

## **Brahmacarya (and the Future of the Western Buddhist Order)**

*by Kamalashila*

*Talk given at WBO Day 1992, London*

When Arthadarshin phoned me with the request from Bhante to give this talk, I said yes of course. But inwardly I groaned. The subject is such a huge one. Not only Brahmacarya – a big enough topic on its own – but the future of the Western Buddhist Order! In spite of much experience of both Brahmacarya and the ever-unfolding future of the Western Buddhist Order, I have not fully clarified my thinking about either of these topics, certainly not the first.

I had the feeling, I don't know if it's true, that Bhante might have been trying to get me to clarify my ideas about Brahmacarya. Well, the approaching deadline of this talk has certainly made me want to do that.

I'm rather afraid of the topic of Brahmacarya. It is a topic about which one can say much from a standpoint of theory, yet completely fail to live up to it in practice. In the area of sexual life, public pronouncement and private actions can sometimes be completely different things. In giving this talk I feel my own ignorance and inexperience very deeply and would like to request your lenience just in case I happen to tread too heavily upon your delicate parts. In this area more than any other it is seemingly impossible to be 'all things to all men' ... and all things to all women. There, I've done it already.

Some of you will know that I gave a talk on Brahmacarya on the Order Convention in 1985. It was called '*The Brahma Life*'. I thought it had potential, and in my ambition I evolved this talk into a somewhat lengthy paper that I read in one or two places over the following year. I tried to synthesise my understanding of the principles of traditional Buddhist monastic life with Bhante's ideas, mostly I think from the 'Ten Pillars', about Brahmacarya, the dhyanas, and insight, together with some personal observations about sexual relationships and sexual continence. I struggled with this paper over that whole period, and as I did, it became even more lengthy and increasingly dry.

I don't think the paper had to be as dry as it became – on re-reading it, the core arguments seem sound enough. The dryness was my dryness. For as I wrote, I lost some of my faith in the Brahma Life.

I never bothered to complete the paper, partly because its message seemed to be increasingly irrelevant at Vajraloka. Even though we had always been a monastic community of sorts, the idea of monastic life had not really been 'in' at Vajraloka for some time.

To some extent we were forced in this direction by circumstances. The various other FWBO Centres always insisted that we must support ourselves financially through

getting men to go on retreat. So the notorious, and very unpopular, 'quota system' was evolved, by which centres undertook to underwrite a certain number of retreat places. In response to this situation, we felt that we should provide more teaching and give ourselves a higher profile.

To some extent the community felt that the monastic life was not an attractive basis for promoting these activities. Though I was not a member of the community at that time, I did not agree with this. I thought that if it was lived in the right spirit, such a community could be very attractive. But I was in a minority, and so felt in danger of getting isolated from my fellow chapter members. In any case I felt that my position might be extreme. I found it hard to know what was best. And in the climate of those days I felt that I needed to make a tactical withdrawal.

There was indeed a particular climate then. As the 80's drew towards the 90's people everywhere – not just in the FWBO, but apparently throughout British society – seemed to be getting into serious sexual relationships. It was the decade in which AIDS had to be taken seriously. Mrs. Thatcher was preaching the virtues of marriage and the family, and at that level – the Daily Mail level – her message seemed to be getting through. In the FWBO and the WBO the era of promiscuity that had flowered – and deflowered – in the early part of the decade was over. Now, more and more people wanted to be in monogamous sexual relationships.

In my isolated position, I was not unaffected by this climate myself. I had been practising Brahmacharya since before my ordination. Obviously at times there had been conflict, but there had been many benefits. But I wasn't completely sure about my relationships with others, which at that time were a little strained. What's the point, I thought, in insisting on being different. Is this really helping my communication? Why be rigid? Why not do something new and maybe learn something? Maybe I was premature in deciding to go celibate in my 20s. Can I really profess to know about the benefits of the Brahma Life without some sexual experience in my more mature years? Thus I eventually decided, well, if you can't beat them, join them! Maybe, I thought, this is an opportunity for me to do some experimentation. Everyone else in the Order has been experimenting – so maybe they know something that I don't!

Whether my disrobing was a useful skilful means or a spiritual disaster, time alone will tell. I do think that it was useful, for me, from some points of view. I'm doubtful as to whether it was useful for anyone else. More recently I have resumed the Brahmacharya vow for a year, and ... well, we'll have to see!

But anyway the paper about monastic life and Brahmacharya died a death. It just seemed to proliferate more and more ideas that I couldn't tie together. And that was what I was afraid would happen with this talk too. It seems somehow typical of this topic. Sex is a topic to which there seems to be no end, no resolution. And no doubt there isn't, on its own level.

In the FWBO, the ideal of Brahmacharya has been hailed as the resolution of the sexual dilemma. In traditional Buddhism, Brahmacharya is praised as the way of life most suited to developing inner harmony and insight into reality. But most people cannot see it in those terms – or rather, they may be able to see it in those terms. What they find difficult is seeing how the ideal of Brahmacharya squares with their own life.

Clearly, what we need is some more clearly defined vision of Brahmacharya – of this much-extolled resolution of the sexual dilemma. What is the path to its resolution, how can we approach that resolution?

In some recent Order meetings at Vajraloka we have been discussing issues raised by Brahmacharya. Once or twice I have watched us talking – me included – and I have thought, “*we really don't know very much about what we're talking about*”.

I don't think this reflects particularly on our chapter. On the whole, I think this is human nature. Here we are, discussing these things so intelligently and openly, but we don't really know. All our knowledge comes from our limited experience, and that experience is of relating sexually. We actually have very little experience of Brahmacharya. We don't actually know very much about the larger possibilities of the spiritual life. As spiritual beings, we are still unhatched, just embryos. We are speaking from inside the eggshell of ignorance. We are still inside the egg, waiting to be born, waiting to see what is on the outside, in the real world.

This is one approach to resolving the sexual dilemma. Looking at where we're at, looking at the human condition.

To do this, we need to start with some very basic facts. I hope you're prepared for this. These facts are the ones that your mummy or your daddy might, or might not, have provided you with at a certain tender age. Of course we know these things very, very well indeed, but let's just go over the basics. I think that we may need to get these 'facts of life' in a more Dharmic perspective.

When we talk about resolving the sexual dilemma, we need to be very clear in our minds about what sexuality is. Sexuality is a form of conditioning. And very fundamental to this conditioning is the fact that there is a body. A certain type of body. As I'm sure you've noticed, there are two broad types of body: male and female. Conditioned by the type of body, and lots of other things too of course, arise certain mental states – certain feelings and certain emotions – that you'll be very familiar with.

Of course, within those two broad types, there are many variants of sexual conditioning. Now that sexuality is so much more acknowledged than it used to be – though still, perhaps, not as much as it should be – it has also become more acknowledged that there are very great variations in sexual feelings. And it seems that these differences are so great – since you have to make so much allowance for these differences in your dealings with people – that it could almost be said that the human species divides into not just two but four different sexes. There's heterosexual male and female, and homosexual male and

female. The members of each of these 'sexes' (to use that term) have very different feelings and emotions, and they want those feelings to be respected. Because for most people, these sexual feelings are very difficult to deal with. Recently, in Shabda, a man Order member told us how difficult it was growing up in the knowledge that he was homosexual. While sincerely respecting his sufferings, I also think that growing up is very difficult with any variety of sexuality. I suspect that the most difficult bit is coping, not so much with one's sexual orientation, though that's difficult enough, but with the demand of sexuality itself.

As Buddhists we know that these differences don't *make* any difference to the basic human potential for Enlightenment, because all human beings can develop the power of self-awareness if they wish. However we also know that there are many other conditioning factors which can effect a person's ability to actualise that basic potential.

Where do all these differences come from? According to basic Buddhist teaching, these differences come from past actions and reactions. In terms of the Wheel of Life, our actions condition a physical body and mind, a nama-rupa, of a particular kind. The simple fact that this psycho-physical complex exists, with all its sense organs connected up to an outside world, then inevitably conditions particular feelings of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are the basic stuff of experience.

And all this experience centres on our body, *this* body that we're 'in', so to speak, right now. The body is so crucial to sexual conditioning because whatever our mental conditionings, whatever our feelings of maleness or femaleness, we possess sexual organs, – or rather a sexual organ, singular! The physical body has in it, or on it, a physical organ with which the person whose organ it is may reproduce himself or herself.

I think you probably know this, so I won't go into too much detail. But just to complete the picture, the male and the female play different roles in the process of reproduction itself. Broadly speaking, as you may know, in order to reproduce they have to cooperate so that their sexual parts, as it were, function together. It's hard to describe in words...

But it just so happens that the action itself can be extremely pleasurable. So pleasurable that the sexual organs become aroused in anticipation of that pleasure – and it's an arousal that affects not just the sexual organ, singular, but the whole body and mind. This arousal *demand*s satisfaction, and very often the demand for satisfaction is so intense that it overrides every other kind of desire.

So we're driven, by these demands, to *exercise* these reproductive organs. We can exercise them on their own, too, but, you know – what with one thing and another – the net result very often is that we find ourselves exercising them with another person. And the fact is, that is what we most *want* to do.

Now this may be the bit that you weren't told by your mummy and daddy. When people exercise their sexual organs they don't always do so because they want to have babies.

Certainly not consciously. They are more likely to have sexual intercourse because their sexual organs are demanding satisfaction.

And at this point, it all starts to become rather complicated.

It becomes complicated because they – that is, we – then have sexual intercourse because of a whole complex of reasons *to do with* getting pleasure and getting satisfaction. It gets complicated because the experience of pleasure, any pleasure, is, of its nature, *addictive*.

And then follows a huge proliferation of rationalisations, views, and lifestyles based upon that addiction. It's *such* a huge proliferation of rationalisations, views and lifestyles that the proliferation is, for many people, indistinguishable from life itself.

In other words, life, for many people, becomes basically about providing the conditions for sexual fulfillment. It's about creating a lifestyle based around sexual fulfillment. Which very often boils down to finding the *money* to create a lifestyle based around sexual fulfillment.

Very often, even if sexual intercourse is not pursued directly for the sake of reproduction, the net result is babies anyway. That is certainly the case with most heterosexual couples. Another influence may be the woman's possible unconscious desire to conceive a child. But anyway, even if their particular kind, or style, of sexual intercourse doesn't result in babies, any sexual couple – that is, hetero- *or* homosexual – will very often end up setting up a lifestyle which is based upon their mutual addiction to sexual gratification.

Now I'm aware that a lot of people find this kind of analysis of sexuality offensive. They feel that sex is a fairly harmless thing, and this kind of talk destroys its magic. My words are not exactly romantic. Of course, sexual intercourse is pleasurable and fulfilling, it makes people happy, certainly for a while. We probably all know happy couples.

But the reason why such couples are happy may have more to do with factors other than sex. And anyway, other strong pleasures, like certain drugs, have their own magic and fulfillment too – they also have their own kind of romance, and they also make people happy, for a while at least.

So I can't see that any taking of offence is *really* reasonable here, because even though sexual intercourse is pleasurable, it also causes a great deal of suffering to many people. Naturally people would rather romanticise it – like some people do with drugs too. They really don't want to look at what their sexual lives do to them. What is most important to them is maintaining them or perhaps improving them. They don't want to look at the dilemma in which they are getting themselves involved.

In the context of the spiritual life, there is so much that could be said here – it's the kind of thing that someone should write a book about. But since this is an area where many fools may rush in with their strong opinions, we need an exceptional angel to write it. There is, such a huge difference between the world-view of an ordinary person – who just

gets on with life and sexual relationships, and sees the word in those terms – and the Buddhist view. It's a very knotty area indeed, the source of a lot of pain and anxiety to a lot of people. People don't like anything that appears to threaten their sexual relationships, and they can see these ideas as moralistic, puritanical and life-denying. How can we show them that the real source of their pain and anxiety is not Buddhism being an old kill-joy, but their own dilemmas, their own inner confusion? It is the contact with reality, with the truth of the situation, that is difficult.

And our minds too are strung out somewhere amidst this difficult issue.

'Strung out' isn't a bad expression in this context. It means dissipated, enervated, wasted – the kind of state that one associates with a hang-over.

On that note, I spoke just now of *addiction* to sexual gratification. As you all know, the vicious nature of addiction is the central point that the Buddha made in his teaching. According to the Buddha, everything that is unsatisfactory in our lives is the result of our craving, our addiction to pleasure. Not that there's anything wrong with pleasure in itself. But addiction to pleasure is slavery, is suffering, is dukkha.

Of course, people don't see, certainly don't want to see, their sexual activities in this way. It just makes them seem sordid, dirty. The things that they hold as of primary importance in human life, they're being told, are merely about addiction to pleasure. Someone is talking as though they were some awful, half crazed, drug addict. Don't forget, we're talking about people here – real people with families, our own families, parents, brothers, sisters, friends – even other Order members. Actually, even us. Our sexual relationships are precious to us in a way that we don't want to associate with the notion of addiction. The suggestion is repellent, nasty, narrow. It feels unjust.

What is happening here? What is happening is that there is a difference between the instinctive sexual basis of sexual relationships and all the other things, the more human things, that can go along with them – the things that people want to go along with them. People want friendship, want companionship, want someone to be interested in them, want someone to depend on them, want someone to relate to. And once the sexual bond is established there really is a relationship – a relationship with very real demands: ethical demands, financial demands, emotional demands, Social demands, demands on one's intelligence, one's cunning, one's generosity – in short, all the things that makes one feel alive, that make one feel responsible, that make one feel, as they say, potent. That make one feel like a valid human being.

And, for many people, a sexual relationship really does provide a way to feel part of the human race. No doubt for many people the responsibility of a sexual relationship, particularly if there are children, forces them to behave ethically, and thereby gives them a sense of their own value for which otherwise, perhaps, they would not know where to look. The modern world doesn't provide much in the way of a spiritual direction.

We can say to such people, look – there's another way of developing ethically, there are other ways of exercising responsibility. There are much better ways, ways that do not depend upon sexual intercourse.

But there I go again, bringing that in. Is intercourse really relevant to this aspect of things? But sexual intercourse is what bonds such relationships. Without that bonding, all that remains are the ethical demands and the responsibility. Under that pressure, you naturally want a bit of bonding. That's the deal in a sexual partnership – at least it is once it gets serious. You certainly wouldn't want your partner to do any bonding with anyone else. Indeed, you've got a right to bond specifically with them.

And in fact, one feels all this very, very strongly indeed. If this is feeling is denied, sometimes even the nicest, the most refined and friendly sexual relationships, can go disastrously wrong. Things can get really heavy. People kill. People hate. People bear the deepest grudges and wreak the most horrible revenges. And it's all for a bit of bonding.

That intensity of feeling, that intensity of craving, is why the notion of addiction is completely appropriate to this context. Even though it is the bedrock of our society, even though it is eulogised, sanitized, and spiritualised, though it is promoted as the ideal human life by our political and religious leaders. It's all a makeshift, a cover-up, a rationalisation for something instinctive in which they are themselves are totally involved. Make no mistake, this really is an addiction, in the most direct sense. It isn't just a metaphor. Moreover, it isn't a mild addiction, like tea, or travel, or computer magazines. This is a very deeply rooted addiction indeed.

So let's, while we're on the subject, ask about the nature of addiction.

One thing that is very characteristic of addiction is that it's a *downward spiral into mediocrity*. One begins with an unbelievable high, the apparent summit of existence. One ends with an equally amazing flatness; an endless journey through the same-iest imaginable flatlands of experience.

Addiction is a process. Our addictions, to whatever pleasures, end up as slavery to a decreasing quantum of the pleasure to which we originally became addicted. This is the phenomenon that us sixties people used to call 'tolerance'. Eventually one must always have some of the thing that used to provide the pleasure merely to feel normal. Without the thing, one feels anything from mild insecurity to raving madness, the DTs, pink elephants, paranoia, frequent correspondence, and sleepless nights. With it, when one's got it, one merely feels – well, normal. Just O.K. It used to feel fantastic, but now there's nothing that special to the experience any more, though of course one enjoys it to some degree, mostly because it stops that horrible, depressing feeling of craving for a while.

And the whole business causes reactions of all kinds, reactions that you can see appening everywhere around. Some people – the more passionate and the less sophisticated perhaps – go right into the sexual game, get hurt, and then try to dry out, go cold turkey,

purify themselves. Then it gets them again, like a madness, and round they go again. They may have all kinds of reactions afterwards. They may get misogynistic or mysanthropic. No doubt it's understandable, in a way, that they do. These are like the people who get into a serious mess on drugs.

Other people, the more emotionally cool and perhaps more calculating, run their relationships on a kind of knife-edge between mutual addiction and mutual exploitation. The main idea is to get as much enjoyment as possible out of the relationship without getting too attached, and of course – they'll say, and mean – without hurting one another. They see one another as little as they can bear, so that when they do meet, it'll be suitably intense, so they don't get bored. But of course they have to see one another sometimes – within a certain undefineable timespan – otherwise they'll forget, essentially, who they are supposed to be in a relationship with.

These people certainly don't get mysanthropic or misogynistic. Or reactive. They're far too clever for that. Why spoil things? These people are like the smarter addicts who are able to manage their habit, and even live relatively normal, though stoned, lives.

What we've just looked at is just one important aspect of what we're doing in our sexual lives. We've looked at how we deal with our *addiction* to that way of relating. We've also noted that that's not how we normally see it. Hardly at all. It seems, perhaps, a crude analysis. I can almost see the catch-word 'simplistic' spreading out, like smoke, across the ceiling.

But this way of seeing sexual relationships was certainly the Buddha's view. And because it *is* the Buddha's view, we must weigh our own responses with care.

Indeed, weighing our responses, watching our reactions, is one way that we may begin to resolve the dilemma of sexuality. It's a way towards that resolution because it is a *reflective* way. Reflection upon the real nature of dukkha, of the unsatisfactoriness of all conditioned things, will lead, eventually, to our actually seeing the nature of unsatisfactoriness.

Brahmacarya is a funny word, isn't it. But as a word it seems to connote better things than 'celibate' – which just means the unmarried state, ie a state of *not having* something. Here we've got an expression for the positive state of freedom from sexual craving.

So what is Brahmacarya? Well, we'd better let's start with what it's not, because I've recently heard a real whopper in this context. I'm afraid I even heard it in my own community.

In the questions answered by Bhante in Golden Drum, he said that no one is 100% chaste, no one is having sex 100% of the time. If we're developing mindfulness to any extent at all, each of us here is probably, in one way or another, at one level or another, working with our sexuality. But this doesn't mean that we are practicing Brahmacarya.



Brahmacarya does not mean simply working with one's sexuality. That is, it doesn't mean working with one's sexuality within the context of sexual relationships and sexual intercourse. Unfortunately, this idea of 'working with one's sexuality' is more than a little ambiguous. It seems to mean anything from refining one's sexual technique, through men's or women's liberation, to refining one's sources of inspiration.

No doubt all of these things can be done in the context of a sexual relationship. But one doesn't practice Brahmacarya while in a sexual relationship, or while remaining open to the possibility of sexual intercourse. Of course one can work with one's sexuality in that way, to a certain extent, but that work couldn't be called Brahmacarya, as such.

Because Brahmacarya means working with sexuality outside the possibility of sexual gratification. Those who practice Brahmacarya don't see it as a deprivation but as a better way of living. Brahmacarya means the cultivation of higher states of awareness as a basis for the development of insight. It implies a lifestyle that is not dependent upon sexual intercourse for inspiration but draws on greater sources of inspiration.

What sources of inspiration, you may possibly be asking. These higher sources of inspiration lie outside the metaphorical eggshell. Sometimes we can poke our little claws through the shell and feel some of this inspiration. But unfortunately the eggs into which we happen to have been born have a peculiar property. The holes that we make – that we make through our spiritual practice – don't remain there for very long. Sooner or later, the shell just grows back again. So we can't just lie there secure and snug, gazing out wide-eyed through the little holes. Not for very long, anyway. The holes do sometimes stay open for a short while, but not often. There's no half way position regarding this egg situation. We can either break out completely, or just snuggle back down into the warm interior again.

Before we go any further into this, we need to take on board the second aspect of this talk – that is, the Order.

The Western Buddhist Order is coming into its first mature years. Many of its members are entering the age which Jung thought most fruitful for the development of the inner life. No doubt meditation practice changes that a bit, but still, I think for the majority of us the middle years are years of deeper reflection – and, potentially – deeper contact with reality.

Because at this time we realise, far more clearly than ever before, that our lifespan is limited. Everyone seems to do this to some extent, in some way. They have to come to some kind of terms with death and impermanence. This 'coming to terms' may be more in terms of the spiritual life, or it may be more in terms of worldly life. It may be that the main question that arises is one's physical comfort in old age – housing, pension, and all the rest of it – or it may be that we start making more serious preparations for the *bardo*.

It's a funny time, too, because I've noticed that even though the potential of the inner life does open up a little more, we can also be at our most worldly in our forties and fifties. Removed by our years from the urgency and the idealism of youth, we're often more

realistic, more in touch with the world. We're at the height of our worldly powers, we know the ropes, we know what's there to be had in the world, we know what we like and how to get it, and maybe by now we've acquired the wherewithal to get it, too.

The young and the old are at the edges of life. They're nearer to death, nearer to the bardo, than we are. It's a long time since we were out there, forty years or more, and it seems to us that it'll be a long time yet before we go there again. So even though in middle age we have come to terms with death in a certain sense, at the same time we're very much involved with life. We don't hold back from it, we're not shy – and also the world looks mostly to us, the mature experienced men and women, for the real action. These are important years, and they are dangerous years too, if we manage to get ourselves sidetracked on the spiritual path. At this age we are also most able to insist on getting what we want, and this may not be what we need spiritually.

And of course, we know what we want. Sexual relationships. Sexual fulfilment. Sexual satisfaction. We want to 'work on our sexuality'. And even though our looks are increasingly against us, we know that in this game, that isn't the only factor. We know that if we want, we can use our experience and know-how to make up for all that, and the overall result is that *we get what we want*.

The bearing that this has on the future of the Western Buddhist Order is clear enough. If we want the Order to continue to function as a spiritual community, rather than as just a group, then there must be a perceptible movement away from addiction. We must be seen to be making spiritual progress. There may be many attempted definitions of spiritual progress, but the Buddha's definition was freedom from addiction, freedom from craving and attachment. So if we are really to live up to our stated aims as a *Buddhist Order*, we must have a perceptible commitment, an obvious commitment, to spiritual growth in *this* sense.

I'm afraid I have some doubts as to whether we are really heading towards establishing a spiritual movement. I am optimistic by nature, I am faithful in temperament. But in this vital area the signs are not clear. I feel that we don't have a sufficiently strong commitment to developing the insight that leads to emancipation. We have commitment to our friendships, commitment to our centre, right livelihood, whatever – and these things are all good things – but I think that we should examine the nature of that commitment. I think that we need to consider to what extent our practice of the mundane perfections, the mundane paramitas, is really informed by wisdom. I'm afraid that means that we need to consider whether our spiritual efforts have any point to them at all.

I think that in the beginning, the majority of Order members used to see their practice almost exclusively in terms of dhyana and insight. Perhaps a little bit of renunciation too. Then later, seeing that there was a need to promote the special values that Bhante was showing us, they started to see their practice in more Mahayanistic terms, in terms of action – principally in terms of giving themselves to the needs of others. They maintained a meditation practice, but the main emphasis got laid upon dana. I'm generalising, of

course, because there is a great variety of Order members, but I believe that this is a fair average now as well.

Over the last couple of decades our practice, we may say, has not been limited to meditation. Almost all of us have gone through the trials and tribulations of setting up centres and retreat centres, helping friends and mitras, dealing with the world, getting money, setting up means of livelihood, setting up good relations in the chapter – so many things, so many very difficult, demanding things – what a life it's been, for many of us. And there has been a great deal achieved through all this dana. A momentum has been set loose in the world that others can easily participate in.

The FWBO has all been founded upon giving, giving that so far, on the whole, has been underpinned by Bhante's wisdom, not our own. Certainly I think that we have given the other perfections a look in – we've tried to make our actions ethical, we've certainly had to exercise patience and energy. There has been a little meditation, and a fair amount of the pursuit of wisdom too, certainly in the form of study, in the form of *sutamaya*– and *cintamayaprajña* – taking in ideas, and reflecting on them.

But the future of the Western Buddhist Order in itself, apart from its works in the world, apart from the *Friends* of the Western Buddhist Order, really depends upon us laying down, individually, our own underpinning of wisdom. And this must be the third level of wisdom, the level, that is, of *bhavanamayaprajña*. The level of vipassana meditation. As the Perfection of Wisdom sutras say, without wisdom, the other perfections are blind. Giving, Ethics, Patience, Vigour, even Meditation in the sense of samatha, are all very great virtues, but they have no eyes. Even meditation has no eyes. And as the Prajñāparamita says, without a guide who can see, even a million blind men – or women – will never, ever, find the way to the city of Enlightenment. And nor will we, I'm afraid.

I think that the Order may be entering a phase in its development in which the paramita of Wisdom is crucial. There is no question in my mind that everything that has been achieved through the FWBO has been completely necessary. You can't create wisdom out of ideas alone. That's just *sutamayaprajña* – the raw, undigested information. You must reflect on those ideas, and reflection often means testing ideas out in practice as well as thinking about it in the mind. What's the use of reflecting, for example, on the principle of Sangha, without any actual experience of what Sangha is like? Even the idea of sunyata, of conditionality, of impermanence, needs to be tested in experience as well as in the crucible of reflection.

But the crucible of reflection, the inner solitude without which reflection cannot take place, is also vital. So I am saying several things at this point.

First of all, I am repeating the Buddha's words in saying that insight, vipassana, is the only effective way out of the suffering of craving.

I am saying that insight proper, in the sense of vipassana meditation, in the sense of *bhavanamayaprajña*, must be supported by *cintamayaprajña* – an intellectual

understanding that we are consciously trying to clarify. And that for this clarification to take place, we need the right conditions. We need some solitude, for example. I don't just mean solitary retreats; I mean that we need a degree of solitude in our everyday lives. Bhante says a little bit about this in his 'Advice to a Young Poet'.

When we practice Brahmacharya, we are practising aloneness. Positive aloneness. Another word for it is individuality. We aren't relating through a need for another person. And this aloneness, this individuality, means that we can form our ideas more in isolation from others. In other words a connection can be made between Brahmacharya and intellectual clarity. To the extent that our body-based, instinctual drives are resolved, to that extent we can draw upon new reserves of clarity and flexibility of mind. This increased degree of *samatha* increases our propensity for *vipassana*.

Even beyond this, we need an outlet through which we may test our understanding of the Dharma on the plane of experience. This is yet another important way that we need to clarify our intellectual understanding.

We need a situation in which we can exercise in practice what we merely believe. What we merely talk about, what we merely teach in our centres.

To really reflect upon the Dharma, to really be ready to gain insight into it, and to transcend the human predicament of craving, we need to find ways of actually practising what we preach.

But what *do* we preach? I know that sometimes we preach rather ambiguous things. Whether in our personal communication with other Order members, mitras and friends, or even in talks and classes at the public centres, we sometimes talk in terms of 'working through things', 'balancing our lifestyle', 'being kind to ourselves', 'making sure our needs are met', etc., etc. We sometimes preach ambiguities and half-truths. It's such a part of the world we live in, so much in the language, that it's hard to avoid, though I don't condone it.

But I think that first and foremost, when we are *really* asked – at those times when we really realise what we are doing with people – we preach the way taught by the Buddha. We preach the Dharma, the way out of suffering, the way out of all that is unsatisfactory, the way out of all limitation and mediocrity. And first and foremost, we teach the way out of the morass of addiction, of craving, and the anxiety that goes with craving. That is essentially what the Dharma is about. In our better moments we are able to engage with the fact that it is *that* path which people actually need, and then I think it's that we give them.

But the question is, though this is what we preach, though this is even what we feel, do we practice it? Do we ourselves feel that through our practice of the Dharma we are becoming less addicted to samsaric desires?

That through our practice of Dharma we are more and more drawn into the current that goes against the worldly stream? Is this the reason why we are practising – are we practising in order to free ourselves from addiction?

Obviously, to the extent that we are not practising to free ourselves, we ought not to teach, we ought not to preach. I imagine that, like me, you feel a certain discomfort if you are recommending something to others that you do not yourself practice.

In such situations we may explain that what we are recommending is an ideal – an ideal that we wholeheartedly endorse, but to which as yet we ourselves only aspire.

This is no doubt fine for some mitras and some new Order members. Of course, people are at different levels of commitment. But from those of us who have been professing the Path for ten or fifteen years, the average newcomer is surely entitled to see more money where our mouths are. Surely you'd expect, as a newcomer, more of a commitment to the Path being professed. And I agree that they are so entitled. I would like to see more courage, more confidence, and more imagination, from my fellow Order members. We need ways of finding that confidence and imagination.

We have been exploring one or two approaches to a resolution of the dilemma of sexuality. One Order member recently put the dilemma like this. He said 'I would like to live the Brahmacharya. But I don't know how to want to. How do I get to want to do it? Actually, we've had the most important answers available ever since we got involved in the movement, but I don't think we use them much – perhaps we don't really have faith in them. The way, as I see it, is the development of an insightful perspective, the development of wisdom. You can talk about friendship, you can talk about communities, you can talk about emotional support, single sex activities, reportings in, whatever, and these are important aids, indispensable aids perhaps, to living a life of Brahmacharya. But I doubt if anyone will make the real break that is necessary just with these. Not in the long term at least – maybe these things will help in the short term. But even then there has to be some perspective of Dharma.

One of the mitras staying at Vajrakuta recently went on retreat at a certain well-known men's retreat centre, and as he sat on his bunk, perhaps reading, he was a little surprised at the behaviour of the young lad in the next bunk. Every so often a friend of his would come into the room and they would get into bed together and have a good cuddle! This happened several times until our friend, who is fairly new to the movement in England, and has a lot of doubts about the FWBO approach to things, he couldn't help asking what was going on. 'Oh', he was told, as though what they were doing was what everyone did, 'We're practising Brahmacharya!'

Maybe they were practising Brahmacharya. And perhaps, they had found a non-sexual outlet for their physical passions in a way that somehow supported their practice of Brahmacharya. I don't think it would help me practice Brahmacharya, though. I think my greatest sources of support have been, firstly, communication in which there has been a real exchange of ideas, and secondly meditation.

This is an example of one possible kind of aid to Brahmacharya – perhaps someone somewhere has told these young guys that sex is partly about physical contact and that by having lots of physical contact without sex, you may be able to get rid of your craving for sex. I hope it doesn't develop into a dogma, though – as these ideas often seem get interpreted. There is, apparently, a considerable fringe of people on the edges of the movement who have been thoroughly put off the WBO by Order members' crude misunderstandings of certain things Bhante has said. I met someone only the other day who, on his first night in a men's community, was told that heterosexual men always have problems with friendship, which of course is the whole of the spiritual life. He was then told that the only way to overcome this was to have sexual intercourse with a man. He was told that even if his communication was very good indeed, there would always be a problem that could only be straightened out by going to bed with a man – presumably with one of that community. That was a bright promising young man. The incident took place eight years ago, and he is still on the edges of the movement, though he told me that Bhante's piece on sex in Golden Drum convinced him that what he had undergone in that community was not a reflection of Bhante's thinking but just a piece of sexual bigotry.

I haven't heard of this form of sexual abuse going on for some time. Perhaps we are over it all now – I certainly hope so. No doubt people can be very awkward and difficult, but at the very least we have to acknowledge the reality of our tendency to exploit others.

In fact the whole notion of sexual activity as a kind of path to resolving the sexual dilemma, which some Order members apparently believe, seems quite false to me. Of course it is a very attractive idea, the idea of using sex to transcend sex. It's attractive because if you say you follow this path then others will still respect you and say – well, at least she's having a go at it, or at least he's having a go at Brahmacharya. And also, just by the way, you can keep on having sex.

Clearly it's hard to put on the brakes all at once, but sooner or later, I hate to say this, you do actually have to stop. There will always be an element of cold turkey, withdrawal, difficulty.

But there's no progress *without* difficulty. Any worthwhile undertaking is going to be difficult. And equally, there's no escape from the dilemma that we are in – except, possibly, in wilful ignorance and unawareness. We can, if we wish, just allow ourselves to become so stupid that we don't notice how much we are suffering, and how much suffering we are inflicting upon others. But on a path of awareness, there is no escape from this issue. We ourselves have created the situation that we are in. We have set up home in a burning house. We have created this nama-rupa, this bundle of tendencies. So much of our energy is tied up in our sexual organs, invested in our need to reproduce – even if we don't want babies in our conscious mind, that's what our bodies want, that's what our private parts want. The reproductive urge is extremely powerful – it's what makes the world go round, it's what makes people fall in and out of love, it's what makes people hate one another. It affects all most people's relationships indirectly,

from the people they live with to the nation and the world. It affects the general climate of views and opinions, the kind of opinions that nations go to war about.

When I asked a fellow Order Member what I could say on the subject of Brahmacharya, he thought for a long, long time. Finally, he said, '*tell them don't do it – it's naughty*'. Well, there you are. But I'm not saying that sex is wrong, or right. I'm saying that we should see the phenomenon of sexual conditioning as it really is – as a form of conditioning which can be transcended. Moreover, addiction to any form of sexual gratification is a form of conditioning that seems to run directly counter to the direction of the spiritual life, and which therefore at some stage of the spiritual life is to be transcended completely. And if we *all* don't start seriously trying to transcend it some time, we can hardly justify calling ourselves Dharmacharis or Dharmacharinis.

The conditioning is so big, with so many aspects to it, bound up psychologically as it is, still, with so much of our confidence, that I think to take on Brahmacharya as a vow requires a correspondingly big leap of the imagination. I think that if you are going to step down off that fence that you are on, you must also do something just as big with your energies, at the same time. It's got to be something really huge. Take on the biggest thing that you can think of.

They say that sex and ambition are closely linked. I feel that this is the case with women as well as men, though perhaps in a different way. In my opinion, we're not ambitious enough in the Western Buddhist Order. I don't mean ambitious in the sense of having a centre in every town – the thin red line of the FWBO will, I'm sure, continue to encircle the globe. I mean spiritually ambitious. Spiritual ambition may well *involve* starting centres and right livelihoods and what not. But it must also involve a serious attempt to create the conditions for meditation and insight in our own lives. You need to think really big. You need to allow your spiritual ambitions full rein. You need to take them all the way to Enlightenment.

<http://www.kamalashila.co.uk/>

[http://www.kamalashila.co.uk/Meditation\\_Web/index.htm](http://www.kamalashila.co.uk/Meditation_Web/index.htm)