

Tape 180: Fifteen Points for Old (And New) Order Members - Edited Version

I will not be giving you a lecture today. I think I was at my peak, as regards giving lectures, between twenty and thirty years ago. That is unfortunate for those of you who came along afterwards, but some of those lectures are on tape for you to hear if you want. So there will not be any spectacular verbal pyrotechnics on this occasion. I am just going to present to you, in a plain and straight-forward manner, from a list of more than forty points I jotted down recently, fifteen points which I have selected as being of relevance to most Order Members. I mention this just so that no-one is disappointed and feels like saying afterwards, "Well, Bhante's not quite on form this morning." I did hear remarks of this sort on a recent visit to India, after I had given a short series of talks. I was told that some of our Indian Order Members had said: "They're not quite so good as the lectures Bhante used to give." When I heard this I was quite pleased, because I thought that they did know the difference between a good and a really good lecture. This reminds me of a story I heard about a famous opera singer. She had just come to the end of the last act of her current opera, and after tumultuous applause she was presented with twenty or thirty bouquets, just like I used to get in India. And someone said to her, "Well, of course you must be very pleased." But she said: "No I'm not". And when they asked her why, she said: "I got the same applause, yes, but I wasn't quite so good tonight, actually." What she meant was that the audience did not really appreciate her. They did not know when she was not quite on form and when she was. I am not saying I am not quite on form, but that this is not going to be a lecture; I am just going to present you with a series of points. Of course we already have our 'Fifteen Points for New - and Old - Order Members' but this time I have reversed the title and I am going to call it 'Fifteen Points for Old - and New - Order Members.'

My first point, or aphorism, is something relatively simple and straightforward: **reduce input**. I do not know anything about computers, so this point is not intended to have anything to do with them. But it often strikes me that we are subject to an enormous input through our senses and our mind. So much impinges on us every day and even every hour. First of all, there are people impinging on us, not just the people with whom we are in close contact, but people whom we merely pass in the street. There are the people we see on the tube, or in other casual ways, and they all have an effect on us. We are not completely unaware of their existence and of their mental states. In the tube, for instance, you can become very aware of the fact that the people sitting in the same carriage as you are sometimes in quite strange mental states. I see people talking to themselves, or nodding their heads, or in a sort of stupor, very tired after the day's work, or even before the day's work begins. So because one cannot help noticing people, they have an effect on one, contributing their input all the time.

And then there is the input from traffic, especially if you live in London. My little flat at Sukhavati in Bethnal Green is relatively quiet, but even there I hear the sound of the traffic. I can also see, through the window of my study, planes coming and going every few minutes. I can hear police, ambulance and fire engine sirens. I can hear glass being broken, and all sorts of goings-on. In the distance, sometimes, I can hear drilling, and people shouting slogans. It is not very loud, but when you go out, it does of course become very much louder, especially if you go right into the heart of the city. So, the sound of traffic and so on is impinging on us all the time. And then there are the sounds of radios and TVs. Lots of people watch TV; someone even told me recently that when they went home, they discovered that their parents had both the TV and the radio on all day, all the time. There are also the things we read. We may pick up a newspaper, so facts from that impinge upon us. If we are regular newspaper readers, we are being impinged on all the time by them. Often we are not conscious of this

impingement; it registers subliminally, but it affects us. I think we probably do not realise the great effect that it has on us. So the point that I am making first is: reduce input.

We may not be able to shut out all the input all the time, but we can be much more careful, much more selective, about what we choose to let in. What gets in can often have a negative rather than a positive effect on us. I am not thinking so much of the radio, but we do need to make an effort to be more selective with our reading matter, with the TV, and even with the sort of contact we have with our friends. We deliberately tune in to different channels on the radio and TV, so we should apply that sort of principle to everything that impinges on us. We are a sort of receiving station all the time, but we do not have to allow all these different outside factors and influences to play on us constantly without any sort of control or restriction. So reduce input, be more selective and try to make sure that the influences that are impinging on you are positive rather than negative.

One of the ways in which we can reduce input drastically is by going on solitary retreat from time to time. When we do manage to get away on such a retreat we are very careful not to take too many things with us. We do not take too many books with us, not even Dharma books, and we do not go away to a place where we are likely to find a TV set or even a radio. We need to be very careful about that, because these things are very seductive. An Order Member wrote to me some time ago and said, "When I was on my solitary retreat I didn't watch too much TV." He seemed to think it a not unusual or unacceptable thing to spend two or three hours a day watching it. Maybe for him it did represent a drastic reduction of input, but really, we should try to reduce our input much, much, more than that. We should have no contact with people, or with the outside world at all, as far as is possible. We do of course have a sort of daily solitary retreat when we meditate. Almost the first thing we do on these occasions is reduce input: we close our eyes. We try to meditate in a quiet place for the same reason, because if you are surrounded by noise you can hardly meditate. The things that impinge on us come mainly from the outside world, so first of all you reduce the external input. Then you can become more aware of the internal input, the wandering thoughts, fancies, ideas, reflections and worries. So then you work on reducing them, and it is only when you have done all this, that you really start meditating. Only then can you have contact with any deeper or higher levels within yourself. I think the artist has to do the same sort of thing. I certainly know that the writer has to do something similar. So this is my first point, a relatively simple, straightforward one, not always very easy in practice: reduce input.

Point number two is: **think clearly**. This is an old chestnut which will, I think, bear bringing to your notice yet again. Framed in rather more traditional terms, it is not so much 'think clearly', but: 'cherish Right View.' You notice I do not say 'cherish Perfect Vision'. That would be rather premature, because there is no Perfect Vision without Right View. Right View is the mundane form of Perfect Vision, and Perfect Vision is the transcendental form or counterpart of Right View. Unless you have Right View, you have very little chance of achieving Perfect Vision. That is why Right View is so very important. The Buddha has all sorts of things to say about Right View. He did not distinguish linguistically between Right View and Perfect Vision, but spoke in terms of *samma ditthi* (Pali), *samyag drsti* (Skt.). But it is quite clear from the context whether he is talking about mundane 'right view' or about transcendental 'perfect vision'. Right View is important because wrong view leads downward. There is a Pali term *niraya*, which means 'downward', or 'downward path'. If you entertain, and especially if you cling to and insist upon wrong view, you are very definitely on the

downward path, you are in decline. So Right View is of very great importance. As I have said: no Right View, no Perfect Vision. If there is no Perfect Vision, there is no liberation, no Enlightenment, no Nirvana, no real spiritual progress.

In order to cherish Right View we have to learn to think, that is to say, to reason. Sometimes I am surprised how difficult people seem to find it just to think. I am not even speaking of thinking *clearly*. So often we are just under the influence of our emotions, very often swayed by our rather negative emotions, and we are not aware of this. We are not aware that we are not really thinking. But to cherish Right View we have to learn to think clearly, to reason correctly. Some time ago Subhuti arranged and led a series of 'logical weekends' for the study and practice of logic. I believe that those who attended them found them very useful. It was a pity that they could not be continued. I am not of course blaming Subhuti here, but perhaps others who know a little about logic could restart them. We could have whole weekends devoted to how to think, how to reason. There is not much point in studying the Dharma if you cannot think clearly, and especially if you cannot even think. So I think that, logically and psychologically, really must come first. Perhaps we should have, at Vajrakuta or elsewhere, weekends devoted to how to think, how to reason correctly. We have arts weekends, and arts events, and even arts retreats, which is fine. But we must also not neglect the other side of things.

One of the things we need to do in connection with thinking is to understand the meaning of the words we use. Sometimes we use words very loosely, very inaccurately. We do not ask ourselves the meaning of the words we use. Very often our speech is laden with jargon from various sources, and that does not conduce to clarity. So let us understand the meaning of the words we speak, and especially the words we write, and consult the dictionary if necessary. The most useful book in the world, I think, is really the dictionary, leaving aside the scriptures. If I was ever to be invited on 'Desert Island Discs', one book which I would definitely ask to take with me to my Desert Island would be a dictionary. But it would not be just any old dictionary. I would not even take Collins dictionary, not even the Concise Oxford Dictionary, I would take Dr Johnson's dictionary, because it is not only a very, very good dictionary - it not only defines words really beautifully and precisely - but it also contains examples. It contains examples of how writers of the past have used words. Thus it is also an anthology of little poetic extracts which show you how the words are used in actual literary, or sometimes in scientific context. So if someone uses a word that you do not understand, or if you are not quite sure of the meaning attached to a particular word, or if it is an ambiguous word, ask for clarification. Otherwise you may be discussing or arguing at cross purposes. Nowadays, I hardly need tell you, so many wrong views are around. Wrong views are pouring in upon us all the time from our surroundings. Open the newspapers and you find wrong views. Read a book, recently published, and more likely than not you will encounter wrong views. Talk to someone outside the FWBO, listen to a political speech, listen to a talk on literature, listen to a speech or lecture on almost any topic and you will encounter wrong views. We live in the midst of this society. We cannot cut ourselves off from it completely; we cannot help but be affected by it. But we must be on our guard against it, and realise that many of the views that we encounter are really quite inconsistent with the Dharma. We therefore have to be very much on the alert, and to be able to think clearly, to reason correctly, and to understand the real meaning of the words used. It is especially important that we do not mix up with the Dharma, some of the ideas and ideologies with which we come into direct or indirect contact. It is all very well to try to speak the language of contemporary life, but we have to be very careful that when we try to speak that language we do not allow ourselves to be misled and start even to think in

those contemporary terms which are inconsistent, not only with clarity of thought, but with Right View itself. So be very, very, wary of favourite, fashionable ideas and ideologies and 'isms' and so on, and stick to the Dharma. We can express the Dharma in relatively straightforward English, up to a point, but be very careful when we start using words and expressions and even borrowing philosophies and semi-philosophies from sources which really are very different from and even inimical to the Dharma itself.

Point number three could be thought of as a specific example of the sort of thing I have been talking about, so I will not dwell on it too much. It is: **distinguish fact from value judgement**. I have found that this is something people find very difficult to do. Suppose it is raining, and you say: "It is raining." That would be a statement of fact. Or one might say: "Rain drops are falling, water is falling." That also would be a factual statement. But if you were to say: "The weather is bad," that is a value judgement. But we do not always realise this. Rain may be bad for us, but it is only bad for us from our point of view, for instance if we wanted to go out for a walk. But the farmer may not have seen rain for several weeks, and he may be delighted that it is raining. He might say to his wife, "Look at the weather we're having. I'm so pleased it's raining, isn't it wonderful?" You experience this very much in India. At the end of the dry season, after a long period of very hot weather, when the rain starts falling, people are delighted. Because if the monsoon is delayed, it means starvation and death for thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people. So if you were touring India at the beginning of the monsoon and you wanted to go out sightseeing, and you were to say: "Oh dear, what bad weather," the Indians certainly would not be in agreement with you. They would be thinking it was fine. They would be dancing with joy, like the peacocks, which are supposed to dance with joy when the first rain cloud appears. People would actually be dancing with joy. To them that rain would be a good thing and not a bad thing. Their value judgement would be different from yours. So we very often confuse these two different types of statement. We confuse them especially when it comes to talking about other people. We might say, for instance:

"Oh, that person is not a very good person." But that is not a statement of fact. If you want to put it in factual terms, you would have to say what that person had actually done, and then give separately your value judgement upon what he or she had done. Another person might give a quite different value judgement.

We find this difference of value judgements occurring in different religions. I will give you an example, a rather indirect one. It arises in connection with this question of blasphemy that I have been thinking about recently, especially in connection with the Salman Rushdie case. You cannot really have a *law* of blasphemy, because different people consider different things to be blasphemous. For instance, to an orthodox Christian, if you say that Jesus Christ is not God, that is blasphemy. Hundreds of years ago you could have been burned at the stake for that. But to a Muslim, if you say that Jesus Christ is God, that is blasphemy. It is just the opposite for a Muslim, because "God is God, there is **only** God". To 'associate' anyone with God, as the Muslims term it, is blasphemy. Hence they believe that the Christian, in 'associating' Jesus Christ with God, is committing blasphemy. So there are two completely different value judgements about this person Jesus. Most people agree that he lived - though some people do not - but if you accept as a fact that he lived, then to consider that he is the son of God is a value judgement; to consider that he is not the son of God, that he is just an ordinary man, is another value judgement, and these two value judgements are quite incompatible. So the term blasphemy means something quite different for a

Christian and for a Muslim. What for a Christian would be blasphemy to deny, for a Muslim is blasphemy to assert. They are concerned with the same facts, but the value judgements in this case are completely different. I hope this example is not too abstract or indirect, but I think you can see what I am getting at. So when you make what seems to you to be a value judgement on anything or any person, ask yourself: "What is the fact behind this?" Try to separate out the fact and to see your value judgement as separate from your fact. Because sometimes people think they are disagreeing about fact when really they are disagreeing about value judgement, which is a quite different thing. A lot of confusion arises in discussion between people, even in the pages of *Shabda* sometimes, springing from the fact that value judgements are not sufficiently distinguished from statements of fact.

My fourth point is: **do not misuse the developmental model**. What do we mean by developmental model? Well, we are all Buddhists, we all go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We all seek to follow the spiritual path. But we have a particular model, in fact there are various models for following the spiritual path, and one of those is what has been called the developmental model. We think of following the spiritual path in terms of personal or individual development, from a lower to a higher stage. This is all very well so far. So then, when we adopt this developmental model, we assess what we do, what we say, even what we think, in terms of whether it conduces to our spiritual development or whether it does not. This is quite correct, quite legitimate, but there is also an illegitimate use of this developmental model, a misuse of it. I will give you a few rather crude examples of the sort of thing I have heard: "I think I ought to have a holiday this year. Maybe I'll go away for a month to Greece. I think it would be good for my spiritual development." Or: "I think I really ought to start getting angry with people. I think it would be good for my spiritual development." Or: "I think I ought to get into a sexual relationship. I think it would be good for my spiritual development." These examples show you the sort of thing I mean. You want to do something, but you justify it, at least to your FWBO friends, by putting it in terms of your spiritual development. After all people cannot quarrel with your wanting to develop spiritually. They cannot say you should not try to develop spiritually. So, that is the way you express your intention: "This would be good for my spiritual development." It would take a rather bold and perhaps insightful spiritual friend to challenge that sort of statement. People have tried this sort of thing on me in the past. I remember someone saying to me in India, long before the FWBO: "Oh I'm sure, Bhante, that someone as wise as you would not think so and so..." So you cannot say: "Well no, I'm not wise". You could do but you probably would not like to. So, wanting to appear wise, you may find it difficult not to think what that person wants you to think. It is very difficult to challenge the words used when the values they embody are held in common. In the same way, the language of 'development' - of spiritual development - is common to all of us. We all use that language, but it can be misused. So if someone tells us, or if we tell ourselves that something would be good for our spiritual development, then challenge it. Just because this slogan of 'spiritual development' has been invoked, it does not mean that it is beyond question. So respond with a challenge: "Wait a minute, did you say a holiday in Greece? For three months? Well, why do you think it would conduce to your spiritual development? Is three months necessary? Do you need a rest, or do you need a solitary retreat more? Or isn't it that you need to work harder?" You need to go into these things, not just to accept that statement from your friend. There should not be a full stop there at the end of his statement, there should be a big question mark. And if the person himself does not put that question mark there, then you put it in yourself, in the interest of that person. Put it there in the interest of intellectual and spiritual honesty, even. So: do not misuse the developmental model.

Then, fifth point: **think more in terms of renunciation**. If you think in terms of giving up, it will help counterbalance any possible misuse of this developmental model. You could ask yourselves not so much “What do I need for my spiritual development?” but “What could I give up?” It is very unlikely that the things you find difficult to give up will be bad for you to give up. If you are not sure what you could give up, then ask your spiritual friends. I read somewhere recently that on retreat, someone had said that they would give up using bad language. I had not known that some of our Friends use bad language, even on retreat. So that might be an appropriate suggestion for some people. Or if someone happens to be a smoker, you could suggest they give up smoking. This is a very, very obvious thing. A few people do take just a very little alcohol; so if they were taking more than just a very, very little, like in their trifle for instance, you could suggest that they give it up. You could give up money. We get lots of opportunities to give up money because we have so many fund-raising appeals. It is a very good and healthy thing to be asked to part with money, because that is one of the things that, quite frankly, we do not find it all that easy to part with, especially if we do not have too much of it to begin with. But if somebody does not have any money, well obviously we ought to try to share with them whatever we do happen to have. So I think we need to think much more in terms of renunciation. It is not only those who are bhikkhus or Anagarikas who have to think in terms of renunciation, of giving up. Every Buddhist needs to do this, regardless of their particular lifestyle. If we think more in terms of renunciation, it will help to counteract this dreadful prevalence of consumerism that surrounds us on all sides. Advertisements are not interested in telling you what you can do without. They are very interested in telling you, for their own reasons, what you cannot possibly do without. This is one of the things to which we are subject all the time. If you pick up a colour supplement or one of those little enclosures that come through the post, you see pictures of all those little household gadgets and holidays and clothes and fashions and accessories and so on which you are supposed not to be able to do without. So, you have to try to counteract that consumerism, and you can counteract it to some extent by thinking more in terms of renunciation: When you see an advertisement, let us say for a glossy new car, do not ask yourself, “Would it be good for my spiritual development to buy this car?” You could say to yourself: “Wouldn’t it be good if I gave up even the thought of acquiring a car?” We could say that really there is no spiritual development without renunciation. So we cannot think exclusively in terms of spiritual development, taking that language literally. We also really do have to think in terms of renunciation. There is no spiritual development without renunciation, without giving up something. We cannot always wait for things to just drop away from us, sometimes we have to actually give them up, even though it might be rather painful at first. Similarly, there is no renunciation without spiritual development. I am not speaking here about renunciation through feelings of irrational guilt, which you should not be having anyway. So we should not think of development and renunciation as antithetical, much less still contradictory. If we renounce unskilful things, practices, words, activities, we really will develop spiritually, it really will help us. So: think more in terms of renunciation. You will notice I am not saying: “Think only in terms of renunciation”, but: “Think more in terms of renunciation”, especially as a means of counteracting any possible misuse of the developmental model.

Now point number six: **don’t accept yourself**. To some this may sound very much like blasphemy. They may say: “Of course you must accept yourself. It is the first thing you must do, just accept yourself.” But let us look a little more closely into the matter. First of all, what does ‘accept’ mean? Well, a couple of years ago I wanted to be quite sure of this, so I consulted my old friend Dr Johnson, on whom I find I can rely. He defines the verb ‘to accept’, as: to receive with approbation, that is to say, with approval. But

surely there is much in ourselves of which we do not approve, much of which perhaps we strongly disapprove. We should not want to retain that, hang on to that particular personal characteristic, whatever it is. We should rather want to reject that. So we should modify this rather popular statement about accepting ourselves and say: "Let us accept what is skilful in ourselves, but let us reject what is unskilful." There is no spiritual development without such an attitude. This is a form of renunciation. I know I am being in some ways a little bit provocative, but consider the truth to be found in the provocation. We are becoming, in the world at large, in our current culture and way of looking at things, in many ways rather self-indulgent. I think there is very general and widespread talk nowadays, especially in therapeutic or psychotherapeutic circles, about 'accepting yourself' and this term has become rather misused, rather like the developmental model. So let us try a change, conduct an experiment: do not accept yourself. Suppose I get angry sometimes: why should I accept that? I do not accept it. If I accept it I am just not going to grow in that respect. Supposing I am mean, that I do not like to give, to part with my money. Why should I accept that in myself? I want to grow spiritually. Therefore one should not think in terms of just accepting oneself totally. That sort of acceptance is suitable only for the infant, not for anybody who has reached any degree of maturity. So do not accept yourself. You could even say: do not accept your friends. Do not accept what is unskilful in them. Say: "I am not going to accept that, put up with that. You acted unskilfully, you told a lie, you let me down. I am not going to accept that. I am not going to let you off the hook." Let there be no collusion. I think sometimes in friendship, not spiritual friendship, of course, but in friendship, there is a sort of mutual collusion. "You let me get away with this and I'll let you get away with that." Sometimes I get reports of Chapter meetings where Order Members have told their fellow Chapter members, "Oh, I think I'm going to do such and such..." And it has been something quite questionable sometimes, or at least something that ought to be looked at more closely. And sometimes other Chapter members say "That's fine, yes, go ahead and do it." I am not saying this always happens, by any means. In some Chapters, at least on some occasions, a vigorous examination takes place concerning what that person proposes to do, but not always. Only too often there is collusion; the person is let off the hook because you 'accept' the other person, accept what they are, accept what they want to do. This can be a very serious misuse of the whole concept of 'acceptance.' So accept in yourself what is skilful and reject what is unskilful.

Receive with approbation what is skilful in yourself and others and reject with disapprobation what is unskilful.

Seventhly: **rejoice in others' merits**. This also is a bit of an old chestnut, but never mind. It is not included in my first Fifteen Points, so let it be included in the second, because it is really very, very important, especially as this is a gathering of Order Members. Rejoice in one another's merits. If an Order Member has done something really good, positive, useful, noble, heroic, then rejoice in that. I think this applies especially perhaps to senior Order Members, not that the less senior ones are excluded by any means. But some of our senior Order Members are really quite remarkable people. And I often feel very proud of them. I am not going to mention any names, that would be invidious. But I feel a lot of confidence in many of them and feel I will be in a position to hand over responsibility when the time for that comes. I will say a bit about that towards the end of this talk. So we should rejoice in one another's merits, and especially in the merits of our older and more experienced Order Members, who contribute so much to the Order, and to the Movement. Occasionally, I am sorry to say, I am aware of a little bit of sniping at senior and responsible Order Members, rather than rejoicing in their merits. This is not to say that they do not sometimes make

mistakes. Anybody may make mistakes. But sometimes I am aware of a little bit of sniping which seems to come from a sort of spirit of competitiveness or at least from a lack of full and proper appreciation. So do not let this get in the way. Sometimes prominent people do lay themselves open, in a way, to being sniped at, just because they are prominent. But in many cases they are prominent just because of the good they are doing, the leading part that they are taking, the greatness of the contribution they are making. So let us make a very definite attempt to rejoice in others' merits, and especially in the merits of those who are doing more than we are. Perhaps we are not doing very much for the Dharma, for the Movement. Perhaps we are not in a position to, quite objectively, but do not let that restrain us. Let us rejoice in the merits of those who are doing more than we are. I will mention one particular Order Member because he is absent, and that is Lokamitra. I rejoice in Lokamitra's merits almost every day. I rejoice in them whenever I think of Lokamitra, because he has done so much for the Movement. If it had not been for Lokamitra I do not think there would have been well over a hundred Order Members in India. There would not have been a Karuna Trust, because Karuna Trust would not have had any channels into which to pour all the wealth that it has gathered here in this country. Most of the things that Lokamitra has done, I could not have done myself. He has a particular combination of qualities which has enabled him to be very effective in that situation. So I personally rejoice very, very much in Lokamitra's merits. And I take him just as a particularly conspicuous example, and also because he happens not to be present. But there are others in whose merits I rejoice in practically equal measure, who have also contributed so much to the Movement, to the Dharma. And I rejoice in the merits of each and every one of you. I do not think there is anybody who has not made a quite significant contribution, even if only within his or her local Sangha, to the well-being of the Movement. So let us all rejoice in the merits of other Order Members.

But of course in order to rejoice in their merits we have to know them. Some of you perhaps have not even met Lokamitra, for instance. But even if we have not met certain other Order Members, we can read about them, for instance in *Shabda*, where very often they do speak about what they are doing. In this connection I was rather disappointed a few months ago to hear an Order Member say: "Well of course I never read *Shabda*." To me this really sounded a quite shocking statement. We should all read *Shabda*. I certainly read it myself, and I can certainly hold myself up as an example in this respect, if not in others. I certainly do read my *Shabda*; I read it as soon as I get it. In fact, if it is late, I inquire for it, as some of you know. Messages go flying around: "Why has Bhante not received his *Shabda* yet?" Because I am eager to get to it and know what you have all been doing, and to rejoice in your merits when I read about all the good and noble and even heroic things some of you have been doing. So read your *Shabda*, so that you know what other Order Members are doing, and can rejoice in their merits in an intelligent sort of way. It is not that you just say, without knowing anything about them: "Oh yes, I rejoice in the merits of all other Order Members." That is really not nearly enough. But if you rejoice in the merits that you really do see and appreciate in other Order Members, you will start taking pride in them. You will become proud of the whole Order. I do sometimes think that we do not take enough pride in ourselves. This is, I am afraid, an English trait, and I am going to exempt all of the non-English people. I am addressing more particularly the English Order Members. I think English people (and when I say English, I mean English, I do not mean British: I am excluding the Scots and the Irish and the Welsh) do not very often think enough of themselves, they tend to run themselves down. Maybe that is alright on your ordinary social and political level, but it is not alright on the spiritual level. We should rejoice in our own merits and be proud of ourselves, proud of our Order. After all, after twenty five years, between us, we really have built up something.

We really have created something in our Order that is worthwhile, that is contributing something really positive to the whole Movement. It is quite a staggering thought the number of people we have come into contact with, continued with, or even just passed through the Movement in the course of the last twenty five years. So let us take pride in the Order. That means sticking up for the Order; if someone misrepresents or criticises the Order to you, or seems to have not a very clear idea of what it is all about, do not hesitate to correct them. Do not let them get away with it. Do it of course appropriately, but do not let them get away with it. And of course if we rejoice in one another's merits and if we are proud of the Order, another thing also will happen which will be that we will trust one another. I do feel that there is not quite enough trust within the Order. Not quite enough trust between Order Members. And this perhaps is a bit of a hangover from our experience of the world. You cannot trust the world. You would be a very foolish person if you trusted the world. I certainly do not trust the world. I do not trust the media: the TV people, or the newspapers. I do not trust most of the authors I read, nor those who write about, say, religious, social and political matters. I do not trust them one little bit. I think I have got a well-developed faculty of distrust, which has been very useful to me. It has helped me to survive some difficult situations. Some people tell me that I have a suspicious look. Well I am not surprised, that is alright and quite natural when dealing with the outside world, but it is not appropriate within the Movement, and least of all is it appropriate within the Order. So trust one another, do not suspect one another. Take it that one another's motives are pure until you have very definite reason to think otherwise. And if that does happen, well just take it up in a positive manner with the person concerned. If you cannot trust one another, you cannot work together. Those of you who work in team-based right livelihood businesses will know that mutual trust is of the very essence of the matter, both in spiritual and in practical business terms.

Now to point eight. It is short and sweet, or maybe not so sweet. This point is: **do not argue - discuss**. Now what is the difference between arguing and discussing? It is quite simple: when you get into an argument in the proper sense of the word, what you are concerned with is to win. You want to beat the other person, to defeat the other person in argument. But the aim of discussion is to establish, to find out between you, the truth of the matter. You aim to find it out co-operatively, just you two, or three or four, as the case may be. You are mainly concerned with finding out the truth. You are not thinking in competitive terms. You are not trying to beat the other person, or to confuse the other person, or confute the other person. You are just trying to get at the truth of the matter, or at least trying to understand it, even if you cannot get at the truth of it. But in argument you are just concerned to win. Now if you are not very careful, what starts off as a genuine discussion can become an argument. It is very difficult sometimes to tell where the one passes over into the other: very difficult indeed. You can if you are not very careful find yourself deep in a real argument, in a very unpleasant way, having had no intention to do that sort of thing at all. You sometimes find yourself just sliding into it, you do not quite know how, so be very, very alert. Be very careful that when you do enter into a discussion, especially a discussion where it is a subject that both of you or all of you have strong feelings about, that it does not degenerate into an argument. There will always be the possibility of argument so long as ego is there. Ego will always tend to try to creep in, to smuggle itself into discussion and when that happens, discussion will turn, unfortunately, into argument. So: do not argue, discuss.

Point number nine is: **do not keep too many options open too long**. The Movement having expanded so much within the last twenty five years, there are many options

open, at least for those who do not have responsibilities outside the movement. So the temptation is that we keep hoping that something better will turn up. Maybe we are invited to join the team of a certain Centre. We think it would not be a bad thing to do, but then we think "that Centre is situated in an industrial town." So we think to ourselves: "I do not want to live in an industrial town; let me wait and see if I get an offer from a Centre situated in a very pleasant; very agreeable sort of country town, or preferably right in the country. Just let me wait and see." You keep your options open. Perhaps you do get such an invitation, and then you think "Well, no, I would really rather like to work in a Centre which had a much better climate. Maybe I need sunshine for the sake of my spiritual development." So you put it aside and do not take up that particular option, but go on keeping your options open. You keep on thinking that something better may turn up. And of course, if you are keeping your options open, you do not have to decide, you do not have to commit yourself. You may be reluctant to commit yourself, maybe you rather like sitting on the fence. Maybe you think it is even a rather noble sort of thing to do: to sit on the fence and keep all your options open, just doing nothing. I am sure there is an appropriate rationalization for this sort of thing. Perhaps you have got a sort of mistaken idea of freedom and independence: "I do not want to bind myself by committing myself to this or committing myself to that." But one can only say in this connection that freedom is found in commitment, not in refraining from commitment. I am talking about specific commitments. Not the commitment represented by one's Going for Refuge. Freedom is found in commitment, because when you commit yourself, it is your act. It is the act of your whole person, or of as much of your whole person as you are able to muster. So freedom is to be found in making that commitment. If you do not make that sort of commitment, if you go on keeping your options open indefinitely, you just stultify. Keeping your options open represents a process simply of self-stultification. So, keep them open for a little while; if you have just left one particular situation which may have been rather demanding, keep your options open for a while, that is certainly quite valid and quite legitimate. Just look around and see what the options are, what you really want to do, what would be genuinely in the interests of your spiritual development to do. See what it would be in the interests of other people and in the interests of the Movement to do, consult your spiritual friends, and then commit yourself. And do not commit yourself just for a very short period, a very short time. I think the fact that we can move around so much and so easily these days means that people get a bit restless after a year or two and they want to move on, to try some other scene. But I think you cannot really achieve very much, anything really very substantial, unless you commit yourself to something for a relatively long time. I am thinking, in the case of a commitment to working in a Centre, to a period of say four or five years.

Then tenthly: **keep your promises.** I have become aware that sometimes people, even Order Members, do not keep their promises. They undertake to do something, maybe to arrange the flowers for the shrine, but they do not do it. This is really very regrettable. If you cannot keep your promises, you are not an individual. Individuality implies continuity, implies that the 'you' of today is able to act upon the decisions and the promises of the 'you' of yesterday. If you cannot do that, if you are at the mercy of passing whims and fancies and change your mind and forget your promises, or default on your promises, there is no continuity in you. And to that extent there is no individuality. You also let other people down. So I think we should give very great importance to this: do not let other people down, but keep your promises. And that means of course not making promises lightly. Years ago when I was in India people used to ask me why I would not promise to do something, and I would say: "I'm not going to promise because I take my promises seriously." So if you take your promises

seriously, you will not promise easily and lightly, but once you have promised, well, your word will be your bond, and people can absolutely rely upon you. It is very frustrating when those who are trying to organise something are given promises: “Oh yes, I’ll help you do this. I’ll help you do that”, but then the promises are broken. It is also frustrating when people simply say: “Well I might be able to help you. Perhaps I will.” They want in this case to keep their options open. If you can only say that sort of thing, do not say it at all. Either say yes, or no. Because if someone is trying to organise something and he has got a couple of dozen people who can only say: “Well perhaps I can help you,” that is no use whatever. Because in order to be able to plan things and to organise, he has got to be able to know who he can rely upon and what he can rely on them for. So pay attention to this particular matter. We could even say that ordination itself represents a particular promise. You promise to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to observe the Ten Precepts which you take at the time of ordination. These are promises: I promise not to harm other living beings, I promise not to take the not-given, and so on.

Point number eleven is: **be more ceremonious**. I am not referring here to religious ceremonies or rituals. I am thinking more in terms of social ceremonies. I will give you an example. For instance, the old Chairman may have resigned, and you may have got a new Chairman. So it would be a good idea if there was a sort of ceremony for installing your new Chairman, to mark that particular event as having a very definite and special significance. Perhaps some of you do this already, but you should invest the situation with a bit of glamour, if the word is not too hackneyed or misused. If you do things ceremoniously, it underlines the significance of the event. It introduces an aesthetic and even an archetypal element into the whole situation. It is not just some sort of official business arrangement. A Chairman, for instance, is a very important person; he is not just someone who presides at Council meetings of the Centre. The Chairman is a sort of focal point for the whole of that particular FWBO. He has a spiritual relationship with the FWBO, a spiritual relationship with every person within the mandala which his FWBO represents. So the installation of a new Chairman is a very important and even a very solemn occasion. It is not like changing the Chairman of a business firm, even a very big business firm. So let it be underlined with a bit of ceremony. There are also events like people coming back from Guhyaloka or Taraloka after they have been ordained. Let them be welcomed back ceremoniously. I heard of a case not so long ago, when someone newly ordained came back to his community, and although they knew he was to arrive, there was not a single person there to welcome him. That was really quite unfortunate. I know that usually people are welcomed back when they have been ordained, but let it be done perhaps on an even grander scale, and more ceremonially. And also connected with this: let us try and cultivate better manners. I know lots of us think that manners are old fashioned, middle-class things, but let us look at manners in a more aesthetic way, and try doing things elegantly, doing them beautifully. I must say that frankly I am quite embarrassed by the bad manners, the uncouth manners, even of Order Members. They seem to have no sort of social *savoir faire* sometimes. I am not speaking about Mitras and Friends now. I noticed especially today the way I was introduced by the Chairman of my talk on this occasion. It was very beautifully done. But it is not always done like that. Sometimes someone stumbles up and says: “Ha, ha, yea, Bhante’s going to give a little talk, yea.... What’s he going to talk about?” It is really awful and I really cringe. In a sense it is not quite so bad when it happens within the FWBO, where we can understand and forgive, but what about the public? Supposing people from the outside world come and witness that sort of thing, what on earth will they think of us? It is not a question of being formal in the negative sense, but of doing things correctly and mindfully and gracefully, with a certain elegance, and also of speaking clearly and distinctly. Here I

must really congratulate Sinhadevi on her beautiful enunciation. I appreciate things like that, and I think we should pay more attention to this sort of thing. It is also a matter of our own self-respect, and it creates a very pleasing impression on those who are listening to us. Perhaps we should, if we do happen to speak on some occasion, listen to the tape of our own talk, make a few notes, and ask our friends what they thought of us. Were there too many ums and ahs, or too many uncomfortable pauses, or did we slur certain words? Or did we even get our facts wrong? So: manners are important, manners in the sense that I have defined. Here there is a particular *micchaditthi* or wrong view that I should mention; it is the *micchaditthi* of spontaneity, or pseudo-spontaneity. "You have got to be spontaneous. You have got to be yourself." Well, if your self is an untidy, uncouth, unorganised self, why should you let it persist? Why should you inflict it on other people? Keep it to yourself. Do not accept that sort of self. It is not worth accepting. Reject it and get a new one that will be better for everybody concerned. So, do not let us have a clumsy, uncouth sort of Movement. It is very important when new people come to Centres to have a proper way of welcoming them and speaking to them. We should not just sort of sidle up to them and say, "Where are you from?" That is not the way to do it. Or worse, you should not ignore visitors while you have a chat with a friend. So we must be very conscious of our manners, our customs, our behaviour, and the degree of ceremoniousness which is appropriate to the occasion. Our Indian friends are so good at this sort of thing. Sometimes of course they go over the top, but I would rather that they did that than neglect what I have called ceremoniousness. Lokamitra sometimes used to say to me at the end of meetings, when I had received forty, fifty or sixty garlands: "Come on Bhante, they can just offer the garlands to your chair. You don't have to stay." But I always made a point of staying because there was so much devotion on the part of the people who were giving. Even though I was tired, even though perhaps, I would have liked a cup of tea, and maybe I was sitting on a very uncomfortable seat, or just seated on the floor for about three hours, I would always say: "Well no, let them finish." I could see what it meant to them. So even if ceremoniousness goes over the top a bit, which it is unlikely to do in England, let us not mind.

Now to the twelfth point: **move towards complete brahmacarya**. You notice I say 'complete.' I say complete because everybody is already observing *brahmacarya* to some extent. As I have observed in the Ten Pillars of Buddhism, it is not a question of some being totally celibate and others totally non-celibate. We are all moving, slowly or rapidly, now or later on, towards complete *brahmacarya*. But let us be more conscious, more aware of that. Let us ask ourselves in this particular area of our lives, well, could I give up a bit more? Could I put my sexual relationship or relationships a bit more towards the periphery of my particular mandala? Sexual relationships obviously have a tendency to slip and slide and snuggle towards the centre of the mandala, but just do not let them do that. Check up on them from time to time. "Could I not put my sexual relationship just a bit more towards the periphery?" That is all I am suggesting, because if you can do that, well then you are moving more towards complete brahmacarya. I will not say anything more about this because we recently had a quite excellent issue of Golden Drum on the topic of brahmacarya.

Then the thirteenth point It may surprise you, or maybe it will not: **remember you are a citizen**. You are not just a Buddhist, you are also a citizen, a member of a particular country, whether it is the United Kingdom or India or any other country. And as a citizen, you enjoy certain benefits. In England it is customary to grumble and to complain about the government, the country, and virtually everything. It seems to be the done thing to grumble at the monarchy, the press, and almost anything that you can think of. But we do enjoy a lot of benefits, and we lead relatively peaceful lives. We

are looked after by our wretched government at least to some extent. We are protected by the police, at least to some extent. So we should be more aware of that, and perhaps, may I suggest, we should be grateful for that. There are people living in other parts of the world who do not enjoy those particular benefits which we enjoy as citizens of our particular countries. I doubt whether there is anybody here from a country which does not enjoy those particular benefits. If any Order Member does come from a country where those benefits are not enjoyed as fully as they are in say England and Germany and Finland, then that is very regrettable indeed. We are really very fortunate in that respect. So I think we should be aware of this and even grateful for it, and I think that it is not enough just to pay our taxes and then forget all about these things. We cannot altogether cut ourselves off from the society of which we are a part. Yes, we want to create a Buddha-land within it, and we have to undermine the existing society to some extent in order to do that. In the long run we would like to undermine it completely, but that is going to take a very, very long time indeed. But in the meantime we can at least appreciate the benefits we receive from the positive features of the existing society and make our own contribution. I think that FWBOs in at least some parts of the country where we do have large public Centres are in a position to have a positive influence on local life, at least on the immediate locality. I think for instance that those who are parents, and who have school-going children, should take an active interest in the affairs of the school. It is very easy to join a parent-teacher association. Recently I heard that the local authority in which one of our big public Centres is situated was looking for a Buddhist to fill a vacant place on the governing body of a school. I heard about it only afterwards, and was really disappointed that no-one had been found to take up that position, even though there were Buddhist parents in that particular area. It was really very disappointing that we missed that particular opportunity. We were offered the place, we did not go looking for it, because the FWBO in that area had created, it seems, a certain amount of confidence in the minds of the immediate local authority. And then again we could even think in terms of participating in local government. I am not suggesting that we should get involved in party politics, but that we should try to make a positive contribution as Buddhists through the medium of local government, to the well-being of the locality in which our Centre happens to be situated. I think some of us should certainly take an interest in things of this sort, starting at the very lowest level. I remember that years ago, someone from Padmaloka used to attend meetings of the local Parish council. It was quite a good thing, sometimes a useful thing. Sometimes we need to be in the know of what is going on, what is being planned. Sometimes planning permission matters affect us, affect our Centres. Supposing a great road was going to be built right next to our Centre, well that would concern us. That is a sort of selfish interest in a way, but apart from that, we should do what we can for people living in the locality, in the ways that I have suggested, regardless of whether they are coming along to the local Centre or not, or whether they are Buddhists or not. If for instance a Buddhist parent joins a parent-teacher association, at the school where their child is attending, especially if they were to get a place on the governing board, well, how much good that might do. So please think in this sort of way: remember that you are a citizen. You have a responsibility to your fellow citizens, as well as a more spiritual responsibility to the Movement and your fellow Order Members.

The fourteenth, the penultimate point, is closely connected with the previous one: **think of others**. Think especially of those who do not have the benefit of the Dharma. That means thinking of expanding into different areas. I would like to see Order Members becoming more adventurous. I would like to see more Order Members taking part, for instance, in the Angulimala project. I do not think we have got more than three or four people involved in this way at the moment, and that is quite disgraceful.

We ought to have more people involved. So those who are in a position, practically and psychologically, to do some prison visiting, well please contact Angulimala and see what you can do, see how you can help. And of course, I think we need more Centres. I do not think we can afford by any means to rest on our laurels. Think of all the people we could reach out to if we had more Centres, not only in this country but in others elsewhere. One reason I am rather aware of this is that I get so many letters from new people. Many of them write even before they become Mitras, and they all sing the same song. They say: "I'm so pleased and so grateful that I've made contact with the FWBO. It's made such a difference. It's changed my life." These are literally the terms that they use, sometimes after just a few months of contact. But there must be many more people, tens of thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands, who could write that sort of letter, if there were Centres of the FWBO in their particular areas. So in this country itself, and in Eastern Europe, and in South America (these are areas I particularly think of) there are tremendous opportunities for spreading the Dharma, for communicating the Dharma, and bringing real hope and inspiration to other people. There is so much more that could be said on this, but time is getting on.

I come now to my last point, which is: **be heroic**. Years ago I gave a lecture called The Heroic Ideal in Buddhism, and I have been thinking that perhaps I should have given not one but hundreds of lectures on this particular theme. You all know that heroism above all is needed in the spiritual life. Spiritual life is not easy. To fight and struggle with oneself is not easy. To counteract the unskilful side of oneself is not easy. To make spiritual progress, to develop, to renounce, all these things are not easy by any means. So we need to be heroic, even for our own sakes. And then of course we need to be heroic if we are to spread the Dharma. There are so many obstacles. Think of the Mahaviharara in Pune. How many obstacles had to be surmounted for just one particular piece of official paper. For just one particular signature, Lokamitra had to go to the same government office forty odd times. Forty odd times, just for one signature on one particular piece of paper. Lokamitra could write a whole series of volumes, I am sure, on the obstacles that had to be overcome before the Mahavihara could be opened and used. So we need to be heroic. If Lokamitra had not been such a hero he would never have been able to accomplish what he has in fact accomplished. And we need to be heroic nowadays because the world is becoming not just a difficult but a very dangerous place. After the end of the cold war, many people thought that things were going to become much easier, politically speaking, internationally speaking. But it looks to me as if they are becoming worse, or have become worse, not better, in many parts of the world. And in this country we may not have such an easy time in the future that we have had in the immediate past. Maybe there will not be any direct disaster, but there will be, I am fairly sure, disasters happening in other parts of the world that are going to affect us, even in this country. And we shall have to be quite tough to survive, and to carry on with our Dharmic work. So we will need to be heroic. So far, in this country at least, we have had a pretty easy time. We have had no real difficulties, as compared with the difficulties faced by other people in other countries, including India, where many of our Order Members, and Friends and Mitras do have a very difficult time for various reasons that I need not go into. Heroic qualities are needed if the Movement is to survive and flourish. So: be heroic.

Now a few, more personal remarks, in conclusion. As most of you will be aware, this year, in a few months time, Bhante will be sixty-eight. How much longer he has to go, how many more years are left to him, or even how many more months, he simply does not know. Nobody knows. And for the last twenty-six years, I have been quite deeply involved with the work of the FWBO and WBO. For the last twenty-six years, the

FWBO and the WBO have been, I might say, my life. But that is not going to go on indefinitely. Bhante might manage to hang on, being optimistic, for, say, another ten years, but he is going to be passing on sooner or later, and I think I may say that that is going to make a difference, at least some difference. So there is going to have to be a transition from being with Bhante to being without him. And I want to make that transition as easy as possible and therefore I have already started handing over some of my responsibilities to some of the more senior and experienced Order Members. And what I mainly want to see in the course of the next couple of years is this process completed. During the last few years, despite having handed over quite a few responsibilities, I seem to have more responsibilities than ever. In fact I have more to do than ever before, which is in some ways disappointing, but in other ways reassuring. It is reassuring because the increased responsibilities are mainly due to the Movement expanding so much. But in the course of the next few years, I really want to hand over as much as I possibly can to the Preceptors, especially the Public Preceptors, and the Presidents. And it is with a view to being able to do that, that we have recently set up what we are calling FWBO Central, which means splitting the present Padmaloka FWBO, the Surlingham FWBO, in two. Kovida has been instrumental mainly in doing this. So one half of Padmaloka is the half that is concerned with the Men's Ordination Process, and the other half is concerned with the Order Office, my own personal affairs, public relations under Kulananda, and so on. So the idea that I have had is to hand over more and more of my responsibilities to this new body. I would not like to have any one particular person having to bear the responsibilities that I bear at the moment. I do not think I would really like to hand over to just one person all my present responsibilities. So I am hoping to be able to hand over my remaining responsibilities and any that may arise in the meantime to this small body, mainly of Preceptors and Presidents, who will be able to function through what we have called FWBO Central. So as and when Bhante does pass on, which we hope will not be too soon, there will be as it were the proper machinery in place so that there is not too violent a sort of transition. Then you will be able, if you feel like that, to mourn Bhante's passing without having to worry too much about how the Movement is going to be carrying on without him.

And, having succeeded in handing over his responsibilities, what is Bhante going to do? Well, that is no problem at all. If he does not have anything to do, he will not mind in the least. He would be quite happy to do nothing for a while. But I expect he will do quite a bit more writing. There are quite a few more little books and pamphlets and papers that he would like to write. And of course he will go on seeing people individually. He may even appear at functions, and just sort of beam amiably on everybody. Bhante may be doing a little traveling: he would like to revisit India, and of course he is going to America shortly. He would like very, very much to revisit New Zealand and Australia. He would like to visit a few new places. He would not mind having a look at Mexico, having always been fascinated by Mexico. He would not mind paying a visit to Istanbul, having always been fascinated by Istanbul. He would like to do some irrelevant things, just because he likes to do them. But he can do this properly and with a clear conscience (Bhante having a rather strong sense of duty) only after he has handed over his responsibilities properly. So that is the kind of way that I am thinking of doing that. I am communicating this to people just to keep you fully in the picture, and no doubt you will be informed, probably through *Shabda* and in other ways, of other developments of this kind as they take place.

I think that is all for the time being. Let me recapitulate, just to help fix things in your minds a little bit. I have brought to your attention a second set of Fifteen Points - for Old (and New) Order Members. First of all: reduce input. Then: think clearly. Three,

distinguish fact from value judgement. Four: do not misuse the developmental model. Five: think more in terms of renunciation. Six: do not accept yourself. Seven: rejoice in others' merits. Eight: do not argue, discuss. Nine: do not keep too many options open too long. Ten: keep your promises. Eleven: be more ceremonious. Twelve: move towards complete Brahmacharya. Thirteen: remember you are a citizen. Fourteen: think of others. Fifteen - and in some ways they are all summed up in this point - be heroic.

Scanned and checked by Silabhadra - May 2004