense faith in the Buddha who presides over it. There one will find all the conditions necessary to progress towards Enlightenment. The best known Pure Land is

Sukhavatī, formed it is said by the vow taken by the Buddha Amitābha when he became a Bodhisattva. The Pure Land schools of China and Japan place great emphasis on this conception.

[9] See note 3 above.

[10] See Sangharakshita, *Buddhism and Blasphemy*, Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1989.