

Editors' Introduction

When the *Western Buddhist Review* was launched in 1994, it presented a variety of articles exploring traditional Buddhism and Buddhism in the modern west. Now, with volume 7, a new website, and new editors, the *Western Buddhist Review* remains true to its original vision. It is the peer-reviewed scholarly journal of the Triratna Buddhist Order and community, dedicated to publishing good-quality original contributions to the ongoing exploration of the Dharma in the modern west.

But while the *Journal* remains the same, things have changed. Ugyen Sangharakshita, the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community (formerly Friends of the Western Buddhist Order), died in 2018, still writing (via his secretary) until the end. Sangharakshita's extraordinary vision and genius is in the background of the *Journal*, in its commitment to modern scholarship as well as its respect for the inherited wisdom of the Buddhist tradition, in its openness to new ideas and especially to the way that the Dharma may be communicated through the Arts.

The Buddhist context in the west, or at least in the UK, has also changed. Buddhism is no longer regarded as an unusual kind of spiritual exoticism. It has become part of the multi-cultural fabric of modern Britain. Who, in 1994, could have predicted the rise of the mindfulness movement? With it, the practical teachings of the Buddha have become secularised and made mainstream. With this popularisation of Buddhism, the role of scholarly journals like this one has shifted from trying to show *similarities* of Buddhist to western ideas to that of highlighting *differences* between popular and more nuanced accounts of the Dharma.

Another unexpected effect of the popularisation of Buddhism is the taking up of one of the most distinctive and difficult of Buddhist teachings, that of *anātman* or 'non-self'. While this used to make almost no sense to most westerners, who habitually connected 'spirituality' with the 'soul', the teaching of non-self has now become a sort of alternative orthodoxy. For atheists especially, the scientific worldview leaves no room for a spiritual soul, and the 'self' has become an illusion generated by neural networks for evolutionary purposes. Within Buddhist (or Buddhish) circles, a movement called 'Liberation Unleashed' has become popular, with the aim of helping people to free their minds from the illusion of a separate self. Some of the methods of enquiry involved in the process of freeing the mind are similar to methods taught by the Buddha, which are said to lead to liberating insights into the way things really are.

In this volume of the *Western Buddhist Review*, we take up the theme of differentiating Buddhist philosophical accounts of the self and non-self from popular ideas from science and from contemporary forms of spirituality such as Liberation Unleashed. The Buddhist teaching of *anātman* is really not easy to understand, and sometimes the way it is explained can be misleading. This issue attempts to offer nuanced approaches to this difficult but crucial aspect of Buddhist thought and practice.

The three articles on our theme of ‘Self and Non-Self’ are based on talks given at a philosophy symposium on the same theme held at Adhiṣṭhāna, a large Triratna retreat centre in Herefordshire, UK, in January 2018. In the article on ‘A Range of (No-)Self Views’, Śīlavādin puts the very idea of ‘non-self’ into a broader philosophical context, and raises some important questions about what it means to talk of ‘self’ and ‘non-self’. If by ‘self’ one means a robust belief in a narrative of being a particular fixed person, then ‘non-self’ means denying that such a self exists. But if by ‘self’ one means the minimal sense of the continuity of personal identity, then it is hard to know what could usefully be meant by denying such a self. The Buddha certainly had such a self. In his article ‘Three Ways of Denying the Self’, Dhivan goes into three distinct ways in which mainstream Buddhist philosophers tried to explain what was meant by ‘non-self’. Not only does this show what a knotty philosophical problem it is to explain ‘non-self’, but it highlights the difficulty of making properly intelligible the claim that insight into ‘non-self’ is liberating. Finally, Matt Drage takes a sideways look at the very process of transforming the self and realising the truth, using the philosophy of Michel Foucault to illuminate the meaning of specific teachings of the Triratna Buddhist community. Buddhist practice involves not only seeing through the self, but also becoming a certain kind of self, in relation to a particular community of spiritual practitioners, with certain values, involved in certain modes of training and development. There is a very positive sense in which as a Buddhist one becomes a someone, a self, at the same time as letting go of a self.

This new volume of *Western Buddhist Review* also includes an article by Mitrānanda (Roger Farmer) on the liberating potential of *jhāna* meditation as taught in early Buddhist texts. The article contributes to a growing literature exploring, again with *nuance*, questions about what can be said about meditation and the liberation process. Mitrānanda’s article is based on a dissertation he wrote for an MA in Buddhist Studies at the University of South Wales, a course which has developed a good reputation in the UK in regard to postgraduate Buddhist studies. Volume 7 will also include book reviews, which will be published as they are ready.

The editors hope you enjoy this new volume of *Western Buddhist Review*, the new website by which it reaches the world, and our ongoing scholarly exploration of Buddhism in the western world. Please consider contributing

articles or reviews, and at the very least sign up for updates to our news feed, which will tell you about new publications as well as events in the world of Triratna scholarship and philosophy.

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