

Harmony With Friends and Brethren

Introduction

Srivati has of course introduced herself but I demand the right to introduce her as well. And I am happy to do so because I've known her for many years and have the good fortune to be her kalyanamitra. We have worked together, she and I, in the London Buddhist Art Center; we were founder members of it, and she became one of the very early dharmacharinis to be a member of the FWBO Arts and she still is. She worked very hard in the arts center as the director, it was a new job, and she had to organize and did it wonderfully. She is a very good organizer, perhaps I shouldn't tell you that because you might want her to do some organizing. And she is actually very busy, now, involved in many things, she's still helping at the arts center, because there are lots of changes going on there today, a second time, and she is back there helping. She left the arts center in order to follow her creative feelings, her urge to write poetry, and in fact she produced a slim volume of poetry which I can recommend to you. And I confess I was bursting with pride when she read some of her poems on the convention last year.

[Remember what I'm going to say and don't get carried away with things I want to tell you,] I could go on for a long time about Srivati-- I must confine myself to what I really mean to say. She's now, having published her slim volume, writing a play with the title of "The Bandit, The Bride and The Bhikkhu".

It's going to happen in London in May and she's going to direct it as well. So it'll be a very interesting presentation. She isn't satisfied with having done something well, there's always something else to get to, on to, to do, and I think that she has such capability, it's quite difficult for her to confine herself to discovering her creativity. Well I'm sure she's going to introduce us to her creativity in her talk and I cannot think of anyone more able to talk about harmony, harmony with friends and brethren, because wherever she works, wherever she is, she brings a warmth and humor and harmony to what's she's doing, so I'm delighted to introduce now Srivati. (applause)

The Talk

Thank you very much, Mallika, I was going to start this talk about the live acceptance of this harmony with friends and brethren. by telling you about when I was in college choir at Darby Cathedral. I was going to describe to you my blue full-length cassock, my flowing white surplice with its wing-like sleeves, not to mention the floppy white ruff that completed the ensemble. I want to tell you about the harmony we created in the choir, how we sang settings by Purcell and Byrd, how I loved the eight part Rachmaninov Kyrie Eleison. I was going to tell you about how this harmony was created under the eagle eye of one Wallace Ross, choirmaster and steam engine fanatic. I was planning to draw out various analogies between a choir and a sangha, telling you about the hierarchy of the young trebles or sopranos and the older and wiser altos, tenors and basses,

reflecting, along the way, on the importance of listening, that necessity for the occasional solo and so on.

Because of course although the grammatical tense of the lines of acceptance refer to the context in which we join the order of course also suggests the intentions which ideally we maintain once in the order. So generally the choir can be a useful metaphor and along the way would have left you with a favorable if somewhat exaggerated impression of my singing and musical ability. [laughter] But I'm not going to do that.

Apart from the fact that Maitreyi gave an excellent talk on this particular line of acceptance used in the musical harmony analogy at the WBO day some years ago, I found my mind turning elsewhere. In fact I found myself thinking about death. It seems to me that death, when I remember its unavoidable certainty, is a great spur to creation and maintenance of harmony in one's relations with others. I first really grasped this beyond the superficial level when many years ago I went to an HIV test. I was beginning a new sexual relationship and although perhaps naively I thought unlikely that either of us would have contracted the disease, we both decided to make sure. I received my counseling, gave my blood and then had to wait for what I think may be a couple of days for the result. And I decided to make the most of the waiting. I remember sitting in the shrine room at Khemadhatu, which is our community by Tesco's in Hackney, and reflecting on what I would do if the result were positive, i.e., negative for me. I imagined how I would want to live my life if I found that I had a limited time left to live. I mean I really imagined perhaps what is of course inevitable. The main things that I remember feeling was that I'd devote more time to my friends and family. I would make more room for the giving and the receiving of love in my life. I would keep those relations in good repair. In the end the test was clear but I was grateful for the reception that I let it force upon me.

Again as I was approaching my ordination in 1993 it seemed I was preparing to die in some way and therefore it was imperative that I was in harmony with everyone before I went. In this case the far north at Danakosha. I found myself more aware of my own temporary status and what followed from that was the desire to have a clear conscience as to my behavior to others, no unfinished business. Of course I don't always remember that I have a sell-by date like any other perishable, but I try, lightly, to bear it in mind. This doesn't work for everyone but it helps me. Generally speaking I don't often find myself in conflictual situations, it's probably because I'm more of a greed type than any other, so harmony is high on my list of priorities. The danger for this type is that we may, in our concern to avoid the unpleasantness of conflict, sit on the truth, not communicate fully. In speaking about harmony then, obviously we're talking about the deep harmony. In our context of joining and dwelling in the order, we're looking at a profound kind of unity based on mutual love and respect. Now it's strange and rather embarrassing but I don't actually remember saying any of the acceptances. Yet my

experience of the ordination retreat was of wanting to dedicate myself to the newly pledged Dharmacharini and it couldn't have been better summarized than in those four simple yet profound lines. In this case, "in harmony with friends and brethren, I accept this ordination" captured my heartfelt wish that we, who are the people I'm close to, the WBO sangha or indeed the whole world, can live together in a spirit of active goodwill and cooperation. And again in a harmony that's not a pretense of concord concealing division and difficulty.

If there's one thing I've learned during my time of growing up in the FWBO it's that true harmony between my friends and I comes only with an awareness, an acknowledgement of, as film calls it, 'what lies beneath'. Don't think about that reference too much, I think that's quite a gory film. It was one of the things that first attracted me to the sangha when I first met it at Glenn Gorton High _____ School, in my first retreat in Battle, in Sussex. The people there were lovely, friendly and dedicated. And they weren't pretending. So as always the best option on an occasion like this is to see what the Buddha had to say about harmony amongst friends, brethren and shall we say sistren perhaps. Because what I want to know is how to maintain any harmony there is and prevent new and remove existing disharmony.

And there in the Majjimanikaya is the answer--the circumstances of the quarrel amongst the monks at Kosambi. The situation is one that is all too easy to imagine happening. Someone does something that another thinks is wrong, and a breach of the Precepts. In this case the monks leave an unused washing water in one of the toilets. In other words something pretty trivial; it's against the rules. For us it might translate into agreed routine in our community or teams. We like what's been agreed, we want everyone to keep to it. We point out to the other person who didn't realize they were in error and maybe they apologize. But maybe we tell others what they did, how could they not do it in the right way? Of course that gets back to the other person and before we know it there's not only a falling out between the two of us, but we've involved others and they're taking sides too. This is what happened at Kosambi between two of the monks who weren't junior ones either. In no time there was, as it said, quarreling, brawling, wrangling, disputing and eventually schism, division and dissenting acts in the sangha. The Buddha tried to help but the verbal arrows continued. In the end the Buddha made an interesting decision. He went away. He left them to it and went off to spend some time on his own. I like this image of the Buddha simply going away. He couldn't make them see what they were doing. He says "these misguided men seem obsessed" and he observed later that even robbers bent on pillaging the realm can act in concord, and that there was no fellowship with fools. In the end the Kosambi lay followers get fed up too, not least because the monks have driven the Buddha away. They decide to withdraw their respect and their alms-food in the hope the monks will go elsewhere, leave the sangha or try to make amends to the Buddha. This works. Is it not often the way when we are angry or fixed on who is at fault? Words of wisdom are not

always going to get through but then a privation or withdrawal does or can. The Buddha meets with all the monks and they admit to stabbing each other with verbal daggers and not practicing loving kindness. So he then tells them of six memorable qualities, as it says in this Sutta, that create love and respect and conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord and unity.

And I'm sure that most of us are familiar with this scripture, we often quote from it and it appears in our mitra study. But I don't think I'd ever looked closely at it. Oh, yes, harmony in the order and love and respect and all that. So I've tried to reflect a little further.

The Six Memorable Qualities of a Bhikkhu

First Memorable Quality

The first of the six memorable qualities is: **"Here a bhikkhu maintains bodily acts of loving kindness both in public and in private towards his companions in the holy life. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect and conduces to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord and to unity."** Now when I was writing this [talk] I was thinking--what can I tell you--all about the about the physical practice of loving kindness? You're Dharmacharinis of the Western Buddhist Order, for heaven's sakes. I know that collectively we are by no means perfect in our practice, but generally my experience of the Order is one of harmony in this way. People mostly very friendly, very kind, very helpful, in fact I think I often take it for granted, so that when the harmony is broken in some way, perhaps by an omission of an act of kindness, it stands out and I feel it all the more keenly. The text mentions loving kindness in public and in private toward companions of the holy or good life. Again I think my friends in the order have that kind of integrity. We may sometimes question our motives but I don't really see people doing things for the kudos or to make the right impression. I hear about many quiet, even anonymous acts of generosity and thoughtfulness and I've often been on the receiving end myself.

Yet we don't always manage it. I think there are two areas where I know I have sometimes been forgetful of the needs of fellow order members. They are when someone suffers from chronic ongoing ill health, or when someone has suffered the death of a parent or another close person. I can be very good in a crisis, I think, but when there is ongoing debilitation or difficulty I know that I sometimes forget what it must be like for that person, that doing simple jobs is difficult, daunting, or exhausting. And often the hardest time in grief is after the funeral and all the help with the practical matters is over. That's maybe the time when our bereaved friend needs us most, when they're at home, back at work, perhaps, but really feeling their loss and confusion and maybe thinking they should be over it all by now.

And are we aware enough of the creeping effects of old age on our friends? It doesn't

cost us anything to ask if help is needed, and often what is a mountain for our fellow order member is not only easy for us but may not take much time either.

Second Memorable Quality

Secondly, it says in the Sutta, "Again, a bhikkhu maintains verbal acts of loving kindness both in public and in private." We all know what a big area it is of the practice of the speech precepts. Although we have a specific seventh precept of abstention from malicious or slanderous speech, in practicing harmonious speech all four speech precepts facilitate the harmony we're talking about. I like the precious stone that Bhante associates with the seventh precept. He visualizes it as a pillar of opal. I visited Australia in 1986 and went to a place called **Cooberpeedee** where they mine opal. I don't think I've ever looked at any opal before. I just loved its, well, opalescence. It's such a magical, almost alive substance, with the way the different colors catch the light. And there at least it was dug up from a landscape that was dry, rough and harsh. If we dig deep enough under our surface, we can find the concordant speech we need, what I mean it is very easy as we all know to quickly say the unhelpful thing, particularly if we feel justified in our indignation or opinion. A short pause before we speak is all it takes to remember not only the person in front of us but also our friend who is not present. Let us not be frightened of silence in our conversations while we consider what we are about to say. I'm reminding myself about this of course under the guise of telling you. Let's say it's one of those moments where we're talking with a friend and we're angry with someone else or maybe annoyed with something that they've done. We know we need to understand our reaction better, probably with a view to sorting something out with a third party or even with just dropping it. But there's also our righteous indignation, we want the satisfaction of getting something off our chest or just having a good moan. Maybe not to the person concerned because we know better than that. It's at that moment I/we have to check our motivation before we open our mouths or go any further. Other people sometimes said critical things to me about other people who I maybe don't know very well. And that negative impression lingers, it's still in my mind even if I have had the intention of giving that person the benefit of the doubt. Maybe I have the same effect on others.

At the same time this is a different point, we also have difficult things we need to talk about with each other. It reminds me of something Jayamati has said in his story telling workshop, when you come across something in the text you're working with that doesn't make sense or that you don't like, say the Buddha says or does something you have difficulty with, you don't avoid it. For example, some people might have trouble telling the story of the Buddha's going forth, because they don't like the fact that he apparently abandoned his wife and child. So in telling that part of the story you engage with it, and perhaps refer to the fact he made a decision that is difficult to understand. How could he have done this? So rather than skirting around it or papering over it you speak to the difficulty. So Michael Caine, on **Parkinson** last Saturday, said something

similar: use the difficulty. In other words acknowledge your relation to the perceived problem and ask what can be learned from it. That way our communication, whether it's story telling or conversation, can be authentic. And we all know what to do, if in doubt: maintain the noble silence.

Third Memorable Quality

Thirdly, **"a bhikkhu maintains mental acts of loving kindness both in public and in private towards his or her companions in the holy life."** So what are mental acts of loving kindness? As Mallika told you that I'm writing this play. I've just finished the third draft and I'm getting the cast together. It's set just after the Buddha's death and it tells the story of Ananda, Angulimala and Pataccara and has Mara as a narrator. I'm mentioning it not just to give you a double advert, but because writing a play with enlightened figures in it has proven an effective form of dharma study. To write convincingly I have to step inside the skin of each character. This means I've been doing a different kind of visualization practice recently. Imagining how these awakened men and women really behave--what do they do, what do they say, how do they think? When the enlightened Angulimala, a hermit, on his way to the Buddha's cremation, meets two hostile men who remember him as he used to be and threaten him, what he does will be based on how he thinks and feels. When Pataccara, an experienced teacher and arahant, is talking to one of her disciples who is doubtful and reactive, how does she respond? It seemed to me that what marks the enlightened characters from the others is that they don't get in the way, in that they don't assert their personalities or preferences. And yet they're not just inactive or uninterested, they are good friends. One of the biggest problems I've set myself with this project isn't just that I, as an unenlightened novice playwright and how to create convincing Buddhas, it's that drama is based on conflict, like Samsara--I want this and I don't want that. The enlightened mind however, as we all know, however, is beyond conflict which means we could have ended up with no play at all, or at least a rather boring one. What I'm having to connect with is the dynamic nature of the non-jewel mind, the energy in their equanimity. This energy in their equanimity is of course their compassion. A Buddha doesn't interfere but he or she does engage. So in the scene when the Buddha comes across the young Pataccara, this is what the story shows us: she's a half-naked mad woman who has lost her mind as the result of the death of her husband, babies, parents and brother. She's not aware of the Buddha and the other disciples. She's lost inside her own story. Some of the monks are discomfited by her mere nakedness. They want the Buddha to go somewhere else. But he sees her suffering and what he does is moves towards her, so that she finds him in front of her. And then it says he stands there until she becomes aware of him and he just looks, kindly. His compassionate attention combines then with a few words, "Sister, recover your presence of mind", bring her to her senses, which means awareness of her half dressed state, a remembrance of pain. What was the Buddha's mental act of loving kindness? It was that pure concern for her well being. And by his kind attention he reached her through the cloud of madness.

I wonder sometimes whether I underestimate the power of thought. I know how it influences what I say and do, but it really does influence the world around me too, even when I'm still and quiet. I was thinking of the people I've sat with in a room who were angry and withdrawn--don't they make a lot of noise in their silence? And what about being around someone in the silence of a retreat who just radiates contentment and happiness? And why else would a meditation retreat leave you feeling like you know the people you've been sitting with in the shrine room every day? And it's not just because it's rather gross and unintegrated beings--sorry, I should just speak of myself here. We can't help leaking our emotions in our body language. Increasingly I believe in the direct power of thought. Loving kindness is a tangible force. We can only know true harmony in our community if we have this internal harmony. It's the inner dimension of friendship. This is a combination of strong self metta so that others' preferences don't trouble us and the desire for the welfare of others, so that at the same time we are aware of others' needs and wishes. It may not mean we have to do anything. Bearing witness to each other may be enough. It's like our preceptors, that's what they (you) do. I know there's a heap of activity associated with that particular responsibility. But fundamentally that is what they do. Remember your private ordination and your preceptor, whoever they are, whatever their personality. When I first entered the hut at Danakosha, before Sanghadevi spoke, there she was, an embodiment of loving kindness. In bearing witness for my going for refuge she was like an archetypal version of herself, modeling pure friendship, even in the first few silent, smiling moments. And of course we don't have to be a preceptor to develop and maintain our mental acts of loving kindness. Lastly under this heading of mental acts of loving kindness I found myself thinking about our brothers and sisters who choose to leave the order. In the last year or so we've had I think five Dharmacharinis resign from the LBC region, individuals that for varying reasons are choosing to go elsewhere. And we need to lift our internal response to that. How do I feel in each case? What do I know and think about it? Do I still wish those women well? At the LBC we just acknowledge the need to do something for ourselves to mark these departures. We're hoping to do some kind of ritual and perhaps have a discussion about what it means.

Fourth Memorable Quality

Back to the Sutta. The Buddha, talking to these disputatious monks, moves on to living kindness in another area. Here is number four: **"Again, a bhikkhu uses things in common with virtuous companions in the holy life, without making reservations he shares with them any kind, any gain of a kind for the cause of the Dharma that has been obtained in a way that accords with the Dharma, including the contents of his bowl. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect and conduces to unity."** So we can develop our harmony by sharing things. I notice in myself that although I value the practice of the dana very highly I clearly don't value it enough to always remember to actually be generous. But I do find that the progression is in the

right direction if I can catch the resistance to giving. For example when Prajnadevi was approaching ordination she was considering Vajrasattva [one of the transcendental figures in visualization practices] as her yidam. Maybe he was considering her too. I have a Vajrasattva rupa, and she asked if she could borrow it. I was really glad to be able to help my friend with a focus for her meditation and devotion and at some point I began to think about what I might give her for an ordination present. And I immediately thought, well would it be perfect to give her the rupa? This rupa had been a community rupa at Khemadhatu and then had gone to another community with myself and Paula Crimmens. When I moved on to Samayatara (community) and Paula was beginning to move away from the FWBO, I was reluctant to leave it behind, but it turned up again as my ordination present from her. And so I like to think that I'm simply a steward, making it available for pujas and retreats and so on. But as soon as I had my generous thoughts about passing on to Prajnadevi, swift as you like was the second thought, "but I don't want to give it away". But when on Prajnadevi's ordination retreat at Il Convento, which I was supporting, Green Tara came to claim her. (laughter) I confess my relief at being able to hang on to that Vajrasattva. (laughter) Sometimes it's easier than others to share. The main thing is to have the intention. I know it's a truism, by some of the most generous people are those with the least material resources. I'm talking about fellow order members. Like Mallika for example. When she comes to visit I don't think she ever comes empty handed. As most of the time she shares with all the people she's a spiritual friend to, it's no wonder she won't admit to how many of them there are. I think she must have developed the siddhi of self-duplication, how else does she fit them all in? Why does sharing, giving of, pooling resources create love and respect and conduce to unity? If we were receipt to someone else's generosity it can lead to an enjoyable sense of pleasure or delight. That in itself can effect how in our own hearts we maybe feel less need to assert our needs or to protect ourselves, we feel a little loving effect coming our way which may then be a seed for our own generosity. If someone shares any of their possessions with us that's showing that they respect us to look after their property. I think sharing can inspire trust because we've had a concrete experience of another's kind awareness of us and that's confidence in us too. Trust is a delicate plant to grow from seed, but without it there's no oxygen in the friendship. And if we are doing the giving, it exercises the metta-muscle. I think the more we give and share, the more we want to share. It can start off as a development of a positive habit and then becomes the way we think and feel. My partner Peter is quite exemplary in this area. He actively seeks the opportunity to share what he has whether materially or in terms of expertise. He takes the view that if he has enough of something, of whatever kind, it's his duty to share it, including his time. The Dana-car, a car he bought for the use of those without one, for daily loan fees that pays for its running costs, is now into its sixth year. In terms of practice within our Order sangha, the mention in the sutta: "including the contents of his bowl", reminds me that on occasions to do with food, what a lovely opportunity to extend our sphere of concern. I catch myself here, in the dining room, anxious about getting a seat. I'm sure I'm not alone. And what about making sure

someone else has a seat? On other occasions the thought will be, will there be enough of whatever it is that I particularly fancy eating? Maybe someone else is more hungry or more anxious. And if I am able bodied then it's up to me to share that briefly held advantage and do the squeezing through the window or to help with the serving or whatever. Similarly there are all the books and clothes and music that we own. In the sangha I think we do quite well passing things around as well as making gifts to each other. I know this has been discussed before, but I still wonder whether as an order we could do more to practice this quality of pooling our resources and joint ownership. It happens in communities to varying degrees and I'd be interested to know what peoples' experience of this is. And including those of us who don't live in communities. Sharing things does seem to reduce attachment. And that has to conduce to unity because then there is less to hold on to and defend. We all have the things we do: donations, standing orders, giving gifts, or lifts in a car, loaning books, but then my experience of book-loaning in the it's dreadful! You loan a book to a practitioner of the mindfulness of breathing and you never see it again! How can that be? So how could I share more effectively? That is to say, as it says in the Sutta, "without reservations"? In terms of money, I've started carrying around change, like Dhardo Rimpoche, so that I have money easy at hand to give to some of the people who I see begging. The other thing I'm trying to remember to carry in my pocket is a particular question. If someone is having difficulty, whether practical or emotional, I try to remember to bring out my question even if I feel busy or resistant. Is there anything I can do to help? Some people seem so touched, surprised even, to be asked that it is very encouraging to bring it out as often as possible. Because they feel cared for in being asked, even if there is nothing to be done, and even if I'm not actually able to do what's needed, at least we can look at finding someone else who can.

Fifth Memorable Quality

Fifthly, **"Again, a bhikkhu dwells in public and private possessing in common with his companions in the holy life those virtues that are unbroken, untorn, unblotched, unmottled, liberating, commended by the wise, not misapprehended and conducive to concentration."** This quality seems to be about the general practice of ethics and our attending to the training principles of the ten precepts. I've got just one observation to make here. It's nothing new really. It seems to me that the only way that I can purify my behavior and motives is if I notice and acknowledge where my virtues aren't untorn and unblotched. It doesn't help if I give myself a really hard time for some unskillfulness, what the Americans would call a double whammy. We get something wrong breaking a precept and then to make sure we can feel really bad, we beat ourselves up for it. That is not the ethical response; it's not metaphor. In formal confession I think I manage to find my objectivity but there have been occasions when I have done something I feel bad about and then used the remorse to somehow reinforce a view that I'm bad, selfish, negative, substitute your own adjective, person. Happily this rarely happens these days, but it is something I try and watch out for, remorse is fine, self-

flagellation isn't. Confession also builds trust, I think. We meet each other at the level of our samskaras, it's exposing, and can feel vulnerable, but it builds the awareness of each other about our best and our worst. These are our habits where we trip ourselves up. And this is exactly the same place where we show ourselves to have an ethical sensitivity and the desire to transform the raw material of our beings.

Sixth Memorable Quality

Number six, the last of the memorable qualities. **"Again, the bhikkhu dwells in both public and private possessing in common with his companions in the holy life that view that is noble and emancipating and leads one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. This too is a memorable quality that creates love and respect and conduces to unity."** Ultimately then it is the holding of right view, perfect vision, that creates harmony. The Buddha goes on to say to the gathered monks that this quality is the highest and most comprehensive of the six, because this is the view that can liberate us and lead to the destruction of suffering. The monks must have been pretty sobered by the Buddha's ticking them off for their quarreling, but then encouraged by his advice on how to cultivate unity. For me his now mentioning right view, I think "oh oh", now he's going beyond me. But then he asks, "How does this view lead to complete destruction of suffering?" and then he tells them. It seems the only true way to guarantee unity and harmony amongst our friends and brethren is to become stream entrants. It's the only way if we are to experience the third level of consciousness, that coincidence of wills, as Bhante calls it, all the time, spontaneously, then we will need to break the three fetters. And here I go again, feeling inspired but somewhat daunted. Yet the Buddha proceeds to list the seven knowledges or factors of the stream entrant, and once again we're given an eminently practical path to follow.

Seven Knowledges of the Stream Entrant

First Knowledge

So to conclude I'm going to very briefly remind you of these seven knowledges or factors of a stream entrant: he begins by describing a bhikkhu or let's say a Dharmacharini, who has gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, asking themselves, "is there any obsession unabandoned in myself that might so obsess my mind that I cannot know or see things as they actually are? He lists the possible obsessions of the five hindrances or being absorbed in speculation about this or the other world as well as quarreling and disputes. He says, if the person finds no such obsession to prevent knowing and seeing things as they are then their mind is well disposed to awakening to the Truths, that is, the four noble truths. And this is the first knowledge or factor of a stream entrant. So I can ask myself, is there any obsession preventing me from being able to see the truth of dissatisfaction and suffering and how to end it by Dharma practice? That question makes the possibility of stream entry nearer, because I know that I and my friends, we're getting better at catching

ourselves on the hindrances and other unhelpful thinking. And I find the word in the English translation 'obsession' helpful. An obsession is a persistent idea or thought dominating a person's mind. I recognize that. It sounds like a lot of my meditations. But I know that noticing and naming the obsessive thought can weaken it, sometimes immediately. I remember being told as a girl and then again as a young adult that I thought too much. Being in a sangha means I'm amongst like minded people. What else is our reflexive consciousness for if not to think about our thinking? We just choose our focus. A sixteen year old GSCORE student at the LBC this week asked me, "But how can you think about all the limbs of the eight-fold path at the same time?" And he gesticulated to show that he thought his head would explode in the attempt. But it's not really like that in practice, is it? We choose our particular focus in different circumstances and try to keep it simple, one moment at a time, with the teachings as our map, not our rule book.

Second Knowledge

The second knowledge, "not shared by ordinary folk", as the Sutta has it, is when we understand that if we pursue, develop and cultivate this view, we obtain internal serenity. We can personally obtain stillness. If I really saw the three lakshanas to be true all the time, and truly saw the emptiness of all things, then serenity and stillness would undoubtedly follow it because I wouldn't have my usual expectations and attachments.

Third Knowledge

Thirdly, the Buddha said that the third knowledge attained by the stream entrant is "seeing on reflection that no other recluse or Brahman outside the Buddha's dispensation is possessed of such a view". I don't quite understand this one unless it means the recognition that right view or perfect vision is not like any other teaching. I know that when I'm hosting a visit to the London Buddhist Center, especially with older adults, some people are very keen to position Buddhism, which they also find very attractive, as being just like all other religions, all are one. Both Prajnadevi and I have given presentations of Buddhism at so-called Parliaments of Religion, run by the Ramakrishna people. These followers of Vivekananda pride themselves, rightly I think, on their inter-faith approach and the cultivation of universal tolerance, harmony and peace. But the truth is, that however welcoming they are to other faiths and despite professing to study them, each time they have announced that what you unites us all is our belief in God. While 'God' is open to interpretation these days, they meant God. And I've had the strong urge to be dramatic like a jilted lover at the wedding when the minister says, "Does anyone know that he just cause or impediment", and who jumps up to halt the proceedings? Harmony only comes with an attempt to understand the other, whether it's a religion or person, not by telling them what you think.

Fourth Knowledge

The fourth factor of the stream entrant is that they know themselves to have the character of a person who possesses right view, and this is described here as one who, although he or she may commit some kind of offense, confesses and discloses it at once to wise companions in the holy life. They then enter upon restraint in the future. And there's an image given here, which is very vivid. The comparison is made with a young tender infant, who at once draws back when they put their hand or foot on the hot coal, no procrastination, just instantaneous withdrawal from what is unskillful.

Fifth Knowledge

Similarly the fifth factor is another aspect of the character of a person with right view. Here the description is of one who, although active in various matters for his or her companions in the holy life, yet has a keen regard for training in the higher virtue, mind or wisdom. And this keen regard is compared to a cow who, while grazing, always watches her calf. Do I have that keen regard? Do I always look for the Dharma in any situation?

Sixth Knowledge

With the sixth factor the reflection is, what is the strength of the the person who possesses right view?

The Buddha says this is when the person heeds, gives attention to and engages with the Dharma when they hear it taught, with all their mind. They hear the Dharma with, it says, eager ears. How eager are our ears? Generally I think I do have eager ears when I'm with the teaching of the Dharma, or listening to a talk or reading or in study. But sometimes I'm resistant to putting myself in earshot. For example I rarely go to the whole of any festival at the LBC and I'm not the only one. We all have our reasons, mostly pretty good ones, but I think I've somehow missed the opportunity to listen with eager ears that I wouldn't have dreamed off when I first came across the Dharma.

Seventh Knowledge

And finally the seventh factor of the stream entrant is when we gain inspiration when the Dharma is being taught, gain inspiration in the meaning and gain gladness concerned with the Dharma. And it seems the Buddha's teaching on this occasion had the desired result. The Sutta ends, "This is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words."

The occasion for the Kosombian Sutta was a schism in the brotherhood of monks which began from a very small incident and two interpretations of what was the right way. There have been a few tricky moments in our order, for example the events in India a few years ago when the order was becoming divided. It's our individual and collective responsibility to clarify any misunderstandings and rectify any mistakes we make that may lead to disharmony. I know these situations can creep up on us, which is why we need to catch things early. And what of old hurts and resentments between us? They're harder to work with when attitudes have hardened and especially if one party has

removed themselves from possible places to communicate, like chapters. But as I said at the beginning of the talk, let's not forget the uncertainty of death. It only takes one person to take a step and both are already closer. To finish, there was another television program I watched this week. You'll probably be thinking that LBC dharmacharinis watch a lot of television, and film; it's true. The program was called "Five Miles High", and it was about the jet stream, that high, fast river of air that circles the globe in both hemispheres.

I didn't know that pilots flying east across the Atlantic from the States make use of it by flying in that stream so that they can cut maybe an hour's flying time as well as saving on fuel. I'm not trying to make a complete analogy here but I was very struck by the image of this rushing river of wind way up in the sky, that's a powerful force affecting weather around the globe and that moves position, so that you have to find it if you want to enter it to flow. I'd been writing this talk that day and it made me think of the stream of sangha that we can enter if we're willing to step into that potentially accelerating flow. And the jet streams, created by the meeting of cold air from the poles meeting warm air from the Equator regions, just like the Bodhicitta, something much more powerful emerging after the apparent conflict and tension. That hot and cold air is affected by how we treat the planet; likewise the flow of sangha is affected by how we are with our hot and cold experiences, our love or hate. I hope that between us, knowing ourselves, hot or cold, we can create a jet stream of friendliness that carries us even beyond the gravitational pull. Thank you. (applause)