

182: Fifteen Points for Buddhist Parents

Malika and friends.

I know that there has been a certain amount of speculation over the last few weeks as why and how I come to be giving the talk entitled 15 points for Buddhist parents. Perhaps some of you may have thought that parents, Buddhist or otherwise had quite enough points to consider already. But perhaps I should just mention by way of introduction, how I did come to draw up this list of 15 points.

I just happened to be sitting, as I so often do sit at my desk, in my flat not very far away from here. And I happened to be working on my current volume of memoirs, and it may be that I did just happen to think in that connection of my 15, in fact my two sets of 15 points for Order members which some of you may have seen. Be that as it may, for some reason which I don't quite find myself able to explain, there floated into my mind, the idea of 15 points for Buddhist parents, or rather a point floated into my mind. So I just broke off from working on my memoirs and thought I had better write this down. So I wrote down point 1 and rather another point. And then I thought oh well and a third point floated into my mind and by some strange coincidence, it really was a coincidence because I didn't count them up until afterwards, I found in the end I had 15 points neither more nor less, for Buddhist parents.

Well, this was some time last year. I put them aside. They got lost from my desk, as so many things tend to get lost from my desk nowadays, but just a few weeks ago, I had to unearth them and I thought, 'Well, you know, I have made these 15 points, maybe I should make some use of them. Perhaps I could even give a little talk about them, just to a few people around the LBC, because after all, there are a few parents around, Buddhist parents. They might be interested in hearing about these 15 points. So I consulted Dharmarati? , he being then of course the Chairman of the LBC, and he thought, well yes, some people might be interested. We could just have it one day in the reception area of, you know, the LBC. So we agreed upon that, and then of course, I thought well, 15 points for Buddhist parents, why not perhaps, let the parents raise questions themselves. Let's have a question and answer session. That is also what we are going to be having this afternoon as you already know. So this is how my 15 points for Buddhist parents came into existence and how it is that I now am talking to you on that subject.

So from what I have already said, you'll understand that this isn't really a lecture or even a talk in the ordinary sense. Malika referred to it as an informal talk. Well you could describe it in those terms. I must say I feel a little embarrassed even that so many people have turned up to what is a little informal talk. I can't really help wondering why. But anyway, but anyway, I'm going to say something about each of these 15 points that I have related and I have to warn you that I'm not going to deal with them very systematically. I haven't tried to rearrange them in any order. I'm going to talk about them just as I jotted them down on that day, now quite a few months ago. And not only are they not systematically arranged, I'm sure they're not complete. I am sure that there are other points that could be thought of, by or for Buddhist parents. Perhaps when we have the questions and answers in the afternoon, more points will in any case emerge. And I must also warn you that there's going to be a bit of overlap between some of the points. It is understandable that you can't keep points of this kind quite separate, quite distinct, separate compartments. I am also incidentally not going to go into the question, certainly not in this talk, of whether one should or should not have children. I have taken it as a sort of established fact that some people have them whether you have them wisely or unwisely, I'm not going into that this morning. I am taking as a fact that children have arrived on the scene.

You all are Buddhist parents and that therefore you are concerned with the fact of being a Buddhist parent. And as the meeting is so chosen, are quite interested in anything of that nature. So without further ado let's go straight into these points.

The first point. Remember you are a Buddhist first and a parent second. Let me repeat that. Remember you are a Buddhist first and a parent second. Let me put it in another way. Think of yourself as a Buddhist who is a parent, not as a parent who happens to be a Buddhist. If you reflect upon this a little you will realise that there is a very great deal of difference between these two positions. When I say that remember you are a Buddhist first and a parent second, I don't mean that you always have, as a Buddhist to put your children second. I don't mean for instance, let's suppose there is a very tempting, very attractive retreat on and your child happens not to be very well, that you should just leave the child to someone else and go off on the retreat. I certainly don't mean that. What I mean is that in principle, in principle, Buddhism comes first. Logically as it were, Buddhism comes first and parenthood comes second. It comes first in the sense that it is from Buddhism that you derive the very principles, in the light of which you are trying to be a Buddhist parent, not just a parent. It is very easy to be a parent, in the literal sense. It is very easy to be a biological parent. Usually one doesn't need to give any thought about it at all. One shares parenthood with practically the entire animal species, so just to be a parent, biologically speaking is no great achievement at all. Most human beings in the world are parents and those who are non-parents, for one reason or another are in a very small minority indeed. But though it is so easy to be a parent, to be a good parent is a very difficult thing indeed. And to be a Buddhist parent is still more difficult. And you become a Buddhist parent by applying or trying to apply, seeking to apply your Buddhist principles, the principles to which you commit yourself as a Buddhist to your relations with your children. So I think, in a way, this particular principle, this particular point underlies all the others: that you're a Buddhist first, in principle and a parent second. So that's point number one.

The second is 'don't be afraid to teach your children Buddhism'. I think there's quite a bit of vague and confused thinking in this sort of area. Usually it runs like this. You mustn't interfere with anybody's thinking. You should encourage them to think for themselves. So in the case of children, don't indoctrinate them. Just let them grow up with quite open, free, almost blank minds, and when they are old enough they will decide whether they want to be Christian or Buddhist or agnostic or Muslim or Hari Krishna or whatever it is. But I consider this to be totally unrealistic, because while you are very carefully refraining from teaching your child Buddhism, refraining as you may see it from indoctrinating your child, all sorts of other agencies are very busy indeed indoctrinating your child instead. Your child is being indoctrinated at school, indoctrinated by peer groups, indoctrinated by TV, indoctrinated by film, indoctrinated by the general atmosphere or our society and culture all the time. So don't think that if you just refrain from teaching your child Buddhism, from indoctrinating your child with Buddhism, that the child will remain completely unaffected and in a completely free and independent way be able to make up his or her own mind about such things when they reach the age of discretion whenever that happens to be, if indeed it is ever reached. So we have to be realistic. And therefore I say, don't be afraid to teach your children Buddhism. You don't have of course to try to explain the ??, you don't have to try to get them reading Buddhism at a tender age. That's not what I am thinking of at all. You can start very, very early. You can show your child picture books, picture books of Jataka stories, picture books of the lives of the Buddha and say 'Look, look this is Buddha', and get the child to say 'Baba'. And in this way, just as you induct the child into the, well at least let us say Buddhist culture. And everybody knows, I'm sure you know that, I'm sure I knew when I was a child, every child loves stories. Well I hope TV isn't tending to exclude domestic story telling. I don't really know anything

about that. But I hope that your children at least still do enjoy listening to stories. They certainly do in India, as some of you know. And sometimes even adults like listening to stories. So you can tell your children stories, Jataka stories, stories from the life of the Buddha, and so on, and in that way give them something of the feel of Buddhism. It is not a question of indoctrination, not a question of teaching specific doctrines, or even very specific attitudes for some time, but just enabling them to pick up on, to empathise with the general cultural feel of Buddhism, to introduce them to that. And of course, it is very, very important that you yourself set an example. When you do come to introduce a little bit of the teaching, maybe the teaching about not harming others, it is very important that you yourself should be setting an example, and that the child should feel it, otherwise as you probably have discovered children are very quick to pick up on discrepancies, and if there is any discrepancy between what you tell the child to do and what the child sees you yourself doing. Yes, I can see a few smiles going around here, the child will unerringly and instantly pick up on it. It is no use telling the child it is naughty to tell lies, and then when someone comes to the door you tell them, 'Just say I am not in.' That is no use at all. That is no use at all. So you have to set, so to speak, an example. And you also teach your child Buddhism, you also communicate something of the spirit of the Dharma through the atmosphere that prevails in the home. I think this is quite important. This is quite important that the child coming home maybe from school, coming back home from some outside activity or interest feels that yes this is a good place to be, it's peaceful, it's happy, or maybe it's lively, but it's happy, it's positive. And there's an atmosphere of affection and security prevailing. It is very important that the child should feel this and perhaps eventually realise it's got something to do with the fact that mum or dad is a Buddhist and they meditate every day. Well, nearly every day. So don't be afraid to teach your child Buddhism, or perhaps I should have phrased that differently. Don't be afraid to communicate something of the Dharma, something of the spirit of the Dharma to your children, because if you don't teach it, if you don't communicate the Dharma, society in the broadest sense is going to be communicating all sorts of other messages which may not have a very positive effect on your children at all. So don't be afraid to teach, to communicate the Dharma to your children.

The third point follows on from that. Realise that you are up against it. Realise that you are up against it. Or perhaps you don't need reminding of this. But I mean up against it in a rather specific sort of sense. I don't mean up against it in the sense you are short of money or that children can be difficult or that you have sleepless nights. You are up against the world in the broadest sense, the world in the sense of Samsara. You are not just a parent, you are a Buddhist and being a Buddhist, and being a parent you're trying to apply your Buddhist principles in your life. You are trying to relate to your children, to bring up your children in accordance with Buddhist principles, but those principles are not acknowledged in the outside world. They are far from acknowledged. You are saying one thing, as it were, communicating one thing to your child. The world is usually communicating something very different, even quite opposite, quite contrary. So you have to bear this in mind. In a sense, you are fighting this all the time, because you are fighting it all the time in your own life too, but more specifically you are fighting it in connection with the bringing up of your child. This is probably quite a question, the extent to which the child, especially the very young child should be shielded from outside influences, perhaps we'll be going into that this afternoon. You can't shield your child completely, but at least you have to realise that in trying to bring up your child in accordance with Buddhist principles, you really are up against it, because the outside world, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally is having all the time, or trying to have, a quite different influence, a influence on your child as well as on you. So that is the third point. Realise that you are up against it. In this particular respect, you are fighting a sort of battle. In fact you are fighting a war. So I'll say no more about that.

But there is perhaps held at hand, and that brings us to the fourth point. I have mentioned this more than once to those of you with whom I am in more personal contact, and the point is, join a parent-teacher organisation. Sooner or later, of course, your child will start going to school and incidentally these 15 points are intended more for people with young children than for people with older children or with children grown up and by this time have children of their own. So I am assuming that you have a school-going child or children, and therefore my fourth point is join a parent-teacher organisation. Don't just leave the education of your child during school hours to the teachers. The teachers may well be doing an excellent job. Sometimes they don't do, but they may be doing. But in any case, it is not an easy job. Being a teacher is no less difficult than being a parent, and I don't really like to think what it would be like to be a parent and be a teacher too, especially if you had several children, perpetual busman's holiday when you are at home. You would find it very difficult to draw the line between work and play. Perhaps there wouldn't be any play at all, but yes, if you have school going children, join a parent-teacher organisation or association. Have contact with the teachers, talk to them, talk to them about the children, your children, children in general at the school, and talk to them about their own problems and difficulties, because I am sure teachers do have problems and difficulties. It is not easy to be a teacher in any case. I remember in the very early days of the FWBO, it must have been in the second or third year, I was giving a talk, or perhaps conducting a question and answer session on Right Livelihood and I was asked to give a few examples of Right Livelihood. So among others I mentioned that of the teacher and, as it happened, there were six or seven teachers in the audience, and they all got up and said, 'We don't consider teaching in school Right Livelihood', partly because it was so difficult and so demanding, but there were other aspects to that as well. But still, even now I know that teachers do have a quite difficult time. We hear, or at least I do on the radio, and I see in the newspapers that teachers are being attacked physically more and more by students, especially by older students, older school-going children, and this of course does make life for them very very difficult for them indeed. So therefore I suggest with my fourth point that parents, Buddhist parents join a parent-teacher organisation or association at the school to which their child is going, or children are going, and try to help the teacher and have some input, contribute some ideas, some suggestions, so that the school may become a better place for all the children who are attending there. It might even be that you have the opportunity of becoming a school governor. If there is that opportunity, and if you feel yourself qualified to take that position, and you ought to be, by virtue of the fact that you are a Buddhist parent, then I suggest you take that opportunity, and try to influence the school through your governorship in a positive and creative way. So join a parent-teacher organisation or just a parents' organisation. I am not sure whether there are just parent-teacher organisations or just parent organisations or join both if you like if schools have both, but don't just leave the education of your child to the teachers. You could almost say that education is too important to be left to teachers, just as they say that politics is too important to be left to politicians. That's another story, but we become actively involved if you possibly can: one of you, either the father or the mother of the child in the school to which your child is going. You owe it in a way to your child, as well as to society at large.

And then fifthly communicate with your children. Some people would say that this is addressed more to fathers than to mothers, but I am not going to make any such distinction. I am just saying, point number five, communicate with your children which means talk to them and talk to them in a serious sort of way. Don't talk down to them. If they ask a question, take that question seriously. If you take it seriously you may sometimes be surprised to find how difficult it is to answer, because children do have friends, and even quite small children, quite young children are quite intelligent, quite perceptive and they can come up with really quite

extraordinary questions sometimes. So take their questions seriously and talk to them. I must say, if I may be permitted a little note of autobiography here. Permitted? I remember one of the happiest memories of my own childhood is of my father spending time talking to me. I can't remember my mother talking to me much to be frank. But I do remember my father talking to me quite a lot. This was of course back in the late twenties and early thirties and my father used to come home from work when he was in work, because those were days of unemployment, and the first thing he did when he came home in the evening, and he didn't normally come in before six or seven was to come to my room. I'd be in bed already. And he would sit on my bed and he'd talk to me. And he'd talk to me for half an hour or an hour. Sometimes my mother would get impatient because she had his dinner ready, and it was getting cold, and she'd keep calling, but he was more interested in talking with me. And we used to talk about all sorts of things, especially his wartime experiences because the Great War was only a few years before. He'd been involved in that. He'd been seriously injured, had a 65% disability as a result of that, so he talked a lot about the war and all sorts of things and afterwards as I grew older, I found it always very easy to talk to my father. In some ways more easy than to talk to my mother. I think I may say my father was rather a thinking man. So this, as I mentioned is one of the pleasantest memories of my childhood that my father spent so much time talking to me. And when he was out of work, which happened frequently, he spent much more time with me and talked with me much more. And well that may be part of the reason why I have a certain gift of communication myself these days. So yes, fathers and mothers alike talk to your children. But that means finding time. Don't be too busy to talk to your own children. Even set aside a time if you are so busy. In the same way perhaps, if circumstances make it necessary that you set aside time for meeting your kalayana mitras or your mitras, if you are a kalayana mitra, set aside a time, set aside times if your schedule is very tight, for actually talking seriously to your children. Not of course that you sit them down in front of you and say, 'Now come on and have a little talk.' You must sort of catch them on the wing. They may not always feel like talking when you've got time. I mean that's part of being a parent, I suppose. So anyway communicate with your children. And don't talk down to them. Share your serious thoughts to the extent that they are able to understand them.

Then, sixth point, oh dear, this is where a bit of discipline comes in. Restrict TV. Some of you may remember that, I think it was the very first of my latest set of 15 points for order members was: restrict input. And of course, nowadays quite a lot of input comes from TV. There's a big debate going on, as of course you all know, as to what extent films involving violence which are shown on TV are responsible for juvenile violence, and even for juvenile delinquency. Some experts say there's no real connection, others say that there is. So it is very difficult for the layman to know what the true state of affairs is, and whether there is, or is not a causal connection between violence as seen on TV and violence in the home and in the street. But of one thing we can be sure, from a Buddhist point of view, whether or not the scene of violence on TV does result in your committing a violent action or not, it certainly does not improve your mental state. At the very least we can say that. And if you spend several hours a week or perhaps even a day watching material which contains a large component of violence, what does that do to your mental state whether you are an adult or whether you are a more receptive and susceptible child. So even from that point of view, even from the point of view that your mind is even more totally imbued with impressions of violence, even from that point of view alone, I think parents need to restrict the viewing, the TV viewing of their children. Some, of course will say children have rights, they've got a right to watch TV, whatever they like. Well most of you know that I don't use myself the language of rights. I use the language of duties, and parents I think, Buddhist parents especially have a duty to restrict the TV viewing of their children. Not just what they watch, qualitatively speaking, but also how much time they spend

sitting in front of the box. I have been hearing some quite interesting discussions on the radio in this connection recently. Surveys have found that British children on the whole are overweight and do not take enough exercise and that their imaginations have been seriously impaired. And this is attributed in great part to watching too much TV. They're overweight, partly because of wrong diet, and we'll come onto that in a minute, but also because they don't take enough exercise. And they don't take enough exercise because it is much more interesting to be propped in front of the TV set. So long as your child is sitting there hour after hour, he or she is not taking exercise. And as I have said, surveys have shown that the average British child is not taking enough exercise and to that extent is less healthy than he or she should be. And then of course watching TV impairs the imagination. Tests have been conducted on school-going children which show that this is the case because watching TV you are taking in, taking in, taking in all the time. You are not using your mind, you are not using your imagination. So excessive watching of TV is not good for the child, and probably not for the adult either, from that point of view. So, restrict TV. I know it is going to be difficult. I remember the case of a woman order member whose children felt deprived because she didn't have a TV set in the house, and in the end she had to give in to their persistent pressure, because they felt so deprived and so different from all the other children at school who were able to talk about this programme and that programme, and they weren't able to join in the discussion because their mother didn't allow a TV set in the house. In the end she had to allow it quite reluctantly. I do believe she managed to restrict their viewing to some extent. So I know the pressures there are at work, but none the less I think parents need to take a firm line and deftly restrict the TV viewing of their children. Not only restrict it qualitatively, but restrict the amount of time that children sit inertly, just goggling at the box.

Now point seven is really a very down-to-earth and very obvious one, but I'm going to mention it anyway; and that is, give your children a healthy diet. Now why do I mention this? Well as you know I live most of the time these days in Bethnal Green. And I do walk about a bit and I do keep my eyes open and one of the things I notice is children eating in the street. And what do they usually eat? choc bars, ice creams, chips. It is very very common. I often see school boys and schools girls eating in this way, so that makes me think, why are they eating in the street? They are probably not getting a proper balanced diet at home. Or maybe parents think that it is easier to give them some money and say go and buy some chips than to cook a nutritionally balanced proper meal. So I think it is very important that Buddhist parents should give this some consideration. There is no need to be faddish, a food fanatic, not like some people were in the sixties when all they would do say macrobiotics, but parents, especially whoever does the cooking, I mustn't assume nowadays that it is going to be mother of course, but whoever does the cooking, whoever, should study a bit about nutrition, and try, try to give the family a balanced diet and discourage snacking in-between, discourage the choc bars and too many ice creams, and so on and so forth, and of course discourage smoking, that's another thing I notice when walking about Bethnal Green, how many school children smoke. I don't know why it is but I notice more school girls than school boys these days. I see them coming straight out of school. They can't be very much more than 13 and they pull out a packets of fags and they light up straight away, and I can't see that that's good for them. So again I think Buddhist parents need to take a firm line with their children when they come to that particular age. It was very different when I was a child. I hope you won't mind another reminiscence. I remember I never even thought of smoking when I was that age, but when I was sixteen my father said to me, ì Son, you're sixteen now. You can smoke if you want to.î So I didn't. I didn't smoke until I joined the army, and even then it was only for a short while, because I didn't enjoy it. I haven't smoked since. So I think it really is fairly discouraging to see such small children, both boys and girls already having acquired the smoking habit. So please

discourage your child. Well, don't discourage, forbid it, just stop it. Exert your parental authority. I know know that parental authority is something that has been reduced to shreds and tatters these days, but whatever pitiful remnants of it are left, please exert it in this respect.

And then, eighth point, socialise your child, socialise your child. This is one of the most important points. Your child doesn't just belong to you. Your child isn't just a member of the family. Your child is, or is going to be a member of society. Your child is going to be part of the wider community and he or she needs to be brought up, even trained in such a way that it is possible for him or for her to function in a positive manner as a member of that society or wider community. And that obviously again involves the exercise of a certain amount of discipline. The child has to be brought up, for instance to respect other people's property, other people's feelings, brought up to consider other people, because if the child is brought up without being trained or encouraged to consider other people, he or she is going to have a very tough time in the world later on, as likely as not, because you may put up with tantrums and bad behaviour, and inconsiderate conduct, but the world isn't going to do that, the world is going to just well not put up with it at all, and then your child is going to have a very difficult time. Socialise your child. Don't inflict your child on other people. I've seen parents doing this. Little Jimmy or little Mary is misbehaving and being very inconsiderate when other people are concerned and what happens, the parents don't correct the child, they just smile indulgently, 'Oh that's little Mary, Oh that's little Jimmy.' And other people are supposed to put up with it. Other people are supposed to like it and say ah, ha, ha. But other people don't like it. Other people are thinking quite unpleasant negative thoughts about your child. They are thinking 'What a dreadful little rat. I'd like to smack his little ...'. That's the sort of thoughts that they're having. So don't inflict your child on other people. I was reading the other day an article in a newspaper in which said the British or the English don't like children. When a family takes their children into a restaurant, there were all sorts of frowns and sour looks, but why should that be? Why should that be? The people have frowns and the sour looks only if they expect misbehaviour. If your child has been brought up to behave decently in a public place no one is going to object to his or her presence, they are going to be glad of it if anything, but if children are brought up badly and misbehave in public places like restaurants, maybe throwing food about and banging on the table with the spoon, just as they do at home, well people are not going to welcome them into restaurants and other public places. Sometimes people say that in other countries people welcome children into restaurants and public places, but in other countries they bring up their children rather differently to the way children are sometimes brought up in this particular country. So teach your children, teach your children to behave properly, teach them good manners we may say. Good manners of course are rather unpopular nowadays, they are associated with well a middle-class upbringing and that sort of thing, so once again we have thrown the baby away with the bath water. We have to, we have to retrieve, we have to retrieve the baby in this particular respect. I was very interested to read not so long ago a little report on the connection between bad manners and crime. Believe it or not, there is a connection. Some of you, especially if some of you are teachers may be aware of this. I'll just read you a little extract from this newspaper clipping.

One of the most striking comments in the recent burst of public outrage about juvenile crime was the remark of a senior policeman that the path to delinquency begins with bad language and bad manners. This is well known to criminologists, well known to criminologists. It seems rudeness and swearing in young children is a good marker for getting into trouble later. This must be one of those odd occasions when common sense coincides with sociology, for it is obviously right. Rudeness comes from the absence of orderliness, the absence of high

expectations and in some sense of ceremony in life. All those things that encourage children to make something of themselves rather than drift into crime. So that aspect of socialisation which consists in teaching children good manners and avoiding bad language, that aspect is very important indeed. Please don't underestimate its importance. So eighth points, socialise your child. Bring up your child to be a worthwhile member of society, a worthwhile member of the wider community.

And then point nine, don't be possessive. Of course, your child is your child with all that that means. Of course you are legally responsible for your child up to a point. But don't develop too much of an attitude of this is my child. Don't develop the attitude that no one else is allowed to speak to my child, no one is allowed to tell my child off you know if the child is misbehaving. In a healthy positive community it should be possible for any adult to tell off any child who is misbehaving, anyway unfortunately in our society at present in this country, certainly in London this is not possible. One sees it happening in India for instance, one doesn't see it here. Here people will tend to resent anybody interfering as they would call it with their child, telling their child off or correcting their child or reprimanding their child verbally. But in the case of Buddhist parents they obviously shouldn't have this sort of attitude, partly because as Buddhists we try not to be attached, at least we try to reduce our attachment. But in the case of Buddhist parents well we're part of the Buddhist community. There are other Buddhists, there are fellow Buddhists, that we shouldn't mind if a fellow Buddhist thinks it appropriate to tick off our child for some little misdemeanour. Supposing the child is here visiting the centre with mother or father and while mother or father drinks something their child is rattling around the centre well any fellow Buddhist should be able to say, 'Come on Tommy, don't make such a noise. Any fellow Buddhist should be able to say that without the parent resenting it or feeling offended. And of course a very important aspect of non-possessiveness is letting your children go when the time comes, when the time comes for them to go forth into the wider world, maybe to get a job, maybe to just settle down, in any case to leave home, to leave the parental nest. You should have brought them up in such a way that well they go forth freely easily, without feelings of guilt, with self-confidence and with you feeling yes a little sad, that's inevitable, but on the whole quite pleased and happy, even perhaps, if you'll admit it a wee bit relieved to see them go. Of course nowadays some children even when they are quite big have to be encouraged to leave the nest, they don't always want to leave or sometimes they want to have it both ways, they want to have their own little nest out there, and a nest back home to which they can retreat in case of need, but yes, bring up your children in such a way that they can go forth into the wider world when the time comes and yourself be very willing and ready, even happy to let them go and to put the whole relationship onto a new basis. I remember in this connection there is a very interesting little verse in the *manushbrihi*? It is regarding fathers and sons. It probably applies to mothers and sons and mothers and daughters, and fathers and daughters too, so the verse says 'When your son is 16, he should regard you as a son and treat him as a friend.' And that becomes all the more easy, all the more possible because when the child goes forth, leaves home. When your son comes to see you, when your daughter comes to see you, it is not your child returning to the nest for a bit of comfort, take it more as a good friend you haven't seen for quite a long time, coming to see you and to talk, communicate. So don't be possessive, that's number nine.

Number ten. This is a bit more specialised. Teach your children to speak properly. I'm rather concerned about the lowering of standards these days as regards language and verbal communication in general. Once again I go around Bethnal Green overhearing people talking, not only children, but adults and sometimes I'm astonished at the poverty of their vocabulary to say the least. So encourage your children to extend their vocabulary, encourage them to

speak correctly, to speak grammatically, because speech is our principle medium of communication with one another. If you haven't mastered this particular medium, you won't be able to communicate with other people beyond a certain level. Maybe your communication will be reduced to the equivalent of just grunts and squeals. So make sure that your child does grow up, not just talking but really speaking his or her language, your language, the language you share with the child, correctly and eloquently with some attention to grammar and the correct meaning of words. Don't be afraid of correcting your child. Some teachers I know nowadays think the child should never be corrected because that would undermine his or her self-confidence. It is a pretty puny self-confidence which can be undermined in that particular way. If you are not corrected, you never learn. You go on making mistakes and mistakes harden and harden and become habits. So correct your child when your child picks up an incorrect expression from school friends and of course try to check your child when he or she shows any tendency to use bad language. Speech is such a wonderful thing. Speech is one of the greatest creations of the human race. As I have said it is our principle forms of communication with one another so let's use it and teach our children to use it as fully and effectively and as beautifully as we possibly can. If we don't teach our children to speak properly, then we are really depriving them of something that is very precious indeed.

All right. point number 11. Take your children to suitable Buddhist festivals. You notice I am steering a middle way here and I don't say, take your children to Buddhist festivals, full stop. No, take your children to suitable Buddhist festivals. Don't invariably leave them at home when there is a Buddhist festival on, and don't, on the other hand, invariably take them along with you, just try to ascertain which festivals or celebrations might be suitable. Not all will be suitable: where, for instance there's a lot of meditation, that isn't suitable, You can't expect small children especially to sit still for more than a few minutes, but as I am sure you all know, children like to join in, they like to do things, so if there's going to be a big puja element in the celebration well by all means bring your children along, in consultation obviously with those organising that particular puja or festival. I've noticed myself when I've been present in this country at celebrations and pujas where children are present, they really like to make offerings, because it is something they can do. It is very simple, it's very easy, it's poetic. They enjoy it. So let's let them make offerings, prepare the offerings themselves beforehand and bring them along and offer them in their own way, but at the same time, as I have already intimated, don't think that the children should take part in everything. There are certain things, certain celebrations, certain festivals where it may not be appropriate for them to take part. I certainly think that wherever it is possible and where there is an appropriate festival, the children should be made an integral part of that. In fact I wouldn't even be against the idea of having a special children's festival every now and then. But clearly that would depend upon the way the centre is run, what other activities are going on and so on.

Well we're getting on with our points. That was point 11, take children to suitable Buddhist festivals. And then 12, introduce children to your Buddhist friends. Now this might seem pretty obvious, but it doesn't always you know happen like that. There is the saying that an Englishman's home is his castle. Well maybe it is the Englishwoman's castle too and we tend not to let down the drawbridge. That's part of our English character. We tend to keep a bit separate from other people, we tend to keep our domestic lives maybe a bit separate from our general social life. But if we do have children, I think it is good, if it is possible at all to arrange for them to spend time or at least have some contact or at least to know our Buddhist friends. I think this is important at least partly because it helps compensate for the nuclearness of the nuclear family. I imagine that most of you to the extent that you belong to or represent a family at all, belong to or represent a nuclear one. If I were speaking in India I would assume that at

least half the parents present might live as part of an extended or joint family of maybe 10 or 12 or 15 or more members, but of course that isn't the case in England. Our households have become very very small, sometimes just one or two or three people and no more than that, sometimes four or five, but the nuclear family is getting more nuclear it seems, day by day, and that isn't always helpful either for the parent or parents, very often the parent or for the children or child. Sometimes the family nowadays consists of just two people, one parent, usually female and one child, either male or female. But that's rather constricting, even a rather claustrophobic situation. And I think if we can introduce our children to our Buddhist friends, to other Buddhist adults it helps modify the rather claustrophobic nature of the nuclear family. Very often of course this happens naturally, spontaneously, but perhaps it doesn't happen in that way always and perhaps some people at least need to make more of an effort in this direction. Also one might say from the point of view of the child, if the child is meeting more adults or is accustomed from quite an early age to meeting more adults, not just adults within the immediate family circle, he or she definitely develops more self-confidence and that is obviously a tremendous asset later on. One of the things I notice being back in this country and working with people born and brought up in the west, one of the things I notice is a very general lack of self-confidence in people and I think we have to be aware of this, and I think that we have to take steps if we are parents to make sure that our children grow up with plenty of self-confidence, not the sort of confidence that finds its expression in anti-social activity, but a self-confidence of a much more positive and even creative kind. And I think, it does help in the development of a child's confidence if he or she at an early age is accustomed to dealing with, interacting with adults way outside the immediate family circle.

All right, point number 13: teach children to care for the environment. Once again my own experience in Bethnal Green. I think it's really quite dreadful because I quite often see children blithely discarding wrappers, you know, and they don't even give a thought. They're not even aware of what they are doing. They do it automatically. They discard wrappings of, you know, chocolates and sweets. They discard the bag they have been using for their chips, and they, they are accustomed to thinking, if they think at all, someone else is going to tidy it up. It is not their responsibility to keep the streets litter free. So one must bring one's own children up in a different way to care for the environment. I give this very simple example, to care for plants and trees, not to damage them. Sometimes I see children with, you know striking trees and in a few cases even chopping them down, trees in the street. So one should bring children up to care for, respect the environment which is after all their environment, the environment in which they live and learn, later on will be working. And as they get older, discuss environmental issues with them, issues of other kinds as well, I particularly mention the environmental issues which have a very immediate, practical application. If ever I see a child of a Buddhist parent throwing down a chocolate wrapper in the street, I shall be tempted to have a word with that particular parent.

And then the penultimate point: teach children to empathise. This is very very important indeed. Most of you will have heard about what has come to be known as the James Bulger case and you know very well that James Bulger was murdered by two very small boys and I heard a discussion about this on the radio after the trial and after the two boys had been sentenced. And someone made the point that the difficulty, the trouble was that the two boys had not been brought up to know, to appreciate, to understand the difference between right and wrong and it was for that reason that they committed that particular dreadful crime. But there was a woman psychologist taking part in this discussion and she disagreed. She disagreed. She pointed out that the two boys had been found guilty of murder and that they had been sentenced for murder and that it had been ascertained that they knew the difference between

right and wrong and that was why they had been found guilty of murder and not just of manslaughter. They knew the difference between right and wrong and she made the point, the very important point that it wasn't enough to know the difference between right and wrong. One has to be able to empathise with other people, with other children, with other people generally, with other human beings. Otherwise one's recognition of the difference between right and wrong would be a purely, as it were, abstract, mechanical sort of thing which would not necessarily influence your behaviour. So children have to be taught to empathise with other children. You can't of course give a lesson in empathy. You can't have it as part of the school curriculum. Here again perhaps the example of parents will come in. Children can be taught, I think quite easily to empathise with animals to feel to realise that what animals feel changes in the way that they do. I remember an incident in the Pali canon where the Buddha finds some boys tormenting a crow, tormenting a crow. So what does the Buddha say? This is quite interesting. He says to the boys, 'Well, look, if you were tormented in that way, how would you feel?' And of course they said, 'Well, we'd feel frightened, we'd feel pain.' And the Buddha said, 'Well, if you would feel pain when tormented in that way, don't you think that the crow feels pain when you are tormenting it like that?' And of course they had to admit yes that that was the case. They started empathising with the crow. Yes. So we have to teach children to empathise with others, empathise with animals, empathise with other children, empathise with all that's living. So this is very important. I remember again during that well known series, that famous series of engravings by Hogarth called the four stages of cruelty. Those of you who are artists may be familiar with it. The first stage of cruelty is some boys tormenting a dog and a cat. That's the first stage of cruelty. And the next stage of cruelty is one of the boys committing a murder. And the next stage of cruelty after that is the boy who committed the murder being hung. And the next stage of cruelty after that is his body being dissected by some surgeons. But the message seems to be that it starts, that's what Hogarth seems to be saying, that a life of violence ending by the experience of violence on oneself, when one is executed just begins with tormenting animals. A lack of empathy for animals, a lack of empathy for other living things. Some people of course are so sensitive that they feel an empathy even with plants, even with plants. And this is quite practicable. Some people don't even like to pluck flowers because they feel that the flower is being injured in some way. Well not everybody will be able to empathise with that, but we should at least empathise with animals and with other human beings. So this is one of the most important things that we have to teach our children, so to speak, teach them to empathise.

Then fifteenth and lastly: don't feel guilty if you have made mistakes. It is not easy being a parent. Well even though I am not a parent, I know that very well because sometimes parents do confide in me, and I do keep my eyes open and I do read a bit about it and hear programmes on the radio about it. It is very difficult being a parent, whether a mother or a father and I think it's more difficult being a parent now than perhaps ever before, in some ways at least. And there are so many variables, there are so many decisions you have to take as a parent without really being able to know all the relevant facts. And things may go wrong despite your good intentions. And even apart from that, children are individuals, they bring their own karma with them. You may bring your child up beautifully. He or she may turn out to be a monster. You may bring them up very badly. They may turn out very well, almost to spite you. I've seen this, because I've lived long enough now to be able to see karma descending from one generation to another. I've known children brought up very badly, with very bad parents, but themselves being very good parents, and bringing up their children beautifully. Then of course the grandfathers or grandmothers being interested in the next generation and other change. So there is that whole specification to take into account, karma. You don't know what karma, quite apart from ???, you don't know what karma your child brings with him or her. So things may

turn out very very differently from what you expected. And even apart from that you yourself are a fallible human being. You're not omniscient, even parents don't know everything. Maybe you mustn't tell the children that too early. Even parents don't know everything. They can make mistakes. So provided you've really done your best for your child or your children and at every stage made what you at the time honestly felt was the best decision, if things do turn out amiss, if things do seem to have gone wrong, well maybe learn from that, but don't blame yourself too much. Don't feel guilty. If later in life your child does something maybe you know perhaps quite bad, don't agonise, if only I'd done this or hadn't done that, maybe it would have been different. You don't know. You can't really work it out. We just have to do the best that we can in the present in the here and now for your child. The rest is karma, chance, circumstances, society, but don't blame yourself too much. Don't feel guilty if it does turn out in the future that you've made mistakes. And perhaps even don't be too ready to think that it was due to your mistake. Maybe it wasn't. You don't know. So don't blame yourself anyway. You did your best at the time. That should be sufficient for you and for others. One parent even, as it were, apologised to their children for the way they had brought them up. Well if you've done something really definitely unmistakably bad which has clearly caused the child suffering, well all right, say you're sorry when the time comes, when your child is old enough to understand, but apart from that, bear in mind that the child once he or she reaches years of discretion is responsible for his or her own life. If anything goes wrong, if the child does do anything wrong, he or she can't blame you for that. They're responsible for themselves, just as you're responsible for yourself. You are responsible only for a very limited response, and for a limited period of time.

So here are the fifteen points of mine. I hope there's been something a little bit new for at least some of you. Let me just very quickly run through them, just to remind you. First of all, remember you're a Buddhist first and a parent second. Two, don't be afraid to teach your children Buddhism. Three, realise that you're up against it. Four, join a parent-teacher organisation. Five, communicate with your children. Six, restrict TV. Seven, give your children a healthy diet. Eight, socialise your child. Nine, don't be possessive. Ten, teach your children to speak properly. Eleven, take your children to suitable Buddhist festivals. Twelve, introduce your children to your Buddhist friends. Thirteen, teach your children to care for the environment. Fourteen, teach children to empathise. And fifteen, don't feel guilty if you make a mistake. So those are my fifteen points. So we've finished for this morning, but as you know, we're going to have a question and answer session in the afternoon. I've already received in fact some questions from some people, but if you have questions, please write them out, and I don't know whether arrangements have been made to collect the questions. I trust they have, but if they haven't you can even write them out and put them on the lectern here and I trust someone will collect them and let me have a look at them a little while before the afternoon session starts. So I hope these fifteen points for Buddhist parents, from someone who isn't himself a parent, except of course in a very metaphorical sense, have created some interest and that's stimulated you to think, even more seriously than you've thought so far about what it means to be a Buddhist parent.