

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BASED ON THE NEW ZEALAND SERIES OF LECTURES

(The Ideal of Human Enlightenment,
What Meditation Really Is,
The Meaning of Spiritual Community)

Place: Probably at Broomhouse Farm [as jet fighter planes fly overhead - and obscure the speakers' voices - at very regular intervals. Broomhouse farm is/was very close to the runway of an air force base.]

Date: 25-7 July 1975

Those Present: Not noted at the time - those recognized by the transcriber (who was not involved in the FWBO in 1975) are the following:

The Venerable Sangharakshita, Vangisa, Lokamitra, Manjuvajra, Marichi, Dhammadinna, Sagaramati, Siddhiratna

Sangharakshita: Well has anybody any points?

_____: I had one. Are you really saying some teachers say duality is transcendent? () This was talking about the Nature of Enlightenment.

S: Yes. The Theravada, in fact the Hinayana schools generally, do not use that sort of language, but the Mahayana does.

_____: () duality?

S: Well one can say that the Theravada point of view is, as it were, non philosophical, non-metaphysical. They speak of Enlightenment in more, as it were, psychological terms - a state of peace, state of happiness. Also of course a state of wisdom and knowledge, but they don't define the contents of that wisdom and knowledge. The Mahayana does that. At least it is a bit more adventurous in that [2] respect, and does try to bring out more fully in conceptual terms, just what that knowledge is knowledge of, and very often this point is made, that in Enlightenment there is no distinction of subject and object. In other words subject and object are transcended. The Theravada never actually says that in general. So therefore I say that some teachers do say this. One might say it's characteristic of the Theravada that it's much more philosophically reticent than the Mahayana. [Pause]

_____: Bearing in mind the Dharma as a raft, which I take to mean virtually that the Dharma has to be taught to people in terms of their current conceptions, or misconceptions, why is Buddhism so definitely non-theistic? Do you see what I mean?

S: Well because there is such a thing as right view and there is such a thing as wrong view. The fact that you speak to people in terms that they understand doesn't mean that you necessarily accept those terms, and you can use their terms by a way of negation. When we

say that Buddhism is non-theistic we're speaking the language of theism. For instance to a Buddhist who's been brought up say in Thailand, to call Buddhism a non-theistic religion wouldn't mean anything at all. You'd have to explain first what theism was. Just as it doesn't make much sense to us to speak in terms of Anatmavada, because the sort of view of Atma that the Buddha was negating we don't have any longer. So Anatmavada isn't very meaningful to us. So in the same way non-theism isn't very meaningful to the Thai because he's got no concept of theism. He'll say 'Well the Buddha is the Buddha. What's the need to go in this roundabout way and speak of a non-theistic religion. The Buddha not being god and not being man. Of course he isn't, he's the Buddha!' They know that right from the beginning.

So this language of non-theism, describing Buddhism as a non-theistic religion, is for the benefit of the theist or the ex-theist.

_____: Occasionally you come across passages where the Buddha speaks in a sort of affirmative way about Brahman or Indra. In fact that Brahma Viharas suggest a positive aspect of (theory?)

S: No, Brahma Vihara - well Brahma in Brahma Vihara means noble, exalted. Brahma is from a root meaning 'great' or 'to grow' or 'to swell', so the Brahma Viharas are the great or the lofty or the noble or the sublime, states of mind. You do get a figure - Brahma, not Brahman, but Brahma, appearing in the Buddhist scriptures along with Indra and Yakkas and so on, but it's always made clear that these beings are, as it were, within the Wheel of Life. These are conditioned beings. They are like human beings but much more powerful, of longer life, and they belong to higher realms of existence, but they are not transcendental. They've nothing to do with Nirvana, nothing to do with Enlightenment. They're all part of the Wheel. There's no reference in the Pali texts to Brahman in the abstract or in the neutral in the Upanishads.

And of course in the Upanishads, Brahman is impersonal, not personal.

_____: If you believe in rebirth and the Bodhisattva is reborn in a non-Buddhist country, this is just speculation, say they're reborn in medieval Europe in a very strictly Christian set up, how would that person go about communicating the Dharma? Wouldn't he have to work within a theistic set up to a certain extent.

S: Well if he was, let's assume, we don't know whether it ever would happen, the Bodhisattva might not be so foolish to do [Laughter] ... He might consider that the obstacles to communication were insuperable, but supposing he did - if you speculate well I can only speculate too [Laughter] and let's suppose [3] that he did, one can only assume he would be using the language of Christianity against the grain. In a sense he wouldn't be using it very honestly, because as a Bodhisattva he wouldn't be believing in it, so he'd be constantly trying to use the Christian language in a non-Christian sort of way.

_____: Which is in fact what the mystics often do.

_____: Yes, but I'm thinking...

S: Some did. Some seemed quite content to use the Christian language in a Christian sort of way, but we must remember that the middle ages intellectually and spiritually were not as homogeneous as we sometimes think. There were all sorts of very strange movements indeed.

For instance there were in (obscured by passing jet plane!)... though they used quite a lot of Christian language, they used it very much in their own way, and the church usually sat on them rather heavily as quickly as possible and sometimes even suppressed them by force (obscured by passing jet plane!)...

_____: ... real insight and you're trying to communicate that but can only use some of the terms that were available at the time or would they be ...

S: It does seem like that. One can't generalize. It does seem as though some of them were trying to communicate something which was not really Christian. In a sense one finds that in Blake also, to take a much more recent example. Blake speaks in terms in God and Jesus but it's immediately clear that his God and his Jesus are quite different, and he was conscious of that. He said, "The vision of Christ that thou dost see is my vision's greatest enemy". He is very conscious of the difference. But what led you to speculate in this way?

_____: I've just been reading (obscured by passing jet plane!)...

S: ... as it were natural idea for man and the artificial idea for man and the fact that sometimes you feel, reading about these medieval thinkers and mystics, that they were sort of resisting the imposition of what was to them an artificial idea, and were trying to assert an idea which was natural or at least more natural for them.

Vangisa: A digression to I think another interesting point, and that was the whole artificial annexation of orthodox Christianity on top of a different movement altogether which had been there from the start. In other words Evans-Wentz talks about the esoteric form of Christianity which was completely suppressed at an early stage by the followers of an exoteric form.

S: I'm not quite happy about that sort of language because...

Vangisa: This isn't his language.

S: Yes. It wasn't so much esoteric as well, by the time it was suppressed, minority. They tried to be exoteric, they weren't allowed to be so they became esoteric because they were being persecuted and therefore had to keep their teachings relatively hidden. But you could say that in the beginning - not in the very beginning, we don't know anything about that really - but in the very early ages of the church, Christianity itself, as if were officially, was presented as an esoteric teaching. For instance, in the very early days the Catechumens were not permitted to be present at the celebration of what afterwards became the mass. They had to leave at that point, and only those who had been initiated and had formally accepted the scriptures via adult baptism could stay on for the mass. Others could not even witness it. They had literally to leave and there were door keepers appointed to see that no Catechumens stayed, that [4] they all were ushered out and the door firmly closed before the celebration of the mass began. But then as more and more people came in membership became more and more nominal and theology became more and more crude, and the more subtle spiritual teachings became less and less popular. In the end they were virtually outlawed by the official triumphant church which had in the meantime become the state religion. That was broadly the picture.

But another point is that Christianity during the Middle Ages, certainly the early Middle

Ages, was a much more fluid thing than it afterwards became and there was quite a lot of doctrine that had not yet been formally defined and so things which became heretical say after the Council of Trent were not heretical then, or things which afterwards became fixed were not fixed then. For instance things like the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary - not the Virgin Birth but the immaculate conception of Mary herself - this was a matter of opinion all through the Middle Ages. Some saints and doctors believed it, others didn't, but it was fixed only much later on.

So there's quite a bit that was tolerated during the Middle Ages until at least the Fourteenth Century when the inquisition was started. It was certainly not tolerated later on. People like Joachim of Flora(?) were never excommunicated though the speculations were almost certainly heretical. But what eventually triumphed was doctrinal Christianity in its narrowest and most exclusive form. That became the norm unfortunately, and it's only in very recent days, only within the last twenty or thirty years that there's been any let up. A lot has happened during the last twenty or thirty years.

_____: So it's been an artificial ideal imposed for a long time would you say? Doesn't Christianity arise from a natural ideal?

S: Not in the Buddhist sense.

_____: So if the natural ideal is something which is the potential in man which one is trying to realize, then it seems strange that for so long such a large part of the world hasn't been able to function at all.

S: I think it is partly due to the historical situation - the collapse of the Roman Empire, invasion of the Barbarians, need to conserve for many centuries rather than to create, and the nature of Christianity itself as a theistic religion, and I think one can never get round this, that it is a theistic religion.

_____: So there's always likely to be conflict within that as people naturally want to have a natural ideal, if you see what I mean.

S: It does seem that in the very early ages there was some possibility of there being a quite reasonable, as it were, form of Christianity, but that just never developed. It was suppressed and a quite different form of Christianity, which was equally Christianity, succeeded in triumphing.

_____: What about the idea of the imitation of Christ? Was that an outlet for the ideal?

S: No, this idea of imitation of Christ is rather different, and pertains as much to externals as to real spiritual qualities, and especially identification with Christ and his sufferings, which can sometimes become a bit unhealthy almost.

One can't help feeling when reading the history of Christianity, reading the history of Europe, that Christianity confused the issue [5] for many, many centuries, and then there was this attitude towards indigenous beliefs, customs, traditions, especially in Northern Europe, and the local culture was completely suppressed.

Vangisa: What was the psychological basis (jet plane obscures words!) of the need for something like Christianity. Quite clearly it's existence ... and this need doesn't seem to be have any sound psychological basis...

S: I think one has to recognize that in the Dark Ages, Christianity did perform a very important cultural function. At the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire it was only the bishops, it was only the church, that had any authority, and that were in the position to enforce some sort of law and order, to give some sort of security, and they also carried on the tradition of learning, and for centuries the clergy were the learned class. So I think there's this very important cultural function of the church which shouldn't be underestimated.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire there were vast tracts of Europe which became depopulated and there was virtual anarchy, and the church was the one strong institution, and it certainly, in many ways, upheld a quite noble ideal. The bishops were constantly trying to stop local wars, and to enforce what they called 'the peace of God' and they gradually managed to get all these different feudal chiefs to agree at least first of all not to fight on Sundays, then not to fight on holy days and then not to fight after such and such time of day. Yes, this was a long process, and it was the church mainly that did put a stop to this constant local warfare, and the monasteries played a very important part in colonizing the fresh areas and developing agriculture and so on. So there was a very important cultural function of the church.

Vangisa: There was a very interesting point you mentioned when you were talking about monasteries. It would seem that certainly for a long period, a person who wished to try to lead a spiritual life had to get away, completely get away, from the social environment completely conditioned by the church as an institution into a different kind of environment. A different aspect of the Christian church as an institution, the monastery as opposed to the town whatever it might be. In other words there had to be a way out of normal Christian society into something else. In normal Christian society you weren't leading a spiritual life if you wanted to.

S: No, we must be very careful here because the church didn't demand you should lead a spiritual life in the Buddhist sense. If you were a Christian layman and if you attended church, if you confessed and if you participated in the sacrament, then that was sufficient. You were assured of heaven. That was enough. No, I think that the main difficulty from the point of view of Christianity was a sort of devaluation of man. Not speaking of man as something which was admittedly imperfect but could develop, but speaking of man as something very badly spoiled by sin, and virtually irredeemable except by the sacrificial death of Christ. I think this was the way in which Christianity mainly imposed a, not exactly artificial ideal - you could hardly call it an ideal - but made you devalue yourself, or did devalue and made you participate or accept that devaluation, and then sort of exacerbated this to a point where you feel really desperate and need someone to redeem you from this terrible state of sin, into which the church had got you, as it were. And this is what I found the Christian missionaries in India insisting most on, and they used to complain about the Indians, especially the Nepalese - 'they had no sense of sin'. This was their great point. 'These people have got no sense of sin.' They used to say that you are hardly human unless you had a sense of sin.

So being convinced that you are a sinner is quite a different thing [6] from just seeing, quite objectively, that you are a weak and imperfect and faulty person who is in need of a great deal

of development. It's a quite different thing. So it's as though Christianity didn't so much give man an ideal - that is to say give man as he is an ideal, but it sort of depressed him first and then offered an ideal, as it were, which was a way out of the state that they put him into themselves to begin with. It was much more like that. It's like putting someone in prison and then presenting yourself as that person's deliverer from prison. That isn't exactly an ideal for that person, to be delivered from prison, because he shouldn't have been there in the first place anyway. No doubt Christianity, to be fair, does say that man was created perfect by god and then fell, but the emphasis was always on the fallen state and that was the present state, that man as he is now is a fallen creature, he's a sinner and cannot do anything for himself and he has to be redeemed. So in this way, one can say, the ideal which Christianity offered was not so much an artificial one but a distorted one. Whereas Buddhism says well yes, man is blind, man is ignorant, man is full of craving, he is selfish, but he can transform himself - the seeds of goodness are there. He's not completely evil by any means.

So the ideal consists in urging man to live up to what is best in himself and to develop what is best in himself, and the Christians don't like this sort of approach. I remember when I was in Kalimpong I gave a lecture once to a local Bengali cultural institute. It must have been in 1950, and some Seventh Day Adventist missionaries attended - they were Americans and they wanted to know what I had to say, I knew one or two of them - so they listened very carefully and I was speaking about Buddhism, about Buddhahood and Buddhist life in my usual way - It's not changed I'm afraid in twenty five years! [Laughter] I heard them discussing my lecture afterwards and I heard them describing it as 'naturalism'. That's the term which they used. In other words there was nothing supernatural. There was no need for redemption from sin or anything like that. That man by his own human efforts can improve himself and realize the truth - this is naturalism, according to them, as against supernaturalism. So they clearly felt that when they described my lecture as naturalism well that was that, they'd classified it quite neatly and obviously there wasn't anything in it worthwhile from their point of view.

_____: They'd more or less made it humanistic.

S: Yes, right, yes. Though of course Buddhism isn't humanism in the western humanistic sense.

Lokamitra: Does this come from Christ's teachings himself or a feeling the need to spread the religion?

S: Well one must say that, in the gospels themselves, the emphasis of Christ does not seem to be on man as a sinner. This seems to have come much more with Paul, who is said to be responsible for many things. But, as far as one can make out, and there aren't very many sayings of Christ - only about three hundred in all - he did not emphasize the fact that man was a sinner, certainly not in the later Christian man.

Vangisa: Christianity as we now know it has very little to do with the (unclear) teachings of Christ anyway.

S: But again one mustn't think in terms of well, the teaching of Christ was all right and subsequently it became something other because the seeds are there, even things that might lead to intolerance. The seeds are there. Theism is there. But at the same time it's only fair to say that that emphasis on the sinfulness of man that you find in Christianity later, especially

since the time of [7] St. Augustine, and which reappears in its strongest possible form in Calvinism, was not there in the case of Christ's own teaching as recorded in the gospels. At best it's a minor chord, certainly not a major one.

Something that occurred to me listening to the talk was this. I can't answer it myself. I'm wondering if anybody has anything to say on it. To what extent can one nowadays speak to people, that is ordinary people, in terms of ideals? Do people respond to this sort of language? What sort of effect does this sort of language have on them?

Manjuvajra: Well I've heard people say well it's only an ideal. If you talk about an ideal, they'll say 'oh, it's only an ideal, why don't you look at reality?'

S: Well this is one of the definitions I gave. This is one of the ways in which I said people use this term.

_____: An unattainable.

S: Yes, something desirable but unattainable.

Lokamitra: I found it quite useful in that some people I've had contact with are working to try and change conditions for the better, so they're working for an ideal, and then you can say well you're working towards something outside. It depends on external conditions. So I found it quite useful to use the term 'ideal', and transfer it from outside to inside.

Dhammadinna: It probably works with people who have some ideals that they see as tangible and as attainable.

S: But it seems as though the majority of people no longer think in terms of ideals.

_____: It seems to scale down now. Somebody said the other day they didn't want to be (unclear)... our particular range.

S: Well that's fair enough, but then the question is what is one's range? How far does one's range extend? It seems to me that the fact that people don't use generally this language of the ideal, or speak in terms of ideals, suggests a certain loss of positivity.

_____: Also cynicism.

S: Cynicism. And also if they see that other people have ideals they will only too often try to undermine those or dismiss them.

_____: Often if you have ideals you're told you're naive as well.

_____: I think myself this is a manifestation that the average population is developing, because to me an ideal is a raft for crossing quite a narrow stretch of water. It's a concept and I think what we're after is to get beyond that. Do you see what I mean?

S: But every term that one uses is a concept.

_____: Yes, but what we're saying all the time is it's not really like this, we're just using words to help us on our way.

S: it's not that words have no congruence at all with reality, surely. There is an ideal so far as we're concerned, there is such a thing as an ideal. It's not just words. There is a higher state which we aspire to and that higher state is an ideal or the ideal for us. And people's [8] scepticism of our ideals is, at bottom, scepticism about any attainable higher state.

_____: Perhaps there are two classes of scepticism. Educated and not educated.

S: I don't think they are basically different. Probably the educated is just more articulate and more sophisticated. I think at bottom they'd be the same.

Manjuvajra: One experience I had with ideals makes me sort of frightened of them or frightened of expressing them, and that is I feel they are sometimes used a weapon against you. If you say that you're trying to follow a certain ideal, then people will try and find as many different ways that you don't come up to that.

S: Then you must retaliate and say, 'well look, I know that I'm imperfect, I know that I'm not living up to my ideal but I'm trying, it is an ideal, it is not the reality of me at present. So why don't you help me? Why this sort of sneering, sceptical attitude? Why do you try and undermine me?' Just turn round and let them have it! [Laughter] It's very bad on their part, very negative. 'At least I've got an ideal and I'm working towards it, even if I fail frequently. You don't seem to have even that!' [Laughter]

Vangisa: Negativity in our society is so completely all pervading. The idea of anything else, the very idea of anything else, the concept of anything else, is an ideal in itself and is equally difficult to communicate. You could say in a sense that for the majority of our contemporaries, the ideal of - well what's the straight opposite of negativity - positivity, is impossible to communicate.

S: Except by being positive.

Vangisa: By being that, but even so, except for the few people who actually go out of their way to come to us, come along and meditate, come along to work out their hang-ups and so on, except for them and a small amount of other people like them it just seems to be a very complete overwhelming cloud and it's just become natural. Anything else seems by contrast not only impossible and unattainable but just unnatural to their way of thinking.

_____: I don't agree with that.

Vangisa: You don't.

Sagaramati: Could it be that people have too many ideals when they're younger and then when they grow up, they don't achieve ... only a small...

S: There is the aspect of the artificial ideal, which is mummy and daddy's ideal, which is imposed upon them. But still I think a sensible adult, even a sensible teenager will be able to see through this and say that the fact that your parents have had, as it were, a false ideal for

you doesn't mean that you shouldn't have a genuine ideal for yourself.

_____: We were saying in the last seminar that we thought that young people, children did have a sort of idealism that somehow or other got lost or squashed or there was no channel for.

Marichi: With cynics you could have it too, because you're so busy squashing it hard that's why it's almost the more they feel it the more they (unclear)

_____: See the possibility I suppose or rather feel the impossibility that one is going to change anything. I think that a lot [9] of young people anyway feel that all these organizations that are so unchangeable, so they then get cynical about any kind of ideals or changing things for the better.

Lokamitra: Should we be looking towards social change then? Should that come into our view?

_____: I wasn't thinking that we should but this...

Manjuvajra: But the point is the only way, it seems to me that you can escape that kind of depression and that kind of pessimism is by turning around to yourself and saying well all right I won't try and change society. So therefore those organizations can carry on and they can do what they like. That's not my adversary.

_____: But what seems to happen is that the ideals are looked at as something impossible so they're no longer ideals to go for but they become sort of specific goals which are attainable, but it's a bit different from an ideal. The goal perhaps of, what, feeding the starving or something, where a whole lot of energy and idealism goes into it, rather than the ideal of...

_____: So they always use external goals.

_____: You get traces of this, don't you, in stories and I think people do always feel that there's something in a fairy story or...

S: I think the scepticism about ideals in general in many cases among young people stems from their feeling that the quite simple ideals which they have of a social or even political nature are up against insuperable obstacles. That there's no possibility of them ever being realized and then they become sceptical about any form of ideal, including that of one's own personal development.

_____: There does seem to be a trend in some circles anyway towards the ideal of realizing human potential in growth groups and... Whether one agrees with their methods or not that tendency is arising. There are a lot of people who were involved in social change and politics have moved to those sort of things quite recently.

S: I think it's also true that a lot more can be done than people think, and that very often those who say well we couldn't succeed, we couldn't change things, went about it in a wrong headed sort of way, and they wanted very often quick results, and maybe they were in it more for sort of kicks almost sometimes. But you do hear from time to time of organizations who have

worked quietly and who have succeeded in certain directions, and in that sense have realized their ideals.

_____: It seems that the feeling that people can be effective has to come first, and then they begin to find out and get together and look for means.

S: No doubt things are rather difficult inasmuch as society is complex and you can come up against great obstacles.

_____: Quite small things I found can change a group of people who feel helpless in a situation, to realizing that if they're clear about what it is they want to do or change, it's amazing what will happen.

S: Very often I think perhaps young idealists aren't really clear as to what they want to do or what their ideal is. They've maybe got a vague feeling they'd like to do something, they'd like it to improve but they're not quite sure really what. Or sometimes there's a lot of impatience with the way things are. Instead of trying to study and [10] understand the way things are and then correct or get round or circumvent, but they just get irritated and lose their temper and do things in a foolish way sometimes because of it.

But apart from this it does seem that 'idealism' is, not exactly a dirty word but certainly a word that people don't much use nowadays. So this is why I was just wondering to what extent one could speak in terms of an ideal at all, or whether perhaps one hasn't to clear the ground first by saying, 'oh yes we must have ideals, human beings must have ideals. You can hardly be human without them.' So do this preliminary work before you start talking about an ideal of or for human life, i.e. Buddhism itself.

_____: How did you find talking about (these things?) in New Zealand?

S: I think more sympathetically, yes.

_____: Because they're less sophisticated...

S: Yes, less sophisticated. People's level there is quite worldly in a way, but the things that they normally want are fulfilled. Most people want, in New Zealand say, they want to get married, they want to have children, they want a house of their own, they want a job that is not too demanding, they want spare time, they want a bit of money to spend, they want plenty of time in the sunshine, they want to go surfing, and they get it, they have it. So there isn't that sort of sourness. So when you point out in a reasonable sort of way well there is something higher than that too, something that goes further, they listen in a quite reasonable sort of way. You can see they are considering it. It's as though their existing goals are more or less achieved, all right, then let's consider the possibility of some other goal. That's the sort of feeling you get there. Not highly idealistic at all, but certainly not frustrated people. People who are leading a reasonably satisfying human life and aren't too disgruntled about it, maybe not disgruntled at all, but who are quite interested in hearing about other possibilities too. That's the impression I got there.

_____: That almost seems to be saying that one needs to satisfy certain things first.

S: It's not so much that. It's as though people there have got into the way of thinking that ideals, even in their case quite modest ones, are attainable. You can do what you want to do if you want to do it. There's not that feeling that society's against you, they are against you, the authorities are against you. You don't feel that in New Zealand in the way that you feel it in England. You don't feel so stifled or so suffocated. You do feel that your life is much more in your own hands. Even though most people do follow a fairly standard pattern, but they don't feel it as something they have to do even if they don't want to. Everything is much more relaxed. So though they aren't at all idealistic, you may say, they are not closed to the possibility of the ideal, or an ideal. That is just my own general impression from contact with a fairly limited segment of the population. This sort of pseudo sophisticated cynicism about ideals - that I didn't find there at all, even among some educated people who were coming along.

_____: So you would have presented this lecture differently in this country?

S: I don't know. Maybe you would have had to justify that approach much more.

Marichi: I was still waiting for you to say something like Buddhism [11] proves that one can be enlightened, but instead you just said one must have faith in this ideal.

S: I did find generally in New Zealand that you didn't have to sort of prove your points too much. People were quite prepared to consider it, the possibility. They didn't call for hard and fast proof or anything like that. They are quite prepared to consider a different point of view and to look at it, as it were, on its own merits. In other words they were reasonably open minded, not just polite. But in very broad terms it seems as though what is very much lacking, or one of the things that is very much lacking in this country is an ideal, a sort of active ideal or dynamic ideal in the sense of a galvanizing factor. Our whole society seems very lethargic - this is the impression you get reading the papers or listening to the news on the radio. There's nothing that people are working for or working towards, either individually or collectively; except quite negative things like beating inflation. No one seems over interested even in that!

Vangisa: What about our friends with the planes down the road?

S: Hmm.

Vangisa: How would you extend to the idea of an ideal. Going out doing something...

S: You mean the pilots? I mean presumably they had boyish ambitions, even boyish ideals of flying and flight perhaps means something.

Vangisa: Well what would be the psychological basis for that, the necessity of the elaborate defence mechanisms that everybody's paying for is having wonderful effects on the American economy(?)

_____: Probably highly idealized too.

S: Idealized. Well first of all the military have got a big vested interest. Unless you've got a big army you can't have more than a certain number of generals and field marshals and all the

rest of it, so they're interested to keep the whole thing going. Partly that, and it's big business and people make quite a lot of money out of it all. It seems virtually everybody's interested in keeping it all going.

Vangisa: So where would you say that the ideal comes in? Say anti communism or something like that.

S: You could put it in those terms, or positively fighting for democracy. But I don't think people even do put it in those terms. Not any more. They don't bother. They carry it all on as though they don't really in a sense believe in it, not in a relatively positive way.

_____: It's a thing that sort of carries itself on. The recruiting drives, come and join this life of adventure and good money and all the rest of it and you get in, then you go a bit higher and you've got to do the same thing to get more people in.

S: By the time you get higher you are drawing a good salary. It's a pretty good life, but you've got to have a lot of people underneath you to sustain all that so of course you perpetuate the system.

Lokamitra: There are a lot of people I think who do fit this category of being very dry and won't respond but I think a great number of them will, and a lot of them are very cynical about personal ideals or spiritual ideals, but a lot of those people are working very much for ideals outside themselves, like raising education, things like this, and I think this is quite a good working basis for us. A lot of them might [12] be very frustrated with ideals but they will still be working for something.

Marichi: There's also this jump into the spiritual.

_____: A lot of people like that are merely occupying their time to hide themselves from themselves.

Lokamitra: I think there's a genuine - looking round at people I know - there's a genuine desire to evolve, but they can only see evolvment in terms of as a whole, society as a whole. They can't understand personal evolvment or evolution.

S: Well they can understand improvement.

Lokamitra: Yes. So one can relate from one level to another. One can...

S: Or at least one use one level as an analogy for another.

I think it is quite important that we do, as it were, present an impression of an ideal, and that we are working for an ideal, and also, even if people are a bit disgruntled or sceptical about ideals, if they see that we believe in certain ideals and are enthusiastic and that we're positive and happy, that will certainly make them think.

Lokamitra: This has certainly been the case, for example, in Bethnal Green. A lot of people have seen Subhuti, a couple have seen me, and they're all very idealistic people, but working outside for the improvement of society.

_____: Who are you talking about? Local politicians?

Lokamitra: And community workers.

Marichi: Even in community work now it's changing to starting with working on yourself first.

Lokamitra: I think gradually there is this realization that it has to come back to oneself.

S: Not that there should be no improvement in external conditions. There certainly should be. A lot of people will need that even to be able to grow themselves to any extent. So the two have to go hand in hand. But it's as though the work on one's self and the development of oneself is really crucial.

_____: So you get the (unclear) wrapped with the other, as it were.

S: Right, yes, yes, because that gives you your *raison d'être* for wanting to improve external things, so that you as an individual can grow, that all individuals who live under those conditions can grow and can develop.

Dhammadinna: I think it's an important point that you really feel that external conditions need to change also. That that's seen by other people.

S: Right, yes.

Dhammadinna: Otherwise it seems to be a very isolated sort of thing, whereas we do actually feel that and I think we should communicate that.

S: This is a point that I raised when I met Nagabodhi's friend, that [13] Christian priest. He asked me why do people do social work, and I said that I was all in favour of social work, but that it should be engaged in from a definite spiritual motivation and basis, and I said in the case of our own movement, we felt that we weren't yet spiritually strong enough to be able to go into things like social work, but that we certainly hoped that we would be able, we'd have resources - human and otherwise - to do this someday, but that we felt it was most important to have a strong spiritual basis, before venturing into these fields, and he was quite satisfied with that.

_____: In a sense on a small scale we're changing the externals, i.e. we choose to live in a different way and provide centres where people can experience in a different way, retreat situations, and they are a movement in that direction. [Pause]

S: I think it's very important to communicate a sense of idealism.

_____: Going back to the point about people knocking your ideals, there are similar parallels say in the world. Someone's a teacher or a social worker and so on. They're not achieving their end all at once. They make mistakes and come up against obstacles and so on. It's the same working on oneself. You can't get there in one jump. People often say things like 'oh Buddhists aren't supposed to do that', because they think you're supposed to be enlightened already.

S: The answer to that is, 'Well I'm a Buddhist, I'm not a Buddha. Buddhas aren't supposed to do that and they don't! But Buddhists are not Buddhas. We're only trying to be.' Even the Buddha made mistakes in his earlier days. He said so quite clearly. So what to speak of other people. It's not that we want to make mistakes or that we're proud of them, but we're certainly not going to let other people knock the ideal just because, on the odd occasion, we're not able to live up to it. It's a really negative sort of attitude, isn't it. It's almost based on sort of real hatred for other people.

_____: I haven't come across that. Is it a particular kind of outlook or ...

Marichi: I get it from someone at work who says she was a Buddhist in a previous life. She's not interested in religion!

S: Well there's only danger of your ideal being knocked in that way, one, if people know you have an ideal. If they don't even know that you have an ideal well they're not likely to knock you for any backsliding; and also that they know you also personally and have got to know some of your personal weaknesses, or have observed you on certain occasions of personal weakness. [Pause]

Some people are rather cautious and if they frame their ideal at all, they frame it in such a way that they can hardly be faulted for not living up to it! If you really nail your colours to the mast, well you're much more easily faulted, but never mind. If you say, 'well my ideal is to love all equally, to know the truth and to be a manifestation of boundless energy' [Laughter] well of course, if you sit down for five minutes they'll sort of find fault with you for not manifesting boundless energy. Or if you don't give them your last fiver. But that is your ideal. They say well 'my ideal just to help people a little bit when I can, if it isn't too inconvenient', well you can hardly be faulted. [Laughter] But you must run that risk. Say, 'yes, that is my ideal, it is a high one. I know I'm not living up to it very well but I am trying, and I'd much rather fail repeatedly than not have an ideal at all'.

_____: Doesn't failing repeatedly lead to depression? Wouldn't [14] it be better to set a low ideal that you can reasonably achieve [Laughter] ...

S: No. I say just no. [Laughter] ... ultimate ideal. When you climb a flight of steps well the ideal is you get to the top, but you know that there are steps on the stairway. You're not going to just jump in one great leap. So you set a high ideal, sure, but you know it's a step by step progression.

_____: Isn't this accepted about any ideal? If you've got an ideal then I would have thought - my understanding of it anyway is - that you're not there. Otherwise you wouldn't have an ideal anyway.

S: Right yes. There's no point in getting depressed because you don't realize it all at once. It's almost like saying well 'I'm not going to think in terms of going all the way up the stairs, I'll just think in terms of putting my foot on the first step', but the first step is the first step of a flight of stairs, that's the whole point about it. It just doesn't end there.

_____: Do the people who object that you haven't lived up to your ideals, are they just confused about what an ideal is? They assume that if you have an ideal you ought to be it.

Dhammadinna: It's not always people outside the movement. Sometimes it's people in the movement who say, well 'Order members aren't supposed to do that!'

S: Well if they don't think in terms of an ideal, they are thinking in terms of something you have been told by someone you mustn't do. But it isn't that at all. They confuse having an ideal with accepting a rule or a prohibition or something of that kind.

_____: It again seems to come back to western conditionings. Right back where we started from.

_____: With the woman at work it's almost like she doesn't want anybody telling her what to do. That sort of thing. Not what I am, but it's just religion, religion tells me what to do.

S: In other words it's an artificial ideal. So this is point perhaps that we have to get across, that it's natural ideal that we are concerned with.

_____: Coming back again to this area of if you fail, in the terms of an artificial ideal, it's a sin, rather than if you fail well OK, it doesn't really matter, you'll try again.

S: You'll try again, yes.

_____: So there's a whole different perspective on the situation.

S: Yes.

Vangisa: It's not really a question of failing. The fact that you're on the first step and you actually have to go through a certain process to get on to the second step, doesn't mean that you've failed to get on to the tenth step.

S: Right yes, yes. When you say, that that is my ideal, it doesn't mean that there's just one step between you and it. There's a whole series of intermediate steps.

_____: Which may involve missing certain marks. If you say I won't swear today or something you set yourself a lower ideal in [15] order to get to a higher one, you might not make that ideal.

S: Perhaps it's also good to dwell, not linguistically but objectively on what you are actually doing rather than thinking in terms of failure and getting depressed. Not that oh I've got such a high ideal, I'm not realizing it, not getting up there. This is almost more the Christian approach. 'Yes, that's the higher ideal, that's my ultimate aim, and this is what I'm doing here and now in that direction. I am making some progress - admittedly I do fail sometimes but on the whole I am gradually moving ahead, I'm gradually ascending.

Manjuvajra: Sometimes you have the attitude that...

[End of side one side two]

... and I'll be a bit like a moth gradually getting nearer and nearer towards it.

S: You don't have to be consciously thinking about it too much or too often. It's just something you know is there.

Marichi: Well it certainly colours your attitude.

S: But you don't have to be consciously measuring yourself against it all the time, because of course you'll feel discouraged, because of course you're falling far short, but just sort of keep it at the back of your mind, or in the rosy distance, and just concern yourself with the steps which, here and now, lead you in that direction.

Vangisa: I feel there's a very cheerful form of comparison. If it's depressing to compare how far you've still got to go, it can be quite cheerful to look back the other way!

S: Yes. Where one was was three, four, five, ten, years ago. 'I've come quite a way since then' you can perhaps reflect. Or at least a measurable distance. At least I'm not in the bog where I used to be, not in that slough of despond or that marsh of micchaditthi or whatever it was. So if one thinks in this sort of way well one will have a sort of happy, joyful attitude. Well here we are, we've got a wonderful idea and we're working towards it and we're making some progress and other people that we come into contact with, they are affected. They become sparked off, they begin to see the ideal. They make some progress too. We're all sort of happily and joyfully growing together, and this is the sort of spirit that one should be spreading around.

_____: In the countries where they don't have this sense of sin, I was wondering if the way they educate their young is less geared to passing so many stages to something else. Whether there's this kind of feeling built in right from when our children are first getting their teeth or something, whether they achieve certain things at the right age...

S: I can speak mostly for the Indians. They don't seem to bother about the exact time that the child speaks. Very often mothers don't know exactly how old their children are anyway. Especially if they've got a lot of them, whether he's one and a half or one and three quarters, well they've forgotten, especially illiterate women in the village. They often don't know whether the child is five or six or seven, especially as I said if there's quite a large number of children. So they aren't bothered by going through the exact stages and exactly at the right time.

Marichi: But Indians who come to this country have quite high ideals for their children, don't they?

[16]

_____: They're competitive ones. This is what I was thinking. That there's this sense of failure if you haven't achieved at any rate what other people expect you to achieve.

S: Well there is a bit of this among the urban educated in India, but on account of sheer economic stress, that if a poor family has managed to send a boy to school, to high school, and he sits through his matric and he doesn't pass, all is terrible, because then they've got to maintain him for another year. Whereas if he passed - this is in the old days, now it has to be at least a BA pass, he could at once get a government job and then he'd support the whole family. If he failed it was terrible to be made to feel this, not intentionally but [obscured by jet

plane!] And that's why when I was in India every year in Bengal after the results were declared, there'd be quite a number of suicides of failed students who just couldn't face their parents. But this is quite modern and quite recent. It's due to economic stress, nothing to do with the culture. In fact quite against the culture.

_____: The Japanese education system is very very...

S: (Unclear)

_____: You don't know if that's within the Japanese temperament?

_____: I was also thinking in terms of ideals. If you have ideals and your whole culture is oriented towards achieving certain things, then maybe it's more comfortable not to have ideals at all, so that you're not facing failing... I was wondering if this was something to do with the kind of cynicism about ideals.

S: I think one has to distinguish between an ideal, especially what I call a natural ideal that you as it were grow into mindfully and with effort which you enjoy, distinguish that from being merely goal oriented in an artificial, pressurized, sort of way that has got nothing to do, or very little to do, with your own deeper, more individual, needs.

_____: If there's maybe too much on one then you don't have a chance to experience the other.

S: Yes. If you're forced to do too many things or are made to do too many things or have to set your sights on certain things and achieve them, well this will perhaps put you off even a genuinely ideal oriented approach. But I think probably not for long, if you can stop soon enough and just not do anything for a while you will sooner or later be feeling in terms of some ideal, something you can achieve, in a more genuine sense, and your bruised petals will start expanding again.

I also feel that a lot of people who come along to us are in a way weaker people, who haven't been able to cope and who feel imposition from outside much more strongly than other people, who are able to cope, and who therefore perhaps don't come along to us for that very reason. They are managing, but I think we do get quite a few people who just can't cope and who will therefore sometimes rationalize their inability in terms of a sort of cynical approach towards the ideal or any sort of energy or effort or activity. I sometimes have had that sort of impression or feeling myself, as though people are trying to sort of almost discourage you by their attitude, to inhibit you, that they don't feel happy that you yourself are full of energy or able to do things or take an optimistic view or have an ideal. It makes them feel rather uncomfortable and maybe inadequate. So they start carping and criticizing or undermining if they can.

[17]

And I think in any sort of so-called religious movement we will tend to get quite a lot of such people and I think we have to be quite careful about that, and not allow their attitude to affect us, and gradually help them to become more strong and more ideal oriented. There are a lot of people in the world, a lot of people in this country, who do cope and respond to all these demands quite successfully, whose horizon is limited but who are quite capable people and

who do succeed in what they set out to do. But we tend to get more of those who don't or who can't.

Vangisa: Actually (unclear) many of the people who cope in our friends society and who seem to do reasonably well in fact do seem to have some kind of a conspiracy of agreement as to what is the minimum that constitutes success and if you look into any commercial and industrial organization the amount of sheer inability that is acceptable as the norm in life is incredible. There does seem to be a definite conspiracy, so it isn't necessary to cope all that well. As long as you find yourself with other possibilities outside.

_____: It's a very limited ideal actually.

Vangisa: Yes very very much.

S: The point I'm making is that many of those who come along with an ostensible interest in religion are those who fall even below that level and who will perhaps tend to be made uncomfortable by any sort of display of energy on the part of those who are already in the movement.

We just have to insist on being idealistic and be idealistic and to give the impression that what we are trying to put across is an ideal, an ideal for human life and a very high ideal and an ideal that would make people happy and that is making us happy. It's no use just talking about it.

Dhammadinna: On a different topic, when you say the dharma's whatever helps us to transform the real into the ideal and then you list the things given to Mahapriya (unclear) on face value without actually going into those categories, they seem to be things that one could quite easily achieve with an ethical sense and we could mainly achieve those things...

S: I don't know that I gave the full list.

_____: Maybe even within a Christian framework, by following the commandments you could possibly achieve some or all of these. It seems a good teaching but it seems to need elaboration.

S: A more positive context, yes. Perhaps I should do that and write it all up.

_____: In a way you're doing the Dharma down a little by saying the dharma's whatever conduces to these states.

S: Yes the states themselves must be seen as something quite developed or as something transcendental at least.

But do you think people have a sort of feeling that they are communicating an ideal? Rather than just teaching Buddhism? Is that the sort of feeling that is being conveyed and created now, do you think?

Lokamitra: I think that's why people get so much from coming along.

S: I'm sure there is much more of this than there used to be. Do [18] you think it pervades say the study group? So far as your experience goes?

Lokamitra: Definitely, yes.

Siddhiratna: I don't think it can be with all the groups. Ours is just like learning Buddhism, it's schoolwork. More of a feeling of an ideal being attained. Very flat in that respect.

S: Why do you think this happens when people are handed Buddhist material? How does it manage to go flat?

Siddhiratna: I don't know. I think it's just the way the individual people in the group teach it. Without having to mention names of all the people in the group, some weeks it can be good, some weeks not so good. It depends on who's taking it and how they're feeling on that particular day and perhaps even how you're feeling on that particular day.

Manjuvajra: I think it's quite difficult to put across the idea that Buddhism isn't just a collection of facts. I can remember one particular person in Cornwall who'd been coming along regularly for eighteen months and he knows a terrific amount about Buddhism. He knows far more than I do, but there's no contact.

S: Well he's probably not interested in Buddhism at all really. He just happens to have latched on to that. It might just as well have been stamps!

Manjuvajra: Well that's the sort of impression I get.

S: I know the type very well because there were lots of them around the Hampstead Vihara and I think some around the Buddhist Society even, and I think some of them will have to say well look, you've read all these books, you know all these facts, but you're no nearer to Buddhism than you were at the beginning, in fact maybe you're further away because you think you know something about Buddhism.

_____: Was he meditating as well or just reading.

Manjuvajra: I don't think he was meditating at home.

S: But also of course where such people are concerned it's very important that one has a really live Sangha. Then they can begin to see the difference, otherwise it's just, as it were, you telling him, and they're not able to see. Unless you yourself are very strong and positive, but even if you are, just one person, it might be missed. So you can hardly miss it when there's four or five.

Siddhiratna: By 'live Sangha' do you mean events happening and...

S: No, I mean four or five very positive, alive, people, who are imbued with an ideal and you see them interacting and you see the way that they do things, well then you can't help feeling probably, unless you're really sort of blind, that well they've got something that you haven't or they're in touch with something that you're not in touch with. But probably just one person would find it very difficult to communicate this, even if he had it, if the other person was

rather blind or insensitive.

_____: You could almost see it as one person's particular work or (unclear) what they're interested in.

S: Yes, 'you are lucky, you were just born that way, you're just a bit more lively and I'm the more serious type.' Yes. But when you see [19] four or five people of distinct character types but all imbued with this same energy, enthusiasm and idealism, then you have to ponder it more seriously.

_____: It would seem to be in relation to us and certain branches and so on that if there are only one or two people then there should be a phase of quite slow development where you can't see (unclear)... one or two who are interested it can take a long time to build up that Sangha of energetic people.

S: It probably is easiest to bring them, as it were, from outside, from a main centre, where already there are many who are energetic and idealistic.

_____: If there were only say three, four or five people going out, then they need to have brought themselves together in a way before they do that. Because if any conflict arises between them, then it becomes magnified and (unclear).

S: This is why we're hoping that when Bethnal Green gets functioning and we do want to start up a new Centre or a certain group of people want to start up a new centre then a team will simply go forth. [Laughter] who already know one another and have worked together and among whom there's a good spirit.

Lokamitra: I don't that this thing about knowing each other too much is absolutely necessary at the moment. If we're all evolving, if we're all Going for Refuge then that's a way to overcome any dispute.

S: But I think even so we've got to have some practice in overcoming it in that way on that sort of basis, before you come into a completely new situation.

_____: Some idea between you about how you're going to do it. You need to have some continuity.

S: Know one another's little foibles.

Marichi: Otherwise you're back to the contrast between what's actually happening and the ideal and you're saying it's an ideal when it isn't.

S: You must be able to show at least something of what a Sangha is like. Even though you may not be perfect but at least something is definitely coming through.

_____: It seems as if that does happen then the growth within the particular Centre will be quite fast, and there will be local people...

S: This is one of the things that Vajrabodhi has always been saying about Helsinki, that we

haven't been able to show people what a Sangha is because there's just myself and Bodhisri and people can't help seeing us as a couple who happen to have taken up Buddhism. They can't see a Sangha. There needs to be three, four, ideally five people.

_____: Having a (unclear)

S: That will of course help.

Vangisa: There's one's personality and other people project (unclear). only one there you quite clearly can't be some kind of protean father figure to everybody, but a certain number of (unclear)...

[20]

S: He either young or old.

Vangisa: Exactly, yes. [Laughter]

S: (unclear due to noise in room)

Vangisa: (unclear). There's a difference between the number of people who are actually going to come back for a start, and what Dhammadinna was saying about the development being very slow, this is true. Very very true because this is the most important fact. It's taken (unclear) almost eighteen months to traverse the wisdom that you would expect to do in a few weeks if you had an actual Sangha to start with. We're beginning to get that spirit now.

S: Oh we've gone right over time. Are there any final points? Any points that anyone has made a note of to ask about? [Pause]

Have people found that in talking with other people, either newcomers at the Centres or people you've met outside, have they found that they do adopt this sort of approach of Buddhism giving you an ideal, an ideal which is something natural and you can grow into. Is this the sort of approach that you find helpful?

Lokamitra: The best one I think.

_____: And that implies the practical side of things immediately, rather than the theoretical side.

S: And also with regard to study groups it does seem as though one should select the material for study with an eye to this sort of possibility of presentation, and if the text for any reason doesn't lend itself to that sort of treatment you mustn't hesitate to go off a bit at a tangent, just to keep people's interest alive and active, not just stick to the text.

Siddhiratna: I think that was the trouble with our group was that we weren't allowed to do that enough. It was too much that you must keep to the text. You had a point come out and you'd like to talk about it but you'd talk about it a bit, as far as the group chair or leader would want to and we'd have to go on again. There was a sort of you had to reach the end of chapter one by the term end, rather than allowing things to sort of go at its own pace.

S: Because there is a middle way. You don't want people talking about irrelevant things but in a way it's almost better that they talk about irrelevant things and enjoy it, rather than get all dull and bored but having stuck to the text.

Siddhiratna: I don't think they get that irrelevant. When it starts giggling one can stop it there, but to keep it really strictly to the text and not allow for any variation, like talking about other books you might have read or something like that which pertains to what you were talking about, is too strict.

_____: There can be serious irrelevancies too, they don't have to be just frivolous irrelevancies.

Siddhiratna: It sounds contradictory.

_____: You can be very serious about something that's irrelevant. [Laughter]

_____: If you feel strongly there must be a reason. Perhaps it's relevant and you're not able to explain why.

S: There need not be a direct logical, verbal, relevance to the actual [21] passage you are discussing. Reading those words might have sparked off something that might look to others as being a bit tangential but to you is quite important, so that isn't really irrelevant. So one has to sort of follow a middle way between sticking to the text in a very narrow boring fashion and allowing people to become completely irrelevant and talking about things which have got nothing to do with the text even remotely.

_____: Surely the thing is you bring it back to, rather than let it roll, is the idea of how it relates to each person.

S: And also if for instance the text clearly is irrelevant and has nothing really to say to the people present you should say well this text doesn't seem very relevant to us nowadays, and even discuss why it isn't relevant, rather than just treat it as though it was relevant when everyone is feeling it isn't, that it's boring. Ask the others, 'well how do you feel about this? It doesn't seem very relevant to me, I never think in this sort of way, I never feel in this sort of way. Well why is that, why was it that say in India people did feel that this was relevant, now we don't?' And you can have a bit of a discussion and say well how do we feel now and in what way has the teaching got to be adapted so that it helps us in our different situation towards the same end? This is the way one has to tackle it. Otherwise it becomes very restrictive and not connected with one's own real needs and therefore not interesting. In other words just boring.

_____: And not a precept.

S: Not a precept. So one mustn't hesitate to treat the text where necessary rather freely, because the sabbath was made for man, as it were, and not man for the sabbath. The text is there to help you, you are not there to keep the text going.

_____: The Tuesday study night groups have been good because there hasn't been a text and one hasn't had to contend with that if one finds it difficult working with a text.

S: You see some texts are better than others for our purposes. I'm not speaking about intrinsically better or not better, but some are better in the sense that they lend themselves to what we are trying to do more readily than others and of course some people are able to use a text more proficiently than others, and if necessary you just have to virtually put the text aside and just draw on your own experience. But you should select the text very carefully to begin with, so that you are not having to deal with page after page that is quite irrelevant and which you cannot make relevant, which you can't even take as a point of departure. For instance if you are leading the class you could even say 'well look I used to think so many years ago this page was quite irrelevant but anyway such and such experience put it in a new light as far as I was concerned', you can sort of bring in these sort of things. But to make it interesting for everybody, but if it isn't relevant well say so, but not sort of go through it pretending it's relevant when it isn't. Say well times have changed, this is no longer relevant, we can pass it over rather quickly or maybe let's discuss why it isn't relevant. Disagree with the author if you feel like disagreeing with the author. You don't have to agree. You may be wrong but never mind. Disagree, say what you think. Even if you're leading the class don't hesitate to say 'well I don't really agree with what is being said here' or if you feel you should be more modest say 'well I don't really understand this. It doesn't seem very relevant to me, perhaps it is but I'm just not able to see it. Can anybody else?'

_____: This comes from a past conditioning, either of school or past conditioning that such things shouldn't be criticized or questioned, like this is kind of holy () or...

[22]

S: I think one would be advised to regard the Buddhist scriptures more like you regard say works of English literature. Certainly inspiring and helpful and enjoyable to read and maybe requiring quite a bit of mental effort to understand properly, but not something that you're bound to accept uncritically, at their face value as it were. Read the sutras in the same sort of way that you read Shakespeare.

Vangisa: Uncritically. [Laughter]

S: Yes, uncritically, but at least the first reading should be uncritical, but we well know there are poor passages even in Shakespeare. You don't have to pretend that they're wonderful when you see quite clearly that Shakespeare wasn't his usual self the morning he wrote that bit!

[Tea Break and Long Pause]

All right, any points from here that are not clear?

_____: ... Buddha ... had a sword.

S: Sometimes the family's called the karma family, sometimes the sword family, but in either case you can't very well illustrate action, so the sword is...

_____: Sometimes the double vajra. Amoghasiddhi.

S: Yes right.

_____: Akshobya with a double vajra.

S: Yes I think that should have been a single vajra in that case. Again you do sometimes see Akshobya with the double vajra, but on the throne, but the sword is the, as it were, family symbol of Amoghasiddhi. [Pause]

_____: When you're talking of two ways (unclear) direct and indirect you said people of certain temperaments are being excluded from using the direct methods.

S: I was thinking for instance of very active people who find it difficult to sit and concentrate, but who can raise their level of consciousness when they're involved very deeply in work in which they deeply believe.

_____: Do you see it as a sort of profession? (unclear) ...

S: Yes, I did say that, didn't I, after mentioning the indirect method. That after one has progressed with them up to a certain point and wanted to raise the level of consciousness to a very high extent, one would almost always have to have recourse then to the direct methods. In fact you'd probably want to.

_____: (unclear) ... get quite a long way...

S: Yes. Since giving this lecture I happened to read a newly translated Mahayana Sutra and I saw that in that Sutra it was said that the monk who is preaching the Dharma is as absorbed and concentrated as one who is meditating and his preaching of the Dharma is equivalent to meditation.

_____: That's as a result of intensive meditation.

S: That wasn't the suggestion - that if you are preaching the Dharma, if you are a very concentrated and all your energies are [23] behind it and you're in a very positive state, that you've got enthusiasm and faith and love and at the same time your mind is reflecting upon the meaning of it, this is virtually the state of meditation or is the state of meditation. I think what we have to be very careful not to do is identifying meditation with its appurtenances as it were. The important thing is the state of consciousness, and usually it will be more easy to attain that state of consciousness, that higher state, when you're in a relaxed physical posture, when you're not doing anything else, when your attention is withdrawn from the sense objects and so on. But that mustn't exclude the possibility of it being raised in other ways without your being, technically, in a state of meditation.

Marichi: So meditation's not the only direct means.

S: Well no it's 'meditation', inverted commas, which is not the only means. There are direct ways of raising the level of consciousness and indirect ways, but it's the higher state of consciousness, whether attained by direct or indirect ways, that is essentially meditation.

I'm quite sure that sort of state can be fairly easily generated by the Puja and chanting. Some people do say that they have as good a 'meditation', inverted commas, by participating in the Puja as they do when they sit and meditate, or even a better concentration, even a better

meditation.

It's the state a mind that one's concerned with, not so much with how one attains that state of mind. Of course you have to be quite honest with yourself and be quite sure that you are attaining a higher state of consciousness by the indirect methods, or not say things like, 'oh I get into a meditative mood just by going for a walk'. Maybe, it's not impossible but be a bit sceptical [obscured by passing jet plane!].

Anyone notice anything they hadn't come across before in lectures?

Lokamitra: A slight change in terms.

S: Yes that's true. When I say concentration, absorption and insight. I think I shall stick to that in future.

Lokamitra: You talk of them as being as one of three different stages, three different ways. Concentration, absorption.

S: I think that's a slip of the tongue. I think I did mean stages. I think I said methods, didn't I? I meant stages.

Lokamitra: If one used the term 'bhavana' would that come in with concentration or into absorption?

S: Bhavana literally means development and the full term is 'samatha bhavana'. If it's used by itself it is the attainment of the dhyanas and also the preliminary states. Therefore concentration and absorption. I think sometimes the expression 'vipassana bhavana' is used. That would mean the development of insight, but bhavana simply by itself means samatha. In other words concentration and absorption.

_____: Can you explain to me the difference between recollection and memory.

S: Recollection and memory. Well recollection is used in the general sense of memory but as used in this context recollection is recollection of oneself, not of any outside thing. It means the maintenance of continuity of motivation. This is what it really is. You maintain throughout the same motivation and are conscious of so doing. The same sense of purpose. That is recollection. You [24] remember all the time what you are about, what you are supposed to be doing, you never lose sight of it. In other words it's the same you operating all the time. This is what is meant by recollection. Because if we become unmindful it's as if another self takes over, it interrupts the continuity of our purpose. We forget ourselves and we remember ourselves or we recollect ourselves when we come back to our original purpose which we recognize as the main one. So recollection means this self remembering or continuity of purpose.

_____: And memory is remembering one's external facts and...

S: Though recollection is used in this more general sense of memory.

_____: One can have a very good memory without being mindful.

S: Indeed, yes.

Lokamitra: So memory's just a faculty and recollection is this faculty applied to...

S: To oneself.

Lokamitra: Applied to oneself in a very concentrated way.

S: I think it's very very important for relative beginners. It's the thing probably to be concentrated on. That and positive emotion. Recollection.

_____: That doesn't mean to say you have to remember everything you've ever done.

S: No, it's the continuity of the purpose. For instance when you eat you never lose sight of the fact of why you are eating, what are you eating for. It's just to keep the body going, not to satisfy greed, but to keep the body going so that you can get on with your personal development. Your recollection of your ultimate purpose never falls into abeyance. You are there all the time as it were, consciously, always operating. So this interruption of one self by another only takes place when you're unintegrated. So recollection implies or involves integration of the conscious personality or even what I also call this vertical integration. So that you don't have your numerous suppressed selves popping up every now and interrupting your major purpose, the purpose of the conscious mind, and overwhelming you and carrying you away completely.

This doesn't mean that you should always be remembering that you're on the spiritual path in a strained and artificial sort of way, but that it's there at least in the background, the consciousness all the time, you never completely lose touch with it. It's like an electrified wire. If you touch it, it will give you a shock, so in the same way if you ever do anything which is against your main purpose, or begin to, you just get a little jolt from that undercurrent of recollection. It's a quite interesting term - re-collection - it's collecting together all the scattered bits and pieces of yourself. So it's re-collection, and it's integration. I think it's important that one realizes in the beginning that one isn't a self so much as a collection of selves or fragments of selves which are all in turmoil and fighting for supremacy.

Manjuvajra: Should you recognize one of them as being sort of the Chairman and like side with that one?

S: Not really. The chairman is awareness. You can of course do that especially if you are relatively integrated anyway as some people are [25] in a natural healthy way. Then they'll be one sort of dominant self with which you identify, but from a more spiritual point of view it's best not even to let that dominant self have everything its own way. Just keep an eye on the dominant self too. Perhaps it's too dominant, perhaps it shouldn't be so dominant. It might be a quite comfortable situation having that one self dominating all the time and keeping all the others in order, but suppose it's the wrong self, as it were? Supposing it's the wrong person in the chair. [obscured by passing plane].

And if you persist it may be that some other submerged self emerges as chairman and not the one that you thought was the chairman or was you rather than any other. It may turn out to be

otherwise. It may turn out that you are not who or what you thought you were! In other words the new chairman, as it were, of your committee of selves is more truly you than the one who was in the chair before. You can sometimes see people giving birth to new selves. They sort of take over a bit from time to time. Perhaps one should especially be aware of one's good self. Nietzsche said on one occasion, or wrote, that I think it was - these may not be his exact words - but real progress begins when one has the courage to baptize the worst in oneself as the best. Perhaps he's putting it rather strongly but you can see what he means. You baptize, even sanctify or consecrate, that unacknowledged side, which usually is a darker side, the side that you think is the less desirable side of you. What you've even thought of as the worst in you.

_____: It would take a lot of courage.

S: Yes, especially if you really do have a worst. Perhaps it's a useful exercise sometimes to ask oneself 'well what do I really consider the worst thing about myself?' and then look at it positively. Because unfortunately nowadays people aren't even really bad. They're just mediocre! If they were really bad there'd be some hope for them! It's the great sinners that become the great saints, not the mediocre good citizens. So very often we're not bad enough to be good. But anyway that's just being a bit paradoxical. Don't take me too seriously! [Laughter] One could quite seriously ask oneself what do I really consider is bad in me, that I'm really ashamed of and don't really like people to know about, and then take up a positive attitude towards it.

Vangisa: Shinran (unclear) the good man (unclear) [Laughter]

S: Right yes. [Pause]

And sometimes of course there's an honorary chairman and a real acting chairman! You like to think of your good self in the chair but he may not actually be. He may be a sort of sleeping partner and somebody else may be actually in the chair and running the whole show.

Manjuvajra: You get tyrants as well. People who can't get out of the chair.

_____: Too much power corrupts too. You can put a good chairman in control.

S: One can also say too little power corrupts! We've heard a lot about this power corrupting. I would say that lack of power also corrupts equally.

_____: It would be a different sort of corruption.

S: Well yes but corruption nonetheless. Corruption is corruption!

[26]

_____:

S: Well the corruption which springs from lack of power results in resentful, envy, jealousy, discontent, disgruntlement, general negativity, sourness, inadequacy, sterility.

Vangisa: The states of mind become habitual presumably as the result of, not even continual

but a briefly recurring reaction to something or other. In a way they become a habit, and it seems to me actually that a habit, certainly one that I'd call a bad habit is just as easy to get rid of as it was to put there in the first place. So each of them know there's a completely haphazard process. You allow yourself to act in a certain way two or three times and by the time you get to the fifth or sixth time it's a habit. It should be just as easy to get rid of it.

_____: It should be.

Vangisa: Should be.

S: But obviously the more often you've done something the more difficult it is...

Vangisa: Yes, yes, yes. This kind of thing though that you are talking about, different aspects of oneself in the chair at different times I was putting on a more casual level. It's the kind of thing one can watch all the time on soporific TVs.

S: For instance you want to do something if you had the impulse to do something but you are prevented or you inhibit yourself, then it becomes more and more difficult to do that and each time you inhibit yourself again.

_____: The inhibitor is like the chairman who has got too powerful but perhaps was originally quite useful. That's what I meant about somebody who's a good power can go bad if it's left in control.

S: Even talent.

_____: Yes.

S: That's why you have an opposition in Parliament. A loyal opposition. [Pause]

_____: With all these scattered bits, I suppose ideally from that it's not a chairman that one has but an ideal.

S: Yes, right. You can say that awareness is the reflection of the ideal.

Manjuvajra: If you develop the attitude of not trying to stick yourself too firmly with one particular self, do you think that can be dangerous in that it can produce a sort of dispersed personality? Supposing for example you know there's one part of you that would very much like to follow a specific career, one part of you would very much like to settle down, there's another part of you that would very much like to head for the hills and if you don't choose one of those to identify yourself with but allow all of them to work on you, do you think that can leave you standing in the middle of a field with no direction to go in?

S: Well yes it can. What usually happens is the strongest wins in the end, but if they're all equally strong then the situation is stalemate, so then it becomes all the more important to develop one's awareness and mindfulness and try to see if there isn't some [27] alternative that can make all of them happy. What is it that the self that wants to go up into the hills is looking for? What is it that the settling down self is hoping to get by settling down? If a number of selves, all more or less equally strong are wanting to do different things, one has to

ask oneself well what is the common denominator of all the things that they want to do. Or if there doesn't seem to be well ask oneself well why am I such a divided person? Just trace it back to the root.

_____:

S: Well there must be inasmuch as you are a person. At least you've got one single physical body with these different bits attached to it. In a sense you're one person. You've one consciousness. Perhaps you are schizophrenic. Maybe you are one body inhabited by several different souls, as it were. Occasionally such cases do happen. But broadly speaking if one goes through a series of struggles, even conflicts between selves, and if one can develop awareness, what emerges in the end is a richer personality, but it may be a longer and more difficult process than it is for the comparatively simple personality with no conflicting selves perhaps. Selves that can get along more or less easily together and all be happily (unclear).

_____ : Could you compromise to a certain extent in that situation, like decide that you follow a job for a certain length of time and you go off for a certain length of time, you live in a certain place for a certain length of time?

S: You could.

_____ : You might find from that which of those things was most appealing to you.

S: There is also the fact that you can have continuity of purpose through a number of different activities. It is not necessarily a different self every time, but different facets of one and the same self. You don't want to be always doing the same thing. You don't for instance have a self that likes cooking and a self that likes walking and a self that likes gardening. It's all you, different aspects or facets of you.

_____ : That's what I meant really. If you did that then you would be creating a continuity of purpose if you say I'll do these three things and see what happens at the end of it.

S: And especially if they did represent different aspects of you which are quite normal and healthy.

Lokamitra: As one becomes more aware then one is more responsive to different needs and so on. Presumably one's much more in touch with feelings and so on.

S: It's more a question of overall continuity of purpose than of all the time doing the same thing. For instance take the what seem to be alternate possibilities of settling in one place and roaming around. Well it's not necessarily a question of two conflicting selves, because you can have an overall purpose of personal development and you can maintain that through these ...

[End of tape one tape two]

S: ... the conflict of selves comes about only when one self as it were directly goes against another. Undoes what the other self has been trying to do.

_____: I'm not quite with you.

[28]

S: Well if two selves pull in opposite directions and they are actually two different directions, then there is a conflict and there are two different selves. But if it is a question of two different activities with the same purpose, even though the activities themselves are quite different, but they're each contributing to the same end, then you cannot speak in terms of conflicting selves.

_____: But it's only when one finds oneself in one of say two possibilities and finds that very unsatisfactory...

S: Yes and one is definitely the negation of the other.

_____: Yeah. [Pause]

S: So you can be doing different things but it can be the same self, as it were, in overall charge. The different activities are assisting the growth of that self. So even though the activities were quite different it wouldn't mean that you were alternating between two different selves.

_____: Say meditation and activity.

S: Right, yes. These are just aspects of your relatively unified personality. But for instance if one day you are all into meditation and asceticism, the next day you want to go on the booze, well those are two different selves.

And also one of the signs is that if it's just one aspect of your personality, or two different aspects of your personality, then when you are fulfilling one, the other doesn't bother you, at least not for quite a while. But if it's a question of two different selves, even when you're into the one, the other is bothering you, and so you can never really be happily into anything, because there's always a tug or a pull from the other side, the opposite side.

_____: In that sort of case do you think you should look for some, let's say, kind of objective situation that satisfies both parts.

S: If they're contradictory - you are talking about contradictory selves now?

_____: Yes.

S: You'd have to find a very contradictory situation, wouldn't you.

_____: Yes.

S: Well that will be very sort of tension fraught.

_____: Right, and maybe impossible.

S: Maybe impossible, or at least psychologically impossible. You would have a breakdown.

_____: So you've got no other choice but to integrate those two.

S: Yes, you'll get so fed up with it in the end that you'll have no choice but to integrate it. If you don't have a breakdown first. It's like the choice to marry or not to marry. There's no middle way. It's either the one or the other. [Pause] And being mistrustful of the higher first.

So I see this whole question of recollection and integration as a quite crucial and key issue at the beginning of one's, for want of a better term, spiritual life, or at the beginning of one's whole process of [29] development. That and the development of positive emotion. No doubt the two are interconnected.

Lokamitra: If one does play around with these other selves then one's just hindering one's own development, usually.

S: Yes, unless it's in the very early stages and you just want to discover how many selves you have and what they are like [Laughter] so that you can start working on the task of integrating them seriously. One should be doing that in one's adolescence, during one's teens. By the time one reaches one's early twenties you should be well acquainted with all your different selves and exactly what they are doing and what they want.

Lokamitra: It seems to me the task of integrating them is largely paying as little attention to them as possible. Not ignoring them unconsciously but sort of...

Marichi: Well that's assuming another self that's...

S: Well if the awareness is maintained and one is conscious of the ideal, and is channelling one's energies in that direction, well these selves will be harmoniously integrated.

_____: What you were saying seems to be at a later stage, when your awareness has developed, although there might still be things sort of kicking back but your main channel is open and you're not going to pay attention to those... but before you get to that point there will still be a certain amount of struggle.

S: Yes. There's also the question of how these conflicting selves develop, because I think on the whole children don't have conflicts, do they, not internal conflicts. They seem to be brought about by emotional manipulation on the part of adults. Maybe it's not the whole story but I think it's a quite common factor. For instance the child wants to do something and it's told it mustn't do it. Mummy doesn't like it, mummy thinks it's naughty, if you do it mummy won't love you, well of course the child wants to be loved by mummy, so a conflict is set up, isn't it. It wants to do this, it doesn't want to lose mummy's love. So which should you risk, which should you give up? Give up doing what you want to do or give up mummy and her love. So this is the sort of way, I think, that conflicts originate in childhood. I don't think conflicts arise by being told one can't do something provided one is told positively. But if one is sort of emotionally blackmailed I think conflicts are more likely to arise. Well are sure to arise.

Vangisa: ... because I say so'.

S: Yes, right. That's much healthier, yes. 'Because I say so'. The child will very often accept

that. Rather than going into all this business, 'well if you're naughty we won't love you and we might even send you away and then we'll call for the policeman and he'll take you off somewhere...' - say 'no, you can't do it' Wham, if necessary, that's that.

Marichi: I used to get really furious with that though. Because I say so.

S: Well how old were you?

Marichi: Well as long as I can remember I was being told off for contradicting my parents.

S: It must be said good naturedly with basic positive feeling for the child.

[30]

_____: But you can explain to most children to a certain extent and they understand. If they persistently can't understand well you just have to say, 'Well I know best'.

S: I think a healthy child of healthy parents is prepared to accept that from the parents because it trusts the parents. Unless of course sometimes it's something that conflicts very strongly with the child's desires. For instance the child wants to touch the electrified wire. You say, 'no you can't touch it'. Maybe for some reason or other the child really wants to touch that wire but you can't, and in the end you have to say, no I'm not going to let you even if you scream your head off. Or if you want you could presumably throw a bit of paper against the wire and it would go up in flames and say look this is what would happen to you. That's why I'm not letting you touch it.

_____: I think a certain amount of explanation is good for them.

S: But if all else fails you have to say well just no, do not persist. You shouldn't introduce it prematurely of course.

_____: They trust you usually in a dangerous situation.

S: Right, and you must mean it. You mustn't just say in a tired sort of way, 'oh no, don't do that', not really meaning it. The child picks up that you don't really mean it.

_____: If you have adults with conflicting ideas then it...

S: When parents - the mother and the father - have conflicting ideas, and try to win over the child to turn the child against the other parent. This is really bad. Or when teachers do this and turns the child against the parents. There was the case of some friends of mine in Delhi, they were journalists, I think Austrians, husband and wife and two children, and the wife was an orthodox Catholic and the two children were sent to a Catholic school in Delhi, though the husband was an agnostic, and one day the children came back from school very upset, and so he was asking them what's the matter, so they said, 'oh teacher', that is the nun at the school, 'said that you will go to heaven and mummy will go to heaven, but daddy's not going to heaven', and that really upset the children in that way. [Pause]

I think therefore it's quite important to ask oneself from time to time, 'what do I really want to do?' Even though it may be something quite unreasonable or even wrong in a way, at least

know and feel what you really want to do. Because if you lose touch with that, sooner or later you dry up. It may be a very unworthy self but it's there and it's part of you and you have to recognize it, even if only to the extent of thoroughly eliminating it. Or baptizing it. [Long Pause]

I think it's quite important to think of meditation, not only in terms of becoming more and more concentrated but in terms of becoming more happy, more positive, more creative, more outward going, more reflective, more reflective, more contented, more happy to be on one's own, more full of energy. Meditation is equally all those things. More playful, in the real sense.

_____: If you find that's not happening what do you do? How do you go about analysing your mental state.

S: Well either by direct methods or by indirect ones or both. Probably indirect ones first. A change of place, satsang, chanting, etc. [Pause]

[31]

Anyway if there aren't any more questions perhaps we should have twenty minutes of fresh air before we have our supper. Is there any final question or is everything quite clear?

Manjuvajra: It seems to me it covers such a sort of vast field.

Lokamitra: As a threefold way is prajna...

S: Three stages.

Lokamitra: Yes, and the three aspects of meditation, is Insight equivalent to prajna or is Insight something which prajna later makes more complete.

S: You can regard Insight and prajna as synonymous. Insight being vipassana. But more often prajna is regarded as the regular, developed, constantly operating faculty, and vipassana as the occasional flash of Insight, or occasional flash of wisdom, if you like.

All right, let's have some fresh air.

[End of session Next Session]

Lokamitra: How did you find hearing that lecture?

S: In a way I'm quite surprised because at the time I was quite disappointed with it. It seemed rather flat and dull. I think the audience was less responsive. Well, it might have been that, whereas for the previous one they were quite interested, but I was under the impression that I hadn't prepared it very well, but it doesn't seem like that.

_____: It seemed very good indeed.

S: It may also be that I was quite tired when I gave it, because it was near the end of my spell and I had been quite busy, but I might have been feeling quite ... in fact I was feeling quite

tired.

_____: Maybe it's easier for us to respond having more idea of a spiritual community than they would have.

_____: Was it given to an FWBO audience or to a general one?

S: General.

_____: That's why I asked ... Sangha.

S: Yes. It might be that there was almost a little sort of unconscious resistance that I picked up on.

Lokamitra: The other two are much more easy to relate to for people who don't know. This is a little bit...

_____: Too direct maybe.

Lokamitra: A bit further on really.

_____: You're asking people to commit themselves while they're still thinking about it perhaps.

S: Anyway they've been playing these at the group on Waiheke Island. There's a new group there.

_____: I thought this was a very different way of approach because it seemed to me that normally when you talked about Sangha before you talked about it negatively, whereas this is the first [32] time you seem to really have approached it by actually saying what it is.

_____: (obscured by tea pouring noises!)

_____: How long had the Christchurch FWBO been going before you arrived?

S: About two years.

_____: Presumably there'd been laid so speak, a cloth. The backcloth had been raised so to speak.

S: Yes, but I was speaking in Auckland. The Auckland group of course is even older. More than three years, but there's only Akshobya, the only Order member permanently there. It certainly made a tremendous difference once the Order came into existence, quite literally overnight.

_____: You're talking about the people you ordained.

S: Yes.

Vangisa: Probably the first approach to the idea of the Sangha (unclear) ... concentrate on ... technicalities.

S: Yes. I did this of course quite deliberately. Partly because the technicalities were in several other lectures, and partly because I was addressing, as it were, the non-converted. I wanted to put it in straightforward terms.

Vangisa: But this is what usually bores them(?) The more technical approach doesn't seem to have much feeling in it.

_____: I appreciated the very simple definition of the spiritual and the psychological because a lot of people get confused.

S: I was a little surprised when I saw it in 'Shabda'. One contribution which declared, by way of a write-up, that one shouldn't make a distinction, or that it wasn't helpful to make a distinction between psychological and spiritual. I couldn't agree with that. The psychological is very general. It's pertaining to the mind, pertaining to mental states and functions in general.

_____: People do seem to have a resistance to the distinction.

S: Whereas spiritual pertains to the skilful specifically.

Vangisa: Personally I've always made the tie up between psychological and mundane. The ordinary psychological consciousness as opposed to...

_____: There's also a distinction between the mundane and the not so mundane.

S: Well a skilful state is also a psychological state but it's a special kind of psychological state.

_____: So really spiritual is just a section of psychological.

S: Yes, yes.

_____: There's always been (unclear) for people to think of psychologically is a lower kind of state and then the spiritual is something above the psychological.

S: Well it is in practical terms inasmuch as most people don't have [33] much experience or even any experience of the concentratedly skilful. So virtually therefore psychological means everything other than that, even though that is not really part of the actual definition.

_____: Could you say that you use the term 'spiritual meeting' in terms of spiritual communication and also spiritual beings.

S: By spiritual beings, I assume I meant people functioning in an entirely or at least predominantly, skilful manner. You can be described as a spiritual being when you are functioning on the basis of skilful mental states, or at least predominantly skilful mental states. And a spiritual meeting would be two people relating, both of them being in that

skilful mental state. That would be a spiritual meeting.

_____: I see.

Lokamitra: Spiritual then has those purely ethical meaning if it's just skilful...

S: Yes because I usually distinguish spiritual from transcendental.

Lokamitra: Whereas usually ethical and spiritual are very often - not you - but they're commonly divided. Here you bring them closely together.

S: Well the ethical in Buddhism in the sense of Sila, is based upon the mentally skilful, and ethical behaviour is behaviour which is expressive of skilful mental states or conducive to the development of skilful mental states. Whereas ethics, say in Christianity, is what is in accordance with divine commandments and, as regards the group, it is what is in accordance with the needs, requirements or opinions of the group. That is the tribal ethic as it were.

_____: I sometimes get into a sort of confusion over ethics and spiritual life. I know that spiritual life is meant to be more than ethics but I often find that it seems to... I react against just ethics.

S: Well one can say that it is a question of intensifying the skilful to the point where it becomes continuous, though it can never become permanent by itself, to the point where it is sufficiently concentrated and sustained to be able to serve as a launching pad into the transcendental.

_____: So you must have that ideal for it to be spiritual. If you don't have anything further, if you don't have the transcendental then it'll just be ethics it won't be skilful.

S: You could say that. In that case the skilful is just ethical. But the word ethics is used quite ambiguously. I was reading yesterday Albert Schweitzer's History of Indian Thought and he makes much of the word 'ethical', and for him 'ethical' clearly includes almost the spiritual.

_____: Can you say anything about the transcendental? [Laughter]

S: Well from the Buddhist point of view the transcendental means whatever is of the nature of ultimate reality, mental states associated with that ultimate reality and the path leading directly to that. This is what we mean by the transcendental, or 'lokuttara' in technical Buddhist language, the beyond the world, hence transcendental loka uttara, above the world, beyond the world. From the unskilful to the skilful to the transcendental, which is also the spontaneous, the non causal, the free.

_____: Would that be directly related to ethical outlook?

[34]

S: Well the Theravada view is that the transcendental expresses itself in an ethical manner. The Tantra though does recognize the possibility of the transcendental expressing itself in a manner which is not in accordance with conventional ethics or even in accordance with customary Buddhist ethics. The Tantra does recognize that possibility, though obviously it

does guard it with a very serious warning that it must be really the transcendental and not simply an unskilful mental state. There's a very good discussion of this by Evans-Wentz in his introduction to 'The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation'. He discusses what he calls the relativity of ethics in relation to this whole question in a very sensible manner. Whereas just for practical purposes, just to give yourself a sort of rule of thumb, you draw up precepts of ethical behaviour and you try to create skilful mental states by conforming your behaviour to those precepts. But one has to be quite clear what one is doing because you can conform in a purely external manner and fulfil the letter of the law, whereas at the same time continuing to have unskilful mental states. On the other hand you can claim to be free but really simply be having unskilful mental states.

_____: This would be a matter for your own personal judgement.

S: Your own personal judgement and the judgement also of your spiritual friends. [Laughter] At least a second opinion is very worth having, especially if you know it is a disinterested one and the opinion of people who really wish you well and have the same ideals as yourself.

Vangisa: There does seem to be still, surprisingly, some resistance within the Order in a few areas to this kind of communication, this kind of mature help.

S: Yes. Why do you think this is? Have you anything to say on that?

Vangisa: Well insufficient spiritual maturity on the part of some individuals. I was hoping you might have something to say on the general subject. The subject has arisen before in your presence.

S: Well sometimes I feel that what is the matter is - I certainly felt this in at least one, possibly two, cases - almost a determination not to communicate. It's not even that. It's almost a conscious determination, or even decision, that I'm not going to open up, and it's as though the doors are firmly shut and that particular person posts himself in front of those closed doors, his back to those doors and he's determined not to (words obscured by horse whinnying!) and he'll sort of fight off any attempt to get through. And sometimes people who adopt this attitude become very very clever at rationalizing and so on and it's very difficult to deal with them.

Vangisa: This actually brings us on to another aspect which is something that has I think been coming up a great deal and that is the extent of an individual's commitment. This is something that is becoming increasingly relevant. (unclear) In fact it raises the whole question of how... we seem to be approaching the situation where we have to assess commitment. In other words we almost have to put up a threshold (unclear),

S: In the case of the Upasika there was a threshold mentioned originally but I think we probably have to raise the threshold now.

Vangisa: Exactly, yes.

S: What was mentioned originally was, first of all that you carry on with your individual spiritual practice, your individual meditation. [35] You never give that up, you practice every day, bar occasional lapses, but it is certainly the case that you intend to practise and very

nearly always do practice every day, at least once, and at least for half an hour. That is the first thing. The second that you attend Order meetings, if possible every week, and of course that you observe the ten precepts in the course of your everyday life. If possible you make some financial contribution to the movement, and if you are in a position to do so, you help out in the running of one or more FWBOs.

These were the simple requirements that were laid down in the beginning but I think many people are doing very much more than that already. But this was the minimum required.

Probably I say the absolute irreducible minimum would be you carry on with your regular practice, you observe the ten precepts and you attend the weekly Order meeting that is nearest to you. In other words you keep up your own practice as an individual and you keep in touch with other Order members. These are the two absolutely irreducible requirements.

But this is the least.

Vangisa: In other words there does seem to be a certain amount of uncertainty almost. It's becoming clear that the least is now no longer the norm, is now no longer good enough. There is a certain amount of uncertainty as to how definite the optimum should be in relation to...

S: Well in a way I don't like to lay it down in too sort of hard and fast a manner, because that makes it almost like a rule. At the same time one doesn't want people to take that absence of a rule as a sort of excuse for not really being committed as much as they could be.

Vangisa: But this can be done. People can do this, can take the absence of any, let's say, stated 'criterion' as opposed to a rule, as a justification for almost anything.

S: When I say contact with the Order and other Order members it means very open contact and being open with other Order members as to where you are.

Lokamitra: This seems to me the main difficulty because if one is out of contact or if one is alienated in some way, say one's alienated - you talked about this on the Udana - if one is alienated from the Sangha, then it'll be very hard to accept anything that is said by members of the Order. You won't want to go to Order meetings and so it'll immediately put you in a position which is very difficult.

Siddhiratna: I think one wonders what you mean by disinterested Order members. What is he disinterested from? His own getting a kick out of listening to your problem or something like that?

S: Well I haven't used the word 'disinterested'.

Siddhiratna: I'm going back some way now to what you said about four or five minutes ago, about Order members opening up, and it's to do with ethical...

S: Yes, not just going along and being there but not really communicating, but when you come into contact with other Order members or attend an Order meeting, that you really do open up and let people know what you are thinking and feeling and where you are spiritually, and not be closed out, even though you are physically present. That mere physical attendance

is not sufficient. You must be genuinely open when you're there in that situation.

[36]

Siddhiratna: When you open yourself up like that you're also vulnerable if you're feeling a little bit alienated, aren't you.

S: If you open up you're not alienated.

Siddhiratna: But if you are alienated to begin with then you want to open up, it's a step you have to make isn't it, you have to take.

S: Yes, also if others who are around are sensitive, they see this and they help you, or they make it easy for you.

Siddhiratna: And that's what you mean by disinterested. When they're disinterested they do that?

S: When I say disinterested I'm not quite sure how I used that word a few minutes ago, or if I did use it.

_____: It was in relation to the second opinion about what Manjuvajra said.

S: Oh right, yes. Oh I meant objective. Disinterested in the sense of objective, not having a personal interest in the matter, and therefore able to be quite open and quite objective, yes. Not disinterested in the sense of non-interested, but disinterested in the strict literary sense of the word. That is to say objective. Not with any axe to grind. This is what it means. You open up with someone who can give you a disinterested opinion. That is to say he's got no axe to grind, he can tell you exactly what the situation is.

Siddhiratna: But it will feel like he's got an axe to grind if your ethical (unclear) that your trying to sort out appears to you, from him that he's got an axe to grind, because he doesn't agree with what you're doing. Therefore it doesn't appear as if he's disinterested.

S: Well it's assumed that a certain amount of trust on your part in him, and this comes back to what Lokamitra is saying - that if you don't have that trust you can't even get advice.

Lokamitra: If that person who does feel alienated is reasonably sincere, they will realize that the other person, after a while, is sincere, after half an hour you'll get over all those difficulties.

Marichi: It's a matter of finding that half hour. That half hour doesn't arrive because of the distrust.

Lokamitra: Oh, it can do.

S: It means that those who see the situation and who have concern for that person must take the initiative sometimes and not just leave them to drift away.

_____: I think one of the reasons why this kind of objection to discussing your problems with

people comes...

S: No, I'm not putting it in that way - discussing your problems - no, it doesn't necessarily involve that at all. That might be there but that's quite incidental. You don't have to discuss your problems in that sort of way. In fact I'd rather tend to discourage that.

Manjuvajra: I was thinking of what Vangisa was saying just now about... can you remember what you said? [Laughter]

Siddhiratna: A minimum requirement of an Order member

Manjuvajra: No before that. You were talking about... there seems [37] to be a kind of block against opening up.

Vangisa: I don't think I said that. There does seem to be a certain resistance which is... In other words what I'm talking about was probably once universal. There was a time when the Order was (unclear) and was not functioning as a spiritual community in the sense it is now. If this kind of thing happens now it's not visible. This is my point. Therefore, let's put it this way, within the context of the Order it's pretty easy I imagine, at least I think everyone would agree, it's pretty easy to see where anybody is at this moment. But if he doesn't open up he's going to stay there. Now if this is the case, there is something wrong, and what is wrong is not problems so much but it is something... you could say something wrong with the whole Order. There is something that needs something done about it. Action of some kind.

Siddhiratna: Can you say what 'opening up' means as well.

Vangisa: Well it's really just the opposite...

S: It's willingness to communicate. My own feeling is that usually where there's this alleged unwillingness to communicate there's resentment in the background, and actually the person feels resentful. Maybe resentful as regards that particular situation or it may be something quite different, but for some reason or other they don't want to acknowledge that, perhaps even to themselves.

Siddhiratna: I wonder if the resentment doesn't come about because of what was being said just after this was that that was the minimum requirement, so you can't have four chairmen or four people, four caretakers of a Centre, so the Centre in fact, the London Centre is only big enough for a certain amount of people to work at it.

Vangisa: There are probably too many there at the moment.

Siddhiratna: Yeah, right. So that's why you need more Centres, and I think if the resentment's there it's because of that sort of thing. At least part of it.

Subhuti: Sometimes but sometimes it's to do with much more personal factors.

Siddhiratna: You mean between individuals themselves?

Subhuti: Well something in particular individuals, not between individuals in the Order but

there are certain individuals who do have specific input.

S: Sometimes.

Lokamitra: I think if someone hasn't found themselves some way of expressing their commitment, then it's not usually there are too many people. It's something in them, and you wonder why...

Siddhiratna: If you look at it it's probably a bit of both.

_____: These situations arise...

Lokamitra: I can't see that in the present situation.

_____: They don't arise entirely in London anyway. It's something much more general throughout the movement.

Lokamitra: If someone wants to express themselves, they'll find something, they'll find some way.

[38]

_____: If they're helped by the others, yes.

S: Not necessarily even helped because they can take the lead and rally others. Say, 'come on, let's do something'.

Lokamitra: There's so much to do.

S: 'Do you want to help me, do you like this idea. This is what I'd like to do. Would you like to join in?' But I must say in a sort of very general way that in recent months I have become aware that... it's not so much a question of some people but maybe certain people sometimes, seem to have always a sort of inhibiting effect on whatever is going on. It's as though they have almost a sort of grudge against things being very active or against things happening or other people being very positive, and they seem to sort of try to undermine that for reasons of their own, reasons which are connected apparently, with their personal problems. Instead of rejoicing that at least you are able to get on with it even if they aren't, and rejoicing in your merit, there's a quite different sort of attitude.

Siddhiratna: Resentment.

S: And this seems to be resentment or resentment seems to be in the background somewhere.

Vangisa: One aspect of the whole functioning of the Order - and I'm probably jumping a bit sideways at the moment - and that is whatever one's activity is in a sense irrelevant. Whatever one's activity there is no such thing as a part time ordination.

S: No.

Vangisa: You're either ordained or not, and that's all there is to it.

S: Yes. There's also the point I made, that you're not obliged to undertake specific activities. If you just want to be free and happy without any specific responsibility, but you're getting on with your own practice, you're keeping in contact, fair enough. But if anybody was doing that in a healthy and positive way they'd be very happy that others were expressing their commitment in their own way by getting on with activities and say, 'well jolly good, I'm glad to see you doing it and I hope you succeed.' They wouldn't be carping and critical, and they just lend moral support, just by being around and by being what they were.

Vangisa: I've probably been very useful in that way.

S: So it isn't that one is saying that everybody is under the obligation to be doing certain things or must follow a certain pattern. There may well be people who aren't doing, in that sense, anything at all, but who are just getting on with their own spiritual development and remaining in contact, and that is a great contribution sometimes, to have sort of happy, carefree people around, who don't have any particular responsibility. But they are committed, but if you get people who aren't committed in the specific way and at the same time they're carping and critical and undermining what you're trying to do, then you must question whether they are really so free as perhaps they profess to be or would like to be.

Lokamitra: People sometimes use that as an excuse to cover up their inability to not express themselves as Order members. Not necessarily doing things but...

S: But if you're alienated from the Order as a whole you're in a very [39] difficult position because you tend to be very resistant and defensive if any Order members approaches you or tries to help you out a bit. It's almost as though you need one or two friendly non Order members around who are able to intervene at such times.

Padmapani: Surely with this idea of the Kalyana Mitra system now, this sort of thing might be eliminated.

S: Yes. Let's hope it can be eliminated in future before...

Padmapani: Not entirely eliminated maybe but certainly...

S: Because originally one of the difficulties was when the Order was very small, when perhaps there weren't more than a dozen people, sometimes people had difficulties or problems and sometimes they had difficulties with me, which meant that I couldn't do anything about the difficulty because by trying to do something about it I'd only make it worse because it was me, and there weren't other Order members sufficiently experienced to be able to do anything. But that is no longer the position now, partly because I'm no longer so closely involved and partly because there are so many other experienced Order members. So that sort of difficulty doesn't arise any more it seems, but it was a definite difficulty in the early days. But there is this difficulty still that if someone feels alienated from the Order as a whole, then it becomes difficult for any individual Order member to do anything about it, but some approach has to be found and the person tackled, tactfully and spiritually.

There's going to be a bit about openness in 'Shabda' extracted from a recent seminar.

Subhuti: You talked about Order members who maybe didn't take up any particular function

and simply continued with their own practice and remained in contact, but I thought in a way that things have got to the point where there is so much to be done that anybody who felt any sort of commitment would want to do something.

S: But you are doing something if you are carrying on with your own practice and just remain in contact, and it may be quite good that there should be at least a few people like that around to remind the rest who have a sort of regular job, as it were, within the movement, that there are other possibilities. Otherwise there is also the opposite danger that you get too much identified with a certain line of action and think of commitment as expressing itself necessarily in that way. Perhaps there are some people who temperamentally are not busy. They have that sort of way of functioning.

Lokamitra: There are some people who, like Suvratta and Srimala who because of family commitments and so on...

Subhuti: That's a different matter.

S: But even there still full timers as Vangisa said.

Lokamitra: I don't know whether this is a bad thing but I'd be quite suspicious of most people if they wanted to take on this role, as it were.

S: Oh, so would I, but I don't want to lose sight of the fact. In fact I don't want anyone to lose sight of the fact that there is that particular mode of functioning - I won't call it a role - but there is that particular mode of functioning. No doubt it is sometimes, if one isn't careful, a bit irritating when you are very busy with a lot of things to do and you see somebody else who's just not got anything [40] to do, and, for instance, Bodhishri told me that on the last weekend retreat she got a bit irritated - even Bodhishri who normally just doesn't get irritated at all - she got a bit irritated by one Friend who turned up for the retreat and was sort of strolling around and he said, well why are you always doing things and bothering about this, that and the other. Let things just happen! [Laughter] And so she told him, she said, rather sharply, that if she just let things happen well there wouldn't be any retreat at all. But you have got to be able to accept that there are these sort of happy-go-lucky people who don't do things in your way and just not get irritated by the fact that they are around. Provided they are genuinely of that kind and not just shirking and not expressing their commitment in any way.

Lokamitra: If they were sincere in what they were doing then I don't think one would feel this negativity towards them.

S: Well if they were sincere and if you were sincere too! [Laughter] It cuts both ways.

Lokamitra: But you'd get a feeling of strength from them.

S: You certainly would. If they were genuine in their attitude and if you were receptive, well you'd certainly feel a support from them, yes.

[End of side one side two]

... laundering their robes and arranging for their lectures and bringing the car to take them

here and there, and they just sit happily, calmly. But people are quite happy to have them do that. Because they feel, well they are really living in a different kind of way and they are just occupied with other things, not with worldly things, as it were. So that's also quite a useful reminder sometimes. Have at least a few people like that who are temperamentally suited to that. Because you have to be temperamentally suited otherwise you really just get bored. So there's a few people who just don't get bored not doing anything at all, who are quite happy not to have things to do. So we have to leave some room for them too. Even though I agree we keep a sharp look out for rationalizations and shirking and so on.

_____: Then again what do you think are the causes of shirking? Why do you think people are not willing to get involved in a practical way?

S: There's no outward going emotion. Lack of positive emotions and lack of capacity to give (obscured by two people having a private conversation next to the microphone!!) ...

_____: ...

S: But the net result is the same. That something is given. Whatever the style.

_____: What I meant was if the local set-up was exclusively on one side it might be difficult for people who are quite able and willing to give, not to participate in that particular way.

S: You must be quite sure that it is that and if it is that, well look around for a few Order members with your style of doing things. But the net result is the same. For instance in this particular case, both in Christchurch and in Auckland, money was available, though in Auckland they did it in a highly organized way and in Christchurch they didn't do it in an organized way at all. In both cases the dana came in. To give just one sort of crude example. Things were done. So the net result was the same. People were giving, even though the [41] style might have been quite different.

Lokamitra: Just going back to Subhuti's point, you were talking about the bhikkhus content to do what they will but the exalted the first sixty Arhants to go out and teach the world. We're maybe not Arhants but we've certainly got a situation where Buddhism is new and...

S: But there's also what is teaching? It isn't necessarily verbal, because I don't want to provide people with excuses, but you can teach by just being yourself and being happy and being free and other people see that, and I think this is no less important - in fact in some ways it's even more important - because a lot of people nowadays distrust the verbal, and maybe quite rightly, and in a way it's much more important that they should see a happy, carefree person and they'd wonder 'why is he like that, why is he so happy, why is he so carefree, what's made him like that?'

Vangisa: On the other hand, it could be the disadvantage if it's say associated with a similar kind of monastic set-up, in this country this would obviously be a very good way of just withering away, and you have got to go out and communicate. You can't, as in some countries in the East, retire until you're into your nice salubrious (unclear) and wait for people to come to you. Only a certain limited number will come. You have to be there and be visible.

S: Ah well there are two ways of communicating. You can have an organized Centre with

meetings and classes, but you can also have, as it were, a freelance Order member who is carrying on with his own practice, who is in contact with other Order members, but who just moves around from place to place, talks to people on buses and on the train, or even at the pub if he visits the pub, or the coffee bar if he doesn't, and he just spreads things around like that. Some people aren't able to do that and are not able to speak to a stranger so easily or freely, but others are, and that is there way of communicating and spreading. So you shouldn't exclude that possibility.

_____: I know that in psychological terms it's said that children respond more to people who've told them. I mean they did what they were told more than what was practised.

S: Oh dear!

_____: Children?

_____: Yes.

_____: In a survey?

_____: I can't remember what it was. It was rather small and extracted from something else but they had somebody trying to teach children and they found that what they enforced by saying but not practising - they tried saying it and not doing it and the reverse and they found that what really stuck was saying it.

_____: Having conditioned the children already.

Vangisa: Well my experience of my own children is the opposite.

S: I say probably, my guess would be, that the saying simply drew the child's attention to the doing. Perhaps the child hadn't noticed what the people were doing, then they drew attention to that.

_____: So you need both, not just one.

[42]

S: Yes, but I think probably to distinguish in that way or to separate in that way is probably quite artificial.

_____: It seems they aren't. It did show that saying had quite an effect.

S: That doesn't bear out my own experience.

_____: It didn't bear out mine.

_____: How old were these children?

_____: I think they were about six to ten.

S: Too late!

_____: I think it would be good to have one or two people like that. Not involved in specific activities around a big Centre.

S: Yes.

_____: Because most Order members are very busy it seems quite good to...

S: It might also scare off new people if they see that every single Order member is busy with a full schedule, a tight programme, and even though they might see the Order member being very happy and cheerful and doing it well, but that sort of life might not appeal to them.

_____: There's also just no space for anyone who comes in from outside and if someone wants to come and have a cup of tea and talk with an Order member, there's no one there. They're too busy.

Lokamitra: It used to scare me off seeing Buddhadasa and Druva. I thought I don't want to become ordained.

_____: And what happened?! [Laughter]

Lokamitra: I changed my ideas!

S: But I think it should be important that there are at least some who are a bit, as it were, free, in a positive way, and are seen to be free, and that we don't give the impression that as soon as you become an Order member you're necessarily at once very very busy and lots of things to do. Even though that may be, or is, very good and necessary, but if new people are given the impression that that is the norm, and necessarily the norm, then that wouldn't be very good.

Lokamitra: I'm quite serious about that. I really was very seriously put off ideas about ordination because I saw that's what people did after they were ordained.

_____: Well you tell people that.

Lokamitra: No, I don't.

_____: You give a very strong impression that people are expected to work.

Lokamitra: No. I say what Bhante says.

S: Well sitting around and talking to people is also working. It's creating. It's not negative, it's not a locked room, it is positive.

[43]

_____: I'm not suggesting it is but I do think Lokamitra puts over the impression that he's not going to sit around and talk to people.

Padmaraja: I don't think we have had provision in Archway for people just to do nothing and be free in that kind of way.

Siddhiratna: Kamalasila is quite good at that. He's slow and doesn't mind making a cup of tea and sitting down with somebody.

S: But also we mustn't forget that at Archway at present it's a somewhat exceptional situation and geared to a special project, but if necessary you have to make that clear to people. That this isn't the way that things usually are or are always going to be. We're gearing all our energies to a very special project.

Lokamitra: A point I'd like to make here is that at Archway if someone comes in, it's quite annoying sometimes that I have to stop doing something I'm doing to look after them but I do, or Dhammadinna does or Subhuti does or Kamalasila does, because there's no one else around. So that weight falls upon the administrative side too.

Dhammadinna: I spend quite a lot of my day talking to people actually.

S: But the reception should be quite different from the office.

Dhammadinna: At the moment it's partly my function because there's no one else there to do it.

Lokamitra: Well it's part of our general function. It has to be.

S: Because also this is why sometime ago I mentioned about us needing a guest master or guest mistress and Marichi now is guest master or guest mistress - whichever way choose to have it, and this seems to have worked in the case of a few Finns whom I think were almost overwhelmed with hospitality! [Laughter]

Well we need a few lilies of the field if you see what I mean 'who tore not (unclear)'s fin'.

Sagaramati: I think there's something in the way we tend to do things as well. We have an idea, say in a Council meeting and then we have to look round for the people to do it, hence all this emphasis on there just aren't enough people to do it. You get the situation where everybody has to do something.

S: Perhaps there should be a special branch there of not doing anything. How many people are not to do anything? How many people without any specific obligation or responsibility, so they can stand in when someone with a regular commitment is unable to fulfil it, for instance to take a puja, and they are just around to talk to people and they're getting on with their own practice and they're, as it were, off for at least a spell. I think consideration has to be given to this in future.

_____: What do you mean by for a spell?

S: Well no regular responsibility for a few months, even though they may be around. Obviously we need a few more people. We couldn't do it very easily at the moment, but this is what we should work towards. People take it in turns to be off. Off, but around. I think that would help to ease any tension that might arise from time to time.

_____: At the moment if somebody's sort of off they're not seen as having any useful function.

S: Well they have to be off positively.

_____: Yes, but from what I've observed they are seen as off and therefore not off positively and so it sort of builds up.

S: Because you see the thing is that only those who are really able to work are able to be off. If you're not able to work, you're not able to be off either, even though you might not be doing anything.

_____:

S: I don't think we have had actually. Not anyone who is sort of positively off, as it were on principle, and that being perfectly all right. [Pause] Probably if we do get a few of these people in future they probably will be people who have been active for several years, and who then take a few months, as it were, off. Not really off - they're just functioning in another way.

_____: And you don't have many people who in a way are quite multi-faceted and have developed the faculty in order to be able to step in the different situations and perform quite differently lots of different things.

Vangisa: We seem to have got to the stage where, for the past year or so, if we were in a situation work, if people who are at present doing the work wish to do something else or stop, we don't seem to have any replacements.

Dhammadinna: I think replacements create themselves when someone leaves a situation. I think when Bhante left London there weren't that many people really able to replace him, but through the force of circumstances...! [Laughter] I don't think one should ever look at oneself as being indispensable. I think that's quite dangerous. It's not good for you, it's not good for the other people.

Vangisa: I'm not just thinking of me.

Dhammadinna: No, just a general viewpoint.

Vangisa: As I say I think it's a good idea for people who have been doing some very important high powered job for some time, should in fact be able to go and do something else of quite a different nature after a reasonable time.

S: I think (unclear) already intends to! [Laughter]

_____: I would think it's quite essential, because you become attached to the job itself.

Vangisa: Well exactly, yes. Many people who are running the whole movement, it would be a good thing to and do something humble and...

_____: If you are doing something and you start wanting to move on, you can only do a

certain thing for a certain length of time and then you obviously see you are leaving that situation in advance and you can find someone else to replace you. That's if you're one of a number of Order members. In a situation like you were saying the situation is a bit different. [Pause]

S: Well there's a whole clutch of Order members in Norfolk without much in the way of specific responsibility.

[45]

Vangisa: It crossed my mind once or twice!

S: But it's all going to go in easy stages and meanwhile they're all getting to know one another and their communication is slowly improving and things are happening but sort of slowly. When the time comes no doubt a Centre will develop also, probably in Norwich. There's seven of them I think now. In Norwich they're just getting on with things quietly, baking bread, producing vegetables, the odd baby and so on. [Laughter] No fuss or bother! Painting your pictures, taking your yoga class. They seem to be thriving on it.

Vangisa: It still seems a waste somehow!

_____: I feel quite a lot of support from the Norfolk situation actually. I feel it's very positive.

S: Well it's nice to be able to come up and be in contact with people who seem happy and very much into what they're doing and who've also got time to talk to you!

Subhuti: They can come down to London!

_____: (unclear) with Devamitra. He comes from there.

Vangisa: Well the next person who wants to talk to me will have to wait until Wednesday week! [Laughter]

S: I believe even Mari has to make an appointment now doesn't she! [Laughter]

Dhammadinna: You seem fairly accessible and talkable to over the phone at work! [Laughter]

S: Well that's different! 'I'm very busy these days, you'd better ring me at work!' [Laughter]

Vangisa: I even find something symbolically repugnant about having to get in touch with (obscured/slurred by Vangisa himself laughing heartily!)

S: If she wants to talk to you she rings you at work.

Vangisa: That's the only way!

S: Are there any other actual points arising out of the lecture?

Lokamitra: There's one arising from the what we do for the world or what does the Sangha do for the world. It seems quite a common question that connects with something we were

talking about yesterday about an ideal. It seems to me what we're up against is we have to get people away from a material conception of our function, if you like, as human beings. People think that if you're not doing anything which will materially benefit others, even though you are failing all the time, if you're not trying then you are not fulfilling your function as a human being, and therefore all of your spiritual life is a waste of time. So that's where we've got to break through in a way at some stage.

_____: Could I perhaps wind up on a personal note. I'd like to know what you think about what I'm doing. In a sense I'm very much doing my own thing and it's what I was doing before I was ordained, although not before I in some sense was a Buddhist, which is, I suppose you could say, helping children to develop in the context of the family. I'm not saying I'm going to spend [46] all of my life doing this but I certainly, just in the ordinary way a father does, I spend quite a lot of my adult life doing it, and I'm going to spend quite a lot more obviously, even if I just fulfil my commitment to the children we've got at the moment. I'd like to hear if anyone thinks this is an inconsistent thing to do vis a vis the Western Buddhist Order. Whether it's basically incompatible or not. [Pause] Because obviously if I'm trying to do two things that are incompatible I probably won't succeed in either and I'm going to cause myself a lot of bother.

_____: Are you causing yourself bother? Do you feel any bother?

_____: Well I've been feeling recently that other people feel that there's something wrong, maybe without objective justification.

_____: I've always felt that I always accepted your commitment and I've always accepted your commitment to the Order and felt that your presence at Order meetings has always been very valuable and I've never really expected more than this. You contribute quite a lot when you come. You haven't been very much recently which maybe is to do with the fact that you've been thinking it all over (?)

_____: Yes. What I meant was is it fundamentally so inconsistent? Is there hope of ultimate conciliation so to speak? Am I trying to do the impossible? Am I going forth absolutely essential in the sense that everyone else seems to do it.(?)

_____: Surely it mental or physical when you said that, so you have to be physical(?)

_____: Yes, my sort of ultimate problem I suppose - though it's not a problem in a sense - in a sense it's causing me difficulty, causing me unhappiness. To be a father, to go for it wholeheartedly you can't pretend to take on the role of a father because children see that. Children see through you instantly, so you have to be very wholehearted, or you have to be absolutely wholehearted about being in a family, and if you're being wholehearted about one thing, does it exclude something else? You see what I mean?

_____: It's also for a mother. [Laughter] I'm doing it and I just can be myself(?) and think that I can.

_____: So you think you can be wholehearted.

_____: Yes.

_____: You've got to be wholehearted.

Marichi: It's rather like you don't just want one person and you try and extend that notion beyond just...

Vangisa: As I have said to you, it's exactly the same thing. One has responsibilities for instance with one's children, one has a relationship with one's children but it does not have to exclude other responsibilities, other relationships.

S: It's like the children, as it were, in a sense versus the husband or the wife. You're wholehearted in your relationship to your wife or husband but you're also wholehearted in relationship to the children. The one wholeheartedness doesn't presumably exclude the other, unless it's a quite unhealthy sort of situation. Possessiveness.

Vangisa: One can see a dichotomy between these two things but it's the kind of a dichotomy that I would expect other people to see. A person who is not himself committed to the spiritual life is aware, or thinks there is a dichotomy between leading a spiritual life and [47] doing anything else. Whereas in fact anything else can be integrated as part of one's spiritual activity, so, in my case Maria and in your case Jean sees a dichotomy between them. This is their subjective reaction to the situation. There is nothing for you to... At least this is how I...

_____: Well I've been getting slightly the impression that - not so much Jean, I can't speak for Maria, as I don't know her well enough - that people in the Order are seeing the dichotomy.

Vangisa: Yes, but they weren't experiencing this.

_____: Maybe this is a recent thing because people have been very much talking in terms of Sangha and the possibility for unlimited commitment and so forth. I obviously haven't got the possibility for unlimited commitment.

Lokamitra: I think this is your interpretation of it. I don't think it's something that's been said. I think people have always been very very positive to you personally and I think there's been nothing else said when you haven't been at Order meetings.

_____: Oh yeah, I'm sure you're right. That's why I ask you explicitly.

Lokamitra: So it's not...

Marichi: It's just a matter of emphasis isn't it.

Manjuvajra: I think that this attitude of commitment to the Order being commitment to doing practical work within the Order, is the thing that causes that kind of difficulty...

S: Within the Friends rather?

Manjuvajra: Yes, and it also causes difficulty for me in Cornwall because you get 'Shabda' and you read it through and you see things like the quotation about Sangha being the whole of the spiritual life, you hear that the rumour's trickling down from London that there's a whole lot of practical activity, and one gets the impression that commitment to the Three Jewels

means going and doing practical work. And then if you're not in a position to make that kind of commitment or if you don't want to make that kind of contribution to the Friends, then you feel maybe I'm in the wrong place, maybe I'm doing something wrong. Maybe it's irreconcilable.

S: Because there also is the question of why you don't want, or why you are not doing. It can be either positive or negative.

Manjuvajra: You see that just confuses it in a way. I know from my own point of view that I don't feel like working in an organizational structure. Now if I just accept that, then I feel much better in myself, I feel much more positive. If I say well now I'm feeling positive, maybe the reasons I'm doing this for are wrong, then I get into confusion.

Lokamitra: But you say that Sangha being the whole of the spiritual life is one of these things, yeah, because I think people do confuse the two things. They confuse Sangha and working for the movement, and I think that in London now there isn't this feeling that one has to express oneself by work at all any more. I think there's a very strong feeling that we're doing things, we're working in every different way and so that people who don't feel that energy very often react, and there's no pressure I think, in London, on people at all to take up something administrative or something. But you hear that people are [48] doing things. You hear that people are working very hard, and that's I think what gets a lot of people...

S: A few people seem to feel guilty merely by hearing that others are doing certain things and feeling or knowing that they are not and then they start feeling guilty and then they feel uncomfortable and even become a bit reactive.

_____: Well I'm one of them.

Vangisa: (unclear)... I think it was you actually raised some time before about this feeling one sometimes gets when one is cut off from Centre activities that one is a kind of second rate, second grade Order member.

_____: (Name)

Vangisa: Was it she who said it? But it struck me actually listening to both of you - I think Suvratta has said something similar, something on those lines once or twice before - and this seemed to be the point that you were both making.

S: If you felt that you were positively not doing things or positively not into organization, the fact that others wouldn't bother you at all, but it does seem to bother you.

_____: Well let me make my position absolutely clear. I am not concerned by the fact that other people are involved in things and I think that's really good. I am very impressed by what's going on in London and very impressed by the magazines that are coming out, the Newsletter, the publications and so on, and even proud of it. But nonetheless I don't feel that I want to actually make a positive move to become involved in that kind of thing. It's then that I start to feel wrong. I feel that I'm not pulling my weight, I'm not doing my bit.

S: Then that is you. There's room for the independent Order member not involved

organizationally but just keeping on with his spiritual practice and keeping in touch, but without an organizational role as it were. This is what I was saying some time ago. But if you start, as it were, feeling guilty when you hear of all these things that are going on, of which you fully approve, it means really you're not very satisfied with yourself, or the way that you are doing things, and your own sort of mental state. This is what it really boils down to. You can see that, but some people deflect it back on to the Order and criticise the Order.

_____: Yes.

[End of recording]

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