

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on GOING FOR REFUGE. Tuscany, 1986

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Vessantara: So now we've got some Going For Refuge questions, questions arising out of the Going for Refuge context. We'll start with Peter.

Peter Nicholson: The question is not so much about the booklet but about the blurb on the back cover of the Indian edition. It states that you are the most senior English bhikkhu. I've seen this statement associated with your name a number of times. I wondered why we give this such prominence.

S: I think it's really out of date, in the sense that it's not an emphasis that really any longer in the FWBO we make. In fact, I was talking to Nagabodhi about this just a few months ago, and I asked him to drop this; because, yes, it is something that is regarded as quite important in Buddhist countries, it has some significance, but I think in the FWBO we don't any longer place this kind of emphasis on seniority as such. So I think it is something one can consider now as belonging to my past rather than to my present - even though, in technical terms, one might say I'm getting more senior all the time! But I think it's not an emphasis that is really in keeping with our overall approach. Lokamitra no doubt thinks it's appropriate in India, where these things still mean something, but I'm not so sure that we should even continue it there. So you won't see it on the back of our last couple of publications, nor on the back of the one that's coming.

Sanghapala: Bhante, do you think of yourself as a bhikkhu or a Dharmachari?

S: That's quite a question, isn't it? I suppose it depends what one means by a bhikkhu, to begin with; also I suppose it depends what you mean by a Dharmachari. After all, I haven't been ordained as a Dharmachari. I think you can say that, in a sense, I am a transitional or intermediate type! - because I am in a way like a bridge; I link the old and the new. In the case of all of you, you don't do that; you're the product of the new development as it were, or the new Movement. But in my own case, for purely historical reasons, that isn't the case, because I was, so to speak, brought up under the old system, but I have lived to inaugurate a new system. So I suppose in a way that that's the position of all pioneers. So one might say, in the strict sense, I'm neither a bhikkhu nor a Dharmachari; I'm some kind of monstrous hybrid! But you are all quite lucky, because you are - or will be, hopefully - just Dharmacharis pure and simple. Do you see the point I'm getting at? (Voices: Yes.) So in a sense one neither belongs to the old nor to the new - but, yes, you're all very fortunate that you do just belong to the new and haven't had to work it all out for yourselves.

Vessantara: Do you think there are advantages to the Movement in your still as it were having a foot in the old camp, or appearing to have?

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S: I think that is less and less the case. I don't know that it really matters very much now, except perhaps in India. I don't think it really matters very much.

Chakkhupala: I was just thinking - given that there now seems to be firmly established the principle of the primacy of the Going for Refuge, in the way that the Movement is structured, and that we are emphasizing the spirit rather than the letter, could you envisage the possibility in the future of having another sort of ordination, or rather a specific kind of undertaking Precepts binding Dharmacharis to a particularly strict form of monasticism? In other words, tending in the direction of a bhikkhu ordination, although not wanting to use that terminology?

S: Well, in a sense, we do have that already, because we have the anagarikas who do take a vow - or the Precept - of celibacy, that is, abrahmacarya. We have in India Jyotipala, in Sri Lanka we have Asvajit; we have Padmavajra in England, though his is probably just for a limited period; and, of course, we've got Ratnashuri. I don't think I've forgotten - oh! we've got Kamalashila at Vajraloka. But I have so far carefully refrained from speaking of an anagarika ordination, because I think the danger is that, if one speaks of another ordination, or even of a higher ordination, it detracts from the importance and centrality of the original Going for Refuge, and I think we must keep that emphasis. None the less, I am very much in favour of more and more people adopting - on the basis of that one ordination, the Going for Refuge - a more and more as it were monastic lifestyle, and even taking the abrahmacarya precept. I am definitely in favour of that. But one wants as it were to keep it within the one basic original ordination. Otherwise, if you have another ordination, or a higher ordination, gradually a split starts developing and we will be, sooner or later, back in the very situation that we have been trying to resolve. But none the less, I repeat I am definitely in favour of a more monastic element within the Movement. Yes. Yes.

Because it's not even just a question of celibacy, it's just a question of - well, you used the word strictness. That is not, of course, a very popular word nowadays. I think I know what you mean; I hope everybody else does. Or at least, I hope that what I think you mean is what I think you mean! - if you see what I mean. It's more like a greater degree of scrupulosity, conscientiousness, thoroughness, in living out the implications of your Going for Refuge. This is what it really means. It doesn't mean the superimposition of some rather strange way of life on that.

Chakkhupala: I suppose I was thinking that, as Dharmacharis actually develop, and develop that kind of scrupulosity, scrupulousness, conscientiousness, and actually live out in finer and finer, more softened(?) and refined ways, their spiritual commitment, presumably there will come a time when - one can see it developing now in the Movement - those more senior Order Members will tend to have lifestyles quite different from very junior Order Members who - (S: Yes) - and I suppose what I am saying is: I can sort of understand even now that a new Order Member or a Mitra or even a Friend would quite naturally see someone who had taken the abrahmacarya precept and was an anagarika as being in some ways in a different category to a Dharmachari. I know it's very dangerous language.

S: Well, he is and he isn't. I think what is important is that he should see the anagarika not as someone different in kind from himself but someone who represents his own commitment in a more intense form, or to a more intense degree; but not someone who has taken up a different line of development, as it were. Otherwise you are back to the old split between the monk and the lay person. I don't think it's going to be very easy to maintain the balance, frankly. I think a lot will depend upon the - well, the more senior and experienced people in this respect. They mustn't sort of claim, perhaps, any special privileges or give the impression that [3] they occupy a special kind of position, or that they are essentially different. The

difference is a difference of degree, not a difference of kind.

For instance, senior, more experienced Order Members may be supported; bhikkhus are also supported, but it may be necessary for the senior, more experienced Order Members to be supported, so that they can give their full time and energy to Dharma activities. But they themselves must be very careful to ensure that that does not as it were separate them in any way, in any substantial way, from those others, perhaps other Order Members, who are supporting them. That is why I think in a way it is quite good, though there may be other inconveniences, if senior Order Members in a community take their full share of duties; otherwise you very easily get this sort of categorization.

Paul Tozer: On the first page of this Going for Refuge booklet, you talk about the activities conducted at our centres, and you talk about courses in human communication. I don't believe that there are many courses in human communication around at the moment. Do you think it would be a good idea to have more courses in human communication, and do you think it's a good medium for the Dharma?

S: I was thinking, of course, mainly of the communication exercises and the particular context in which they occur. I don't think we've actually had many communication courses as such; I think we've simply usually had just communication exercises in the course of a more general retreat. I am not quite sure what the position in the Movement at present is in this respect; but I think it would be a good idea, from time to time, to have, say, communication weekends. I held quite a few of these myself years ago, I think it was at Caxton Hall; we had several in one of the smaller halls there. I think - sometimes they were one day, sometimes they were over two days. But we had mainly communication exercises, with a meditation, I think, at the beginning and at the end; and quite a bit of explanation and discussion about the exercises and their implications, and about human communication in general. And perhaps it would be a good thing if we did have more of these. I find it difficult to say whether we should or should not, definitely, because this is something, I think, which can only be decided by the centres themselves.

I must say, to be quite frank, I've had one or two little reservations about communication exercises more recently, in the context of a mixed retreat or mixed course. From time to time I have not been very happy about the results - for reasons which, no doubt, I need not go into. So I think one needs to exercise caution in this particular respect, because, you know, the communication exercises really do work; they do have some effect, as I'm sure everybody, practically, knows or has personally experienced.

Uttara: Bhante, do you see them being used, say, within a beginners' course, or would you think you should leave them out of a beginners' course - say, at the end of a course when people have been ...

S: What kind of course are you thinking of?

Uttara: A meditation course ...

S: If it's a meditation course as such I don't think you should introduce communication exercises. I am not so sure that they go together all that well. I won't be very certain about that. But perhaps one could wind up with something of that sort. But, again, that needs to be carefully considered. You've had a meditation course; would it not be better to end up with a

really good meditation? Because, if you introduce communication exercises then, it's something very different. If you've got [4] a general retreat, with a bit of everything - some Puja, some meditation, some talks, some discussion - well, by all means have two or three sessions of communication exercises, too. But if it's just a meditation course, I'm very doubtful whether you should have communication exercises too at the end.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, this follows on from what Uttara has just said, and also what you were saying earlier about teaching meditation. My so far very limited experience in Cambridge, where there has only been the time and facilities for one class a week, is that people seem to like to be able to drop in and drop out, regulars like to be able to attend as well as beginners, and if one just simply followed the format of a cycling course in, for example, mindfulness of breathing, I don't think it would fulfil the demands of a lot of the people who come. And it seems that a lot of variation is required. What we have tried is sometimes having discussions, sometimes short talks, sometimes introducing a bit of devotion, sometimes having communication exercises - in a way just to keep up people's interest.

S: Yes, it would seem as though perhaps sometimes one has to follow a path of very irregular steps. But I think you have to be very careful you are not just keeping people happy and amused and entertained, in that they are really getting somewhere. You might consider it would be more worth your while just to forget about the people who drop in from time to time and, if you've got four, say, really serious people, concentrate on them. You might consider that a better thing to do.

But in the long run, or in the end, it is the man on the spot that has to decide, in the light of the situation.

Vessantara: Bhante, my impression is - I don't know whether other Order Members would confirm this - that, whereas in the early and mid-seventies communication exercises were very popular, within the Movement - say at Pundarika we did have communication courses and weekends, a lot of people used to come and get a lot out of them - now, at least at some centres, you only have to mention that at the regulars' class you are going to do communication exercises next week and the numbers drop quite dramatically.

S: Ah. That's interesting.

Vessantara: It's as if they aren't generally as appreciated as they used to be.

S: Perhaps they are not as necessary as they used to be - possibly?

Vessantara: Well, you'd think that people would really enjoy human communication, even if they are not absolutely necessary. You'd think they would quite look forward to the opportunity; whereas it seems that people fight rather shy of them. At least that is my information.

S: And [they] prefer meditation?

Vessantara: Well, they seem to prefer almost anything, meditation, or Puja or a talk, or - I don't know whether other people have ...

S: I just wonder - and this is only a wondering - whether there is enough in the way of

explanation and discussion of the exercises, or whether it is not that simply the exercises are laid on and that's that. I used to talk and explain quite a lot. I've even done that here, haven't I, in earlier Tuscanies - I think I've actually demonstrated once or twice. Not so much discussion, but with at least [5] quite a lengthy explanation of each stage and so on, or a comparatively lengthy explanation.

So perhaps there isn't enough of that element, but the exercises aren't put sufficiently within context. I don't know; this is just a sort of speculation. It could be so.

Uttara: On communication exercises - I personally [...] mentioned about doing them in courses and other classes; I have become very wary of actually doing them at all, especially for people who are even intermediate, because they can be quite a frightening experience for people who ...

S: I do know, by the way, that they are often done on the women's retreats, and the women seem to enjoy them very much and get a lot out of them. But this is just women among themselves. And sometimes they are done at Padmaloka on men's retreats, aren't they, and they seem very popular?

Uttara: Yes.

: Surata's leading them seems to be very popular. (Voices agreeing.)

Uttara: I think it's just because, over the years, in taking communication class and being quite sensitive to the people and seeing the looks in people's faces as they were doing them, it seemed that it was, rather than having a positive effect on them, it has actually frightened them, because to be suddenly confronted with another human being, so I've been quite wary of pushing it upon people, and really trying to emphasize the ...

S: I did notice some years ago, and I drew attention to this fact, that many people conducting communication exercises were making the little sessions too long, and that that was introducing strain. I used to keep them quite short, and very gradually lengthen them. I usually started off with five minutes. But I did discover that some people were having 15-minute sessions, which is far, far too much.

Padmapani: Bhante, I remember that in the old days, at Keffolds and Pundarika, what you used to do - I don't think people do it so much now - was that you used to actually watch whom you put the person with.

S: Oh, yes! That's quite important.

Padmapani: - and move people around as appropriate. What you tend to get sometimes is people just having a communication with someone they want to have a communication with, which can be a non-communication.

S: Right, yes. Or you just get, by pure accident, two quite blocked people together. What I most looked out for was that: that you didn't get two people together who were quite blocked, and both of whom found communication difficult. I used to allow people to sit with whomsoever they pleased, to begin with, but I very quickly changed them all around. But I think you have to allow people to sit with whom they please to begin with, because they've

got all these ideas about personal choice and not being told what to do - but I don't think you can just let people sit with whomsoever they wish, because in a way it defeats the purpose of the whole exercise.

Paul Tozer: Connecting up with what Uttara and Vessantara were saying, I get the impression that people are very scared of communication exercises, and that that's [6] the reason why if you say you are going to do communication exercises next week only half the people turn up.

S: But they do enjoy them in the context of a retreat, so who are those people who don't turn up? Is it regulars or Order Members or Mitras or - what about all of you? Would you think it wasn't so important to turn up the following week, if it was communication exercises? Maybe people don't think it's much to do with the Dharma, so they can give that a miss. Maybe it isn't just that they're terrified of looking somebody else in the eye - or eyes, I should say.

Uttara: It wasn't everybody who was scared, it was just some people who definitely looked as if they were finding it very difficult.

S: I can certainly remember that, in the old days at Keffolds - this was on retreat - there were a few people who absolutely refused to do them, and one or two who really were terrified; used to sit rigid with terror. Including one person who in another group, outside the FWBO, was teaching a kind of communication exercise. I remember him very well. He left in the middle of the retreat; he couldn't take any more.

Alan Pendock: I wonder if people have a chance to almost like chicken out if they know it's going to be next week, and - My experience is that I feel nervous, for instance, when I start doing communication exercises, if I know it's going to happen, but once I get into it I really enjoy it. I see that quite often in other people. They're nervous to start with, but at the end of the session they sit round talking for ages afterwards; it's really quite broken the ice. And I wonder whether that has something to do with it.

S: So perhaps there is a lesson to be learned here: that perhaps it's best to have communication exercises within the context of a retreat.

Uttara: Bhante, we seem to have no trouble these days in managing - on a mixed retreat - to get men to sit with men and women to sit with women. They don't seem to object to that at all.

S: People don't. Probably they feel safer. Well, all the men do; I'm not so sure about the women. I think women don't seem to find such a big difference, you know, sitting with someone of their own sex, as men do. That is my overall impression. I think between men you often get a sort of competitiveness and even hostility, which usually is not there in the case of women - at least, in that kind of way. But anyway, that's perhaps a big generalization. I think this is perhaps one of the reasons why one has to be very careful with communication exercises in mixed groups, and avoid them, perhaps, if possible: because it's just taken in a sort of social sense and not taken very seriously; it even becomes a sort of flirtation. But the ability to communicate is important, and perhaps, like everything else, it's a skill to be learned, with or without the help of communication exercises; and maybe we do need to give more thought to this. Even if you are going to give talks, well, communication is important. You need to be able to communicate. So maybe there is room for communication courses, or

at least room for a slot on communication in the context of retreats; and, again, this is something that those concerned can give some attention to. Though I have also said that, in the case of Order Members, it shouldn't be necessary for them to do communication exercises, because they should be making an effort to communicate with people, especially with fellow Order Members, all the time. The exercises are really only for those who have reached such a point of non-communication that they really need definite exercises to help them; but Order Members should be in [7] communication with at least some other Order Members all the time, and should be extending their communication all the time, with Order Members and others.

Vessantara: Although communication exercises may not be necessary for Order Members, do you feel that inasmuch there are particularly good conditions when you are making your communication with someone else particularly conscious, there might not be a place even for Order Members?

S: But don't you do that when you, say, have a personal talk with somebody?

Vessantara: I don't know that people consciously go through the same sort of checklist, almost, as is built into the communication exercises.

S: I do know that sometimes Order Members, just two of them, do go off and do the communication exercises themselves together. I think probably that's a better way of doing it, in the case of Order Members, if they feel that kind of need.

Alan Pendock: In *Going for Refuge*, you mention here - this is when you talk about becoming a Mitra: 'Henceforth your time, energy and interest will be devoted exclusively to the FWBO. A Mitra is expected: (1) To attend their local FWBO centre regularly and participate in its activities; (2) To keep up a daily meditation practice; (3) To maintain contact with the Order Members ... and (4) To help the centre, and the Movement generally, in any practical way he or she can.' When I became a Mitra, or when I asked to become a Mitra, my first criterion was 'Had I stopped shopping around?', which isn't actually in this list of four. Is this suggesting that there are almost five criteria?

S: One could put it this way, but I think I missed that particular one out on that occasion, simply in view of the audience I was addressing. I do know that, in India, they do speak in terms of five criteria, and one could think of it in those terms. What's the extra one?

Alan Pendock: The first one: 'To attend the local FWBO centre regularly and participate in its activities.'

S: As far as I remember, I used always to mention that in England itself; but perhaps it got rather conflated with being in touch with Order Members, because that's the usual situation in which you are in contact with them. And obviously, if you are in touch with them and they need a bit of help, you give that. Perhaps it would be better to spell it out separately and have five.

Jayamati: It does rather imply that you are not shopping around, if you are attending your

local FWBO centre regularly and participating in its activities.

S: Mm, sometimes people do attend several places of worship, so to speak. I think also there is the point that - maybe this is why I omitted it in India - that there may not be a centre for you to attend. This would certainly be the case with many of our Friends in India who live several hundred miles away from an FWBO centre but who do see Order Members from time to time and keep in as much contact with them as they can, and come on retreats when they can. Do you see what I mean? I think perhaps I was also concerned to make it clear that you didn't necessarily have to go via a centre, because, after all, the main thing is the Order. So you can have your direct contact with Order Members without going through contact with centres.

Jayamati: But you wouldn't be expected then to shop around?

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S: Pardon?

Jayamati: Once they had asked to become a Mitra, you wouldn't be expecting them to be shopping around at all - ?

S: No, no.

Jayamati: - even though they might not be operating through a centre?

S: Right, yes. At least they'd be happy and satisfied with their personal contact with those particular Order Members outside any centre context. Also, there is this point - I did touch on it the other evening - that one really needs to distinguish between the Order and the various FWBOs. Sometimes we speak in terms of 'the FWBO'; well, actually there isn't a 'the FWBO'. There are FWBOs in the plural, which obviously have an interconnection, but there is no one FWBO. But there is just one Order, and I think it is quite important that when people start coming along to a centre, and especially when they become Mitras and start having contact with Order Members, they are conscious of being in contact with Order Members and through them with the Order as a whole, also as distinct from simply their contact with that particular FWBO. Otherwise, if you are not careful, as a Mitra - or even possibly as an Order Member, though this shouldn't happen - you sort of over-identify with that particular FWBO; whereas if you are to identify at all it should really be with the Order. You shouldn't see the Movement, see the Order, just in terms of your particular local FWBO, especially once you as a Mitra have asked for ordination or started thinking in those terms.

Vessantara: So, bearing that in mind, does that mean that in a way we are better off with four criteria, without the one about going along regularly to your local centre, as an actual criterion for being a Mitra?

S: No, I think in practice it does mean that you really need to go along to your local centre. If somebody got interested in the Movement and was in contact with Order Members, but didn't want to go along to the centre, it's usually for negative reasons. Occasionally that does happen, but I haven't yet encountered any positive instance, I think, of that kind of thing. There could be one. But usually, if it does happen, it means that people are shy of meeting what they call large numbers of people, or something of that sort, something that they've got

to get over. So, in practice, I think that being in contact with Order Members does mean going along to a centre. But none the less that distinction has to be made.

There are some people I know who want to have contact with me but don't want to have anything to do with centres, or even with other Order Members. Well, there's really not much I can do for them; I don't have the time, and also I feel there is a definite psychological limitation, or even blockage, on their part, on account of which they want to have just contact with me, avoiding or bypassing centres and Order Members.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think there could be a case for a person becoming a Mitra not visiting the centre if the Order Member was prepared to go to, say, that town where that Mitra was and hold events?

S: Oh yes, we do have that; for instance, at Diss that has been the case, and it is the case at other places, too.

Padmapani: So that person could be a Mitra in that case?

S: Yes, they could be a Mitra.

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Vessantara: Because this does seem to rather limit things, both in terms of if you don't it's difficult to have any outlying Mitras, and also inasmuch as Mitras, once they are Mitras, are supposedly fulfilling the criteria. You do seem to get Mitras who go along bravely to the centre for perhaps three nights a week for three years, say, but then they feel like they want a break for a time, they are still keeping in touch with Order Members but they want to get on with their own practice.

S: Right. I think the essential thing is contact with Order Members. Usually that occurs via a centre, but I think it doesn't have to be so. Especially, as you say, if they have had perhaps contact for some years and have established firm contact with Order Members.

Ratnaprabha: Can I just try and tie you down a bit on this? Because when Mitras ask to become Mitras, in a way it is useful to have a definite checklist that one can sort of trot out and say: 'These are the four criteria', or 'These are the five criteria'. So would it be possible for us to decide, now, as it were, that the four criteria were the criteria listed in the Going for Refuge pamphlet, less 'regular attendance at centres' and plus 'stopped shopping around'?

S: Oh, I think I couldn't be hurried! I'll give it some further thought, and perhaps consult some other Order Members, especially the chapter convenors and possibly the chairmen. I agree it would be better to have one same list, but I think I would like to think about it some more before coming to any definite conclusion.

Ratnaprabha: That is actually the status quo, though; that particular list I mentioned is what Mitras are told nowadays.

S: Yes, right.

Ratnaprabha: This question may have already been answered, actually, because Uttara posed a very similar question, but perhaps I'll just briefly

mention it. It's to do with the position of what we usually call Friends who are quite peripheral to the Movement and like to attend classes sometimes but who don't feel very strongly identified. I have the impression that, in some cases, such people feel in a bit of a cleft stick, because they get to a stage where at least psychologically they feel there is pressure upon them either to get more deeply involved or to pull out altogether, and it's quite difficult for them to remain at that Friend stage; and we may lose people for this reason.

S: I must say I'm rather surprised to hear that, because I've always emphasized that in the case of the Friend he was absolutely free to have as much or little contact as he wished. I have even gone so far as to say 'even if he only comes along once a year to the Wesak celebration, he is still a Friend'. I think probably it's a question of that thin dividing line between encouragement and pressure. Certainly make it clear that people are welcome, and you'd like to see more of them, but there must be no sort of pressure to involve people more than they really want. Again, it's not always easy to tell. Maybe they are just waiting for a bit of encouragement. Maybe they feel - sometimes people get strange ideas - I know some people have felt that they have to be invited to become Mitras, and they are waiting to be invited. You see? But we mustn't bring any sort of undue pressure. There is definitely a place for the Friend, the person who just wants to be a Friend. It's a pity if he does just want to be that, having made the contact with the Movement, but that is his choice, and one has to accept that so long as it is his choice.

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Uttara: I think that is right.(?) I think also what happens, from my experience of people coming along to centres, is that sometimes the conflict arises within themselves without the pressure - (S: Oh yes.) - because they have recognized ...

S: Oh yes. That is quite another thing. That does happen. I've known cases of that sort, even quite recently. It takes this particular form: people are resentful, for instance, that they can't go along to the Mitra class or Mitra study group without being Mitras. They want to be free just to go along and join in the Mitra group as they are free to go along to all the open public classes, and they can't see why they should have to become a Mitra in order to do that. So, in a way, they put themselves in a cleft stick. Part of this is due to the liberal modern ideology that everything should be open to everybody, you know, regardless of readiness, qualifications and so on. So sometimes Friends have complained to me that they are not allowed to attend the Mitra classes, and they sometimes - not that there are very many of them, but there are some - speak in a disgruntled way as though there is some sort of discrimination being practised against them. It is really quite odd.

Padmapani: Bhante, I think there is a category, an area, which is not a Friend, and not a Mitra in the modern sense that we mean Mitra. Rather they are old Mitras that have really sort of lapsed from Mitrahood, but they are not actually Friends with a capital F, and they refuse to give up their Mitrahood; so they are just sort of floating in outer orbit, so to speak.

S: Well, Devamitra has recently interviewed practically everybody, all the Mitras he could get hold of, and I think he is gradually putting it to such Mitras that they should clarify their position. Unfortunately, we have got just a very few old Order Members of that kind, too, and I think their position will have to be clarified in due course; perhaps fairly soon, because there

are some who have really dropped out maybe 10 years ago, and our policy - or my policy, or my principle - is to give people every possible chance. But I think we have to draw the line somewhere. But, anyway, as regards Mitras, that is part of Devamitra's job; he certainly is well aware of that. But initially, he is just trying to encourage those who are Mitras, who are on his roll, actually to put their Mitrahood into effect. I think we have dropped just a very few from the Mitra roll who are definitely out of contact and from whom nothing has been heard for several years; we have dropped a few such people.

Ratnaprabha: I am trying to imagine what it feels like to be one of these - not these lapsed Mitras, but I am going back to the Friend who wants to remain on the level of Friend, but

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... perhaps some kind of conflict. I think what may sometimes happen is that, for very good reasons, the limited number of Order Members and perhaps Mitras available at classes devote most of their attention and energy to the more promising people, the ones that do seem to be wanting to move ahead.

S: Right. Well, one can see that there is, in a sense, a reason for that.

Ratnaprabha: Yes. There is a good reason for it, but it does mean that the pool, the positive group of peripherally involved people, doesn't receive very much encouragement, and perhaps for that reason remains smaller than it healthily should be. I don't know if there's any answer to this, but -

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S: In a sense, there isn't. One just has to determine one's priorities at any given time.

Uttara: What we have found in Glasgow is, in terms of people that come under that category, that if we send them out invitations, just generally keeping them in touch with what's going on - festivals, and ...

S: You phone them, yes.

Uttara: - and phone them and invite them to the centre, and so on, that a lot of people do appreciate getting cards and inviting them to retreats and things like that.

S: Very true, yes. And even if you do concentrate on the Mitras in any given situation, at least spare a moment for the Friend, at least say hello or exchange a few words, so that they know they have been remembered or recognized.

Vessantara: I don't know quite how to formulate this, Bhante, but it arose out of a discussion in our study leaders' meeting today when we were talking about Ratnaprabha's question; and it seems that some centres are - I don't know how far as a matter of policy - concentrating particularly on certain kinds of people who get involved in some way, perhaps they are unattached, say. How far do you think that, if an FWBO centre is the only centre in that area, they should as it were be providing the full range of FWBO facilities, showing that the FWBO actually is for everyone, or how far do you think it is reasonable for a centre to concentrate on a certain kind of approach - ?

S: I think a lot depends on the size of the centre. I think it's only a comparatively large centre that can provide the full range of activities and approaches, and I think a smaller centre will have to specialize.

Vessantara: I suppose what I'm asking is whether, given that it may not be possible, how far local FWBO centres in each city should specialize. Presumably there is a point where you've got large enough, where you can either provide more facilities for the kind of people you've got already and intensify them, or you could branch out and reach other kinds of people that at the moment you are not catering for.

S: I think a lot depends upon the personal temperament of the Order Members concerned. I think there are some Order Members who feel quite impatient, perhaps wrongly, at just spending time with people who are very peripherally involved and who much prefer more intensive contact with those who are more seriously minded. So no doubt that more subjective factor has to be taken into consideration. But I think certainly the Movement as a whole, in any given country, needs to provide the full range of approaches. And I think word very quickly gets around within the Movement that such-and-such centre is of this type and such-and-such centre is of another type, and sometimes people move around accordingly.

Vessantara: I suppose the difficulty is when you have people pick up that the centre that they are at, or that they first approach, is specialized, before they have really got a full appreciation that there are other centres which have got other approaches.

S: That's true. Well, there's my classic story - well, I hope you haven't heard it before; one or two of you might - of when I was down in New Zealand, in South Island, in Christchurch. Somebody came to see me and - I think he had been coming [12] along to the FWBO but he had stopped, as far as I remember. So I asked him why; so he said, well, there was something about the FWBO he didn't like, and that's why he'd stopped. So I asked him, well, just tell me what it was. He said, 'Well, the FWBO is against poetry!' So it emerged that the particular Order Member with whom he was most in contact just didn't like poetry and was dismissive about it, and he had understood that to be the sort of official attitude of the FWBO. So it just shows how careful you, as an individual Order Member or even as an individual centre, have to be in giving an impression of the FWBO to people who come along. So when I assured him that that was by no means the case, etc. etc., he was quite surprised - pleasantly surprised. I don't know whether he continued to come along. In any case our Christchurch centre more or less closed down shortly afterwards. But that's an example.

So I think it's important that, in every centre, even if they don't provide certain activities but make it clear that there are other centres that do provide those activities - I mean, well now, of course, I think Subhuti's book should make it clear what the position is, so that if a particular activity isn't provided by your centre, you know, reading Subhuti's book, that it is provided by other centres.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think there is a general principle to be learned from here, in the sense that if Order Members can move around to different centres like they can, that centres ought to have maybe different types of people, in terms of Order Members, at those centres, to give a larger range?

S: That's true; for instance, I have said recently - I don't know whether anybody heard this - that every centre should have at least one Scotsman! (Laughter.)

: Why is that?

S: Well, I also said that a single Scotsman goes a long way! It's like having salt in the meal: you don't want too much but at least you need something! (Laughter.) It is interesting that you've got Scotsmen, and also even New Zealanders, distributed quite widely around the Movement; and probably it is a good thing that you get a mix of personalities within the particular group of Order Members, assuming that they can get on well together. I know this does make quite an impression on relatively new people, especially on big retreats, when they see a group of very different people, personality-wise, all working harmoniously together. This makes a very big impression, it tells its own story. It conveys its own message: that here are some with university degrees and others who are barely literate, and some who are very outward-going and others who are very calm and subdued, and some who are very scientifically minded and others who are well versed in the poets, but all working together and all good friends and all happy together, and running the whole retreat. It gives a very good impression of the FWBO. But if every single member of the group has got a Ph.D - or is illiterate, as the case may be - well, you don't convey quite the same sort of impression; or if they're all, say, 32 years of age and have got beards, or - (Laughter throughout this.)

Padmapani: Don't you think that's actually quite an interesting point? - that unless there is that attitude prevailing in centres, what you get is people gyrating - I mean gravitating - towards a particular type of person, in order to expound a certain view of what the centre is. In other words, 'This centre is an intellectual centre', 'This centre is an arts centre' ...

S: Right. I think the advantage of having a mix of Order Members, regardless of the activities they are conducting, is that the message is that there is a place in the Order, or in the Movement, for every kind of person. Otherwise, if all the Order Members are intellectuals, the message that gets across is that you have to [13] be an intellectual if you want to be an Order Member. So I think from that point of view, also, it's good to have a mix of different kinds of Order Members - younger and older. It's very useful to have a mixture of older and younger Order Members, because some people who come along will have difficulty with older people, due to authority projections and all that sort of thing. So it's good if there's a young Order Member, perhaps a very new one, with whom they can get into contact. I have seen this happening, actually, on several occasions - that a new young person has felt much more at home with a very young, new Order Member, and has avoided the older, more experienced Order Members, not felt so comfortable with them. There is quite a variety within the Order already, but I'd like to see an even greater variety.

Uttara: Nationalities.

S: Nationalities, too, yes, indeed.

Sudhana: This is a real question out of the blue, Bhante. We were talking about cross-sections, and - we don't really seem to attract people from black cultures. Have you given this any thought? I'm not sure whether I've heard ...

S: I have given this some thought; the question has been raised before ...

Sudhana: Oh, has it? Sorry.

S: - on different occasions. We have had a few coming along, but they don't usually stick. The conclusion I have come to is that, on the whole, from their point of view at least, we are not lively enough. Because, if you take any sort of note of the sort of churches or other such groups that black people go along to, they are very, very lively indeed, with lots of jolly singing and clapping of hands, and I think that kind of approach appeals to most black people. I am not speaking of Indians, of course; I am speaking of the West Indians or Africans. I think, probably, this is the main reason: we are just not lively enough. We are in a way too English. Well, it's not surprising, because most people in the FWBO are English - and Scottish; and even the Scots aren't quite as lively as a lot of these black people are. I think this is the only reason I have been able to come up with. There is also the fact that different communities seem to keep to themselves and not want, very often, to mix with other communities.

Sudhana: Thank you.

S: But anyway, does anyone think there is anything in this - that we are not lively enough for black people? Do you think they do prefer this more lively approach, or is it not so? (Murmurs of assent.)

Sanghapala: They are Christian already. (?)

Padmapani: We had one or two very, very tall, very young black people coming along to the LBC, and they were very interested in karate [...]. That was their major draw, I think; but they dropped off, for some reason. Maybe we didn't have a steel band.

Peter Nicholson: Bhante, are you suggesting maybe that we are not lively enough per se, rather than not lively enough to attract black groups?

S: Well, in some ways you can't, as a whole, be everything. The Movement as a whole can't be lively or not lively, because then it'll be limiting itself to [14] attracting one or another kind of person. But maybe we should at least have some particular centres that are more lively and perhaps known to be more lively, to which the more lively people, including black people, might be attracted.

Alan Turner: Bhante, do you have any ideas how this liveliness might be [developed]?

S: Well, probably not by taking thought. Maybe we have also to define what one means by liveliness. In the case of black people, they are more lively, more exuberant - more noisy, you could say if you wanted to. Whether that is necessarily always a positive quality, that is another matter. Would you want a lot of lively, noisy people, say - whether black or any other colour - on a retreat?

Uttara: I get the impression they seem to be attracted to the, I think it's the Nichiren sect. I've seen an article in The Times or The Guardian, showing them getting involved - dancers, especially black dancers.

S: Usually, of course, objectively, black people tend to go along to Christian churches if they go to anything, and usually Pentecostal churches where there's lots of very jovial, not to say noisy singing, and where there's talking with tongues and all that kind of thing. Well, it is

perhaps difficult for us to offer that kind of thing. (Loud and prolonged laughter.) Not just it's beyond the competence of individual Order Members, but perhaps it's not in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism itself.

Sanghapala: Bhante, you do get people coming to [...s] wanting chanting; that's what they want, they don't want the meditation, they don't want the Buddhism.

S: I think there is something to be said - again, we talked about this on a recent retreat at Padmaloka - for upgrading our chanting. And one or two people are interested in following this up; I think Suvajra intends to follow this up, and to see whether we couldn't incorporate different varieties of chanting, perhaps with different tunes and so on, and make more of it and have it more of an attraction. Not just an attraction, but a fuller expression of devotion. So if anyone is interested in following this up, I am quite happy that they should do it, because obviously I can't follow up everything myself, even if I am personally interested. Again, it could be that different centres specialize; because some people will definitely prefer a plainer, simpler, more austere approach, with not much in the way of chanting or Puja; others will perhaps like a very lavish kind of Puja. Just as, say, in the Church of England you've got the High Church and you've got the Low Church and you've got the Broad Church. Not to speak of, say, outside the Church of England you've got the Quakers and people like that, who have nothing in the way of chanting or ritual. I don't know at this point whether different centres have got a reputation for being better at chanting or ritual or whatever. I think perhaps not, yet; they are all pretty much on the same level, which is not very high. Chanting on the whole is better than it used to be. I must say, sometimes, coming down to the LBC I have been quite well impressed by the level of the chanting compared with what it used to be - I mean, when I've led the odd Puja - because it's been, you know, a good volume of sound and everybody really together, and it used not to be like that. I was quite pleased to see that in the last couple of years.

Sudhana: Regarding chanting, I seem to think that the Tibetan chanting seems to incorporate a certain primitiveness with something sort of quite highly refined. It seems that in the West we've lost touch with that kind of primitiveness, and are a bit blocked.

[15]

S: That's probably true. I must say, I've encountered it only in one particular respect or one particular form so far, within the context of the FWBO, and that was when we had the bagpipes, at the opening of Sukhavati. I really felt that that was quite a good sort of starting point; it seemed to really fit in quite well. It was somebody's brother. (Voices prompting.) Jinavakti(?)'s brother. He was said to be not particularly good, but it was quite good enough for the occasion. I couldn't help feeling it did fit in; it is indigenous - if you think in terms of the British Isles as a whole - and it seemed quite appropriate for that occasion. So we've talked about this sort of thing recently at Padmaloka - not especially mentioning bagpipes, but that people should investigate a bit more, maybe experiment a bit more. Some people, I think, don't like bagpipes, do they? I don't think you often hear them even in Scotland these days, do you?

Uttara: Except when you go to the Highland Games.

Vessantara: Northumbrian pipes are ...

S: Is that so? Ah. Maybe we should investigate.

Uttara: You also have the b[...], which is a drum(?). I've often tried to - if one could play it properly, it could [...]. You'd have to find the correct chanting to go with it.

S: Yes, the bagpipes are a very stirring sound. It's analogous, in a way, to the Tibetan instrumentation.

Uttara: You don't think it would ...

S: I'm not saying it's necessarily suitable for incorporation with Puja! Not if you were sitting next to the person playing. But having it, say, in the open air on some festive occasion - it seemed, on that occasion at least, to fit in very well, I thought; quite appropriate.

Padmapani: Bhante, can you give me any recommended reading on the Tibetan instruments and why they use them? Is there any sort of ...

S: I don't know that any work has been done on this.

Padmapani: They definitely use a very systematic form of symbols ... think it's usually [.. mathematical system (?)]

S: They do have written music. I've seen the Tibetan music; I think a few manuscripts have reached the West. They have a musical notation. I expect someone is studying it at the moment - probably at some American university. But, to the best of my knowledge, no books have been published, in English at least, on the subject. I am sure we will have something sooner or later, because every aspect of Tibetan culture is being quite rigorously studied. How are we getting on?

Vessantara: We've got one little question and one question of indeterminate size.

S: All right.

Vessantara: I think Peter's is the little one.

[15]

Peter Nicholson: Bhante, why does the word Mitra not have a masculine and a feminine form?

S: Oh. I'd have to check that in fact it doesn't have. It might have. I'd have to look in the dictionary and check that it actually didn't have a feminine form. It probably does, but I won't be certain of that. I'm afraid I haven't brought any dictionaries with me this year.

Peter: If you found that it did have one, would you be likely to suggest that we adopted it?

S: I think probably it would be better not to. We've got used just to 'Mitra' now. But I don't have any strong views on the subject, I must say. But first we'd have just to check whether there was in fact a feminine form or not.

Vessantara: Last question, from Paul.

Paul Tozer: Bhante, in the lecture, you quote a formula from the Pali Canon which I'll read out. It goes: 'Excellent, lord, excellent! As if one should set up again that which had been overthrown or reveal that which had been hidden, or should disclose the road to one that was astray, or should carry a lamp into darkness, saying, "They that have eyes will see!" even so hath the Truth been manifested by the Exalted One in many ways.' I was very struck by this passage in that it seems to suggest that the person, when they see the truth, recognize it as if they had seen it before, it's familiar. And yet, traditionally, it's not that they had actually seen it before and fallen from that state. So I wondered what you had to say on that.

S: Well, just one brief comment, because it is a bit late. One could say quite a lot on this. But that fourfold comparison is usually associated with the opening of the Dharma eye, and the opening of the Dharma eye involved the development of Insight. Insight is Transcendental, it's not mundane. So inasmuch as it's Transcendental, presumably, it goes beyond space and beyond time, so there is a timeless quality to it; so that one doesn't experience it as something that you understand, so to speak, just now, but in a sense that you've always understood, because the experience is outside time. So I think it's due to this quality or element of timelessness in the experience that one feels it in that sort of way.

Anyway, perhaps we should leave it there, though we could say more, perhaps. But one can always bring up these questions again on some more suitable opportunity, if one wants to go into them more deeply.

[16]

13 October 1986

Vessantara: We've had our fourth day of study on the Going for Refuge pamphlet, Bhante. We've got very few questions - we've got five. We'll start with Tommy.

Thomas McGearry: This question arose out of the teaching of the five eyes, and we'd like you to explain the difference between prajna-caksus and samanta-caksus, [...] giving [...]

S: I suppose this relates to the difference between the arhant and the Buddha. In some parts of the Pali Canon, those that seem to be the earliest, it would seem that no essential difference is recognized as between the arhant and the Buddha in respect of the content of their spiritual experience. In any case, at that early period, it seems that the term Buddha itself was not used in a very narrow or specialized sense, nor was the word arhant. But it does seem that, as time went on, 'arhant' and 'Buddha' came to be distinguished. Even in the Pali Canon, a Buddha has ten powers which an arhant does not have; and in the Mahayana, a Buddha came to be seen more and more as having a deeper, a more extensive spiritual experience than did the arhant. So, if one recognizes in any way a difference between the level of spiritual attainment of an arhant and the level of spiritual attainment of a Buddha, then of course there must be distinctive 'eyes', as it were, for them. If, of course, one maintains that there is no essential difference between an arhant and a Buddha, then the distinction between prajna caksu and samanta caksu will fall to the ground. So one can't say that there is or that there is not that fifth caksu; it depends on whether one distinguishes between an arhant and a Buddha.

Having said that, one does get the impression from reading the Pali Canon - what seem to be the earliest parts of it - that the Buddha did have something that the arhants didn't have, even though they too were Enlightened; but it isn't very easy, perhaps, to see what exactly it consisted in. So if one enumerates five caksus, one is following the general Buddhist tradition that there is some difference, however indefinable, between an arahant and a Buddha.

Padmapani: Bhante, I think I remember you saying at one time that you felt, because the Buddha was the first person to discover the Law, or was turning the Wheel of the Law, that made him, marked him or earmarked him as something special, beyond ...

S: Well, in a sense, yes, and in a sense, no. Because I referred to these earlier - as they seem to be - passages in the Pali Canon where no distinction is made with regard to content of the Enlightenment experience as between an arahant and a Buddha. It is said that the difference is that the Buddha attained Enlightenment first, without a teacher; the arhants attained it afterwards, with a teacher. So it would seem that it is assumed that, even though the Buddha-to-be possessed superior qualities of determination and initiative, that did not make any difference to the actual content of the Enlightenment experience when he did attain it. But sometimes it seems to be suggested that, in fact, Buddhahood was an inherently higher experience than arhantship, which requires a totally different preparation and a totally different degree of determination and initiative, and that is more or less the Mahayana position; though, at the same time, one has to recognize that the Mahayana tradition is dealing, so to speak, with a somewhat degraded - or downgraded, perhaps I should say - version of the arahant ideal.

It is much the same as in the case of, say, scientific discoveries, one could say: that it might take a scientific genius to make a certain discovery, but once he has made it - well, even a child, perhaps, can understand it if it is properly explained, without that degree of scientific genius, or perhaps with no particular [18] scientific talent at all. It is sometimes said that a fourth-form schoolboy knows more about science than all the ancient Greeks put together. It doesn't mean he is a greater genius than any of them.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which the equipment that is required for the attainment of Enlightenment enters, so to speak, into or determines the nature of the Enlightenment experience itself. It raises questions as to whether you can distinguish in that sharp sort of way between the Path, at least the Path in its upper reaches, and the Goal. But certainly the impression one gets from the Pali Canon, taking that to be nearer to the historical reality of things than the Mahayana Sutras, is that the Buddha absolutely dominated the scene.

Ratnaprabha: In your lecture, Bhante, earlier this year, 'Discerning the Buddha', you talked about the Buddha as it were continuing up the Spiral and not reaching a point to stop at called Enlightenment. Do you think it is possible to actually mark specific stages further up the Spiral - for example, perhaps, one marked by the opening of the prajna-caksus and another one further up marked by the opening of the samanta-caksus?

S: Well, if one has a series of caksus like that, and if one accepts the figure or image of the Spiral, well, clearly those last three caksus will correspond to different points on the Spiral itself, won't they?

Ratnaprabha: Mm. I've got a slightly related question about the next two 'eyes' down: that is the relationship between the dharma-caksus and the prajna-caksus. I think you explain quite clearly what the difference is, but the terminology seems odd, in that prajna is usually a word

meaning Insight; but yet it is the dharma-caksus which represents the attaining of Insight. Is there any reason why the prajna-caksus should be used for the arhant's eye?

S: I've never come across any explanation. There may well be one; I can't say I've ever come across it. I think that the prajna-caksu is a somewhat later terminology than that of the dharma-caksu, which seems to have arisen at the very earliest period.

Ratnaprabha: Do you know what the source is of this teaching of the five caksus?

S: I can't remember offhand. It is certainly found in the Sanskrit tradition; I won't be quite sure whether it's found in the Theravada Pali tradition too. I think it is, in which case it would be a relatively late tradition, probably not found in the Pali Canon itself. But references to the first three caksus are found throughout the Pali Canon. The Buddha himself is often referred to as the one who possesses 'the Eye', without any qualification.

The simplest thing to do, in a way, is just to look up the terms in the Pali and the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionaries. They will give references to texts in which the terms occur, and you can quite quickly find out from The Eternal Legacy just how old those texts are, if they are canonical texts, and where they fit into the tradition.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, the Going for Refuge lecture discusses Stream Entry, and in the Pali Canon there is a section which describes what is called the Mirror of the Dharma, in which the Buddha explains to Ananda - I think it seems to be intended as how you can tell if you are a Stream Entrant.

S: Or you can tell whether others are Stream Entrants.

[19]

Ratnaprabha: And, if I understand correctly, it seems to say that you use two main criteria. First of all, absolute confidence in the Three Jewels - the Tiratana Vandana formula is given - and secondly, perfect morality. I have two questions related to this. First of all, this perfect morality would seem to imply that you could say that a Stream Entrant has, as it were, completed the first stage of the Threefold Way. Is this ever stated traditionally, that the Stream Entrant has got to the end of that stage, so to speak?

S: No, I don't think it is. I doubt whether it would be envisaged in those terms. I don't remember what is the Pali term here for 'perfect' in this context. The passage is from the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. It's a rather odd sort of passage in many ways; but inasmuch as the Stream Entrant still had vestiges of unskilful mental states, as represented by the remaining fetters, one would have thought that the morality of the Stream Entrant could not be perfect in the absolute sense. One might even inquire what does one mean by 'perfect morality'? If you were even to step on an ant, would that infringe your perfect morality?

Ratnaprabha: I think it's mainly my gloss, because I have the quote as to what it actually says. It says: 'His morality is unbroken, untorn, unblotched, unmottled, emancipating, commended by the wise, not misapprehended, and conducive to concentration.' So I think I just simply glossed that as being perfect.

S: That seems a quite reasonable gloss! For instance - let's go through those epithets again.

Ratnaprabha: 'Unbroken.'

S: Yes, that is your observance of sila is uninterrupted; you don't observe it for a few days and then not observe it for a few days, and then again observe it for a few days. Then?

Ratnaprabha: Well, there's 'untorn, unblotched and unmottled.'

S: Untorn - it's a clearly metaphorical expression. I can't think at the moment what it might correspond to. It's different from 'uninterrupted'. It's spoiled in some way; maybe your morality is spoiled when there is some, you know - hm. It depends how you take 'torn'; maybe a partial breach, because if you tear a piece of cloth you don't have to sort of tear it right across. Maybe it's some sort of flaw; you have got the morality up to a point, but it's not perfect, it's imperfect, like a torn piece of cloth.

Ratnaprabha: And then 'unblotched' and 'unmottled'.

S: Yes, 'unblotched', without any great stain on it; and maybe 'unmottled', without lots of little stains. And then?

Ratnaprabha: 'Emancipating.'

S: Ah, yes, not constituting a fetter; because there is such a thing as sila pataparamasa(?). So you are observing this perfect sila, apparently, and you are not attached to it, you don't make of it a fetter itself. So it tends to emancipation.

Ratnaprabha: And then 'commended by the wise'.

[20]

S: That's obvious, isn't it?

Ratnaprabha: 'Not misapprehended'.

S: Yes, not made the basis, presumably, of egoistic ideas.

Ratnaprabha: And lastly, 'conducive to concentration'.

S: Yes, helping you to attain the next of the three great stages of the Path. One would assume that there is some difference between the morality of a person who is only a Stream Entrant and one who is, say, an arahant; but it could, of course, be argued that the differences, externally speaking, between the attainment of a Stream Entrant and a Once-Returner, a Non-Returner and an arahant is so subtle that that difference doesn't manifest on the level of conduct. One could argue in that way. But I'd rather doubt that. I would imagine there would be some difference of behaviour; so that, strictly speaking, only an arahant, or perhaps only a Buddha, could actually practise perfect, absolutely perfect, morality. But perhaps the whole question, in a way, is wrongly put. I don't mean Ratnaprabha's question, but that whole way of looking at the matter.

I must say I am rather doubtful about this whole passage in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. It is

notorious, of course, that the Mahaparinibbana Sutta is a very composite text. I have written about this in *The Eternal Legacy*. It is quite a patchwork, and since it is a very important text, inasmuch as it relates to a very important period of the Buddha's life, all sorts of additional later material has in fact been inserted, and I suspect this is one such piece of material.

Chakkhupala: I wondered if in this case you could look at the question the other way round and say that it argues that the opening of the Dharma Eye was actually a considerable achievement - it argues an interpretation of that as something not very much less than Enlightenment.

S: Yes, indeed, one could.

Chakkhupala: It reinforces that point of view; that is the single spiritual achievement.

S: Yes, yes. Though, none the less, there is still a difference between that and the higher stages of the Path, and one would expect there to be some manifestation of that difference in one's actual behaviour, including ethical behaviour. Maybe it's something that needs looking at more closely - whether, when you become a Stream Entrant and the Dharma Eye opens, your morality reaches a point which it cannot go beyond on that particular level. But it seems to me at first sight rather unlikely.

Ratnaprabha: The absolute confidence in the Three Jewels I suppose is more reasonable, is it?

S: 'Absolute confidence' - is that a paraphrase again, or - ?

Ratnaprabha: I'm afraid I haven't got the Nanamoli with me, so I can't remember.

S: Usually the description which is given is 'not to be disturbed, not to be shaken, not to be uprooted by anybody whether brahmana or sramana or Mara or Brahma.' But then, again, I would say on this level even more that, if you are to make any distinction between the spiritual attainment of a Stream Entrant and the Once-Returner and the Non-Returner and the arahant, there must surely be a difference in their experience of faith in the Three Jewels. In the case of a Buddha, the person [21] Going for Refuge has become one with the Refuge itself; the subject and the object of Refuge are the same. So surely that constitutes a great difference? So if a Buddha's Going for Refuge is the perfect Going for Refuge, or the absolute Going for Refuge, as I've called it, well, surely the other Goings for Refuge are not absolute - are not, therefore, perfect? But perhaps the passage need not be taken in this highly technical, literal sense.

Kevin Donovan: To get back to Ratnaprabha's first criterion: unless I misunderstood you, a couple of weeks ago I think you made the point that a Stream Entrant would have still unskilful mental tendencies that he was working with ...

S: Indeed.

Kevin: - but they wouldn't necessarily be manifested in behaviour.

S: Ah, I said they wouldn't necessarily be, but that phrase does not preclude them from being manifested. I only said that they would not necessarily be manifested. That suggests that they

might be.

Ratnaprabha: There was just a last phrase that I was interested in in this passage. It goes on to say, as we know quite well, that the Stream Entrant is 'destined to Enlightenment', but it also says that he is 'certain of rightness'. I didn't see what the Pali word was, so I don't know what this one means. Would that be something distinct from 'destined to Enlightenment'?

S: I couldn't say without looking at the Pali. The word 'destined', I suppose, can't be taken absolutely literally.

Ratnaprabha: There seemed to be no mention of Insight, which is the criterion that we usually use to determine a Stream Entrant, in the whole thing; unless you count 'confidence in the Three Jewels' as [..] Insight.

S: I do believe there are some other texts which would speak of Stream Entry in terms of faith in the Three Jewels, but clearly faith is not to be understood in a purely emotional sense. It's as though faith also includes understanding, also includes Insight. Faith in the Three Jewels can't be unshakeable unless you have some Insight, even a high degree of Insight; otherwise you'd be overcome by vicikitsa from time to time, at least. So a full and perfect faith would no doubt be an uninterrupted faith, among other things.

Dharmamati(?): This follows on from [], Bhante. One can understand the usefulness of anagarikas in intent, but given the possibility of a split eventually occurring within the WBO, I just wondered is it really worth the risk? I can also see areas where even being anagarikas in India is slightly self-defeating.

S: What do you mean by being an anagarika?

Dharmamati(?): Having people perceive it as a higher ordination and actually wearing the robes.

S: When you say 'people perceiving it as a higher ordination', who do you have in mind?

Dharmamati(?): I mean within the Order; such that eventually one gets as it were a band of first class and [a band of] second class.

[22]

S: I'd be very surprised if people within the Order saw it as a higher ordination, after all the explanations I've given, because I've made it very clear on each occasion that that is just what it isn't. So, if Order Members were so obtuse, so to speak, as none the less to think that it was or to feel that it was, that would almost suggest that one would expect them to almost not understand anything. Do you see what I mean?

: Yes. So that ...

S: I think the important thing about the taking of the abrahmacarya precept is just that. I think the robe is not essential. Whether anagarikas continue to have robes in that way or not - that is a quite open question; but certainly I would like more and more people to take up the

observance of abrahmacarya. There is, of course, the point that if there is something slightly different about you, something that people can recognize, hopefully you will not become the object of sexual propositions in the way that you might otherwise have been. That might lead to mutual embarrassment, one might say; do you see what I mean? Also, of course, there is a link with tradition. I am not sure how important that is at the moment. It may be sufficiently important for us to continue to have anagarikas wearing some kind of yellow robe; on the other hand, it may not be. Again, as I said, that's something that can be regarded as an open question. But the real point here is celibacy, whether one uses the term anagarika or not, whether one has a yellow robe or not; or even whether there is a ceremony or not. The ceremony is just to assist you in your determination to be celibate, simply that. And, of course, as we know, in the case of the Dharmachari ordination, if you express outwardly, not only mentally but verbally and in bodily terms, your determination to Go for Refuge or the fact that you do Go for Refuge, that gives it a fuller expression and therefore strengthens it. So, similarly, if someone takes an extra precept, whatever that may be, in front of other Order Members, on, say, a solemn occasion, that will surely give it more effective expression and strengthen the person's determination to observe that.

This brings us back a little bit to some of the things that were mooted, rather than discussed, a few evenings ago in connection with sex, guilt, celibacy and all the rest of it. And I advert to the question, or that whole area, because today I received a quite interesting book, sent actually by Ratnaguna, and the title of the book is - oh dear, I can't remember it now - it has slipped my memory; but the gist of it is that the author - the authoress - is questioning whether sex is as necessary as we think it is. And the book is really an argument for celibacy, on all sorts of grounds; not spiritual grounds, because the authoress has no particular religious or spiritual affiliation; she seems to be just humanistic in her outlook; but she argues the case for celibacy on psychological grounds, on health grounds, and in the interests of just general wellbeing and happiness. She is herself married but celibate. She managed to convince her husband also that celibacy was a good thing. I haven't read much of it and I am willing to put in the Library when I've finished with it, but it seems a quite interesting and worthwhile book. She makes, in fact, quite a few points that I've been making over the last few years, and I get the impression almost that something is in the air. And she makes the point quite explicitly that she has completely reversed her attitude from what it was 20 years ago when she was a young, or very young, woman; she has completely changed her mind on the subject of sex. She thinks it's a complete myth. Oh yes, the title of the book is Sex is Not Compulsory. She thinks it a complete myth that sex is so necessary as people usually think it is. She comes out with all sorts of interesting facts and figures; for instance, that nuns never suffer from cervical cancer! Funny, the direct relation between cervical cancer in the case of women and sexual activity, especially very early sexual activity. Also there is a chapter on celibacy and vegetarianism - she is also a vegetarian - celibacy and women, celibacy and men. She has some rather, what shall I say? hard [23] things to say about men and their sex lives. I'm afraid I couldn't help agreeing with a lot that she said. But, anyway, having whetted your appetite a little - (laughter) - in a few days' time I'll put the book in the Library, and those who are sufficiently interested can read it. It's a very readable book; I think it's based on information and study, but it's written in a quite straightforward, lively style and isn't very long. So you might even go back from Il Convento completely converted to celibacy! Anyway, I just mention that by the way.

Dharmamati(?): The feeling I'm getting now, as you're talking, is that you don't really see the danger of that sort of split in the FWBO?

S: Well, I've said, on previous occasions, I see dangers everywhere. So long as, or to the extent that, you are not Enlightened, there will be dangers in everything that you do; everything that you do, even of an ostensibly skilful nature, can be made the basis of an unskilful attitude. But there are degrees of danger. I don't see any great danger in having lots of anagarikas, or in regarding them as having some kind of higher ordination. I think at present, if there is any danger, it is more of people identifying more and more with a very lay style of life in the more ordinary sense. I think the danger is of some Order Members settling down into a life of a fairly ordinary sort of job - maybe even if it is in a co-op - and a relationship, whether inside or outside marriage, and so on, and just losing a sense of adventurousness and initiative. I think that is the greater danger, and that is almost invariably connected with giving sex a relatively central place. I do see that as a greater danger, because, in other words, I don't see the danger as consisting in a few people being extra strict, so to speak, and therefore isolating themselves from the rest of the Movement; I think the greater danger is of quite a large number of people becoming relatively lax and making quite a difference between themselves and those who are not so lax. Do you see the difference? I see no prospect, at the moment, of, say, half the Order, or even a third of the Order, even a quarter, even a tenth of the Order, becoming anagarikas. But we do have, perhaps, as much as a fifth or even a tenth of the Order not really pulling its weight; and if there is any danger in this respect that is where it lies.

Chakkhupala: I've heard it reported that on a previous occasion, Bhante, you have said you would like to see, or would be quite happy to see, a few anagarikas in the Movement in this country, as it were just to fly the flag, so that it would be seen to be a [...] option or whatever. Just picking up on what you have just said, would you be pleased to see, say, 20 per cent. or even a quarter or a half of the Order actually as anagarikas?

S: Well, if I was pleased to see just a few of them, presumably I'd be still more pleased to see a lot of them! Well, yes; I mean why should I not be pleased? Yes - if they were celibate for positive reasons, as no doubt they would be.

Chakkhupala: Would you prefer the Western Buddhist Order to be celibate?

S: I would prefer that people chose to be celibate. But I think one must be very careful of not making it a sort of official requirement. I think that's a quite different thing; especially, perhaps, in view of the feelings of guilt etc. connected with sex that a lot of people do have. I think, by its very nature, it must be a voluntary thing. So I wouldn't like there to be a rule, so to speak, that the Western Buddhist Order was celibate, or that you couldn't join it unless you were celibate; no. No, I think we must have celibacy and non-celibacy both as options. Though I would be very happy if people made the choice of celibacy. Perhaps the last thing that people should feel is that they were being pushed into it somehow or coerced into it, or even morally blackmailed into it. That would be undesirable. [24] If the price you have to pay for that is that, when they are very young, they do play around for a year or two - well, never mind.

I must say, just adverting again for a moment to this book, I found it very encouraging that someone without any real religious contacts or inspiration could be thinking along those sort of lines, in a quite sensible and systematic way, having discovered in the context of her own life that celibacy was a happier, more worthwhile, more fulfilling state than its opposite. Anyway, I'll leave it to you to look at the book if you are interested.

Alan Turner: Bhante, would you encourage anybody who was considering celibacy to, for example, just live with other celibate people, or to find a particularly supportive environment in which they could practise that?

S: I think that, if one would like to be celibate and get out of the habit of non-celibacy - one of the points made in this book, and this again is something I have said several times over the last few years, that non-celibacy is just a habit that one gets into - if one wants to get out of that habit, clearly one needs an environment which is going to be helpful to you; and, if you are trying to bring your sexual feelings into some sort of order, you don't want to be constantly titillated and stimulated and aroused. So, obviously, it would be best for you to move into a situation or environment where that didn't happen.

Padmapani: I could envisage a time, Bhante, when there were quite a few anagarikas, hopefully, in the Movement, and those people might be, say, at Vajraloka or even Guhyaloka; and they will come back and form teams to move into large centres. Yes, there might be two or three of them, say.

S: That's possible. That is possible - especially older ones, perhaps.

Padmapani: Would you think that that would be a good move?

S: I think it's impossible to make that kind of generalization. Those who were concerned would have to make up their own minds, having regard to their particular characters, talents, what they wanted to do, the nature of the centre, etc. etc. But if such people decided to do that, I expect I would be quite happy - if I was still around.

Douglas Ponton: Would there be any negative reasons why someone might want to take up the practice of celibacy? For example, they might have strong puritanical [views?] and repressed sexuality. Would that be a bad basis on which to take up the practice?

S: I suppose it would, but - 'puritanical', 'suppressed' - it begs all sorts of questions. I did mention guilt, didn't I? But I don't know; perhaps you could still be celibate and work out your feelings of guilt about sex notwithstanding. Perhaps one doesn't necessarily have to engage in sexual activity to get rid of your feelings of guilt, if you have any, about sexual feelings and activity. Perhaps you could resolve those guilt feelings more easily if you remained celibate. I think I am questioning here various post-Freudian assumptions, which again the author of this book does.

[25]

Uttara: I won't use the term 'before you authorize' somebody to become an anagarika - more sort of if you granted that people come and ask you that they might become anagarikas, and you recognize that they are ready to take that step - what do you actually look for? Do you see them as being ...

S: What do I look for? The first thing I look for is age! (Laughter.)

Uttara: Do you try and see them as being fairly contented within themselves, also into their spiritual practice, knowing that they are really getting on with it?

S: Yes, indeed. If you look at those who are at present anagarikas - leaving aside Padmavajra, who has taken it just for a limited period - Jyotipala, for instance, is over 40, he has been married; Asvajit is over 40, he has been married twice; Ratnashuri is well over 60, has been married many years and has been celibate for 12 years before taking the precept, has two grown-up children; so, presumably, they all know their own minds. Kamalashila had, I think, an experience of several years of celibacy before he actually took the precept. So, again, presumably, they all knew their own minds.

Uttara: So maybe after a certain time of experimentation with them ...

S: I think I'd be a little cautious, or I'd be all the more cautious, the younger the person was. Someone over 60, I think, other factors being equal, well, it would be very surprising if they couldn't take up celibacy. I've been thinking recently that Order Members especially on reaching the age of 40 ought to think very seriously in terms of celibacy.

Uttara: In the Movement we have been talking about deriving pleasure more and more from the spiritual life. Do you see that there would also be some people who would get to see that they were actually enjoying their spiritual life?

S: Yes, indeed. Yes.

Uttara: Because it wouldn't [do if they were] constantly looking as if they were having a hard time of it; that would be possibly an added burden.

Side Two

S: One thing that struck me about this book I referred to was that the authoress, and a number of women whose views she quotes, experience celibacy as something liberating, and as a source of great happiness and contentment. That's quite striking.

Uttara: It's the freedom not to worry any more.

S: Yes, freedom from worry and anxiety, and able to relate to people, including members of the opposite sex, much more directly, much more honestly. And all the women that she quotes - and she is mainly concerned with women's views - mention an enhanced capacity for friendship. Several women mention that, after becoming celibate, they made lots more friends and had a much fuller life in that respect than before. They made friends of both sexes.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you see taking the anagarika vow as a means of liberating the energy which would have gone into sex into, say, meditation? Or do you see it in any particular way? It's just energy, presumably, that is being liberated which would go into sexual [activity].

[27]

S: That is certainly an aspect of the whole matter. I think a higher degree of integration; I think that is the natural result. But certainly also, freedom from a lot of worry and anxiety and restlessness. It might be interesting one day to do a sort of survey of the Order and ask people what their experience of celibacy was like, to the extent that they had experienced it, even if they'd only experienced it, say, for a three-month period such as this. At the end of a Tuscany retreat, no one seems particularly the worse for having been celibate for three months!

Any more questions?

Paul Tozer: I've heard it said that one should aim at becoming an anagarika when one is experiencing a lot of dhyana. What do you think of that?

S: Well, in the light of what I've said with regard to the authoress of that book and what she has written in the book, that would seem not to be necessary. I think you are much less likely to think about sex, or need sex, or think you need it, if you're experiencing dhyanic states, but it would seem that there are quite a lot of people, certainly quite a lot of women, who are quite happy being celibate, who haven't even heard of dhyanic states, and probably have never got into them. That is one of the reasons I find the book really quite encouraging. In fact I think this is one of the points that she makes: that celibacy is something that is open to quite ordinary people, and which can give them great satisfaction and happiness. You don't have to be a sort of spiritual athlete or an ascetic to become celibate. In fact, she says it's really much, much easier than people think. She seemed to feel that we have been programmed into thinking that we've got these dreadful, or terrible, or wonderful, sexual urges that must at all costs be satisfied, and if they're not satisfied you're going to be dreadfully miserable and unfulfilled and out of things, or a wallflower or whatever.

Padmapani: Bhante, does she say in her book that she feels celibacy is easier for women than for men?

S: I've not read the whole book, but she does seem to think on balance that men are probably a little more sexually susceptible than are women, from the very nature of their sexual organization; but she certainly doesn't think that celibacy is beyond them!

Padmapani: The other part I wanted to ask was: were they not thinking in terms of celibacy until they had had children?

S: No, she does refer to the cases of a number of women known to her who are single career women and who are very happily celibate. No, children don't really feature much in the book at all. I don't know whether she has - or at least not what I've read so far - perhaps she doesn't have any thoughts on the subject. Possibly, if she was asked, she would say that this urge to have babies is as mythical as this urge to have sex! She might; I suspect she might.

Sudhana: Bhante, I'm sorry to ask you to say it again, but I wasn't quite sure if you suggested that even not having a dhyana experience might even help you. If you have dhyana experience you may be more susceptible; is that what you said just now?

S: No, no, nothing like it. No, what I was saying - I think in response to Paul's question - was that people do sometimes think that if you want really to get beyond sex and be celibate you've just got to be immersed in dhyana all the time, that being so much more satisfying. So I commented that, certainly, if you are enjoying that highly satisfactory experience of dhyana, you are much less likely to think in [28] terms of sex. But this book that I've been reading shows that you don't even need, apparently, to have recourse to dhyana to be free from the sexual urge, or at least to have it bothering you much less. Because, apparently, quite ordinary people with no interest in spiritual life can get quite a lot of satisfaction and contentment out of celibacy; far more satisfaction and contentment than they ever got out of sex. So 'sex is not compulsory!' You are quite free not to have it; you don't need to have any

feelings of guilt about not having sex, no feelings of inadequacy about not having sex. It's not a sin not to have sex! She makes the point that, in the last century, if you had sex outside marriage, for instance, there was something dreadfully wrong about you, but in these days if you don't have sex at all and want to be celibate there is again something dreadfully wrong about you. She mentions cases of people, and I'm sure there are a number of them because I've come across them, going to doctors and saying, 'Doctor, there is something wrong with me: I've lost my sexual drive,' and of course the doctor treats them for that 'illness'. According to her, that is absolute rubbish. You've perhaps just reached a natural phase of your development as a human being.

How are we getting on?

Vessantara: We've got three probably not very big questions to go.

S: Well, let's see whether they are big or not.

Vessantara: The next one concerns the passage in the pamphlet where you are equating the five different experiences of Going for Refuge, Stream Entry etc. and you say that they are like, or that they draw attention to, different aspects of the one experience. You have also, on another occasion, equated the paravritti, the turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness, with this experience. So what aspect of that one experience would you say the paravritti, [to use] that terminology, draws out?

S: The paravritti is a turning about; so I suppose the question arises, what is it a turning about from? What is it a turning about towards? One could look at it in terms of a turning about from the conditioned towards the Unconditioned, or from vijnana to jnana. To the best of my recollection, the Lankavatara doesn't relate it to any such corresponding terms, but one could clearly look at the paravritti in that sort of way. In more contemporary terms, you could even regard it as a turning away from the group and a turning towards the spiritual community, a turning away from the statistical individual towards the real Individual; and so on. But it's a quite deep, quite transforming, experience, evidently, and on the level, it would seem, of Stream Entry. It is, broadly speaking, a more so to speak psychological way of looking at Stream Entry.

It did occur to me, by the way, just a few minutes ago, talking about Stream Entry and about the breaking of the three fetters, perhaps we need to find positive equivalents for those three fetters. I think I might have done this once, in passing. Not - thinking of Stream Entry - in terms of what you get rid of, so to speak, but what you actually achieve, what you actually attain. I did speak in terms of - what? - clear, creative, and what else was it? (Voices prompting.) Committed. Yes, right. But even perhaps that is not really enough; perhaps it isn't sufficiently concrete, unless one perhaps turns them into abstract nouns: commitment and clarity and creativity. But do you see what I mean? -perhaps we need to get away from the more negative type of terminology and turn more to the more positive type of terminology. Perhaps people would respond to that more enthusiastically: if you were to speak in terms of achieving greater clarity, achieving a higher degree of spiritual commitment, and achieving a higher degree of [29] creativity. But you would have even so to define those terms quite carefully, wouldn't you? Because creativity, for instance, could be greatly misunderstood.

Ratnaprabha: I suppose the advantage of the negative terminology is that you can speak of breaking one of these fetters, breaking through your self-view so that it is no longer there; but

something like creativity or clarity [suggests] a gradual process. It is difficult to see a point at which you don't have clarity beforehand, and do have it afterwards.

S: Well, perhaps it is so with the fetters; perhaps you don't actually snap them, just like that, but you are filing away at them. Well, some people do just snap them, no doubt, but no doubt it requires a tremendous burst of energy. I think most people just sort of go on filing away, and then they see that now there is very little of the fetter left, and then they summon up all their energy and just burst that last remaining thread, so to speak, of the fetter.

Sudhana: Bhante, turning to that correlation of the five aspects of the one spiritual experience ...

S: Co-ordination. Sorry, I thought you said coronation.

Sudhana: I actually said correlation. Two of them are Going Forth and Stream Entry. In the Buddha's own career, he was said to have Gone Forth when he left home after the Four Sights. I wonder if that could be said to coincide with his Stream Entry, or whether there was any other point in his career where he could be said to have entered the stream?

S: So far as I know, there isn't, in the biography of the Buddha, a point at which he is traditionally said to have entered the stream. I don't think it is ever suggested that he entered the stream when he left home. The usual accounts of the Buddha's Enlightenment speak of him as destroying the asravas, and that seems to have been an earlier way of looking at the Enlightenment process than looking at it in terms of breaking the fetters.

Sudhana: So that Going Forth, as it is recounted in the Buddha's life, is more a poetic expression?

S: Well, no, as far as we know he did literally Go Forth. He went forth from the life at home into the homeless life. Subsequently, of course, that appears in Buddhist tradition as the sramanera's ordination; in the case of the Buddha, pabhaja(?), as it is called, did not have quite the same significance as it had later on for his disciples, because when he Went Forth he went forth from something and into something, but not exactly to something. But, within the context of Buddhist tradition, one not only goes forth from something and into something but also to something. I mean, when the Buddha left home, he had only so to speak the vaguest idea of what he was looking for. In our case, at least we think we know what we are looking for if we, say, Go Forth as Buddhists.

Douglas Ponton: In our case, would we actually sort of Go Forth before we Go for Refuge?

S: Ah, in our case the Going Forth is an integral part of the Going for Refuge itself. Roughly speaking, you could say it corresponds to the private ordination. There is the Going Forth, as it were, from the group, and then the acceptance into the spiritual community. So these are two different aspects, so to speak, of the Going for Refuge.

[30]

Douglas: But the private ordination would only be the external mark of something which had taken place on an internal level.

S: Well, the same with the traditional pabbaja, you know: when you leave home, it's not just leaving home in the external sense, it's a psychological experience too. It can even be a spiritual experience.

Douglas: So could you differentiate, in an internal and psychological sense, the Going Forth from the Going for Refuge?

S: If you Go Forth with the idea of achieving Enlightenment, then that Going Forth is an aspect or integral part of the Going for Refuge itself. But you can leave home, obviously, with quite different motives; I mean you are not necessarily an individual because you leave home, because you could leave home and just go into a similar situation. But if you leave home with a spiritual motivation within, say, a Buddhist context, then you are moving in the direction of Enlightenment and moving in the direction of the spiritual community.

Sanghapala: I was wondering, could Going Forth be seen as Going for Refuge in negative terms?

S: I think not, simply because if you Go Forth within a Buddhist context, you are not only Going Forth from the group, you are also Going Forth in the direction of Enlightenment, the spiritual community; so it can't have a purely negative connotation. You don't simply Go Forth from something, you Go Forth to something, and that supplies the positive connotation. In the Buddha's case he just went forth from something, because he felt dissatisfied, he wanted something more, something different, but at that stage he had, so to speak, only a vague idea of what it was. We say that the Buddha Went Forth in search of Enlightenment; we are able to say that only because the Buddha attained Enlightenment, and we know what was the end of his quest. But the Buddha didn't know that he was Going Forth, when he did go forth, in search of Enlightenment; he was going forth in search of something, but he didn't have any clear idea about it because he hadn't so far experienced it.

Gerd Baak: Is our situation actually different from that of the Buddha?

S: Well, yes, fortunately it is, because we don't, so to speak, have to find it all out for ourselves. We have to experience it for ourselves, but we don't have to find it out for ourselves. In a way, the Path has been shown.

Gerd: Psychologically speaking, we are in the same position, we don't know.

S: Well, yes and no, because the Buddha has communicated the Dharma; the Dharma, surely, has some meaning for us. We may not understand it fully and deeply, in fact we don't, but it does communicate something; otherwise the Buddha would not have taught the Dharma at all, because he was addressing himself initially to quite unenlightened people, to putujanas(?). So we have the Dharma in a way that the Buddha didn't have the Dharma, inasmuch as the Buddha did attain Enlightenment, and not only attained it but also did his best to communicate something of what he had attained and showed the way to that. So we are not in the same position as the Buddha, if we study or are receptive to the Dharma - which is not to say that we necessarily have even an adequate intellectual idea of it; but we do have something, the Dharma has been communicated to us to some extent, which was not the case with the Buddha.

I sometimes think that we don't always realize that; in fact, I think I have commented on this

before - that we don't realize how little, in any sphere of life, [31] any sphere of experience, how little we have found out for ourselves. It's all been explained to us, to taught to us, or given to us, by others in either the recent past or the remote past. There is very little that we have found out for ourselves.

So we are, yes, in a very different position from the position that the Buddha was in, and perhaps fortunately, because we might not have the same determination or the same initiative, the same drive, that the Buddha had; even if we did experience the same feeling of lack or need.

Ratnaprabha: This is the last question. In the Going for Refuge pamphlet, you speak of the levels of Going for Refuge, and the first level, you say, is 'the "provisional" Going for Refuge, sometimes called "ethnic" Going for Refuge. This consists in simply reciting the Refuge-Going formula in Pali, ... just because it is part of your national culture.' Now sometimes there is a distinction made, I think, between an ethnic level of Going for Refuge and a provisional level, the two terms being used separately, so that the provisional is something like one, in a rather vague way' becoming a Buddhist', being a Buddhist or being attracted to the Buddhist path. Do you think this distinction is a helpful one to make, to enumerate five levels rather than just four, of Going for Refuge?

S: I regard ethnic Going for Refuge and provisional Going for Refuge as being as it were on the same level, but I regard their points of departure as being somewhat different. I have explained this before, but maybe nobody's heard it. When I speak in terms of an 'ethnic' Going for Refuge, I am thinking of Buddhists who are really just nominal Buddhists, who are born into Buddhist families, Buddhist countries, Buddhist cultures, but who don't think seriously about Buddhism, who are not really Individuals or even trying to be such, but just because they have been, as they think, 'born Buddhists', they recite the Refuges and Precepts, and they regard that as indicating their membership of what is in effect a Buddhist group. So this is what I term the 'ethnic' Going for Refuge. It is the Going for Refuge of most Buddhists in Buddhist countries.

Then there is the 'provisional' Going for Refuge. In a sense, the ethnic Going for Refuge is provisional, inasmuch as it can be a basis for the further and higher Going for Refuge; none the less, I use the expression 'provisional' Going for Refuge in the case of those who become, as it were, Buddhists, who are not 'born Buddhists' - and here I am thinking of the majority of followers of Dr Ambedkar who have become Buddhists - but who have become Buddhists, as you said, with not at all a clear idea of what in fact they are becoming, with quite a vague idea, and who take that step either because the rest of the family does, or their whole community does, or even just because Dr Ambedkar asked them to. It is provisional because they are open, many of them, to going further, as we know from our own experience with them in India, particularly in the case of those who have become Order Members.

So there is a sort of connection between the ethnic and the provisional Goings for Refuge; but as I have said, their points of departure are different but they are on somewhat the same level. So I don't regard the two of them as constituting two different degrees or levels. They are on the same level.

Ratnaprabha: Is there a place for distinguishing a level of Going for Refuge for people in this country - the Movement in the West - who are not yet Order Members but who, let us say, attend centres regularly or perhaps are Mitras or something like that?

S: Well, you could regard them as having provisionally Gone for Refuge, because some of them might come along and they are happy joining in Puja, happily reciting the Refuges, but they see the FWBO just as a very positive, enjoyable group. So they can't be reciting the Refuges even as it were effectively and not yet thinking in [32] terms of being Individuals. They are just sort of joining in what everybody else is doing and are happy to do that, and, yes, on that level it is a quite positive experience.

Of course, there are all sorts of intermediate degrees. One doesn't want to make it too rigid or too as it were hard and fast. There is a sort of continuous scale, almost. Some people recite the Refuges and Precepts on the occasion of a Sevenfold Puja with almost the same feeling as an Order Member, but others, you can see, are just reciting quite mechanically. It means really nothing to them at all, they are just joining in! - joining in the chorus, as it were. But, all right, it is provisional. It is the basis for going further.

Ratnaprabha: Somehow - it may just be my [..], it seems a little unsatisfactory that somebody should be reciting such momentous words as 'To the Buddha for refuge I go, to the Dharma for refuge I go, to the Sangha for refuge I go', without either understanding fully what they imply or intending fully what they imply. Do you think there would be a case for restricting the reciting of the Refuges to only those who have effectively Gone for Refuge?

S: I have thought about this. I think probably it would be impractical, in view of the fact that there are so many other Buddhist groups, so to speak, apart from the FWBO, where people not only recite the Refuges and Precepts without being Buddhists but are even given the highest Tantric initiations without them being Buddhists. So I think the sort of world situation of Buddhism is such that we can't help our path being one, to some extent, of irregular steps. But in theory, in principle, I agree with you.

On the other hand, to look at it slightly differently, when people recite 'To the Buddha for refuge I go,' in the case of everybody there is at least a glimmering of understanding. It is not that they are reciting in a totally foreign language; it may be when they recite in Pali, but people also recite in English, and they usually know what the Pali words mean: 'To the Buddha for refuge I go', so at least there is some glimmering of an understanding that you are moving in the direction of the Buddha, whatever the Buddha represents - something higher. So you could even claim, as I have said, that a provisional Going for Refuge is still a Going for Refuge - though it might sound a bit paradoxical or even contradictory. It can be the basis of something more, a further, higher development.

Vessantara: Bhante, I didn't quite follow your point about the fact that other Buddhist groups recite the Refuges as a matter of course. How would that affect what we do?

S: I suppose, if we were to restrict the recitation of the Refuges, say, to Order Members, it would differentiate us from the rest of the Buddhist world, probably to an undesirable degree; and perhaps it would even appear that we weren't recognizing the fact that some other people did Go for Refuge outside the FWBO etc. etc. I think it probably would create too great a gulf. On the other hand, I won't say I am completely sure about that, but I think it would be something that we would have to consider very carefully indeed.

Alan Pendock: Is there a case for a more popular or less specifically Buddhist devotional practice instead of a Puja, a sort of intermediate stage?

S: But of course this sort of devotion has to have an object, so if it wasn't the Buddha,

Dharma and Sangha what would it be?

[33]

Alan Pendock: The only thing that came to mind was just perhaps human ideals - perhaps the Five Precepts ...

S: Too abstract for devotion, you see; devotion needs something, as it were, personal. Yes, devotion needs a person, really. So if you don't have the Buddha, the human embodiment of the Ideal of Enlightenment, you can hardly have Bodhisattvas, who are even more Buddhist, as it were, than the Buddha! I mean - could you introduce tree worship? (Laughter.) Well, in England you could introduce dog worship or cat worship! The ancient Egyptians worshipped cats. But you see what I mean?

Alan: Yes.

S: I think it's probably better to go on as we are.

Alan: So by taking the Buddha away you would just take away all devotional - ?

S: I think so, yes.

Alan: Even the Truth? The idea of the Truth is too vague, or ...

S: I think it is too vague, yes.

Padmapani: Bhante, surely we don't really need to define the Going for Refuge in different stages? In a sense, there must be a qualitative difference - the difference between a Mitra and an Order Member or between a Friend and a Mitra and an Order Member. I mean, we are not just talking about the words, we are talking about the actual process of doing the Puja, which must be felt, surely? It must actually be experienced, in a way - the feeling, the difference between somebody who embodies the Refuges more than somebody who has just come along, say, for the first time?

S: Oh, of course, yes indeed. Though, of course, one shouldn't underestimate the capacity for a genuine response even on the part of a completely new person, because sometimes even a completely new person makes a quite deep connection. On the other hand, of course, some people can be coming along for years and not make any particular connection at all with the figure or image or ideal of the Buddha.

Padmapani: So surely that could be an argument for not abandoning the idea of having the Puja just for Order Members?

S: Well, I don't know that it could, because you just don't know what is going to be the response of the newcomer. I would imagine that there were at least as many newcomers who have a very positive initial response as have no response at all.

Jayamati(?): I thought of the Puja as a practice, really, so that even though you may not start practising it, practising the Puja with really understanding or really feeling or really Going for Refuge, that by practising it, just by doing it, something actually does seem to happen, willy

nilly.

S: True. Also I usually distinguish between what I call devotion and what I call commitment. You can be devoted to the Buddha without being committed: that is to say, you can admire the qualities that the Buddha represents to a greater or a lesser degree, but you may not have come to the point where you actually want to commit yourself to realizing those qualities personally. Or you may even admire the Dharma, even admire the Sangha; so there can be devotion, and I think in the [34] context of a Puja devotion can manifest even if commitment isn't there. But, of course, devotion can be a stepping stone to commitment.

And also there is another point: if you have, say, Order Members and non-Order Members doing a Sevenfold Puja together, well, surely something of the commitment with which the Order Members recite the Sevenfold Puja and the Refuges and Precepts will as it were rub off on to other people; something will be communicated by or through the commitment of the Order Members. We know that there is a very different atmosphere when there are simply Order Members present, say, performing a Sevenfold Puja. So if there are Order Members and Mitras, something of the intensity of the way in which the Order Members recite the Sevenfold Puja must affect those who are there who are not Order Members who have any sort of sensitivity or receptivity at all. So that is an argument, perhaps, for everybody from time to time doing it together, and therefore having the Sevenfold Puja, including the recitation of the Refuges and Precepts, open to everybody on such occasions.

There is a somewhat connected point that someone wrote to me about recently: he felt it was a great pity, from one point of view, that ordinations were currently nearly always held, for men, at Il Convento, because it is well known that a lot of Mitras get a great deal of inspiration and encouragement out of actually witnessing public ordinations. So it is somewhat analogous.

Uttara: I was thinking the same thing.

S: This Mitra, in fact, wrote and suggested that perhaps we could sometimes have public ordination ceremonies for men which were open to other people. I do know from my own experience that people are often deeply impressed by the ordination ceremony, even quite peripheral Friends.

Ong Sin Choon: My question is to do with the level of Going for Refuge. Does one know whether bhikkhus fall into this category of taking the pabajjas ordination?

S: They might. The fact that they were bhikkhus in a technical sense would be neither here nor there, because some bhikkhus just have got no idea about Going for Refuge at all. But it depends on the individual; you could have a bhikkhu, living in some Buddhist country, who was achieving all these different levels of Going for Refuge. That is certainly not impossible. I think it's probably a bit unlikely, inasmuch as the Going for Refuge is given such peripheral importance, usually; but it's not impossible.

Ong Sin Choon: I think it's much easier for Westerners to see that; for an Easterner, you see bhikkhus with robes, so it is sometimes quite difficult to - probably because there are more categories, all with yellow robes - Order Members, Mitras and Friends and - (?)

(end of tape)

[35]

Tape 3

S: Anyway, where were we?

Vessantara: Sin Choon was talking about putting bhikkhus in a sort of special category.

Sin Choon: Yes, it is much easier for Westerners to see the different levels of Going for Refuge.

S: It is much easier in the FWBO. I don't know about outside it. Outside, there is quite a lot of confusion, I think; lots of Western Buddhists don't find it at all easy to see the difference.

Sin Choon: Yes, and those who are outside the Friends. So what I mean is that in the Friends we have levels of Going for Refuge, we see the levels [...]. Coming from the East, we see that some bhikkhus are effectively Going for Refuge, but my question [is how to] see the different - (?)

S: Well, you've just got to look a bit more closely. He may be actually Going for Refuge, one doesn't know. But one should assume that, just because he is wearing a yellow robe or a black robe and so on, that he is necessarily really Going for Refuge.

Sin Choon: So he could fall into any of these categories?

S: He could fall into any of these categories.

Sin Choon: So you mean it is not necessarily [robes that] monks ...

S: Well, if he is wearing a robe it means he has been ordained as a monk, that's all. I mean, if you yourself get ordained you will be able to read the letters that Asvajit has been contributing to Shabda about his experiences in Sri Lanka, and some of those experiences are with bhikkhus and sramaneras. I have just been reading today the latest Shabda; some of his experiences have been extraordinary. I don't know what some of those bhikkhus and sramaneras are up to or what sort of idea they've got about Buddhism; it's absolutely, in some ways, quite horrific.

One must just not be misled by externals. People are very easily imposed upon. Don't think that people are less easily imposed upon in the West; they're not!

Uttara: Bhante, going back to your first point about celibacy. It would seem by what you said that people who take up the abrahmacarya precept don't necessarily need to be experienced in dhyana, because you have a history(?) in the East where you have a monk - he may not be meditating but at least he has ...

S: I must say, from my contact with bhikkhus in the East, I didn't ever get the impression that bhikkhus - those who were celibate, and there were some who weren't - had any great difficulty about being celibate. I remember talking sometimes with Thai and Sinhalese bhikkhus, who were the ones I had most contact with. Just talking among ourselves, we often

remarked on the fact that bhikkhus were normally happier than lay people - not that they were highly spiritual, they weren't - and sometimes the bhikkhus used to say, 'Well, look, we are supposed to have given up everything, we don't have wives, we don't have families, and these lay people are supposed to be enjoying all the pleasures of life, all the worldly pleasures, but [36] look how miserable they look!' And it was true. Bhikkhus, on however low a spiritual level, broadly speaking, almost always looked much happier than the lay people. And that is quite interesting perhaps, in view of this book I've mentioned this evening; that perhaps you don't even need to be spiritual to be celibate and happy!

Alan Pendock: That needn't necessarily be so, seemingly. They've got very little responsibility ...

S: That's also true. They've got very little responsibility. Or they've got only such responsibilities as they choose to assume; some might be quite active, might be running a school or busy giving lectures on the Dharma, or busy studying. I must say I have met some discontented monks, but I think usually they were discontented because they didn't have any work to do.

Alan Turner: Bhante, just to go back to the comment you made about people in the UK appreciating public ordinations - do you think there is a case for people who get ordained at Il Convento to take part in some ceremony or something when they get back to UK, at their centres, for example?

S: I think it wouldn't be at all a bad idea if they were to be welcomed, in a sort of as it were official way; not just by the Order, that particular chapter - I think that happens anyway - but if they did come, say, from a particular centre, when they got back everybody connected with the centre should give them a reception, maybe make a little presentation, give them a book or something. Because it's to everybody's benefit that there should be another Order Member around in that centre or in that country or whatever. It's an occasion for rejoicing for everybody. So I don't think it's a good idea that a new Order Member just sort of slips back into his centre, and then someone maybe who hasn't been coming along for a few weeks comes along and thinks, 'Oh, I've seen that chap before, but he wasn't wearing that kesa before, that white thing around his neck - what's happened?' So they don't know. I think it would therefore be much better if there was that sort of official reception, almost. I don't mean something social, I don't mean a party! - please don't think that! I mean something definitely religious, as it were, in the Shrine Room - it may be preceded by a Puja - and just receive them back. I think that would be a good thing. And perhaps, subsequently, the chapter, the other Order Members, could do something more specific, perhaps have a special meal or something.

Uttara: In Glasgow now it has become a tradition, when somebody becomes a Mitra, that there are presents given to them ...

S: That's right, that's good, yes.

Uttara: - in the Shrine Room and there's this, you've got presents and a lot of people [...]. People really enjoy it.

S: I know it happens a lot with the women Mitras, down south at least; it doesn't seem to

happen quite so much with the men Mitras, because I happened to be talking to some men Mitras and describing what happened with the women Mitras when they became Mitras, they got great piles of cards and presents; I have seen them getting up to 50 and 60 cards and presents. And the men Mitras said 'When I became a Mitra, no one gave me a single present, not even a card!' So I think, to give the women their due, they are better at things of this sort. But there is no reason why the men should not show their appreciation also, when people become Mitras. It will [37] make them feel, help them to feel, that it's a really important occasion and everyone is really happy that they have become Mitras.

Ratnaprabha: Could I just return to Sin Choon's question? I can imagine that, for a new Order Member, say, returning to, for example, Malaysia, where there are already a lot of bhikkhus in robes, it could be a very difficult situation, because people would not be prepared to recognize them as a different sort of Buddhist from the ordinary ethnic Buddhists. Is there any way in which one can - apart from just over a long period educating people about the significance of Going for Refuge - deal with that situation?

S: I don't think so! This is the situation Asvajit is encountering and, to some extent, perhaps, Jayapushpa too. Or perhaps she is experiencing it even more, because traditionally in Buddhist countries, even women in robes don't get much recognition, not to speak of those who are committed without wearing any robes. I am afraid it is going to be a long and possibly painful process of re-education.

Ong Sin Choon: But Jayapushpa recently wrote to me saying that she has performed some dana, giving monks fruit. I am not quite sure about an Order Member who is effectively Going for Refuge and offering bhikkhus ...

S: Well, you can certainly feed bhikkhus; if they come to see you, you can certainly feed them. But I think the ceremonial offering of dana in such a way as to suggest that the bhikkhu as such was on a higher level than someone who had Gone for Refuge would not be at all desirable; not even, probably, as a skilful means. Just be friendly. If the occasion requires, be hospitable.

Ong Sin Choon: That's making the distinction between bhikkhus up there and Order Members down there, because you make an offering to mean ...

S: Yes, indeed. I think that means that one isn't really communicating what we need to communicate; that is to say, the importance of the Going for Refuge. You are in effect saying that what is important is being a monk and wearing a robe. You are depreciating the importance of the Going for Refuge.

But there will always be that pressure on one to observe what have in fact become just ethnic customs. There were [many] difficulties of that sort when Buddhism first was introduced into China. It took several centuries to sort out these things. So we are not going to sort them out very quickly or easily. Asvajit, in the article I was reading today, recounts a long discussion with a samanera that he had, in which he tried to explain about the importance of Going for Refuge, and he talked for a long time with this samanera; he thought perhaps he was a bit receptive; but apparently, the next day, the samanera was very upset and spoke quite roughly to Asvajit saying, 'You've been trying to mislead me' and so forth.

Sudhana: From what you've been saying, Bhante, I'm wondering whether we ought to look

very carefully at any of the ceremonies or what have you that we go to that involve bhikkhus, where bhikkhus have a special place and maybe places at the front. If you go and see the Dalai Lama, bhikkhus sit at the front - that is, the Tibetan bhikkhus; or if you [went] to Christmas Humphreys's funeral, the bhikkhus there were deferred to and put into special places ...

S: Actually, things are changing a little, because when some of our Order Members went to Chithurst to join in the Wesak celebrations I spoke to them beforehand as to how they should behave, and it went off quite well; and the bhikkhus there were very careful, apparently, how they behaved with the Order Members. It was quite [38] noticeable that they were making an effort to behave properly with them - some more so than others. So gradually we are making our point.

But I must say we can't altogether blame traditional Buddhists if they don't understand, because our point of view, so far as they are concerned, is really quite strange and unusual, and we are after all in a very small minority compared with them, if one considers traditional Buddhists in the East. So it is up to us to put our point of view across quite clearly and in a friendly sort of way. Subhuti is currently working on a little booklet, at my suggestion, on the Order - a bit like the booklet that we brought out some years ago on co-ops. It'll be just a small, illustrated booklet just giving a clear idea what the Western Buddhist Order is; and we can distribute copies of this. Because some more traditionally minded Buddhists find it quite difficult to understand our position or our point of view. It is so strange to them - strange as that itself may seem! - that you should put the Going for Refuge right at the centre of your mandala. They have got so used to thinking that it's the yellow robe that is the centre of the mandala.

Uttara: I am just trying to think of the view that the bhikkhu, in a lot of ways, maybe there is a lot to be admired about somebody who has become , even from the point of view of, I don't know whether you accept that he has actually given up the world, maybe in a symbolic sense he has given up the world but maybe he is still attached to it. I was thinking more of myself, even the question of celibacy, when you hear that word you (gasp)! (Laughter.)

S: Well, perhaps you won't after this evening, or after reading that book!

Uttara: But I'm thinking more from the point of view of at least, there, there has been some gesture or whatever it is that they've actually made, cutting themselves off (no, that isn't the word) - [..]ing themselves from the world, at least they are making some statement in a way, they are holding some sort of value. So to that degree maybe they should have a degree of respect paid. Do you think they should have any degree of respect paid to them, not based ...

S: Ah - but to what are you paying respect? Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: Yes, maybe ...

S: Because you might meet somebody who has also taken a vow of celibacy but isn't wearing a yellow robe. You see, you should in that case pay the same respect. But that is not the Buddhist tradition, or the conventional Buddhist tradition.

Uttara: I think, as we know, it has degenerated and ...

S: Clearly, the Buddha's own attitude is absolutely clear: if you respect someone, you respect them for what they are, not what they claim to be, or not what they are by hereditary descent. This was the Buddha's whole argument and difference with the brahmins. Yes, their great-great-grandfathers might have been holy men, but they weren't; but they were claiming to be holy men and to deserve respect just because their great-great-grandfathers deserved respect; or for other such reasons. And bhikkhus, I am afraid, very often claim respect in a very displeasing sort of way, just because they have got a certain ordination. They feel, very often, that that sort of respect - and it is a very high degree of respect - is absolutely due to them, and insist on it being given; which means they insist on treating you, you not being a bhikkhu, as a completely inferior sort of person; which is not conducive to anybody's spiritual development. So you should approach, I think, everybody with an open mind and just try to see what they actually are; but not go by technical ordinations or by robes or anything of that sort.

[39]

Again, you must have read some of Asvajit's and some of Suvajra's experiences in India, too. Some of them are really quite incredible. So I think one's initial approach should be of friendliness and consideration for another human being, and just openness to the possibility that, yes, there are some spiritual qualities there that you may admire; but not allow yourself to be as it were almost browbeaten into showing highly exaggerated respect for someone who, as far as you know, just doesn't deserve it at all.

I thought about this a lot when I was in India, because after all I started off as a very new person, a very new bhikkhu, myself, and I felt that I should follow tradition quite implicitly, without questioning. So among bhikkhus, especially in the Theravada, the tradition is that you pay respect to all those who are senior to you in ordination, and I did this quite scrupulously for many, many years; but eventually I felt 'This is quite wrong,' because some of the people I was paying respect to in that sort of way I knew were absolute rascals - not that they were just not very good bhikkhus; they were not even good human beings; they were just rogues in the fullest sense. And in the end I felt 'No, it's not right that I should pay respect to them.'

But the argument always was, 'You don't respect the man, you respect the yellow robe'; but I couldn't accept that any longer. And I know in a few cases there were bhikkhus whom I knew and whom I was quite friendly with who were senior to me, and if I paid them respect in the usual way they would become quite embarrassed and would ask me not to, because they were aware of the sort of lives that they were leading. So in the end I came to the conclusion that the state of affairs which has been reached in the Buddhist world in the East, especially in the Theravada Buddhist world, is such that this principle of 'You pay respect to the robe but not to the person wearing it' is doing more harm than good. It is helping to maintain a system which is no longer what it used to be and is not really worth preserving.

But I thought about this quite a lot. It troubled me for quite a long time, because I did not want - I felt, as a quite junior person, that I didn't want to break with tradition or appear to be in any way unwilling to follow tradition, etc. But in the end I felt, no, I can't go along with it any longer. So shortly before I came back to England, I just stopped paying respect in that sort of way to bhikkhus whom I could not genuinely feel any respect for. I was friendly with them; I always kept up friendly relations; but respect was another matter.

Sudhana: Bhante, did you ever encounter any sort of cynicism from the lay people with regard to bhikkhus, and in a way you could see that their faith in the Three Jewels was destroyed by rogues in robes?

S: Well, when you are speaking about lay people in Buddhist countries you are often speaking just about peasants who don't know very much. I think very often they are not cynical, even if they know that the bhikkhu isn't perhaps all he ought to be, they haven't reached that sort of mental or intellectual level of being able to think very much for themselves. It's the custom to respect the bhikkhus - all right, they just respect them, they don't think too much about it. But younger, more educated, especially Western-educated men sometimes don't feel happy about the situation. I, for instance, knew one Sinhalese student - this was in Calcutta in the quite early days - and he was quite unusual; he was a quite intelligent chap and I got quite friendly with him because I was going down to Calcutta every now and then. And he was very displeased with a certain Sinhalese bhikkhu who was connected with the Maha Bodhi Society, he was actually living there - who wasn't at all bhikkhu-like, in all sorts of ways. So, when a suitable occasion arose, this Sinhalese student wrote a whole page about this bhikkhu in the visitors' book! - exactly what he thought of him; which was quite unusual. The bhikkhu was very, very angry indeed. The page was torn out. I remember him doing that. He was so outraged just by the way that bhikkhu was living and behaving, he just wouldn't [40] tolerate it. But that was very unusual; but, yes, he was a young man of some self-confidence from a quite well-to-do family, going to Calcutta University, about 23 or 24. So he just wrote in the visitors' book what he thought. But the average Sinhalese upasaka is quite incapable even of thinking in those sort of terms.

Sudhana: Not in the way, say, Westerners might be slightly cynical about priests?

S: No, no, I must modify what I said. If the bhikkhu isn't wearing his robes properly they will be quite upset. If the bhikkhu hasn't shaved his head in exactly the right way, they will be quite upset. Or if the bhikkhu eats food even a few minutes after 12 o'clock, they will be very upset. But about other things they don't seem to bother. You see, this is in a way why it's so bad; it's so formalistic. I've gone into this in many pages of the Survey, haven't I? It's an old axe of mine that I'm grinding. But I became very aware of this quite early on, but I went along with the system for many years before I felt, well, no, this is not good for them and it's not good for me that I should follow this any more.

Sudhana: Is he ever an object of humour?

S: No, I would think not. Not to the ordinary lay person.

Cittapala: Bhante, when you say 'paying respects', could you give us some idea exactly what you do, for instance ...

S: Well, if you are a lay person, an upasaka, or if you are a junior monk, you must always - well, in the case of an upasaka you always bow down, usually three times, in front of a monk when you met him and when you leave; and if you are a junior bhikkhu you do the same with respect to any bhikkhu who is senior to you in ordination, even by an hour. Sramaneras always pay respect in the same way to all bhikkhus. And all nuns pay respect to all monks. And this is quite strictly observed in Theravada circles.

Cittapala: So when you ceased to pay this kind of respect, what kind of response did you have?

S: I didn't have any particular response. I think people understood what I was getting at. Of

course, I didn't stay long in India after that. And also, another point, by that time I was very senior myself. There were more people paying respects to me than I was having to pay respects to.

Uttara: This is the opposite situation from myself being in a position like that, especially within the Punjabi Untouchables. I occasionally went up to the house to have lunch with them or have a meal, and I used to keep having to insist that they would eat with us, at the same time, or even sitting at the same table, because they ...

S: Ah, but don't forget that this is the traditional Indian way of treating a guest. Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: Ah, I thought it was, you know - because they wouldn't sit at the same table as us, they used to ask us if they could sit at the same table ...

S: Ah, that might be because of their association with bhikkhus.

[41]

Uttara: Bhikkhus, that's right. So I said, you know, forget it, just sit at the table. Do you see that as being the right way to handle things, or would you think it would be better for me to just keep to the tradition?

S: It's difficult to say, because with Indians, as I say, it's a way of treating a guest. They treat any guest like that, not just a bhikkhu or an Order Member. I think one must just be guided by one's sense of the situation. If you find, when you insist on them sitting and eating with you, that they become genuinely embarrassed, well, just stop, just don't insist. On the other hand, if they are not very much conditioned by the bhikkhus that they have met, they will be quite happy just to follow the more Western custom. One just has to use one's common sense. But, for instance, in India, usually when I go people don't eat with me. Normally, Dharmarakshita, for instance, would never eat until I [had eaten]. I would often say, 'Come on, you haven't eaten, just come and eat with me,' but he wouldn't; he'd insist on serving me! He is, anyway, an exceptionally devoted sort of person, and of course I've known him many years. I don't remember him ever eating with me.

Alan Pendock: In Brighton we have, or I have, a very indirect contact with Chithurst - either people have been there or we get a newsletter. My impression from the newsletter is that the bhikkhus actually work quite hard doing forestry, doing up the Priory, and they seem to have quite a strong meditation programme. Do you think they are redressing the balance at all?

S: Yes, I think normally in Sri Lanka or in Thailand bhikkhus wouldn't do that sort of work. So I think possibly, due also to sheer necessity, they are redressing the balance a bit. They have departed a little bit from the Eastern Theravada tradition. I think that's an entirely good thing.

Alan Pendock: Incidentally, would they be breaking the Vinaya in doing some of those things?

S: They could be; they could be. But it would only be a minor rule, anyway. But none the less, they would be departing to a small extent. For instance, they couldn't cultivate the soil;

that is against the Vinaya for a bhikkhu. A sramanera may do so, but not a bhikkhu.

Alan Pendock: I'm assuming they are bhikkhus ...

S: I think they mostly are, yes. A bhikkhu cannot cook food, he cannot light a fire. There are many such rules. Well, he can't handle money. Some of them don't, but I think some of them do. I'm sure some of them must be lighting fires. To strike a match, strictly speaking, is against the Vinaya. But I think they are being in some ways obliged to modify their attitude, just by virtue of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Sudhana: Bhante, I almost found myself asking the question whether the same attitude exists in China, but, of course, it's communist. But what about Japan? To your knowledge, do they have similar attitudes there?

S: In what respect?

Sudhana: With regard to lay people's attitude to the monks. Are they deferred to in the same manner as they are in ...

S: I think in all Mahayana countries there is a big difference, because, in Mahayana countries, all accept the Bodhisattva ideal. Again, I have mentioned this [42] in the Survey and on other occasions. Whether you are a monk or whether you are a lay person, you accept and recognize the Bodhisattva ideal, so you are on the same path; not as in the Theravada, where the monk is on the Path to Nirvana and the lay person is simply on the path, at best, to a happy heavenly state or a better rebirth. So in the Mahayana, by virtue of that common spiritual ideal, the monastic order and the laity have been brought much closer together, and I think, usually, less formal respect is shown by the lay people, certainly in ordinary everyday life, to the monks than is the case in Theravada countries. Japan is a case by itself, because, with the possible exception of one very small school, the Ritsu(?) school, there is no monastic ordination in Japan; it has been entirely replaced by Bodhisattva ordination, and there are some big schools of Japanese Buddhism which do not have any kind of monastic tradition, even with Bodhisattva ordination. For instance, the Jodo Shin Shu; they don't distinguish between the monastic order, that is to say those who live as monks, and others; they don't have any monks. Not just in the sense that there is monastic life but without bhikkhu ordination; they don't have people leading celibate lives. So in their case that question doesn't arise; and they are one of the very biggest of the schools of Japanese Buddhism. Among the Zen people, well, in some Zen traditions you live as a monk when you are at the Zen monastery studying, and when you go back to your local temple you marry and raise a family. So in Japan the situation is rather different.

Sudhana: You said that people feel that they are all following the same path; you mean ...

S: Very broadly speaking, yes.

Sudhana: The laity, in that case, are educated as to the ideals of the ...

S: Well, it's difficult to say how educated they are, but they all do think, to the extent that they think about the Dharma at all, in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal.

Sudhana: And if they are lay followers they feel that they are treading that Path?

S: I think it's not so much that the lay people feel that they are the same as the monks; it's more like the monks, who are usually better educated, feeling that they and the lay people are on the same Path.

But what is important is that one pays attention to the actual situation. I mean, supposing that some bhikkhus are not quite as good as they should be; well, OK, one can continue to pay respect to the yellow robe regardless of who is wearing it; but when so many bhikkhus fall so far below the level that they are supposed to be on, well, then it all becomes a bit of a mockery. Or when they cease to understand even what Going for Refuge means, one can't really in honesty regard them as deserving of respect, except just as human beings.

So in some ways this is a departure from Buddhist tradition, but in another way it's a return to what the Buddha himself said and insisted on very strongly.

Sudhana: This is getting a bit far-fetched now, Bhante, but one so often sees in travel agents pictures of monks, advertising Thailand; one wonders whether they are almost becoming part of the tourist industry - you know, like you have the Guards in London and so on. Do you think perhaps ...

S: Well, one mustn't over-generalise. If you go to Bangkok I'm sure you can find bhikkhus who are part of the tourist industry, but if you go up north into Thailand and if you go into the forests there, you will find bhikkhus of a very different type; so one mustn't overlook that fact too. I think the basic principle is you [43] must just try to relate to people directly, and not be misled by externals. Formerly, in England, people used to be very impressed by a title, didn't they? Or the man who was not a gentleman treated the gentleman in such a way, a way that the gentleman never treated him, there were these tremendous social differences. But that's all gone, or virtually gone, now. Not so long ago I was reading one of Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the upper-class characters always speak very roughly to the lower-class characters: 'Come here, you fool! you idiot! What are you doing?' - and the lower-class characters consider that as just the normal way in which they were addressed by members of the gentry. It doesn't bother them in the least! And the higher your rank the more you spoke to people in that sort of way. I know people showed what we would regard as the most exaggerated respect for the peerage. Well, at one time the peerage had actual privileges; for instance, couldn't be arrested. So now things are very different. So, in the East, in much the same way, very often bhikkhus who are bhikkhus just by virtue of the robes they wear are given this exaggerated respect without their being really any better than the people who show them that respect.

But people do go very much by externals: originally, there was always some reason for it, but then it's become sort of hereditary or it's become a matter of form, and then it becomes undesirable.

Cittapala: Bhante, to what extent does Asvajit play along with the forms and customs of [...]?

S: Well, what do you mean by play along?

Cittapala: Well, I was wondering - that's a good question - well, to the extent that presumably things are expected of him, to behave in a certain kind of way. I was inferring from what you were saying that one should actually perhaps just ...

S: Can you be more specific?

Cittapala: I'm trying to formulate it. For instance, if you meet somebody in a social sense, normally there is a quite standard set of procedures by which you can normally engage in polite first manoeuvres, as it were, and presumably these things extend in Sinhalese society as well. Does Asvajit go along with those ...

S: Again, you have to be more specific, because there are so many of these sort of things. Lay people seem to regard him as a bhikkhu; I doubt if there is any great difference in the way in which the lay people treat Asvajit.

Cittapala: I was thinking more of his interaction with other bhikkhus - well, not ...

S: Well, they will not treat him as a bhikkhu, for sure; that's almost the last thing that they will do. Usually, bhikkhus are very insistent on nobody being treated in the way that they are treated except bhikkhus. I don't know if you've got your current Shabda? There's a good example of it there: in a particular place Asvajit was staying on retreat, he was invited along for the meal, so on the first day he sat down with the bhikkhus, because that's where the seats were, there were no other seats, and there were bhikkhus on this side of him and samaneras on lower seats at the other side; and one of the samaneras was very uncomfortable about that, and afterwards he was told he couldn't sit at the same table with the bhikkhus, so he was given a seat in a corner on a lower level. So he was at first a bit upset by that; but then he saw it as a bit of a joke, and was laughing to himself. So he made his position clear, that he did not accept that - he didn't believe in that. But, all right, he was there as a guest, so if they wanted him to sit on the floor and the bhikkhus at the table, all right, he'd do that. [44] But does that constitute 'going along' or does it not? Do you see what I mean? He doesn't bow down to the bhikkhus as in fact they would expect him to, him not being a bhikkhu. He doesn't go along in that sort of way. But if they want to give him food sitting on the floor, all right, never mind; he's not going to rebel against that.

Cittapala: Because presumably, in that kind of situation, you don't really have often very much time to explain your point of view.

S: That's true; perhaps you don't even have a language to explain it.

Cittapala: Well, yes.

S: But he has explained his view, in fact he explains his view quite carefully to anybody who cares to listen. But the bhikkhus are usually very difficult to convince. The lay people, perhaps, less so. And, of course, he has got his Sinhalese Mitra with him, Siri, who very strongly believes in FWBO principles and has written articles in the newspapers to that effect. He does have people who have regard for him and who know his position and understand that. On the whole, he is doing very well. But he sometimes thinks - putting it perhaps a little unkindly - that the bhikkhus are almost the last people who are going to be converted to Buddhism! It really seems so sad that they could have got it so wrong. It seems, even judging by Asvajit's articles and letters, that the situation is even worse than I feared. It's almost pathologically wrong. Anyway, you read his recent letter. If you don't get your copies of Shabda here, you can borrow mine.

Anyway, someone is looking at their watch - oh dear! It's five to ten. So have we got through

the Going for Refuge now?

Vessantara: No, tomorrow night is the last.

[45]

Tape 3

17 October 1987

Vessantara: So this evening, Bhante, we've got two questions which were left over from last time on the Going for Refuge pamphlet, and seven on starting the study on chapter 4 of the Nanamoli. So we'll start with Peter and his question on Going for Refuge.

Peter Nicholson: Bhante, we were considering the number of precepts that an Order Member undertakes. We were wondering if it would be advisable to have more than ten of them. We saw two areas in which they could be extended: firstly, in making more explicit underlying principles such as the Ten Precepts [...] specifically about mindfulness; and secondly in making more explicit duties and things which are implied in the Refuges and Precepts, such as gathering together in large numbers regularly in Order meetings. Do you see any benefits or dangers in extending the Precepts in these sort of ways?

S: I think I've been trying to avoid multiplication of precepts; because what I have seen in traditional Buddhism, especially in the case of, say, Theravada bhikkhus who technically observe 227 precepts, is that many precepts get lost on the way. It's as though if you have too many precepts you are inclined to neglect quite a few of them; so therefore, when the Order was founded, I came to the conclusion that it was best to have a small number of very fundamental precepts which everybody was well acquainted with and which everybody - that is, every Order Member - made a very definite effort to observe. I'm not saying that the principles or the practices you've mentioned aren't important, but I am not so sure that they should be incorporated as extra precepts, because one could in that way go on multiplying precepts almost indefinitely.

None the less, I see no reason why there shouldn't be perhaps a commentary on the Ten Precepts, bringing out all their implications. No doubt there is room for something of that sort. Perhaps there is also room - this is going off at a slightly different tangent - for a sort of constitution of the Order. I have been thinking about this for several years; it's one of the things I'm going to be looking at in more detail, perhaps, next year. But something like the importance of regular meetings, which suggests weekly chapter meetings and monthly regional and national Order weekends - things of that sort I think would be dealt with more suitably in a sort of constitution of the Order, rather than by way of precepts added on to the existing ten. The existing ten also have the advantage of being a traditional set which seems to go back to the very earliest days of Buddhism, It also has the advantage of being based upon that triad of body, speech and mind, in that way making it clear that the whole being, the whole personality, is involved in the observance of those precepts.

So I think the gist of the matter is that I am not really in favour of additional precepts. I think that the fewer precepts you have, probably, the more likely people are to take them seriously and actually try to observe them. But that doesn't mean that things which it is important for Order Members to practise and observe shouldn't be emphasized, and Order Members reminded of them, in some other way.

Peter Nicholson: Do you feel your Ten Pillars of Buddhism lecture is a commentary on the Precepts, or are you thinking of something different when you mention a commentary?

[46]

S: In a way it's a commentary, but I think perhaps it isn't sufficiently detailed, really, for a commentary. If one takes simply the First Precept, there is very, very much more that could be said on the subject of non-violence and its implications, and of all the different ways in which one should practise non-violence and abstain from violence. So it's much too short really to qualify as a commentary. I think a commentary on the Ten Precepts would probably occupy at least four thick volumes! If anybody has any ideas of that sort, it would be quite a good work to devote one's life to.

Uttara: Bhante, you just reminded me of a chapter in the middle period of the Buddha, where a monk comes to the Buddha and says to him: 'Lord, I can't practise the 150 rules of conduct', and the Buddha says, 'Can you train in three of them?' - and they were the higher consciousness, the higher virtue and the higher understanding. And when the monk says, 'Yes, I can train in them,' he gains arhantship.

S: So more and more of less and less! But you appreciate my reasoning? - that is to say, that one should have preferably a smaller number of precepts that one takes really seriously and makes a genuine effort to observe, rather than a much larger, apparently more impressive number, which one doesn't perhaps take so very seriously.

Cittapala: Bhante, could you say a little more about what you see this constitution as probably containing?

S: I don't really want to say very much; in fact, I think I can't, because it's something that needs to be thought about really very much more. I am thinking that, among other things, it should make fully explicit the purpose for which the Order exists, and also provide it with a sort of structure. This is mainly what I'm thinking in terms of; especially with a structure that will provide for all the different functions and responsibilities which at present I undertake myself. For instance, we don't have any actual procedure laid down with regard to ordinations: how they are to be given, or who is qualified to give them, under what circumstances, on what conditions; so far that has been mainly my personal responsibility. But clearly things can't remain like that.

Another question that really needs to be dealt with is: when does membership of the Order cease - under what conditions? In what way would one have to behave to disqualify oneself from membership? So far, I've taken what might be described as a very, very lenient view, and people have only left the Order if they either died or actually resigned. But I think we need to have some provision for, so to speak, not exactly removing people, but recognizing that they are in fact, by virtue of their lack of contact or behaviour, no longer members of the Order. I think a provision of that sort needs to be made; because we have just a few, a very few Order Members even at present who perhaps haven't been in contact with any other Order Member for maybe ten years, or who may have committed serious breaches of the Precepts. We can't just ignore those things. Or suppose, for instance, in the case of someone who otherwise does wish to continue to remain an Order Member, he or she does commit a very serious breach of the Precepts; how is that to be dealt with? It can't be just passed over. So there has to be some kind of provision for dealing with these things.

So I have not been in a hurry to consider any such provisions, because the Order needs time to

grow and we have to study the situation and see what sort of contingencies arise, what sort of provisions are necessary - not just lay everything down in advance without relation to actual conditions or actual happenings.

Cittapala: This would seem to mirror the way that the pratimoksha itself first came into existence.

[47]

S: One could say that, yes. So these are the sort of things I've been thinking of incorporating in, for want of a better term, I would call a constitution. You could also call it a rule, if you liked, in the Benedictine sense.

Ratnaprabha (adjusts microphones).

S: Perhaps we could go back a moment to this question of precepts - something which has occurred to me in the past is in connection with the Bodhisattva precepts. I am not thinking in terms of anyone taking the Bodhisattva precepts, but I think they are a very interesting set, and I have sometimes said it might not be a bad idea if the assembled Order, on special occasions, should just go through them, should even recite them: not in the sense of actually taking those precepts, but as a reminder of what the Order, in its more altruistic aspect, stands for. And I've even said that I'll take a study some time on the Bodhisattva Precepts in the form that I received them from Dardo Rimpoche. I don't know whether many of you are familiar with these; they are available in various forms. Recently someone has taken a few copies of my particular set which I translated with the help of Dardo Rimpoche in accordance with his explanations, based on Sankapa(?)'s commentary. But I think, sooner or later, we will be as it were putting them into circulation.

Cittapala: Bhante, who was it that took those copies?

S: Oh - I expect it was Dharmadhara, but I think he made a number of copies for somebody else who wanted them.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, this is a question about the cosmic level of Going for Refuge. Do you feel it is possible to identify an urge to self-transcendence in the Lower Evolution, whether in the whole process or in individual organisms?

S: Well, I suppose I can only say yes and no to that. I am not sure to what extent that speaking in terms of a cosmic Going for Refuge is to be taken as a sort of poetic statement and to what extent it is to be taken as, so to speak, a metaphysical statement. I wouldn't like to be taken as laying down some kind of doctrine - do you see what I mean? - so much as trying to express some kind of feeling, some kind of experience or some kind of response. But it is clear that, sooner or later, I will have to say something more about that. Perhaps I'd better give it further thought and then deal with it at length in some talk or paper, even. I think I'd rather do that.

Ratnaprabha: Do you think that'll be before I finish my book, or afterwards?

S: Well, I don't know when you are going to finish your book! We'll see. Perhaps it is a suitable theme for a talk in connection with a Convention or something of that sort.

Ratnaprabha: You did speak, Bhante, in the Higher Evolution series of lectures, about a continuity between the Lower Evolution and the Higher Evolution.

S: Yes, but then this raises the very vexed question of continuity and, so to speak, discrete development - whether development does proceed quite continuously, or whether it proceeds by jumps or leaps. I tend to think of that as really an artificial, even quite a semantic, problem. I think I prefer to stick to the traditional Buddhist formula 'in dependence upon A, B arises; in dependence upon the Lower Evolution, the Higher Evolution develops', without committing myself to saying whether the process is a continuous one or whether it does proceed by [48] discrete steps. I don't think either the concept of continuity or its opposite, taken literally, really represents the realities of the situation. Because if you analyse the concept of continuity, how can you analyse it except in terms of discrete moments? It is like time; is it divisible or is it indivisible? Is it absolutely continuous or is it discrete? Does a minute really contain 60 seconds? If so, how do you pass from one second to another? If you can't pass from one second to another, how is it that there is any time at all? So I think this whole question of continuous versus discrete development (this is '-ete', by the way, not '-eet') (Laughter) is really a quite artificial one. But perhaps it's another of those questions I need to look into a little more so that I can spell it all out perhaps more clearly than I have done in the past.

Vessantara: Those were our two questions left over from Going for Refuge.

[end of transcript]

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