



Personal Statement

Br. William John Van Gordon's personal statement in response to the article published in the Daily Mail on the 25th May 2007

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Why am I responding to the statements contained in this article? I am responding for the benefit of the lay sangha and all of the many people who have chosen to practice spiritual development and to use the monastery as a base to support their efforts.

I write this statement in response to an article written in the Daily Mail on the 25th of May 2007 outlining Mrs. Rita Van Gordon's emotional perspective in relation to myself.

As stated in the published article, I am William John Van Gordon, the son of Mrs. Rita Van Gordon. I am 28 years of age and I am one of the directors of the charity called Pine Forest Sangha.

I would like to begin by thanking Mrs Rita Van Gordon for giving me the opportunity to practice patience, loving kindness and compassion and to practice generosity by giving her my time and energy.

For a period of many years now I have been subject to a campaign of harassment, persecution and defamation perpetrated by Mr and Mrs. Van Gordon (my parents) in conjunction with one or two other family members and other individuals.

This small group of people headed by Mr and Mrs Van Gordon are responsible for the inaccurate and slanderous allegations made in the Daily Mail article and this group have established themselves with the primary intention of spreading harmful and malicious gossip in relation to myself, the monastery and individuals related to this charity.

The charity Pine Forest Sangha released a statement at the beginning of this year regarding the harmful activities and publications made by this group. This article can be found by following the link www.pineforest.org.uk/id41.html

Both myself as an individual and the charity as an organization are in the process of taking legal advice from our respective solicitors in order to determine the appropriate course of action in light of these malicious and slanderous words.

I would like to say that the inaccurate and very misleading statements made by Mrs. Rita Van Gordon have probably jeopardized the charity's projects of bringing people in great need here to the monastery from Nepal and Sri Lanka and in the creation of two orphanages in these countries which would have benefited a great deal of children who have less than nothing. This is a good example of how our thoughts, words and actions have an effect on all things and we should therefore be fully aware and vigilant of what we are thinking, saying and doing. I sincerely hope that Mrs. Rita Van Gordon's mindless and malicious words have not influenced too greatly our possibilities of helping others.

I personally have much compassion for Mrs. Van Gordon who is obviously suffering a great deal but she must now learn that I am 28 years of age and living my own life. As stated by Mrs Van Gordon; I do have a very good brain and I know how to use it, so it is time for her to let go and allow me to live my life which I am thoroughly enjoying, perhaps then she could begin to enjoy her own life.

In the Daily Mail article Mrs. Van Gordon implies that I have distanced myself from her and from the family as a whole. This is, in fact, total nonsense. I have made many attempts to talk with my parents yet on each and every occasion they have used this opportunity to simply further their campaign of harassment and slander or to try and convince me that Buddhism is a cult and not a serious religion. In fact, as stated in the previous statement issued by the charity, both my parents have previously been issued with police warnings for harassment, and my father has previously been arrested for assault and charged by the police for harassment of myself with appropriate bail conditions imposed. The charity's lawyers are now in possession of conclusive evidence that proves that Mrs. Van Gordon and one or two other individuals including family members are responsible for continually publishing anonymously on internet chat forums slanderous, malicious and potentially harmful gossip. These publications have continued for a period exceeding six months and the individuals in question have been contacted by the charity's solicitors.

Mrs Van Gordon states in the article that I was "befriended" by Br. Edo three years ago. The opening statement of the article is false as I met Br. Edo many years before this during my time at university. It is stated in the article by Mrs. Rita Van Gordon that I took employment. Please allow me to elucidate. Many years ago I took employment as did others with the sole intention of raising funds in order to establish this charity here in Great Britain. It was at this point that both Mr and Mrs Van Gordon began their campaign of harassment which even included, as stated by Mrs. Rita Van Gordon, trying to "section me under the mental health act". I really cannot be totally certain whether this was due to a misunderstanding or over possessiveness on my parent's behalf, or simply a pure desire to 'control' fueled by greed. Mrs. Van Gordon even states that I entered into investments with my father. Here I take the opportunity to state that there has never been any form of joint investment in any thing with my father.

Since the article was published in the daily mail I have been contacted by many many people wishing to write to Mrs Van Gordon expressing their anger and outrage at her behavior in terms of making such malicious comments in a national newspaper about her own son. I would like to thank these people for their concern and their support but would request however, that individuals refrain from doing this as I do not believe that it is helpful to react emotionally. Also, since the article was published I have been contacted by many newspapers and radio stations wishing to publish the 'other half of the story'. The newspapers have even suggested writing articles under the headings such as "Mother tries to section son under mental health act because of religious beliefs" or "possessive mother desperate to control 28 year old son's life". To date, I have declined such interviews as it is not my belief that adding fuel to the situation would be in any way constructive or harmonious.

In the article, Mrs. Rita Van Gordon uses very powerful and emotionally evocative words such as "brainwashing", "cult", "charlatan", "conman" and so forth. I believe that her intention here is to attempt to seduce an emotionally volatile public and she is undermining and greatly underestimating the intelligence of people reading this article. I believe that she herself is showing a great capacity for using words in order to manipulate people and their opinions.

In the Daily Mail article Mrs. Van Gordon states that "I have been trapped in some brainwashing cult..... by a dangerous conman" These allegations are completely false. In fact, it was myself along with others who convinced and invited Br. Edo Shonin to come to Great Britain in order to help in the creation of a monastery here. He reluctantly accepted after a great deal of persuasion. Now I find myself along with the others in a somewhat peculiar situation because since Br. Edo's arrival here, he has received nothing but incessant harassment and bullying from certain members of my family who have made many many inaccurate assertions including allegations that he is a conman and not a monk for example. These are my feelings but whenever Br. Edo is informed of such allegations he just quietly responds with a smile "Is that so" and continues his daily tasks.

The article mentions that a complaint has been made to the Charity Commission and Pine Forest Sangha was made aware of this complaint towards the end of last year which originated from an individual working in conjunction with my parents. The nature of this complaint was very similar to the allegations as detailed in the previous statement issued by the charity. The link for this statement has been included above. These allegations were investigated by the Charity Commission and rejected on the grounds that they were completely unfounded. We are not aware of any further complaints raised against the charity.

As the charity is only one year old, it has been working together with the Charity Commission in order to ensure that solid foundations are laid down so that the charity can develop and grow in a successful and wholesome manner. I believe that the charity has been very successful in its first year and has made marvelous progress in furthering its objectives and has touched the lives of many individuals in an extremely positive way. For anybody interested, the trustees annual report, that will be issued in the near future will have full details of all of the charity's activities. We attempt to run the charity in a productive, open and effective manner and we always welcome and consider seriously any suggestions or concerns that people may have.

As previously mentioned, I will not be drawn into any form of any negative verbal exchange with Mrs. Rita Van Gordon. However, perhaps it is correct for me to express a concern because it is in the interests of benefiting the wider community. It is stated in the article that Mrs. Rita Van Gordon is a primary school teacher and I have a great deal of respect for anyone who is a teacher of young minds as it is a position that has a tremendous amount of responsibility. Primary school children are at a very crucial age with regards to their development and it is very important at that age that their perspectives and outlooks are broadened and varied so that they can integrate well the concepts of "global citizenship"; understanding and respecting different beliefs and values. From reading this article and from my direct experience, I believe that Mrs. Van Gordon has stepped outside of the ethical values pertaining to her professional position.

I, like many others who practice Buddhist meditation, have made my choices based on my own personal experiences and also based on logical reasoning. The Buddha himself said "Do not believe anything I say out of faith in me". We must base our practice on lived experience and on good logical reasoning.

I live a simple life and thoroughly enjoy it. I do not try to impose my choices and beliefs on others and I do not allow that others impose their choices and beliefs on me and my life. Life is very precious – this is my life and I dedicate my life to benefit others according to the choices I have made. I hope sincerely that other people who wish to follow a spiritual practice whether Muslim, Jain, Jew, Christian or Buddhist can be allowed to do so without fear of persecution.

My lived experience which is personal and individual is that the spiritual path as expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha and taught at Pine Forest Sangha is, for me, a solid, enjoyable and wonderful journey which helps me to embrace my life and find happiness in every breath and in every moment. I have to say that I am not alone in this experience because it is shared by millions of other practitioners on the path to spiritual awareness.

We are a very small monastery and we lead a very simple life. However, if anybody is genuinely interested in finding out more about Buddhist practice then please address your queries to enquiries@pineforest.org.uk

Upon my return to the United Kingdom after the 5th of June I shall be more than happy to answer these questions and if appropriate meet in person with anybody who wishes to make an appointment.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this statement.

May it be of benefit.

William John Van Gordon

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