

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrās](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

The seminars were all recorded and later transcribed. Some of these transcriptions have been carefully checked and edited and are [now available in book form](#). However, a great deal of material has so far remained unchecked and unedited and we want to make it available to people who wish to deepen their understanding of Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

How should one approach reading a seminar transcription from so long ago? Maybe the first thing to do is to vividly imagine the context. What year is it? Who is present? We then step into a world in which Sangharakshita is directly communicating the Dharma. Sometimes he is explaining a text, at other times he is responding to questions and we can see how the emergence of Dharma teachings in this context was a collaborative process, the teaching being drawn out by the questions people asked. Sometimes those questions were less to do with the text and arose more from the contemporary situation of the emerging new Buddhist movement.

Reading through the transcripts can be a bit like working as a miner, sifting through silt and rubble to find the real jewels. Sometimes the discussion is just a bit dull. Sometimes we see Sangharakshita trying to engage with the confusion of ideas many of us brought to Buddhism, confusion which can be reflected in the texts themselves. With brilliant flashes of clarity and understanding, we see him giving teachings in response that have since become an integral part of the Tiratna Dharma landscape.

Not all Sangharakshita's ways of seeing things are palatable to modern tastes and outlook. At times some of the views captured in these transcripts express attitudes and ideas [Tiratna has acknowledged as unhelpful](#) and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

We hope that over the next years more seminars will be checked and edited for a wider readership. In the meantime we hope that what you find here will inspire, stimulate, encourage - and challenge you in your practice of the Dharma and in understanding more deeply the approach of Urgyen Sangharakshita.

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

MITRA RETREAT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS 1985

Devamitra: ... involved in the FWBO for thirteen years and I've been an Order Member for well over eleven years now and during that period many times I've been introduced as a speaker by Bhante but one privilege has always evaded me and that has been an opportunity to get my own back on him. (Laughter). This is the first time I've ever had to introduce Bhante to an audience. But of course he's someone who proverbially does not need any introduction whatsoever. He himself has observed more than once on men's events here how ridiculous or impossible it seems to introduce speakers like Subhuti or Nagabodhi or Vessantara or Abhaya because they're so well known, everybody knows them. But how much more impossible is it to introduce Bhante because he's even more renowned than they are. So without any further ado I'll hand over now to Bhante who's going to very kindly answer your written questions. (Pause)

Sangharakshita: As I expect you know quite a wide variety of questions have been handed in and therefore the question arises exactly how one is to deal with them. Is one just to deal with them at random or is one to try to organise them into various groups or categories. Usually I try to organise questions into groups or categories so that we're not jumping too disconcertingly from one topic to another. But I must admit I haven't found it easy to sort out your questions for this evening into clear cut categories. But I've done my best and I've come up with a classification into questions dealing with body, questions with speech and questions dealing with mind. Well some of you may be thinking you can't remember having asked any questions either about body, speech or your mind [Laughter]. Which goes to suggest that one isn't to take this classification too literally.

To take the classification in reverse order, under questions relating to mind I've included all the more, as it were, theoretical questions, or if you like even philosophical questions or doctrinal questions. And under the category of speech I've included questions about truthfulness and literalness, literal-mindedness. And under body I've included all sorts of practical questions. So those are the three categories under which I'm going to consider the questions that you've handed in.

So first of all, starting with questions which can be classified as dealing with mind or theoretical questions. These are both traditional and non-traditional and there's a tiny bit of overlapping in fact. In fact we've got four questions about conditioned co-production. So let's deal with these first. These are of course quite theoretical. First of all comes two questions from the same person, I think, or the same group.

"Are conditioned coproduction and creator god mutually exclusive"?

Well the very short answer to that question is that they are. You can't really believe in creator god and conditioned coproduction at the same time. But perhaps I'd just better offer a few words of explanation. Perhaps the key term here in a way, is creator god because various forms of the theism think of god as the creator. The creator of the universe. The creator of everything mundane, everything that exists. So usually when one thinks in terms of a creator one thinks in terms of a creation. You think of a first point at which or from which everything began. Before that there was nothing, that is to say, nothing mundane, nothing created. If you like there was only god though some theologians will argue that you cannot even speak in terms of before and after with reference to God. But certainly creation had a beginning, creation was the beginning.

But if we think in terms of conditioned coproduction there is no beginning, there is no first beginning, no ultimate beginning, or perhaps I should say, because this qualification is usually added, no perceptible first beginning. If one thinks of conditioned coproduction one thinks in terms of a particular phenomenon arising in dependence on another phenomenon which in its turn has arisen in dependence on another phenomenon which in its turn has arisen in dependence on another phenomenon and so on back and back and back and back. And you never come to, you can never perceive, an ultimate first beginning of everything. You don't come to any point at which the mundane or the 'conditioned' in Buddhist language issues from the unconditioned. You don't find yourself at any point of ultimate origin or first beginning or creation.

So for this reason we say that conditioned coproduction and creator god are mutually exclusive. There is something more that can be said and this relates to that qualification which I introduced, no perceptible first beginning. Because when you try to go back and back to that point of first beginning, as you trace your steps, as it were, back and back. As you trace the sequence of phenomena back and back, it is of course your mind that is tracing. You are thinking in terms of that process. Your mind as it were accompanies you. So at every stage however far you go back there's not only the phenomenon arising, there is the mind which is conceiving of the phenomenon as arising.

If we take this, as it were, philosophy of conditioned coproduction a little further, a little deeper we see that the phenomenon which arises represents the object, and the mind that perceives that phenomenon represents the subject, and that there is no object without subject and no subject without object, no nama without rupa, and no rupa without nama. So this is why it is said that there is no perceptible first beginning of things. You cannot perceive a first beginning of things because that would be to perceive, one might say, the non-object. You'd come back to a point where there was a subject but there was no object. And again according to Buddhism subject and object are interdependent. Where you get object you get subject, where you get subject you get object. So you can't go back to a point where you have only the perceiving subject and not the perceived object. You go back and back and back indefinitely so long as there is a perceiving subject. The only way that you can cease to perceive the objective universe is to cease to perceive so to speak the subject that perceives that universe. In other words you cannot go beyond the object without at the same time going beyond the subject. And if you eventually do go beyond the subject and the object, or beyond the object and the subject then you'll be so to speak in a transcendental state, though state isn't the right word because that's too overly subjective, a state in which the very distinction of subject and object no longer has any meaning and where the whole concept of origination as well as cessation has no meaning either.

So this is the standard Buddhist view we may say. So clearly this kind of view, the view of conditioned coproduction is not compatible with the idea of a creator god. This is just a very rough outline as it were. So then there's the second question on the same paper goes on to ask:

"How radical was the 'things with its cause view'? Was it new or did it form part of some philosophical viewpoint prior to the Buddhist enlightenment?"

Well here again the answer is quite simple and straightforward. As far as we know. As far as the records go, as far as the evidence goes, there was no trace of this way of thinking before the Buddha's time. We have the Vedas, we have the brahmanas, we have the Upanishads, though even the oldest of those are now believed by at least some scholars to be post-Buddhistic rather than pre-Buddhistic, but nowhere in that literature do we find anything like

the view of conditioned coproduction, pratitya-samutpada. And of course from a Buddhist point of view that is not altogether strange because according to the Pali scriptures, in fact according to all the Buddhist scriptures the pratitya-samutpada, the conditioned coproduction, represents the formulation in conceptual terms of the very insight that made the Buddha the Buddha. So inasmuch as the Buddha became a Buddha at a time, in a place, where no Buddhas existed, one would not really have expected there to have been any knowledge of conditioned coproduction inasmuch as that represented the conceptualised expression of the content of His enlightenment experience.

So as far as is known the philosophy, if one can call it that, of conditioned coproduction is unique to the Buddha and unique to Buddhism. It represents a quite distinctive point of view.

All right, let's go on. Still on the subject of conditioned coproduction. (Pause)

"Does ignorance arise in the same way as the other nidanas in strict causal relationship with the preceding nidana? The relationship in this case does not seem so clear cut as that between other pairs of nidanas, for example, six sense spheres and contact"

There's a, there is or there used to be a quite common misunderstanding on this point. You're all quite familiar with the fact that avidya or ignorance is the first of the twelve nidanas, the twelve nidanas which are usually enumerated, that is to say, not the positive nidanas but the other more well known set. So because they're enumerated in this particular order, beginning with ignorance and ending with birth, old age, disease and death, it is sometimes thought, and it certainly used to be thought when Buddhism first came to be studied, that ignorance represented some sort of primordial first cause. Because you've got ignorance first and it was out of ignorance, as it were, that everything came. Ignorance was there first. Everything else was there subsequently, everything is caused by this great primeval cosmic ignorance. But that is actually not the Buddhist point of view at all. Avidya maybe enumerated first in the series of twelve nidanas but it's not really to be conceived of as coming absolutely first, absolutely before all the others. Under some circumstances it does and under other circumstances it doesn't.

In this connection you will remember that the nidana chain can be subdivided, and it can be subdivided into those nidanas which represent the karma process or cause process we may say, and those nidanas which represent the effect process, or sometimes we say action process and effect process. So if you look closely at the chain of the nidanas, you'll find you've got a cause process of the past life, a result process or effect process of the present life, a cause process of the present life, an effect process of the future life. I'm sure you've all gone through this material. It's in various sources. So you've got in sequence, cause process, result process. Cause process, result process. And this goes on and on. Ignorance of course being included as part of the cause process of course, looked at from one particular point of view. In a sense, of course, ignorance is present all the time. It's just that it's more, one might say, noticeable at some times than others.

But ignorance in the sense of privation of the realisation of reality underlies all the nidanas. One mustn't think of it just coming first and having come first it doesn't come second, third, fourth, and so on. It sort of ceases to exist. But no - it goes on in a sense repeating itself all the time. But one has got this sequence of, as I've said, action process, result process, action process, result process, and this of course, as I explained a few minutes ago, goes back and back and back. You can't find any absolute first beginning of that. So it isn't that ignorance represents anything like an ultimate first cause of things. I think one has to try to see ignorance as an essential part of the whole process. Either as actually operative or so to speak, lying in abeyance and waiting to become operative when circumstances permit.

All right, another question about conditionality this time in connection with karma and the Buddha. In fact it overlaps with another question. I'll read them both together. The first question is headed:

"Are the laws of conditionality and of karma applicable to the Buddha? In our study group we were unable to resolve the question of whether or not the Buddha is subject to the law of karma. It seems to me that before His parinirvana the Buddha would be operating on all the levels of conditionality described by the five niyamas. Can one consider that the Buddha is still subject to conditionality of a spiral kind and to the law of karma but unlike us he uses them continually to his advantage by having volitions which are entirely skilful?"

And the other version of much the same question goes:

"Can you explain why a Buddha accrues no karma, even positive, when on a moral ethical plane His actions would appear to have consequences?"

It really is quite simple. Let's take it from the point of the view, say, basic Buddhism of (). According to basic Buddhist teaching the Buddha is subject to the law of karma, in the sense that, even though he has in this present lifetime attained enlightenment he still has to suffer the consequences of any unskilful action that he may have performed before His attainment of enlightenment, and there's an illustration which is usually given in this connection and that is of the episode in which He was wounded in the foot by Devadatta. Devadatta, you may remember wanted to take over the Sangha. The Buddha wouldn't allow him to do that so he became very upset, angry, annoyed, jealous and he even went so far as to try to assassinate the Buddha. And one of the ways in which he tried to do that was by rolling a great boulder down upon the Buddha from a mountain peak as the Buddha was walking below. So the great boulder came bouncing down, it missed the Buddha but a splinter of rock from that boulder pierced the Buddha's foot and drew blood, it just wounded him slightly, maybe just scratched him. So this is traditionally considered as having been the result of some unskilful action that the Buddha had performed in a previous existence long before he became a Buddha.

So the fact that you have gained enlightenment doesn't mean that as an enlightened being you might not have to suffer the consequences of those unskilful actions performed before your enlightenment.

There was an instance of this in a way in the story of the life of Angulimala. Because even after Angulimala had become an Arahant he still had to suffer the consequences, or some of the consequences, of his past bad actions. He was beaten, he was attacked and so on. But of course in a way there is a difference, because when you're enlightened you can only suffer in your body. You can suffer physical pain. You don't suffer any mental distress. So one might say that there is a limit for that reason to the amount of suffering that you are required to undergo because, I mean in the case of most people, if they're attacked or if someone tries to assassinate them, not only is there the element of physical suffering but they'll become deeply disturbed, upset, afraid, angry and so on. But in the case of the Buddha and in the case of Angulimala after he'd become an Arahant there was no question of that. There was simply the physical pain to suffer as a result of their previous unskilful actions. And we know from our own experience that we often make things worse for ourselves than they need be. We undergo some quite slight physical inconvenience and it becomes a real suffering to us on account of our mental attitude. So a positive mental attitude can greatly reduce the impact of physical suffering. So this is what happened in the case of the Buddha and in the case of the enlightened Angulimala. Yes they suffered physically, that was a result of previous unskilful actions, but they didn't suffer nearly as much as we might suffer under similar circumstances.

Because they bore the suffering with a completely different mental attitude. No doubt recognising it as the fruit of previous karma.

But then there's another aspect of the question. What about the Buddha's present activities? What about the present activities of an enlightened being? Do they constitute karma? Do they produce results in the future? Because the question is, well, the Buddha's actions of body, speech and mind, are skilful so should they not produce the results of skilful karma in the future? Well the traditional Buddhist answer goes something like this. The traditional Buddhist way of looking at skilful actions is to divide them, from a certain point of view, into two classes. There is a class which is simply skilful and which under the law of karma produces positive, that is to say, pleasurable effects. But there is another class which is called technically akirya or inoperative, and these are the skilful mental activities resulting in skilful actions of speech and body of those who are enlightened. Their skilful mental states, though skilful are not productive of any future karma. They are, as it were, complete in themselves. In a sense one might say they don't even come under the law of conditionality at all. They're an expression, one might say, paraphrasing, of the unconditioned. And in any case, of course, one might say, from the Hinayana point of view, a buddha or an arahant is not going to take any future rebirth, he's not going to take any future body so there is nothing as it were left on his death to, so to speak, inherit the karma, what to speak of unskilful karma, there's nothing left as it were to inherit skilful karma.

So in the case of a Buddha, in the case of an arahant there is no question of even skilful karma in the ordinary sense. One might even perhaps simplify the matter by saying his karma, if one can use that word at all in this connection, has become transcendental. It's neither cause nor effect. So that perhaps is the short and reasonably simple answer to that question.

All right now we're coming to something still theoretical, still doctrinal but of a rather different nature. Quite a different kind of question.

"Dakinis. Dakinis have great significance in the tantra but their male counterparts - the dakas - seem to be only mentioned in passing. Have images of them been revealed? Do you think that images of dakas will be revealed and developed in the future or are dakas in fact of little spiritual significance?"

Well perhaps here there's a slight question of literalness because the term dakini is feminine and it's masculine counterpart is daka. And actually if you take the word daka, just that word, take it quite literally, there's very little about dakas in Buddhist literature. But does that mean that there is very little about the masculine counterpart of the dakini? Actually it doesn't mean that because for some reason or other, some historical reason or other, instead of the daka figuring in the way that the dakini does in Buddhist tradition and literature and art, the figures instead, the equivalent or an equivalent of the daka in the form of the dharmapala. So dharmapalas of course occupy quite an important place in Vajrayana tradition, in Tibetan Buddhist art. There are many, many examples of them. And it's because they are also in a way the counterparts of the dakinis that they've superseded at least in terms of nomenclature the daka.

So yes there are images of dharmapalas and you can regard those as images of dakas. But the question goes on: "Do you think that images of dakas will be revealed and developed in the future or are dakas in fact of little spiritual significance?" Well we have images of dakas in the form of dharmapalas already. The assumption is that they will continue. But what are the conditions in dependence upon which they'll continue or not continue? I mean what are the conditions on which images in general continue to exist or don't continue to exist. Well, the

conditions broadly speaking are that people find them meaningful, that people respond to them. People find them of significance. I know quite a lot of people find the dakini a figure of some significance and no doubt quite a lot of people also find the figure of the dharmapala of some significance. They respond to it. It has a sort of emotional appeal to them. They like the sight of all that fiery energy and all those skulls, that wrathful expression and all the flames. It appeals to them in some strange way. So you can't perpetuate images simply on theoretical grounds. You can only perpetuate images or images only perpetuate themselves when they mean quite a lot to quite a lot of people. So in a sense it depends upon you.

All right, those were the theoretical questions as it were. So let's come onto these questions concerned with in a way speech, especially with literalness, literal mindedness. We've already touched on that just a little bit. The first of these questions goes:

"Last night you mentioned that you thought that people were taken to too much literalisation. Is this because we are one-sided, or do you consider metaphorical interpretation to be a higher faculty? In either case how can we develop it?"

So what is it that makes people literal-minded? I think there are two reasons for this broadly speaking. I think you can't ignore the letter. You can't ignore the literal meaning of a teaching or a tradition. You've got, so to speak, to learn, to acquire, the literal meaning first, you've got to understand that first. So I think one of the reasons why people are sometimes rather literal minded is that they're still struggling with the letter of the teaching and are probably likely to be struggling with it for some time. I think you have first of all to master the literal meaning of a teaching before you can ask yourself what it means in a metaphorical sense or in some other deeper sense.

So I think this is the first reason why people are a bit literal minded. It's because they're still struggling with the letter of the teaching and trying to comprehend that.

I think the second reason, in a way the more basic and fundamental reason why people tend to be a bit literal-minded is, in a way, just because of lack of imagination. Perhaps they can't appreciate the multifaceted or the many-sided nature of the material with which they are dealing. Very often they tend to think, well, there must one meaning which is reducible to a set form of words and no more than one meaning. The idea that there are shades of meanings, levels of meaning, facets of meaning, I think this is foreign to the minds to begin with of at least some people. In other words one might say they're literal minded, I mean, once they've learnt the actual letter of the teaching, because their minds are not sufficiently subtle, that their minds don't sufficiently resonate we may say to the inner significance of things. So again why is this? Very often it's because I think people aren't accustomed to reflecting upon things. They're very accustomed to dealing with the outside world and very often you can deal with the outside world in a straightforward sort of way but when you come to deal with the inner world, when you come to deal with the spiritual world or spiritual truth with symbols, you can't deal with them in that same kind of way. You need to develop a much subtler sort of mind, a much more sensitive kind of mind which is capable of dealing with, capable of handling, the truths, if you like, the experiences, of that other kind of world.

So I think if we want to get over our literal mindedness, once we have mastered the letter of the teaching we just have to learn to become more sensitive. We have to reflect more, we have to think more. For instance it isn't enough that you think about a particular teaching when you're in a study group or when you're reading a book. If what you've been reading about is of any importance to you, you should be turning it over in your mind all of the time and going deeper and deeper into it, asking yourself what it really means. What is its deeper significance? And if you do this of course you will naturally at the same time get over your literal mindedness. If you ask someone or if someone asks you, well, 'what's two times two?' Well you'll say four straight away. But a lot of you will think that you can ask questions

about the spiritual life or about spiritual truths or about spiritual realities in the same sort of way. Ask a completely factual question and get a completely factual answer. So very often when they ask questions they're after that completely factual answer which by the very nature of the situation you can't get.

One might say that a factual answer though correct is usually not worth having, not from a spiritual point of view. If your question does admit of a completely factual answer, you might say it's a quite shallow question. If your question can only be answered with all sorts of ifs and buts and as it were and so on well then perhaps it's not quite such a shallow question. But we have to get accustomed to the idea in a way that truth, spiritual truth especially, or even if you like the truth of human life is a very multifaceted thing, not to say many splendored thing which cannot at all easily be reduced to a set formula that you can learn off like you learn off any other fact about the mundane world.

Anyway this answers the first part of the question, but then the question goes on: "Is this because we're one-sided or do you consider metaphorical interpretation to be a higher faculty?" Well one can speak in terms of a higher faculty but one can also speak in terms of a higher development of the same faculty. But in whichever way one speaks certainly some kind of growth, some kind of development in this respect is needed.

And then of course the question concludes how can we develop it? Well, we develop it in all sorts of ways. I think one of the ways is just discussion. Especially discussion with those who know more than you do or just see a little more deeply, because then you'll be brought up against the fact that your questions and your whole way of looking at things is rather literal-minded. Indirectly, of course, meditation will help. Perhaps reading things like poetry will help, appreciation of the arts will help. Your mind will be made more and more subtle.

All right still pursuing the same kind of questions. (Pause)

"If Enlightenment is the goal of the spiritual life then does it not follow that all enlightened beings are equal, and yet with reading and study there are suggestions that this is not so and there is a hierarchy of buddhas. Would you explain this hierarchy and where does Sakyamuni Buddha fit into this scheme?"

A hierarchy of buddhas. Well, in a sense there isn't a hierarchy of buddhas because, well as the question suggests all buddhas do have the same realisation, they've all attained nirvana. They've all assumed bodhi. They're all so to speak at one with reality so strictly speaking one can't really speak of a hierarchy of buddhas. The buddhas are all equal. But they're not sort of mathematically equal. It's not as though you've got a buddha here and a buddha there, and a buddha next to him and then another buddha further along, all sitting down a row and they're all equal in the modern sort of egalitarian sense. It isn't really like that at all because the buddhas overlap. You could even say they overlap to such an extent that there is really only one buddha there. In fact not even one if you look at it really closely, because even one is transcended. But there appear perhaps to be a variety of buddhas, looked at from different points of view or within different contexts. But certainly there's no hierarchy of buddhas one might say. But there is such a thing of course as a spiritual hierarchy. There is such a thing as a hierarchy of bodhisattvas, there's a hierarchy of aryas. In Buddhist literature you get the Stream-Entrant, and you have the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, the Arahant, then the Bodhisattva and then the Buddha - that is the hierarchy.

But perhaps at the back of the questioner's mind there was this idea of the trikaya, the nirmanakaya, the sambhogakaya and the dharmakaya. Now each buddha one might say has a nirmanakaya, a sambhogakaya and a dharmakaya but this sort of language is really very

misleading because there can be only one dharmakaya, that being the ultimate reality. So one can't really think of the nirmanakaya buddha, the sambhogakaya and the dharmakaya buddhas as being a hierarchy of buddhas. To begin we speak of a nirmanakaya buddha and a sambhogakaya buddha and so on but this doesn't mean literally that you've got three different buddhas. If you've got anything at all you've got one particular buddha existing on three different levels. The nirmanakaya being the buddha, the same buddha as he exists or manifests on the historical level, the sambhogakaya buddha, that same buddha as he exists on and manifests on the archetypal level and the dharmakaya, that level if you can speak of a level at all which really transcends all levels in which he is at one with ultimate reality, beyond even the archetypal.

So even here you don't really have a hierarchy of buddhas. You may have a hierarchy of levels within one and the same buddha but you don't really have a hierarchy of buddhas themselves. You get the same sort of way of thinking when people ask you such questions as, well, Avalokitesvara is the bodhisattva of compassion. Does that mean he hasn't got any wisdom? Or Manjugosha is supposed to be the Bodhisattva of wisdom well is he also compassionate? If he is then why is he the bodhisattva of wisdom? If, as sometimes one reads, Avalokitesvara, though the bodhisattva of compassion also is fully possessed of wisdom and if Manjugosha, though the bodhisattva of wisdom is also possessed of compassion, well how can you distinguish between them? Well, in a sense, you can't. There's just a difference of aspect. You see Avalokitesvara predominantly under the aspect of compassion. Manjugosha predominantly under the aspect of wisdom but it isn't really that you have a bodhisattva who embodies compassion and nothing but compassion and another bodhisattva who embodies wisdom and nothing but wisdom. If you think in that way then you're the victim of literal-mindedness.

But you'd be surprised at the number of questions I get, even from Order Members I'm afraid, of this nature. So there's no hierarchy of buddhas. If one speaks of a hierarchy of bodhisattvas then of course the hierarchy is based on the ten bhumis, the ten stages so you can have bodhisattvas of the first bhumi, the second bhumi, the third bhumi. It's in the tenth bhumi the bodhisattva becomes a buddha. So the buddha represents the topmost level of the hierarchy.

All right, something rather different.

"When the Buddha answers a question after the questioner has asked three times is this the custom of the time or the Buddha's own custom or should we not take it too literally? Does it suggest that the Buddha was reluctant to answer?"

As far as we know it wasn't a custom of the time. But we don't know definitely that was simply a custom that was peculiar to the Buddha. It may have been, it may not have been. But it does seem that the Buddha refrained from answering questions in this way until he was asked a third time when the circumstances were of a special seriousness. And by the circumstances being of a special seriousness I mean of seriousness for the person asking the question. Serious in the sense that the person asking the question was likely to get much more than he bargained for. Sometimes you don't realise the implications of your question, and the answer to your question can come as a terrible shock to you because you haven't really realised what it is that you were asking, asking the Buddha in this case. So it seems to me that the Buddha's refusal to answer the first time the question was asked, and even his refusal to answer the question the second time it was put, was the Buddha's way of warning the person concerned that if you persist in asking the question something very serious is going to come, something very serious even is going to happen.

You know this in the ordinary way if you ask somebody, 'well what happened'? And they say, 'no, no, I really can't tell you'. You don't take that literally to mean they're definitely not going to tell you. It's their way of saying, well, it's a quite serious matter. It's something you might not like to hear. So then you say, 'well, no, no, come on, tell me, out with it'. And they say, 'Oh, no, no, I couldn't possibly tell you'. And then again you persist it and out it comes but in the meanwhile you've been alerted to the fact that it is something quite serious. So it seems to me that this is why the Buddha initially refused to answer the question. In a way it was out of compassion. It was the Buddha's way of lessening the shock, lessening the impact of the answer to that question on that person when the answer eventually came.

So this is my personal understanding of the matter. All right.

(End of side one side two)

"Bhante, you mentioned in the Udana seminar that in India one's options are very cut and dried. Either one is married and fulfilling those responsibilities, one is single and celibate, or one is following a spiritual pursuits as a wanderer. In the West our position is much more ambiguous and we have the opportunity to mix various lifestyles. There is the old conflict between girlfriend and community life for example. Would you agree that in a sense we have too many options facing us and that this is an obstacle towards people seriously and wholeheartedly committing themselves to the spiritual life?"

Yes I think actually I would agree with that. I think in a sense, at least from a certain point of view, it is a disadvantage that some many options are open to us. One notices this sometimes with people who've rather a lot of money. If you've rather a lot of money it opens up to you all sorts of options because you don't have to work, you don't have to bother about money. If you like you can go off to Greece, you can even go to Bali. You can go anywhere you like. You can buy books, you can buy, you know, sports gear if you want to get into body building or something of that sort. You can buy a new car if you want to go touring around. You can go visiting all the art galleries in Italy. If you've got money all sorts of options are open to you, but what one very often finds is that the person who's got the money to do all these things, or at least do whichever of these things he wishes to do just doesn't know what to do. Doesn't know which option to take, doesn't know which option to follow.

So one might say in much the same way within the purely spiritual field there are all these options. Yes you can live in a spiritual community. Yes you can get a flat living by yourself either living a celibate life or non-celibate life or you can take a vow of celibacy officially, you can even become a monk, you know, there are all these sort of options. So sometimes people waver and hesitate between these options for such a long time they never really get started on any particular path. They never really take up any particular life style for a sufficiently long time so that they can actually experience and even gain some benefit from it.

So I think that, yes, due to our relative freedom from economic worries, freedom from financial worries, thanks to the dole sometimes and all that sort of thing, thanks to our great mobility in modern times, all sort of options are open to us both non-spiritual and spiritual, all sorts of cultural options which weren't open to people before and sometimes we're quite bewildered. In former centuries very often it was quite clear what your path in life was going to be. You were going to do exactly what your father did. It was simple. If your father was king, well you'd be king. If your father was a sweeper, you'd be a sweeper. If your father was a bricklayer well you'd probably be a bricklayer. If your father was an artist perhaps you'd be an artist. If your father was a politician, you'd be a politician and there is still something of this in British society even now. But very, very much less than it used to be. For most people, given only the limits of their education perhaps, intelligence perhaps, the options are

all open. Any one of you if you really wanted to could be a millionaire. Well, in five or six years perhaps if you really wanted to and you had a certain modicum of ability or within five years you could be well advanced on the spiritual path, perhaps you could be a stream-entrant. Or perhaps you could have founded a flourishing co-op or you could have gone and preached the Dharma in some distant country. I mean all these sort of options are open to you. Sometimes Order Members are a bit bewildered at the options that are open to them. There's Lokamitra calling from India for Order Members to go there. There's Manjuvajra calling from America for Order Members to go there. There are people in New Zealand, you know, crying out for more Order Members there. People in Australia. So think all these wonderful opportunities for a young Order Member. He can go to America, he can go to India, he can go to Australia, he can go to New Zealand, he could go to France, he could go to Italy, there are all sorts of places where he could go and start up an FWBO. So all these dizzying sort of options are open to you.

So sometimes it becomes a bit self-defeating. You end up your head going round and round and not knowing really what to do, which path to follow. So yes, what are we to do then? Well, one of the things that we can do is consult our spiritual friends because sometimes they know us better than we know ourselves and can tell us, at least can advise us, what path would be the best for us and also the best for others taking into account the total situation within the FWBO, needs of the world, and so on and so forth.

And also of course, one has to try to see for oneself the importance of sticking to something. Sticking say at a particular centre for two or three years. Sticking in a particular community for a few years. Pegging away at the same meditation for perhaps two or three years. Studying the same texts for two or three years. Living within the same framework for two or three years whatever it happens to be.

So until you develop a certain stability, a certain maturity, a certain power of judgement and can see then more clearly the next step and not just be distracted and bewildered by all the fascinating possibilities, all the fascinating options that open up before us.

So yes, in some ways we are at a disadvantage but there is an advantage at least because in the past under the old system though there was much greater stability what often happened was the you ended up with quite a lot of square pegs in round holes. But I think nowadays there's a greater possibility of the square peg being fitted into a square hole because round and square holes alike are now much more widely available and you can take up that path of life, and that spiritual path even which is best suited to your individual needs and your individual temperament. This is why within the FWBO we try to offer a broad range of possibilities. Within the FWBO well there's quite a sort of range of possible lifestyles. You might for instance be a family man. You might be married, you might have children, you might have a full time job but you can still be a Friend, you can still be a mitra, you can still be an Order Member. In the same way we've got other people living in communities, living in a large community, living in a small community, living in a men's community or in a women's community and in a few cases even in mixed communities, though they tend to be rather rare because people have found they don't give perhaps such satisfactory results. But all the options are open or any sort of possible combination of these options so that everybody can find what is really most suited to him. What will help him, the situation, the lifestyle, the practice which will help him to evolve, help him to develop.

So just to take up the concluding part of the question. This plenitude of options need not be an obstacle to people seriously and wholeheartedly committing themselves to the spiritual life. But for it not to be an obstacle clearly one needs to give the matter very serious thought and also to consult one's spiritual friends and try to understand oneself.

A question of a quite different nature.

"Do you know why in the Udana seven appears to be a magical number?"

I'm afraid I don't. (Laughter) I must say it had escaped my notice that the number seven did appear to this extent. Presumably it's something that's been discovered in the course of study that the number seven does occur again and again. Well, if that is so that is interesting because, yes, seven is a magical number. In Buddhism we've got the seven bodhiangas, we've got the seven treasures of the king, the seven stages of purification. But of course in Buddhism if one looks at it in this way, it's as though every number is a magic number. We've got the Four Noble Truths and all sorts of other sets of four, the four satipatthanas. You've got sets of six, you've got the six paramitas, you've got eight, the Eightfold Path. You've got nine, you've got ten, you've even got eleven actually. Perhaps you could say you've got magical numbers up to sixty-four, one hundred and eight, two hundred and fifty.

So I think if you're to regard seven as a magical number you've got to be able to show, well, there's something unusual and extraordinary about the number seven and also some philosophical significance of its magical nature. So I don't know whether this is to be taken seriously or not. Perhaps yes someone with perhaps cabalistical or numerological interests would like to investigate it, try to work out, you know, which is the most magical number in the whole of the Pali Canon. (Laughter) And perhaps we can make extensive use of it. We've also got of course the Sevenfold Puja, haven't we.

"In our study group we were discussing the incident where the Buddha tells Rahula you must train yourself never to speak a falsehood even for a joke. We couldn't decide whether to take this literally or metaphorically. Can you comment on this please?"

I think that what the Buddha had in mind, though here I'm speculating, is a joke in a sense of a practical joke. Someone might for instance, some humorist, might say: 'Oh! What do you think. The post has just come. There's a big parcel for you.' And you go there, all eager to get this big parcel and you find there's nothing there. It's just a joke. So I think that this is the sort of 'joke', inverted commas, that the Buddha had in mind. It clearly involves falsehood. It isn't really very kind. It's a sort of practical joke, sometimes playing on people's susceptibilities and perhaps taking advantage of them even. I don't think the Buddha meant to say that everything you say, even when you're joking with someone, has got to be absolutely and literally factually true. I don't think the Buddha meant that.

As I say I think he had in mind, sort of, practical jokes which raise a laugh at somebody's expense but which involve the actual telling of a falsehood. So I think on the whole this is to be taken literally rather than metaphorically, though not too literally.

Still on this subject of literalness.

"Were not the Mahayanists taking the Bodhisattva Vow too literally?" Actually the question says too literary but it's really literally "and too far by saying that the Bodhisattva vows not to enter nirvana until he has saved all beings from samsara."

Well, yes this is absolutely true. If you take the Bodhisattva Vow to mean that the Bodhisattva vows that he will guide everybody else to nirvana and then he himself will attain nirvana only after they have attained, it being assumed that while he's helping others to attain nirvana, well he hasn't attained it himself. So that he's able to help others to attain nirvana without having attained it himself. Well clearly this is ridiculous. You can't take the

Bodhisattva Vow in this sort of way. What it really means we may say is the Bodhisattva realises that his own attainment of enlightenment cannot really be separated from that of others because there is no absolute irreducible difference between self and others. I think one can look at it in those comparatively simple terms.

So from these various examples, these various questions or at least some of them, one can see how careful we have to be about literal-mindedness. On the other hand we mustn't take things or try to take things metaphorically when they clearly are meant literally. For instance, there is a precept - the fifth precept out of the five - in which one undertakes to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs. So this has been understood by one particular group in America as meaning alcohol in the literal sense but not to drink the wine of delusion. (Laughter) So in this particular group they promise, they undertake, not to drink the wine of delusion which of course leaves them perfectly free to drink the wine in the literal sense because that's not what the precept really means! You've not got to take the precept too literally. So in the same way when the Buddha says that one should not engage in violence, well that's not meant to be taken too literally, He couldn't have meant it literally. Well, we're familiar with that sort of thing in the case of Christianity. Christ says "Turn the other cheek" but every bishop probably in Britain, every clergyman practically will tell you, "Oh he never meant it literally. He didn't mean it to be taken seriously. He just meant metaphorically".

So I think you must be very careful, you know, while avoiding literal-mindedness not to try to take metaphorically, falsely, those statements in religious scriptures which clearly are meant to be taken quite, quite literally. So you've got to steer a middle way between these two extremes.

All right. Now we come onto the practical questions, questions in a way connected with body. They're a very mixed bag. I was just wondering just where to start. Maybe I'll just take up the first one that comes to hand. There are three here.

"As mitras how should we start developing a feel or rapport for Bodhisattvas prior to ordination and the visualisation practice."

Well there's one quite simple and easy way in which one can do this. One can familiarise oneself with their pictures. Just have their pictures up around you. At least the pictures of the better known Bodhisattvas, the three, four, five great bodhisattvas. Familiarise yourself with their colours, their emblems, and their symbolism in general. In other words it's as though you have to learn the grammar first, or the language of symbolism in this respect.

And then, Oh, here we jump on to something a little different. Is it

"Which did you find the most difficult in developing your mindfulness and awareness?"

That's quite a question isn't it? "Which did you feel most difficult in developing your mindfulness and awareness?" Presumably the questioner means the most difficult in relation to something. Of course one might say it's very difficult to develop mindfulness or awareness anyway. But if I look back at my own experience I think I can identify one or two situations in which though mindfulness was always difficult to maintain, it was most difficult to maintain in those particular situation, if I look back to what I was like, say in my let's say early twenties. I think I found mindfulness most difficult to maintain, or awareness most difficult to maintain, or at least one of the situations in which I found it most difficult to maintain was when I was discussing things with people. Because when you are young you start discussing you can very easily get into an argument. And once you get into an argument you can very easily become, not exactly heated but a little excited let us say. And when you

become a bit excited you can lose your awareness, lose your recollection of what it is that you're actually talking about. What it is you're actually discussing. It doesn't mean that you necessarily lose your temper but you get so involved in the talk, so involved in the discussion that it sort of takes you over, you become sort of slightly possessed and afterwards it sort of dawns on you that you've lost your awareness or you've lost your mindfulness.

So I remember that when I was in my twenties I used to have quite interesting arguments and discussions with people about Buddhism, about the Dharma, but I'd get so absorbed that sometime later I'd realise that I'd lost my awareness of why I was really engaging in that discussion. What the purpose of the discussion was or what we were really trying to do. What point we were really trying to get at. So I think this is one of the sort of situations that everybody who is trying to develop his awareness or trying to develop his mindfulness should keep a very sort of sharp eye open for because in discussion, or even in just sort of casual conversation, you can very easily get carried away even though the subject itself may be quite a positive one, and to the extent that you get carried away you of course lose your mindfulness.

All right.

"I've heard you quoted as saying 'If you do not have your sexuality sorted out by the time you're thirty it never will be'. What do you mean by this and is it a correct quote?"

Yes I think it is roughly a correct quote. But what does one mean by "having your sexuality sorted out by the time you are thirty?" Well don't take thirty too literally. (Laughter) Allow a year or two this way or that. But I'm not sure if I used the expression 'have your sexuality sorted out' but we'll take it that that was roughly I was getting at. I think what I had in mind so far as I can recollect is that you should understand yourself so far as this particular aspect of your total nature is concerned. In other words, you should be able to see quite objectively. It should be something that you're quite able to look at objectively. Something in a way that you're not afraid to look at and to understand. Because sometimes we find that people try to sweep their sexuality as it were under the carpet. That is not to say it doesn't manifest itself actively in their lives. It may manifest itself very actively in their lives but they don't actually make it a subject of reflection. They don't try to understand well what is happening. What sexuality means to them or what form their sexuality is taking. How important the place it occupies in their life. They sort of just let it go on very often or not go on as the case may be, and, sort of, think, or half think about something else. They never give this particular subject their real attention. And of course if you're thinking in terms of personal development, well you have carefully to examine every aspect of yourself. Your mental state, your activities, your relations with other people, your ideals, your ultimate purpose, your goal in life and so on, you have to look at all these things if you really want to grow, if you really want to develop. So you have also to look at your sexuality and ask yourself quite honestly where you stand in relation to it and where it stands in relation to you. Because it is after all a part of you so whether you like it or not you've got to take it with you or not take it with you, in the course of your spiritual life.

So what you can't do is as it were leave it out of consideration. So first of all you've got to take stock of the situation, take stock of yourself so far as this particular aspect of your life is concerned and then make up your mind quite clearly and consciously what you're going to do about it or not do about it in such a way that it does not hinder you in your quest to develop as an individual. In other words you've got to face up to this aspect of yourself, this part of yourself, quite openly and quite honestly and not ignore or gloss it over or try to, well in a way, try to pretend it doesn't exist. You've got to sort of ask yourself, well, whereabouts in my personal mandala do I put my sexuality or maybe - an even earlier question - you have to

ask yourself, well, taking it that I've got a personal mandala - I think you're all familiar with this way of looking at things - well, whereabouts in that personal mandala do I actually put my sexuality? You might of course be faced with the awful truth that actually you put it pretty near the centre and then you might think, well, if I've got my sexuality at the centre of my mandala, well clearly there's not going to be much in the way of spiritual progress or development for me. I've got to shift it at least a bit towards the periphery and I've got to try to put enlightenment, I've got to try to put the Three Jewels, more and more in the centre of my mandala.

I think very few people will be able to banish their sexuality from their mandala altogether but at least they should be able to put it more and more towards the edge of the mandala, more and more towards the periphery and not allow it to occupy such a central place. But you've got to take a look at it and you've got to ask yourself whereabouts it is in your mandala at the moment and is that where it ought to be, assuming that you want to develop as an individual?

So this is what I mean by sorting out one's sexuality. No doubt different people will sort out in different ways. Alright from that we come on perhaps quite naturally to personal relationships.

"A marriage ceremony, UK, involves an individual giving his or her word to comfort, honour, support, love the partner until death. What guidance can be given on the possible conflict between such an undertaking and a complete Going Forth including leaving home?"

Well, "a marriage ceremony, UK, involves an individual giving his or her word to comfort, honour, support, love the partner until death". I'm afraid I don't really know much about marriage ceremony, UK. I'm not sure whether the question is asking about the religious ceremony or the registry office ceremony. I don't even know whether that's called a ceremony. In the old days a woman used to undertake in the course of the religious ceremony to "love, honour and obey". I don't know what it was the husband undertook to do. I don't know whether on the occasion of the registry office ceremony - I know they've changed the wording of the religious ceremony now - I don't know whether on the occasion of the registry ceremony one actually undertakes to do anything of these things. Can anyone enlighten me? Anyone who's been through it perhaps? Yes.

_____ : No.

S: No. Oh so the question doesn't arise. So perhaps it arises just in the context of the religious ceremony. Does anyone know about that? Anyone able to offer any information? Anyone actually undergone a white wedding or anything of that sort?

_____ : Oh yes.

S: Yes. Yes. So what does one actually nowadays promise to do?

_____ : I can't remember the exact words but (Laughter).

S: That's a rather dreadful (). (Laughter)

_____ : It's quite a long time ago. (Laughter). It's very similar to that. The woman nowadays doesn't promise to obey and there is of course "with all my worldly goods I thee endow".

S: Now that's interesting because (Laughter). That assumes that you've got some worldly goods. (Laughter) Obviously if you don't have any worldly goods, obviously you can't endow her with them. But I wonder what even that means. You endow her because, I mean, when you get married, even with this sort of ceremony, you don't on the spot legally hand over everything to your wife. But presumably she's got some sort of share?

_____ : She's got some ideas about it. (Laughter)

S: So I wonder what the position would be. Supposing under the law, someone who was married wanted to Go Forth, wanted to say become a monk, would he be allowed to take as it were his share of the joint property and hand it over to the monastery that he was joining or give away to the poor. I mean would that be permissible? Presumably it would be. Because presumably if they separated or if they got divorced there would be a division of the property so if he left home, presumably he could take at least half of what might well be his own goods with him. But maybe this does require further investigation. Whether you'd be, in a way, legally permitted to Go Forth in that particular way. I mean, what about children? Does a married man have a legal obligation to support his legitimate children. Well, I think he does, doesn't he? So supposing you became a monk. Well, what would happen then? Would you still be required to support them? Does the law recognise the fact that you've become a monk, whether a Christian monk or a Buddhist monk or any other. I mean in the Middle Ages certainly that would have been recognised, but under modern, secular law is it any longer recognised? Could you be prosecuted?

_____ : I can answer that if you like.

S: Yes.

_____ : Well, it's just dependant on your income how much you pay for the children. If you've got a very low income and you can't contribute anything then the lowest is something like eight pounds a week per child, but if you can't pay that's normally paid by Social Security.

S: So that would mean if you could Go Forth as a monk but you would still have to apply for Social Security for your children. Presuming that the mother was still alive as it were.

_____ : Yes.

S: So it seems that there aren't very many problems. (Laughter) Thanks to the welfare state. So it seems (Laughter). It seems to be then that in a way, legally you are responsible but thanks to the provisions of the social services in case of need you can fall back upon them. So you wouldn't actually be prevented from Going Forth. You couldn't be stopped from Going Forth if you wanted to.

_____ : May I just say. I wasn't thinking so much legally. After all it's maybe one is trapped when you're young and green and you don't really know what you're doing but nevertheless it's an undertaking that you give after some thought, in rather serious circumstances as an individual. I was thinking it more from that point of view. You said the other day the importance of an Indian businessman giving his word. One gives one's word. Now it maybe that one is using that because one maybe doesn't want to Go Forth, as an excuse, I could see that. But never mind that for the moment. One has given one's word ()

S: Well, from a traditional Buddhist point of view, I mean, the situation is quite clear. According to the Vinaya if you're a married man and you want to Go Forth as a monk you

have first of all to take the consent of your wife. Because supposing you gave your word to someone they can if they wish at your request release you from that. So the idea was that if a married man after due consideration wanted to Go Forth, well, with his wife's consent he could do that. Well, then the question arises, well supposing the wife doesn't consent. Well, there are sort of historical precedents, the husband who wants to Go Forth just commences a fast to death. (Laughter) But even without going to those extremes, if a wife becomes convinced, even against her will that her husband just doesn't want to stay, he just can't stay at home, it's sort of literally killing him to stay at home because his heart is really elsewhere, I think probably in the long run unless she's very, very hard-hearted indeed, she will give way. So it seems that in practice in Buddhist countries this has always sorted itself out quite satisfactorily because usually in a Buddhist country the wife will also be a Buddhist so at least she'll have some understanding of what it is that the husband wants to do, what it means to become a monk.

So usually even though she may not be very happy about being left, yes she usually does agree. Also one mustn't forget that in Buddhist countries a woman can remarry. There is no difficulty about remarrying as of course there was in ancient India usually. So, yes, no doubt there are some difficulties but tradition has shown, history has shown that they're by no means insuperable. So I think so far as this country is concerned the legal position is that there would in fact be no problem. And even from the socio-economic point of view there wouldn't be any problem. But there remains as it were the moral problem, one might say. The ethical problem. Because what to speak of allowing one's husband to become a monk, I've known cases where a wife wouldn't allow her husband to go along to a meditation class once a week. So it's really a question of two individuals coming to a reasonable agreement because even though one does undertake on marriage to support and cherish and all that, a wife, I don't think one undertakes to spend every minute of the twenty-four hours with her. So if she does object to the husband going to a meditation class once a week, or even to going on a retreat, probably that could be regarded as unreasonable. And perhaps it would be an indication that there was something lacking in her life itself because no one human being should be as a dependent that on another human being for their sense of inner security even if they happen to be married to them, or in a very close relationship of whatever kind to them.

But it is obviously very difficult just to give up somebody completely because they want, as it were, to go free. But perhaps that is the greatest manifestation or the greatest expression, of genuine affection for somebody that you allow them to do what they want to do, even though it means that you, whether for the time being or permanently, are deprived of their company. Because we know that human affection very often is a very selfish thing and one of the things that we have to learn in connection with other people, in our personal relationships, is to weed out the element of selfishness and exploitation and replace with it by a more and more genuine affection that really desires only the good of the other person. So I think if say in the case of husband and wife, if there has existed a sort of genuine and human relationship between them, if one or the other wishes to leave for the sake of leading a spiritual life then I think the other at least after some time will be able to understand and accept that.

All right. Oh, only a couple left.

"What is the significance and relevance of chanting the mantras at the end of the seven fold Puja?"

How many mantras are there? Seven? (Laughter). It's that magical number again.

"Are they traditionally chanted at the end of Puja in traditional Buddhist countries?"

Well it depends very much on the country. In some Buddhist countries of course like Ceylon or Burma they don't have mantras in this sense. I mean these are the Mahayana cum Vajrayana mantras. But such mantras are chanted, sometimes many times, in the context of pujas certainly in Tibet, China, Japan. I mean, often, are chanted at the end by way of as it were winding up. Well sometimes the Vajrasattva mantra is chanted at the end many times by way of purifying oneself of any fault one might have committed in connection with the puja or whatever else one has been celebrating.

I'm not sure that the exact seven mantras that we recite are recited at the end in any particular Buddhist country, but the general principle is the same. That you recite mantras from time to time, in the course of the puja depending on the nature of the puja. I mean, if you're invoking, for instance, Manjughosa, it's only natural that at the point when you invoke him you recite his mantra and so on. And very often of course mantras are recited at the end of a puja or other such celebration simply as a way of sort of calling down the blessings of those particular buddhas or bodhisattvas or whatever it is that you've done. So yes, this is broadly speaking a traditional practice.

All right there's another ethical dilemma.

"In 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism', you describe the Ten Precepts basically as fundamental ethical principles but which can be taken on as specific rules of training ideally to be followed under the guidance of a teacher or preceptor who can help the trainee learn how to apply the precepts to the affairs of everyday life. My question concerns as an example the application of the first precept. Faced with a situation in which to kill a person seems the only way to prevent the immediate deaths of several other people at his hands could the first precept be best applied by murdering that person out of compassion for the others? If so, how does that square with your statement in the 'Survey of Buddhism', new edition, page 130, (Laughter) "It is not possible to commit murder with a good heart because the deliberate taking of life is simply the outward expression of a mind dominated by hate?""

Well it has to be admitted that in this respect, with respect to this particular ethical dilemma there is a difference of opinion, or difference of teaching, as between the Hinayana on the one hand and the Mahayana cum Vajrayana on the other. The view that I've expressed in the 'Survey' passage quoted is definitely the Hinayana view. It is not possible to commit murder with a good heart because the deliberate taking of life is simply the outward expression of a mind dominated by hate. According to the Hinayana especially according to the Hinayana Abhidharma, the taking of life is as a matter of as it were psychological fact always accompanied by an element however subtle of dosa, that is to say of hatred or antagonism which is of course unskillful. So the Hinayana does not recognise the possibility of taking life out of compassion or the possibility of taking life out of compassion in order to save life.

The Mahayana though, or the Mahayana cum Vajrayana seems to take, if one takes its teaching literally, a somewhat different view. The Mahayana seems to say that under certain circumstances the Bodhisattva out of compassion can take life. By which it presumably means can take life without there being an element of dosa in his mental attitude. Though at the same time very often the Mahayana does say that in the case of a Bodhisattva he may take life out of compassion to save, as in this particular instance, a greater number of people - to save their lives, but at the same time he will suffer for it but he knows he will suffer for it and he is prepared to suffer for it.

So one sees this difference of opinion as it were within the Buddhist tradition itself. So in a way one might say that there isn't really a dilemma, it's just a question of choosing or making up one's mind whether one accepts the Hinayana way of looking at things or whether one accepts the Mahayana way of looking at things. I don't know whether one could in fact clearly identify such a situation. A situation in which to kill a person seemed the only way to

prevent the immediate deaths of several other people at his hands. I think it's very, very doubtful whether you'd actually know for sure that you're going to be able to save the lives of a number of people by taking the life of one person. I mean, this is the sort of argument that sometimes people do employ. For instance quite recently on the radio and in the newspapers there's been a discussion about the dropping of the first atom bomb which of course, first and second atom bombs, the dropping of those bombs was responsible for very great loss of life. But it has been argued by some people that if those two bombs had not been dropped when they were dropped, the Second World War would have continued longer and a greater number of people would have been killed. So it can further be argued, so some people say that the dropping of those two atom bombs was in fact in Buddhist terms an act of compassion. But of course other people say, well no, other people maintain that actually the war would have ended quite quickly in any case. But again that is greatly disputed. So it's very, very difficult to know. It's very difficult to be sure of the facts of the case. So there is that difficulty too. There's also the point that one might sort of work out a theoretical solution beforehand and decide that it would be better to do this or it would be better to do that but how would you actually feel and how would you actually behave when you found yourself in the actual situation ...

(End of tape one tape two)

.....to be able to judge the situation. So I doubt very much whether it is in fact helpful to try to arrive at a theoretical solution of these sort of ethical dilemmas in advance. I think what one has to do, in fact really the only thing that one can do in this particular case is to imbibe the principle of non-violence, or if you like to put it positively, the principle of love, to the fullest possible extent that you can. Identify yourself with that particular principle, identify yourself with that particular attitude to the fullest possible extent and then when you find yourself in a situation of that sort, inevitably you will act in accordance with the measure of non-violence, the measure of love that is in you as well of course as the measure of intelligence that is in you. But how you will act I think cannot be predicted or worked out in advance. And I think you yourself, I mean, will not know how you will act in any given situation. But if you've tried to imbibe, if you've tried to imbue yourself with that principle of non-violence well you will surely act in a better way than you would have acted had you not been imbued with that particular principle of non-violence to howsoever limited an extent.

In other words how you behave in any given situation will ultimately depend upon what you are, what sort of person you are, with what mental state at that particular time. You may behave more ethically, you may behave less ethically but you will behave in accordance with your nature and the more ethical your nature is the more ethically you will behave. The more full of love your mind is the more compassionately, the more non-violently, you will behave. So I think there is no theoretical solution. You have to develop the principle of non-violence or the principle of love up to the fullest possible extent and trust that when you find yourself in a situation of this sort it will enable you to do whatever is best, that is to say whatever is best according to those circumstances or the best that the circumstances themselves permit, whatever that will turn out to be. So that's it.

(Applause)

Devamitra: I've heard Bhante say a number of times after introducing various Order Members talks on Men's Events at Padmaloka that we don't know how fortunate we are and he says that after some of us have managed to absorb just a tiny, tiny little bit of his own wisdom so what am I to say in these circumstances. We're very fortunate indeed to have the wisdom straight from the Windhorse's mouth. (Laughter) Bhante's time is very, very valuable, it's very valuable to him but it's very valuable to the whole Movement. People

frequently speak in terms of priceless works of art but really I think Bhante's time, for us, is priceless too. It's a much more priceless thing. When he spoke the other evening introducing a speaker, he expressed his pleasure to see you all here and without wishing to detract from that, I must say I was a bit disappointed that there weren't more of you here, precisely because of events like this, questions and answers, question and answer sessions with Bhante which are so valuable, so helpful, and which cannot be compared with anything else that you are likely to encounter. So on behalf of all of us I'd just like to thank you Bhante for giving us your priceless time once more.

End of tape two tape three

Devamitra: Very special occasion because we've come to the second of our question and answer sessions which I know everybody's been looking forward to very much but it is of course also the eve of Bhante's sixtieth birthday so that makes it an even more special occasion. I'm not going to say anything more by way of introduction this evening. I'll hand straight over to Bhante who I think has got more questions this evening than on the previous occasion.

S: As I did last time I've divided the questions into categories and there are four categories. This time of a rather different nature from last time. First of all I've got a whole lot of questions arising out of study, arising out of the study of the Udana as well as I think out of the study of some of my own works. Then there's another group of questions roughly concerned with meditation and the spiritual life. There's also a group of questions, a smaller group, in fact I think the smallest, arising out of Buddhist tradition and a fourth group arising out of the FWBO.

So I think I'll deal first of all with the questions which arise out of study, especially study of the Udana. This is the biggest group of questions. (Pause) Let's start off with something reasonably simple and practical. Someone says,

"I recall a translation of a Tibetan text where a master advises his followers that there is no need to search for advanced teachings. If the Refuge and Bodhicitta are practised fully then by degrees all the advanced and esoteric teachings will be revealed by the inner guru. Please would Bhante comment and elucidate this subject?"

I'm not quite sure where this particular quotation comes from. Possibly it's from the 'Door of Liberation', possibly it's from the sayings of the masters of the Kadamba school, but yes 'there is no need to seek for advanced teachings if the Refuge and Bodhicitta are practised fully, then by degrees all the advanced and esoteric teachings will be revealed by the inner guru'. I think that on the whole I would agree with that. I think I'd just make one qualification inasmuch as the text speaks of the Refuge, that is to say, the Going for Refuge, to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and the Bodhicitta as though they were two separate things. But if one looks at them more closely one sees that the Bodhicitta is in fact inseparable from the Going for Refuge. Of course there are different levels of Going for Refuge and different levels of arising of the Bodhicitta. But broadly speaking we may say that the Bodhicitta represents, or the arising of the Bodhicitta represents, the more as it were altruistic dimension of the Going for Refuge itself. I've made this clear I think on a number of occasions. So that is the only qualification I'd like to make.

But I think everybody is by this time familiar with the fact that in the FWBO we regard the Going for Refuge including of the arising of the Bodhicitta as absolutely central and absolutely fundamental, and one of the things which distinguishes the FWBO from I think all other Buddhist groups or almost all other Buddhist groups is the fact that we give such

importance to the Going for Refuge, because it is after all the Going for Refuge that makes one a Buddhist. It's the Going for Refuge that makes one a follower of the Buddha and we've seen when we've read or when we've heard about various people's encounters with the Buddha in the Pali scriptures, that as soon as they are impressed by the Buddha, as soon as they're impressed by His Teaching, as soon as they're convinced of the truth of His Teaching, their reaction or their response is to say 'To the Buddha for Refuge I go, to the Dharma for refuge I go, to the Sangha for refuge I go.'

So the Going for Refuge we may say is the fundamental, it is the basic Buddhist act, and if you haven't understood that you haven't really understood what it really means to be a Buddhist. And if your calling yourself a Buddhist without understanding what it means to be a Buddhist, then clearly there isn't much meaning, much value perhaps in your calling yourself a Buddhist at all. So if in fact the Going for Refuge is the fundamental Buddhist act, it's the Going for Refuge that makes you a Buddhist, well clearly, everything else follows from that. The whole of the Buddha's Teaching we may say, the whole of Buddhist philosophy is no more than an elucidation of what it means to Go for Refuge. So we can go deeper and deeper and deeper into the significance of the Going For Refuge. We can look at it from all sorts of different points of view. We can look at it on all sorts of different levels, from the relatively low to the very, very high, the very, very lofty indeed.

So as our understanding of the significance of the Going for Refuge deepens, as it becomes more and more profound we shall naturally understand more and more about the Buddha's Teaching. We shall understand the Buddha's Teaching more and more deeply and we shall understand it for ourselves. And in this way, in the words of the question, 'all the advanced and esoteric teachings will be revealed by the inner guru'. Because the inner guru represents your own deepening understanding of the significance of the Going for Refuge. Of course it may be that in the course of your spiritual experience, in the course of your meditation, that inner guru is projected in the form of an apparently external figure whom you may perceive or whom you may hear in the course of your meditation, but nonetheless the inner guru represents your own developed or your own awakened intuition or insight or even wisdom - call it what you will. So therefore it is true that if the refuge and the Bodhicitta are practised fully, then by degrees all the advanced and esoteric teachings will be revealed by the inner guru inasmuch as you are understanding that fundamental act of the Buddha's life more and more deeply. (Pause)

This is a question that arises out of the study of the Udana but it could almost as well be relegated to the questions dealing with the FWBO. The question goes like this:

"Within the Udana, Chapter 3, verse 6, there's a reference to a monk by the name of Kalindavacca who upsets the monks by calling them menials. In the time of the Buddha was there a practice of asking someone to wait before Going for Refuge as exists within the FWBO. The question is posed in reference to two criteria for ordination. Is the person subjectively ready? Can the Sangha absorb them?"

So, yes, in the time of the Buddha there was a practice of asking certain people to wait before going for Refuge. This was the case especially with those who had been followers of other teachers and other traditions, other schools of thought. I think it was Saddhaloka in the course of his talk, he made reference to the six teachers, the six schools of thought, existing in the time of the Buddha. So there was a requirement usually in the time of the Buddha, apparently laid down by the Buddha himself that if you had belonged to one or another of these schools then, if you wanted to go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you were placed on probation. Now the reason for this seems to be that you needed, perhaps, time to consider the matter because you may have expressed your wish to Go for Refuge in a

purely impulsive manner, and also there may well have been the question of your needing to rid yourself of your previous, what we might call psychological and religious or even spiritual conditioning before you really were free to Go for Refuge. Because if you had been a follower of one or another of these schools, perhaps for years together, perhaps for your whole lifetime, it's very, very unlikely that you would be able to throw off the influence of the teachings all at once and really Go for Refuge.

So it seems that that was the reason. The Buddha did make an exception. He made an exception in the case of the followers of one particular teacher who seems to have taught the doctrine of Karma in much the same way that the Buddha taught it. So an exception was made there in the case of sort of people coming from that particular school. So one could say that it's much the same in the case of the FWBO. I think one of the reasons, not so much why people are asked to wait, as one of the reasons why people have to wait, is that there are all sorts of conditionings, nowadays not only religious but even non-religious and anti-religious, that they need to shake themselves free from. I don't say this is the only reason, there are other things too. There are various psychological difficulties perhaps that they need to overcome. There are various aspects of Buddhist teaching with which they need to come to terms which they need to clarify for themselves. So even though they come into contact with the FWBO and are deeply impressed and want to Go for Refuge all at once, it usually isn't possible. I say usually because one can't lay down a hard and fast rule and one knows that even in the time of the Buddha, perhaps most of all in the time of the Buddha, there were people who came to the Buddha who were impressed by His Teaching and went for Refuge and were allowed to go for Refuge immediately. I believe that there used to be sort of story going around the FWBO that wherever Bhante went on any little journey he was always careful to keep a spare kesa in his briefcase just in case. Well, actually I didn't do that. (Laughter). Well, perhaps I should have done or perhaps I should do. Because one never knows, one might while travelling, one might on the railway train, one might even in 'The Red Lodge' Cafe (Laughter) just happen to meet someone who is so overwhelmed by what one happens to say or some companion of one happens to say that they express the desire to commit themselves on the spot and it would have been highly convenient to have a kesa handy. So far that hasn't happened but yes, there are some people who do take to the FWBO much more quickly than others and who are in fact ready for ordination quite soon. Others as you know very well have to wait, not because I want them to wait or because Order Members want them to wait but because that is the position where they actually are at the moment. Have to wait, even for months, even for years before they are finally, as it were, free, really free to Go for Refuge as distinct from simply repeating the words.

So yes we do have this practice of not exactly asking someone to wait but trying to get him to see that he isn't yet ready to Go for Refuge in the fuller and more genuine way that is desirable if he is to be an effective member of the Order right from the beginning. (Pause)

And here's another question based on the Udana. Perhaps we'll deal with all the Udana questions together.

"How is the episode, Chapter Three, Sutra Three, in the Udana of Yashoja and the noisy monks to be explained with regard to the idea of not doing things for approval. When Yashoja himself says, 'Come now, reverend sirs, let us so dwell that the Exalted One may be well pleased with our way of dwelling'?"

I think first of all we have to understand that there's nothing wrong in principle of desiring the approval of other people or desiring the good opinion of other people but there are two ways of going about this one might say. First of all there is the neurotic as one might say desire for the approval of other people regardless of who they are simply because your own sense of

self-confidence and inner security depends upon that. You're unable to stand on your own feet. You're unable to give approval to yourself so you depend in a neurotic manner on other people's approval before you can approve of yourself and before you can feel the self-confidence that you need to feel in order to function. So seeking approval in that sort of way, seeking approval in order to bolster up your own self-confidence because you can't feel so confident without that approval is definitely to be discouraged. But there is another kind of not exactly seeking for approval but being aware of the opinion that others have about you, especially the wise. In the Buddha's Teaching, in the Buddha's tradition generally, great importance is attached to your being concerned what the wise think about you. That is to say, those who are more experienced than you, those who are more insightful than you, those who have a deeper understanding of things than you. You should be very much concerned what they think about you. Whether they approve of you or disapprove of you. Not because you're neurotically dependent for your own self confidence upon them and what they think, what they feel about you, but because what they think about you or what they feel about you provides you with a sort of guide, inasmuch as they are by definition the wise, as to whether you are on the right track or not. And that is quite a different matter. And it's that about which Yashoja is speaking.

If there are certain people whom you know, certain friends of yours, that spiritual friends who you acknowledge as more experienced than yourself, wiser than yourself, more deeply understanding than yourself, and if you find that they happen to disapprove of or if you find they are not too happy with something that you are doing, well then you'd do very well to consider whether in fact what you are doing is right, is skilful. So this sort of attitude is rather different from the neurotic sort of attitude I mentioned formerly. So Yashoja himself says "Come now reverend sirs, let us so dwell that the Exalted One", that is the Buddha, "may be well pleased with our way of dwelling", because the Buddha is the wisest of all. If the Buddha is pleased with the way that you are dwelling or living then you really must be on the right path. Or if all your spiritual friends are pleased with the way in which you're behaving, you must be on the right path.

But if your spiritual friends are not very pleased with the way you're behaving then of course you have to ask yourself whether you are on the right path or not. So the two cases are really quite different. (Pause)

All right again from the Udana.

"One of the Udanas speaks of 'he who doth crush the great 'I am' conceit, this, even this is happiness supreme'. Our study group leader said, it would describe a way of expanding one's ego-sense to accomplish this same end. Could you enlarge on this?'"

The basic objective, of course, is to get rid of this 'I am' conceit. To get rid of this identification of oneself with whatever one thinks of oneself as being. But there are two ways of doing this. You can either, as it were, negate the self. You could either reduce it to zero or you can affirm of the self, affirm it more and more, affirm it more and more immanently, so to speak. You can expand it to infinity. In both cases you get rid of the self. In both cases you transcend the self, or you transcend the 'I am' conceit.

Usually in Buddhism, especially in the Theravada, it's the first method that is usually adopted. You try to realise, you try to experience by one means or another the illusoriness of the self, its relativity, its non-absoluteness. But you can go about things in a different way. You can, so to speak, identify yourself with all other living beings. You can try to see yourself in all other living beings. You can try to see yourself in the whole of nature. You can try to experience your one-ness with the whole of nature so that nature, as it were, the

whole of existence, becomes your own self or your own self becomes the whole of existence. In this way you expand yourself to infinity. So whether you expand yourself to infinity or whether you reduce yourself to zero in the long run it comes to the same thing. So this is what I was getting at in the comments which were referred to.

One might even say that in meditation in any case, meditation in the sense of passing through the dhyanas, you do expand yourself. You might even know, even from a limited experience of meditation, that if you go at all deeply into it, you do have a sort of sense of expansion. A sort of sense of liberation one might say, and this is why the dhyanic levels of consciousness are sometimes termed in the Abhidharma as mahagattacitta, that is to say, expanded consciousness. I think I gave a lecture once many, many years ago on 'Meditation, the expanding consciousness'. So some of you might like to listen to that if you want to get a clearer idea about the expansion of the sense of self to infinity rather than the reduction of it to zero.

All right here comes a question also growing out of study but this perhaps could have just as well come under the heading of more traditional questions, or questions based on tradition. This is all about Buddhist cosmology and it consists of four questions in fact.

"According to tradition, Gautama resided in the Tushita heaven before being reborn as a human being. And Maitreya is said to reside there awaiting rebirth. What is the significance, if any, of this? It seems rather low down on the scale of existence for a future Buddha to live. Does Buddhist cosmology change from tradition to tradition or Yana to Yana or is there agreement from all schools?" And three, "The Tavatimsa heaven, is said to be where the Hindu gods reside. This suggests that Hindu or at least Indian cosmology has its highest realm here. Is this so or is there another explanation? The six heavens of the kamaloka have been interpreted by you, I think, as representing the realm of aesthetic appreciation. Have you worked out a kind of psychological equivalence for each of the six?"

Let's deal with the questions in reverse order. As regards to the six heavens of the kamaloka as interpreted by me and whether I've worked out a kind of psychological equivalence for each of the six, I must say that as yet I haven't. I've got a sort of general idea of how they can be explained in, so to speak, psychological terms but I think a detailed working out of that still remains to be done. But I have it in mind. It's one of those things I think about from time to time.

But before that "The Tavatimsa heaven is said to be where the Hindu gods reside. This suggests that Hindu or at least Indian cosmology has its highest realms here. Is this so or is there another explanation?" It's actually not quite like that. The Tavatimsa devaloka is the realm of the thirty-three, because Tavatimsa means thirty-three. These gods though are not the gods of later Hindu mythology, they are very definitely the Vedic gods, the pre-Buddhistic Vedic gods headed by Indra and of course these pre-Buddhistic Vedic gods don't figure very prominently in later Hinduism as we call it. In Hinduism the prominent gods are Rama, Vishnu and Mahishvara, Krishna, Rama, Ganesh, Kali, Durga. These aren't even mentioned in the oldest Buddhist scriptures. They're not mentioned in the Pali scriptures for instance.

So when one speaks of Hindu or Indian gods residing in this particular heaven one is referring to the Vedic gods. So one could say that up to that point, up to that particular heaven, which isn't a very high one, the Buddhist and the Hindu cosmology coincides. But not beyond that. This is something that I've given some thought to. In the Buddhist scriptures one does find a quite detailed enumeration of the different gods, of the different heavens which correspond on the objective side to the dhyana states on the subjective side. We're given the names of so many different kinds of gods. But rather surprising perhaps,

apart from the Vedic gods who are included in the Tavatimsadevaloka, none of these names of gods or heavens occur in Vedic literature as far as I have been able to check, at all. Which is rather interesting because sometimes it is said that Buddhism shares its cosmology with other Indian traditions. In other words that the various heavens, the nomenclature of the various heavens and the various gods right up to the very limit of conditioned existence, are common to Buddhism and Hinduism. But actually that is not so. The names of the higher realms, the gods of higher realms seem to be peculiar to the Buddhist tradition and to the best of my knowledge don't occur in post-Buddhistic Indian literature either.

So this suggests that Buddhism has a different cosmology and a different, as it were, spiritual hierarchy from the other Indian traditions. Again this is something I hope to go into in some detail in a lecture or paper on some other occasion.

That brings us to the second question. The third question back. "Does Buddhist cosmology change from tradition to tradition, or yana to yana or is there agreement from all schools?" Broadly speaking there is agreement though the Vajrayana does seem to introduce a few variations or a few modifications. The Vajrayana certainly in its Tibetan form speaks of the mysterious kingdom of Shambala. That doesn't come into Hinayana and Mahayana accounts. But broadly speaking the cosmologies of the three yantras are all the same.

But then last or that is to say the first question, "According to tradition Gautama resided in the Tushita heaven before being reborn as a human being. Maitreya is said to reside there awaiting rebirth. What is the significance if any of this? It seems rather low down on the scale of existence for a future Buddha to live." I must say I've not encountered any explanation of this. There may be one but I haven't come across it. It does seem to me that there may be an explanation, and the explanation may be really contained in that last bit, within parentheses. "It seems rather low down on the scale of existence for a future Buddha to live." Well, perhaps that is exactly why a future Buddha exists there or dwells there for a while just because it is rather low down, because after all he's about to be reborn on earth and perhaps even in the case of a future Buddha it's not desirable to have too great a transition all at once. If he'd been reborn in a very much higher level, well when he came to be reborn on earth he might, one might say, feel it's too much. We know quite well from our own experience that when you go, say, from Vajraloka back to a busy city centre you feel that transition sometimes quite dramatically. It's good if there is a sort of half-way house for you. So perhaps the Tushitadevaloka represents a sort of half-way house, neither too high nor too low, where the Bodhisattvas wait before they're reborn for the last time. That's the only explanation of which I can think at the moment. Tradition doesn't seem to give any explanation. (Pause)

All right the next question will or batch of questions, a number of questions at once, seems to relate to miracles. Arising out of the study of the life of the Buddha by Nanamoli.

"During the course of our study of the life of the Buddha by Nanamoli we've come across many instances of the Buddha performing miracles. There is the occasion when he makes Yasa invisible to his father. There is the case of Kasapa of Uruvela where the Buddha performs many marvels producing flames, mind-reading, splitting five-hundred logs simply by saying they should be split; Creating five-hundred braziers for the aesthetic to warm themselves by and so on. And again when the Sakyan clansmen were too proud to pay homage to him, he performed the twin marvel causing the simultaneous appearance of jets of fire and water from all his limbs. He took Nanda from the heaven to the heaven of the thirty-three to show him the five hundred dove-footed nymphs. All of these instances add up to a lot of miracles, and they are just a sample. We usually don't associate the performance of miracles with the Buddha and Buddhism." Presumably because you don't read the life of the Buddha. (Laughter) At least not the life of the Buddha by Nanamoli. "The questions which

arise therefore are: 1) did the Buddha use his supernormal powers to convert people to the Dharma; if so why?"

Did the Buddha use his supernormal powers to convert people to the Dharma; if so why?" Well if he used his supernormal powers to the Dharma, presumably he used his supernormal powers to convert people to the Dharma. (Laughter) Because if you accept that the Buddha did have supernormal powers, why should he not use them to convert people to the Dharma? Because if you want to convert people to the Dharma presumably you use whatever equipment you may happen to have. Whatever gifts, whatever talents, you may happen to have. After all, the Buddha is fully enlightened by definition, so presumably there's no question of His misusing those powers in any way. And even if he does use his supernormal powers to convert people to the Dharma, He doesn't do it in such a way that they are sort of bludgeoned into conversion to the Dharma. He doesn't try to overpower them. He doesn't try to even terrify them into becoming converted to the Dharma. That sort of conversion to the Dharma isn't possible. So if one does accept that the Buddha did have supernormal powers and did want to convert people to the Dharma, there seems to be no reason why he shouldn't use His supernormal powers to that particular aim.

But then there's another question,

"Are these incidents later embellishments thought up by the story-tellers as the old tradition carried on down the centuries perhaps intending to indicate the flavour rather than the fact of what happened?"

I think one has to discriminate. I think some of these incidents, some of these miracles, do in fact represent later embellishments. I think that is pretty clear. And they are intended to indicate the flavour rather than the fact of what happened. But I don't think we can rule out the possibility that the Buddha did have, let's say supernormal rather than miraculous powers. Because I think we can't rule out the existence of supernormal powers in general. I think the evidence for them, not only in the life of the Buddha, not only in Buddhism, but perhaps in all religions is just too overwhelming. For instance, telepathy was mentioned. I think telepathy is reasonably well established. You get instances of it in the lives of so many great spiritual teachers, not only Buddhists but non-Buddhists. Some people might even have experience of telepathy themselves. It's considered a rather low grade supernormal power in any case.

So I think one has to distinguish between actual embellishments upon certain episodes in the life of the Buddha making them more miraculous than they actually were, and instances where the Buddha may well have exercised supernormal powers which he actually did possess. I think one has to keep an open mind as regards that particular possibility. And then 3)

"Could it be that sometimes miraculous things occurred simply because the Buddha was present. For instance when Kasi Bharadvaja threw away the rice which he had patronisingly offered to the Buddha it began to hiss and boil in the water. Incidentally in this instance why could he not offer the rice to someone else?"

Well, yes, I think this also did sometimes happen. I think sometimes miraculous things as the questioner says, or supernormal things occurred simply because the Buddha was present. Because one might say the Buddha's character, for want of a better word, was so powerful and so positive that it set up reverberations on all sorts of levels whenever he was around. And as a result sometimes things started happening. I think one finds that sort of thing happening more widely than one might sometimes suspect. I've certainly had some

experience of it myself, both positive and negative. That is to say there are some people who can have a quite disturbing effect on their environment, apparently by supernatural means and others who can have a very positive effect on their environment in the same way. So this possibility also I think can't be ruled out.

Maybe it's a case of the more interpretations the better as you said a few nights ago. Well, yes, I think it's not only a question of the more interpretations the better, but a case of recognising that there are different orders of fact or different orders of truth even. Different orders of existence. That, yes, there are instances where the life of the Buddha has been embellished with miraculous stories and there are other instances where the Buddha might well have actually exercised supernatural powers which he actually had and there are other instances where the Buddha's mere presence might have had an effect which might seem to people present as due to his supernatural powers, even though he might not have actually consciously exercised them. (Pause)

Another lot of questions on study.

"We have been studying Bhikkhu Nanamoli's "The Life of the Buddha". During the course of our study we came upon a passage from the Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga, Kandaka One, which said 'At the same time the queen Mahapajapati, mother of Prince Nanda and aunt of the Buddha, attained the first stage of realisation. This event seems to have taken place some time before Mahapajapati questioned the Buddha for entry into the Sangha. Could you explain why it was that she, a Stream-Entrant, tried to force the Buddha's hand? Secondly, if she was a Stream-Entrant why did the Buddha test her commitment by asking her to comply with the Eight important rules?'"

Well, there seems to be some doubt as to whether that realisation, Stream-Entry, did occur before the episode in question or not. Well let's take it for the sake of argument that it did occur in fact before. So then where does that lead us? Well, I think that first of all we have to realise that Stream-Entry is the first of the transcendental realisations according to the standard Hinayana teaching, at least the standard Theravada teaching. First there is Stream-Entry attained on the breaking of the first three fetters. Then there is the stage of the Once-Returner which is attained when you weaken the next two fetters, and the stage of the Non-Returner which is attained when you break those same next two fetters, that is to say, fetters four and five and the stage of the Arahant which is attained when you break the last five fetters, thus breaking all Ten fetters. So one can see from this that even though Stream-Entry from our point of view represents a very, very high achievement, a very, very high attainment indeed, there is still a long way to go to what we may call full enlightenment. And in particular it is pointed out by the scriptures that even though you might have become a Stream-Entrant, you still have a very great deal of greed and anger or hatred to overcome. To overcome greed and hatred takes you two full stages according to this enumeration because the Once-Returner only weakens greed, anger and hatred.

(End of side one side two)

Mahaprajapati still has a very great deal of work to do. There's still a great deal of greed, there's a great deal of anger, a great deal of hatred to be overcome. So in that case it still quite possible that though she's a Stream Entrant she's not above putting pressure on the Buddha or even trying to resort to a fait accompli in the case of the Buddha. And for the same reason the Buddha is not above subjecting her to very, very severe tests. You see this in the case of the life stories of so many great Zen masters or Ch'an masters. I mean they might attain to a very high spiritual state but perhaps it is just then that their master, their teacher starts really putting the pressure on them because there's always the danger that when you

attain a certain level, a level which is comparatively high, high as compared with the state that you were in before, you sort of slacken off, you tend to rest on your oars and not make much in the way of a further effort. So that's when the master really gets to work on you. So this may well have been what happened in the case of Mahaprajapati Gotami - yes, she's got so far, yes she was a Stream Entrant, but she still had a lot to do. She was still capable of bringing pressure to bear on the Buddha, she was still capable of trying to bring about a fait accompli as regards her entry into the order. Perhaps we may say there was still quite a lot of 'female will' left in her even though she was a Stream Entrant so the Buddha felt that yes, in order to help her to overcome the remaining fetters, and don't forget there were seven still to be overcome out of ten, he'd test her. He'd impose these eight Galoka(?) Dhammas, these eight heavy observances on her. And of course eventually we do know from the same scriptures, that eventually she did gain full enlightenment. She became one of the Arahants. So it would seem that the Buddha's methods worked. I mean, however unacceptable they may seem sometimes to our sort of egalitarian way of looking at things.

I think that's all the questions that arose out of study. So let's go on to the next group. Let's take next those arising out of meditation.

"In the lecture 'A System of Meditation' you said that a meditator passes through the stage of integration before going on to the stage of spiritual death and finally spiritual rebirth. I can't remember exactly what you said but I took it to mean that one has to have extensive experience of dhyana before going on to spiritual death and spiritual rebirth. You connected each of these stages with certain meditation practices. Integration - samatha practices, spiritual death - six element practice and contemplation of the nidana chain, spiritual rebirth - visualisation practices. In practice, however, people do not seem to follow this path of regular steps in the FWBO. For instance, every Order Member has a visualisation practice. Could you please clarify the situation?"

One may say that yes, in the Order actually people do follow the path of regular steps. But one must remember that the spiritual life or the spiritual path is a spiral, and it's a spiral in more ways or more senses than one. One of the characteristics of a spiral is that it traverses the same ground, so to speak, again and again but each time at a higher level. So all right as an Order Member you practice samatha. You have some little experience, let's say, of the dhyanas and then having practised samatha, having become relatively integrated you experience death through the practice of the six element meditation. You experience it to some extent and then again you experience through the visualisation practice, rebirth, but again to some extent. So it isn't as though you go completely through one stage first, perfecting that and then completely through the next, completing that. That would be following the path of regular steps very, very strictly as it were. But that is actually not what happens. You go round and round, again and again, but each time hopefully on a higher level. I mean having been reborn, well, you are able to be more integrated. Being more integrated you die to an even greater extent. Dying to an even greater extent you're reborn more truly. But having been reborn again more truly you go round again as it were.

So it's as though you go round and round the spiral of the spiritual life, of these three kinds of practice, these three levels, but each time you go round on a higher level so that you have a greater experience of the dhyanas. You become more and more integrated. You have a deeper and deeper experience of spiritual death and one might say a more and more overwhelming experience of spiritual rebirth. But you go on in this way until, yes, you have the full experience of integration followed by the full experience of spiritual death, followed by the full experience of spiritual rebirth. Nowadays it would seem to be difficult to do things in any other way because you can't, as it were, keep from people theoretical knowledge of the higher stages. Formerly you could because teachings were transmitted purely orally or

they existed in handwritten books, handwritten manuscripts which were kept, as it were, under lock and key. So in former times you could be given simply the teaching that you needed at a particular time. You could be given simply, well the teaching of, well you're a novice and you should just sweep up the leaves in the courtyard. So you wouldn't be taught anything more than that in former centuries. You wouldn't know what the bhikkhus were doing or the teachers were doing. You'd be told your job is to sweep up the leaves in the monastery courtyard and you might be doing that for two or three years and just concentrating on that. And at the end of that period perhaps you'd be given a very small teaching and you'd be told to practice that. And that's all you would know, there'd be no general miscellaneous study. And in this way you would proceed, step by step, and stage by stage.

But that isn't possible any more because people come along to the FWBO having read all sorts of books about Theravada, Mahayana, Zen, esoteric Tantric practices, perhaps they've even had half a dozen high grade Tantric initiations from travelling Tibetan lamas so they (Laughter) you see, sometimes got very confused in the process before they come along to the FWBO. So you can't, as it were, keep things from them. They know that there are these higher stages so the only possible pattern is that, yes, you go through these successive stages but again and again, on higher and higher levels, each time round deepening your experience of that particular level until finally you experience each level to the full.

So in a way you're following the path of irregular steps but you're following the path of irregular steps in a regular way that amounts, one might say, to following the path of regular steps. (Pause) Alright.

"Let thyself be known. Know thyself." Quote from Surata's talk. Does this in any degree apply to the Buddha's enlightenment experience?"

Well one might say that it applies to the Buddha's enlightenment experience most of all. Because after all the Buddha's enlightenment experience was an experience of non-dual wisdom and compassion. It was an experience of sunyata. So one might say in that enlightenment experience of the Buddha there was no self and no other, at least not from the Buddha's point of view. So the Buddha was letting himself be known to the fullest possible extent, in the highest possible degree. So far as he was concerned he not only knew himself but he was communicating himself fully to all other beings, even past, present and future, who did not however exist apart from himself or who did not exist as different from himself. Obviously we would see things differently. But from the point of view of a buddha he's letting himself be known and knowing himself at the same time, one might even say in the same sense, in the fullest possible way. I mean obviously that's a state which is very difficult for us to understand.

I've sometimes used the analogy or the comparison of what happens in the course of communication exercises when you're having your best experience of communication in that particular connection, in that particular context. Sometimes you find that it's as though you've got one mind between the two of you. I don't know how many of you have ever reached this point. I hope at least a few of you have, but you're saying, 'Do birds fly' and 'The sky is blue today' and if you're doing properly, if you get really into it, a sort of rhythm builds up, a certain concentration develops and eventually it's as though you're fully in tune. It really is as though there's just one mind between you. So it's not you disclosing yourself to him or him disclosing himself to you. It's not as though he and you are communicating. There's just communication without any him and without any you. So you experience that just for an instant perhaps on a comparatively low level. But in the Buddha's case, one might say, that that's what the Buddha experiences all the time in the fullest sense. At least from his

side. At least from his side there's no barrier to communication even there is from our side. So from his own point of view the Buddha is communicating himself fully, disclosing himself fully all the time, but unenlightened beings, of course, can't see it and, , can't appreciate it. (Pause)

"Our meditation practice is fairly consistent throughout centres and retreats, in particular the phenomenon of double sit with walking and chanting between. The practice of walking meditation proper seems to facilitate good exercise and energy and also a good level of concentration. Why is this not taken on within the FWBO given that within the context of a double sit including mettā practice it should not produce an overall alienating effect?"

I'm just trying to let my mind go back to the early days of the FWBO and why we didn't introduce the walking meditation, walking meditation of this type. As far as I remember at that particular time walking meditation was associated in a lot of people's minds with Zen and some people had done this walking meditation - I think it's called kin-hin - had done it with various visiting Japanese roshis but they were in fact doing it in a quite, sort of, mechanical, quite alienated sort of way, at that time. So I rather think that that was why we didn't introduce it within the FWBO. I've a vague recollection that we did try it on a few occasions on early retreats but I found that people were doing it in the Zen way, the way that they were accustomed to doing it on Zen retreats, which was clearly having an alienating effect. But nonetheless I think that - well that was many years ago - I think that we might have reached the point now within the FWBO where people well understand the dangers of doing this particular practice in an alienated way and when in fact they are much less likely to do it in that way. So recently I had in fact a talk with Kamalasila and I suggested that he experimented a bit at Vajraloka introducing this kind of walking and walking meditation.

In fact I also suggested that - well in fact I've mentioned this on a number of other occasions - I've suggested that we should try to develop much more, as it were, applied meditation within the FWBO. I don't think there's any danger of our becoming alienated if we try to do this. By applied mindfulness I mean being much more mindful, especially mindful in between sessions of meditation with regard to our bodily movements, speech, behaviour generally and so on. I think probably there's a lot of room for improvement in this particular way. I've often commented in the course of the last so many years on the fact that sometimes you see people emerging from the Shrine Room apparently after a quite good meditation, but the minute they're out of the Shrine Room, their bodily movements are quite unmindful and quite scattered and they start even sometimes chattering in a quite unmindful way which seems quite inconsistent with having had a good meditation for the previous hour or even two hours.

So I think partly because mindful behaviour is good anyway and partly because mindful behaviour after meditation will help prolong the effect of the meditation itself. I think we need to stress the importance of applied mindfulness much more than perhaps we have done in the past. So if you do go to Vajraloka, well, be prepared for Kamalasila introducing a bit more walking meditation, and perhaps much more mindful work periods and so on.

There's another form of walking meditation as it's called, though perhaps we should say mindful walking, which consists simply in walking up and down while remaining mindful, possibly even repeating a mantra. I remember when I was in Kalimpong I used to do quite a lot of this, especially during the rainy season and especially when I was living at the Triyana Vardhana Vihara where I had a very nice veranda where I could do this quite comfortably and quite conveniently. So walking meditation as it's called here, one might say is a sort of intermediate practice. It helps you to continue the sort of mindfulness, the sort of awareness and concentration you've developed during the sitting meditation into the activities of ordinary everyday life. There shouldn't be so much of a gap, so much of a hiatus, so much of

a difference, between what you do when you're in the shrine room and sitting, and what you do on other occasions. So the walking meditation or the mindful walking, the mindful acting, the mindful working, helps you to bring the state of mind that you experience in the shrine room while meditating into all the affairs of ordinary everyday life. (Pause)

So:

"Can humour be creative? To what extent can one use humour in a positive way, even in a way which leads to a higher and less subjective mental state? What must one avoid to not fall into the trap of using this humour as an end in itself?"

The Buddha seems to have had a sense of humour. The Buddha didn't joke but the Buddha did indulge, if that is the right word, in irony. Some of the Buddha's statements are very, very ironical indeed though in a quite subtle way. There's one instance I recollect when Sariputta said that he thought that the Buddha was the greatest Buddha, one could say, who'd ever lived. So what did the Buddha say. He said, 'Well in that case Sariputta I assume that you have known all the Buddhas of the past?' So Sariputta had to say, 'No Lord.' 'And I assume Sariputta that you've at least known all the Buddhas of the future'. 'Well no Lord.' 'I assume that you at least know me thoroughly.' 'Well no Lord.' (Laughter) So here we see the Buddha's quite gentle irony and one can't help thinking, yes, the Buddha did have a sense of humour, even though he didn't make jokes in the crude sort of way that people usually do. So yes I think humour can be creative. The Buddha's humour in the form of irony was certainly creative, was certainly positive.

"To what extent can one use humour in a positive way?" Well, I think that's an example, one might say. Gentle irony. "Even in a way that leads to a higher and less subjective mental state". Sometimes of course, we can be humorous at our own expense but I think that usually, I mean, the humour that leads us to a higher and less subjective mental state is the humour in which somebody else, perhaps indulges at our expense. But it must be gentle, it must be positive and we must feel it as gentle, we must feel it as positive. Not feel that we're being ridiculed or made to look ridiculous or anything of that sort, otherwise we shall react perhaps in a negative way.

"What must one avoid to not fall into the trap of using this humour as an end in itself?" I've noticed that there are occasions when people try to turn everything into a joke. I don't know if you've noticed this. I've certainly noticed it quite a lot. You try to talk about something serious and then someone makes a joke and then somebody else makes another joke and in that way the whole subject, the whole discussion is turned into a joke. I don't like to generalise but I think the English are particularly good at doing this. There's something which I call it English humour which I've been doing my best to eliminate from the movement for some years. (Laughter) It's a sort of humour that's peculiar to the English and which people abroad, for instance in India, just don't understand at all. I find it very difficult to characterise. It's a sort of subtle, sort of cynical undermining. I sometimes spot examples in the *Newsletter* and I always draw people's attention to it. That is the writer's attention. I remember not so very long ago, maybe last year there was a description in the *Newsletter* of a retreat and the description at one point went something like this. "The retreatants after they had wolfed their food....." Well 'Wolfed their food'. That was apparently meant to be funny, that you describe people on retreat as 'wolfing' their food, it's a bit of a joke, but somebody in India, I pointed out, wouldn't see that as a joke at all. They'd take it quite literally, that actually the people on retreat were behaving in a very greedy way, so greedy that they were more like wolves than human beings. But there is this subtle sort of cynicism, this sort of subtle undermining of everything by making a sort of joke of it. This is what I call English humour. I'm afraid I've become rather allergic to English humour. I think not because it's humour but because of the cynical, undermining element that one gets in it and I do

discourage it on every possible occasion. I think it represents a sort of diluted cynicism in the guise of humour. I think this is what it really is. At bottom it's cynicism and I think cynicism is one of the most negative and unskilful of all possible qualities.

There is a French poet who wrote once: "Take rhetoric and wring its neck". I'd like to paraphrase that as "Take cynicism and wring its neck". You don't get cynicism among our Friends in the East. You don't get cynicism within the FWBO, the Trailokya Baudda Mahasangha Sahayak Gana, in India. I don't think I've ever heard there anybody, whether Order Member, mitra or Friend, being cynical, unless it was a visiting Englishman or Englishwoman. I think that should give us food for thought. I mean, why is it in the West, or especially in England apparently people have got this sort of, this subtle undermining cynicism that leads them, even within the FWBO, to make a joke of so many things that aren't to be treated in that sort of way, which are really serious. Which the people themselves really take seriously but they've got into such a habit of making a joke of everything that they can't stop themselves. It's a sort of nervous habit, like a nervous facial tick, they've got into, they sort of can't help it. But they can actually help it and they've got to help it. We really have to eliminate this rather awful manifestation of pseudo-humour from our midst.

So one shouldn't fall into the trap of using this humour as an end in itself. I really don't know why people why do it. Well, even though I say it's cynicism, at bottom I don't really know what makes them so cynical when they are involved in the spiritual life and trying to develop as human beings. Perhaps it's part of the conditioning that they carry over into the movement from outside. (Pause)

Yes, I think that's all the questions about meditation. Ah, there's one somewhat connected with that. This also came out of a study group.

"In the study group came up that there are Arahants who don't teach because of their inability to communicate their experience. Communication after all seems so basic a human ability that you wouldn't expect that in such an advanced stage you could be unable to communicate your experience. Could you comment on this?"

I think that the difficulty is really of an historical nature. The original Arahants as we may call them, people like Sariputra and Maudgalyana and Ananda could certainly communicate very, very well. The Buddha often called upon Sariputta to explain in detail something that he himself had explained only in brief. So Sariputta who was an Arahant certainly was able to communicate. But as the years went by, as the centuries went by, the Hinayana seems to have developed a rather narrow conception of the Arahant. They thought of the Arahant as one who has the truth from the Buddha, was able to understand and realise it himself but wasn't able to communicate it. But that seems to have been rather a limitation of the Arahant. I would certainly say to the extent that someone has realised the truth, to the extent that wisdom is there, compassion is there, and to the extent that compassion is there the desire to communicate is there. Of course, one may communicate in different ways. You can communicate by word of mouth, through speech, you can communicate, so to speak, silently through your actions. You can communicate even through signs, gestures. You can communicate through symbols. But if you are spiritually realised, if you are spiritually enlightened in one way or another, you will communicate because it's part of your very nature to communicate. Because compassion is part of your nature. So I think that this particular way of looking at the Arahant is really quite unreal and not connected with the spiritual facts.

Devamitra: I think the question actually pertained to the question of someone having developed jnana but not having a great deal of punya rather than jnana in the absence of compassion.

S: I don't think punya is so much essential to communication as compassion. Because I've known cases where people might, for instance have had a lot of punya and lots of qualities but on account of their inadequate wisdom and compassion they weren't really able to communicate very well. Not really. Whereas I know other cases where people have had very little equipment in the way of say, command of language, eloquence and so on, but nonetheless inasmuch as the wisdom and compassion were there, they have been able really to communicate. So I think we have to be careful not to confuse the capacity to communicate with anything like fluency or anything like eloquence in the ordinary mundane sense.

Sometimes someone who is apparently ill equipped as regards talents and qualifications, but who has a measure of spiritual understanding and enlightenment will in fact be able to communicate quite well. I think I mentioned in this connection the example of the person from whom I learnt the communication exercises. This was a woman I met in Bombay, an elderly woman called Muriel, eh what was it, I forget her second name, Muriel. But anyway she wasn't an educated woman, she couldn't even speak decent grammatical English and she was in many ways a quite ignorant woman and she spent most of her life working as a nurse. But yes, she'd had quite strong spiritual interests and she'd been in contact with some quite highly developed people and she had a very strange capacity to communicate. As I said she couldn't speak properly. She had no gift of language or anything like that but she could communicate extremely well and I really noticed it on this occasion. It struck me on this occasion that talents in the ordinary sense, and presumably talents come from punya, are really not necessary to communication. And perhaps sometimes we can see this even within our own movement, that you may not necessarily be able to communicate the Dharma well, even though you may be highly intelligent and you might have read a lot of books but you may be able to communicate it well to others just on the basis of your own your own deeper spiritual experience. So I don't think therefore that punya does in fact really come into this. (Pause)

All right. (Pause) Still got quite a few. (Pause) Yes. (Pause)
These are questions connected with tradition.

"In traditional Buddhist countries people often memorise and chant verses and sutras as part of their daily lives. Do you think that this practice has any relevance and value for us in the West?"

Yes, I certainly think it does have. Some people, some Order Members I know, do chant or recite in this way before they do their visualisation practice. I mean some of the visualisation practices require that; and reading, especially reading aloud from the scriptures, from the sutras is a very good introduction to meditation. Many Tibetan Buddhists don't meditate but every morning they read certain texts, they read certain scriptures and then they chant a mantra. So yes, I think this practice is to be encouraged. For most people I think it's just a question of time. Sometimes people don't apparently have time even for their morning meditation. But if you do have time, it is a very good idea to read preferably aloud sutras, Buddhist texts of various kinds. In the case of those who are not mitras, those who are Friends and perhaps who haven't got around yet to a daily meditation practice, well, they could perhaps well just read something of a spiritual nature. Read a few pages of a sutra, either to themselves or aloud every morning if they feel not ready yet to take up regular daily meditation. This is a good lead into regular daily meditation.

"Can you say something about the Tibetan oracle? How does it work? Do you think the oracles of ancient Greece were the same? Do you think an oracle would be useful for the FWBO?" (Laughter)

Can you say something about the Tibetan oracle? How does it work?" There's a book written by someone who stayed with me in Kalimpong called Nebesky-Wojkowitz. He was an Austrian scholar who wrote a book on "Oracles and Demons of Tibet". It's a very interesting book. I helped him in fact with the English of some of the descriptions of the wrathful deities and it was very interesting. He gives an account of the oracle. But broadly speaking a Tibetan oracle is someone who has been, as it were, chosen. I knew a couple of oracles when I was in Kalimpong. One of them used to come and see me regularly, not in his capacity as oracle but just as in his capacity as oracle priest. And apparently the oracles are chosen by the god, as it were, that inspires them and that takes them over, that possesses them. They don't particularly want to be oracles - it just sort of comes suddenly, apparently without any preparation. Someone finds himself possessed by a certain deity, a certain god, who says that I want this person to be my oracle priest and the person has to accept that. I have heard stories where someone who refused or who tried to get out of it simply died. And usually the oracles require certain things, a certain stage of ritual purity, usually they require celibacy and so on.

So broadly speaking an oracle is a person who becomes under certain circumstances possessed by a particular god, usually a wrathful deity or a minor wrathful deity. And in Tibet the oracles were usually attached to Buddhist temples though they were inherited from pre-Buddhist times and usually it was a high-ranking lama, an incarnate lama, who would use the oracle, who would throw him into trance and question him either on his own behalf or on behalf of the monastery, on behalf of a private individual or even, in the case of the important oracles, the government. I mean there was a state oracle of Tibet, in Lhasa, whose son was a friend of mine. Dhardo Rimpoche, my own teacher in Kalimpong, was quite adept in using or working with oracles. He was quite famous for this.

Strange to say I never witnessed a performance though I could easily have done, I just wasn't interested in those things at that time. Perhaps if I'd known I was going to be questioned about them back in the West I would have informed myself more fully. But apparently it's a quite fearful performance and the oracle changes physically to a remarkable degree, the body swells up, sometimes the head becomes enormously enlarged, it becomes very fierce, apparently quite dangerous and sometimes twists swords and ties them to knots with his bare hands and it's then known that he's ready, that he's possessed by the god and he can then be questioned. And Dhardo Rimpoche on certain occasions was consulting one or another of the oracles in Tibet, almost every week but I never went and saw them, I just didn't feel interested. I was much more interested in things like meditation and doctrine and so on. Not in oracles. But a friend of mine, an English Buddhist friend did go along and see once one of Dhardo Rimpoche's performances with the oracle and he said it was really quite terrifying. He wouldn't care to go again.

But apparently Dhardo Rimpoche always had it completely under control and apparently at a certain point in the ceremony he would just bring the possession to an end quite suddenly. Of course the oracle doesn't know afterwards what has happened. He doesn't know what he said in that state. He himself is, so to speak, completely unconscious, absent. He's absolutely taken over by the oracle and it is very, very wearing. Oracles don't usually live to a great old age. It's a tremendous strain on the whole organism. And yet I think from what I've read about the oracles of ancient Greece, there are oracles of various kinds. What I've read for instance about the Delphic Oracle, where of course, there was a pythoness, a priestess of Apollo. It seems that much the same sort of thing happened. But it seems in ancient Greece it probably wasn't so highly organised, so much under control of higher spiritual personalities as in, as it was in Tibet.

"Do you think that oracles would be useful for the FWBO?" Well, what is an oracle? What is a wrathful deity? Very often of course the replies that the oracles give are very obscure. That was the case, even very often with the replies of the Delphic Oracle. Sometimes they could be interpreted in a number of ways. And sometimes you needed a skilled professional interpreter to interpret the oracle for you. But basically the oracle seems to come from a level which is, say, transrational. It's a message from, you could say, even the unconscious and you can get messages from the unconscious in various ways. From your dreams, even from omens if you like. So I think the general significance of the oracle is to remind us that you can't be guided entirely by conscious rational factors in your life. All sorts of other factors do enter in that you'd be well advised to take some notice of. Whether we'd ever be able to have oracles in the traditional sense in the FWBO or in the West at all I'm really not sure, because these people have to be trained and the job of being an oracle priest is very demanding and also of course you've got to have the demons ready to manifest, not the demons, that's Nebesky's term, but the wrathful deities willing to manifest.

So in a way it's up to them. The initiative comes from that side, it doesn't come from us. We might conclude that we need oracles, we might even pass a resolution in a council meeting to that effect!(Laughter) But it's the gods, the wrathful deities who've got to take the initiative. They as it were have to look around and see some suitable person, someone whose body they can make use of and act accordingly. So we really can't do anything in the matter. It's up to them. (Pause)

"In the chapter 'The Essence of Enlightenment' in the 'Survey' you quote the Pratiyasamutpada formula so that the reader may be afforded the opportunity of acquiring merit by reading and reciting it in the original language. Is it therefore more meritorious to read and recite the Dharmic formulas in Pali than to reflect upon and remember the English translation, and what are the mechanics of gaining merit, literal and metaphorical? Also if the Pali and Sanskrit languages are so important should we therefore take great care to chant correctly and make more effort to learn Pali?"

I must say I can't remember exactly why at that time I wrote in that particular way but I think I know why I did so. It's not that literally by repeating something in Pali you gain more merit than by repeating it in English because it is basically the meaning that matters. But it's not enough to have just an intellectual understanding of the meaning. There must be some feeling. And I think that what I was getting at was that if you reflect that well,
(End of tape three tape four)

..... the words which the Buddha himself actually used, two thousand five hundred years ago and these same words have been used by all sorts of saints and sages all down the centuries. I mean that may well in the case of some people give rise to certain, say, devotional feelings which can then blend with your intellectual understanding of what those words actually mean. This I think is what I was getting at. It's not that just by repeating in Pali automatically, so to speak, merit would accrue. It's very much a question of the feeling with which you recite. The idea that you're reciting something in the words which the Buddha himself may well have used can well give rise to certain strong positive feelings on your part. But apart from that I think it is quite useful if some people do learn Pali and Sanskrit. I'm encouraging people nowadays to do that and I think a few will be learning Pali and Sanskrit. A few people from within the Order, because it's always useful to be able to refer back to the original language, the original text especially when it's a question of important and significant technical terms. (Pause)

Yes, there's another batch. I'll try to go them a little more quickly now. These are the questions connected with the FWBO.

"You have said that Men's Events should be the equivalent of Order weekends for mitras. Could you explain what exactly you mean by this and say what changes need to come about in order for this to happen?"

I don't recollect saying it. I may well have said it. But if I did say it it was to compare the two in a very broad sense. In one way one can't compare men's events with Order weekends because Order weekends are exclusively for Order Members whereas in the case of men's events you get Order Members, you get mitras and I believe you get even some Friends. But I think what I was getting at was that men connected with the movement should give the same importance to men's events as Order Members give to Order weekends. And we should try to make them as intense, as spiritually intense an occasion as we can. We should take them as seriously as Order Members take the Order weekends. I think that what was the sort of thing I must have been getting at. (Pause)

"When one reads the Pali scriptures one is impressed by the beauty, thoughtfulness, control and the elegant good manners shown by the monks to each other in simple things, just as the way they greet each other. Do you look forward to a time when people in communities and on retreats such as this observe such well-mannered formalities as an integral part of the spiritual path? Could you please expand on the theme? Do you feel that the FWBO is ready or approaching readiness for such an innovation should it be thought to be suitable?"

I think such an innovation, if it is an innovation is long overdue! I think such things as, well, the beauty, thoughtfulness, control and elegant good manners shown by the monks are real expressions of sensitivity. For instance, sometimes one notices that, let's say, supposing someone makes a cup of tea for somebody else. Well, yes, that they make a cup of tea is a nice friendly gesture. But what happens? Well, maybe the cup hasn't been washed properly beforehand and also maybe they fill it right up to the brim and some of it slops over into the saucer and instead of just handing it to them, they just bang it down on the table in front of you, and say "Here you are!" Well that isn't the best way of doing it. I mean, yes, as I've said, it's nice that you've the thoughtfulness to offer them a cup of tea, but you might as well do it properly. You might as well give them a clean cup. You might as well not fill the cup too full. You might as well not slop it over into the saucer. And you might as well hand it to them in a refined sort of way. Do you see what I mean? So I think there's a very great room for improvement in this respect, in the whole movement and I've been agitating I thought for such an improvement for some time past. But clearly it must spring from heightened awareness and sensitivity. You can't lay down a whole lot of rules to the effect that, well, on such and such and such an occasion you'll behave like this and on such and such other occasion you'll behave like that. It has to grow out of increased awareness and sensitivity.

But yes, things are improving slowly. I mean, nowadays, in connection with pujas or the occasion of pujas we often sit in lines don't we. We try to present a more orderly appearance in that particular way and I think that we're trying to eat in a more decent and civilised way. The Buddhist scriptures, the Vinaya in particular, is full of the Buddha's suggestions to the bhikkhus. They weren't all perfect in the Buddha's day. I mean, for instance, the Buddha did not like the bhikkhus to make noises while they were eating. The Brahmins used to do this apparently. The Brahmins, as it were, as a matter of principle used to smack their lips and make all sorts of noises while eating. The Buddha asked his bhikkhus to eat quietly and there's a list in the Vinaya of the six brahminical noises (Laughter) while eating that the bhikkhus are not supposed to make. There's a chop, chop noise, and a sup, sup noise (Laughter) and so on. The Brahmins used to have various unpleasant habits where they used to eat their rice with their fingers, well, that was a general Indian practice, but the Brahmins after they'd eaten, used to shake their hands like this (Laughter) and the Buddha didn't like his

bhikkhus to do this and they used to fling great lumps of, balls of rice into their mouths. The Buddha didn't like the bhikkhus to do that. He didn't like them to speak with their mouths full.

But you see the sort of British equivalents of these sort of things going on all the time sometimes. So yes, I think a more refined way of living, more refined manners, more elegant manners, are really required but not as something artificial or imposed from without but as I've said, as I've emphasised in fact, springing from your own more developed awareness and sensitivity and consideration for other people's feelings. I mean, it isn't very pleasant when you're having your supper to be able hardly to hear yourself speak to the next person because the person sitting next to you or nearby you is chomping away so loudly, or sucking his soup so loudly, or slurping it or something of that sort.

Another thing I sometimes notice is scraping of chairs. People sort of drag their chair along the floor and a dreadful scraping, when seven or eight people scraping their chairs on the floor at the same time, well again you can't even hear yourself speak. It's quite unpleasant. So people should try to be more sensitive. So actually I could expand on this theme quite a lot. I was under the impression that I'd expanded on it on many occasion beforehand but perhaps the news hasn't got around very widely. But I won't expand on it now because we're rather short of time. In fact I think we've gone over time. But never mind, we're near the end of the questions.

"Were there any serious deficiencies in the organisation of the Sangha as established by the Buddha which provide lessons for the FWBO in these comparatively early days?"

I was trying to think of something but I could only come up with one particular point. And this grew out of the recent seminar that I had with the chairman on a book called "The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka". And in connection with that we were going into the organisation of the early Sangha and we saw that there were two things that the Buddha and the early Sangha in general were very concerned to safeguard. First of all there was the autonomy of the individual monk. The autonomy, the personal autonomy of the individual member of the Sangha. That had to be safeguarded at all costs. On the other hand, one also had to safeguard the harmony of the order. One had to safeguard the co-operativeness of the order. One had to make sure that all these autonomous individuals acted in harmony. You see, in some ways the two were inconsistent, but somehow you had to bring them together. Everybody had to be responsible for himself. Had to be an individual. Had to be autonomous. At the same time all the autonomous individuals needed, if there was to be a Sangha, a spiritual community at all, to be acting in harmony with one another. So it seems that the Buddha felt, or the Buddha realised, that this could be achieved only in one way. It could be achieved only if the monks, the bhikkhus, these autonomous individuals who were expected to act harmoniously, could meet together regularly and in large numbers. That was the key to it. It was by meeting together regularly in large numbers that they could make possible the achievement of these two apparently irreconcilable ideals. That is to say, personal autonomy and 'collective', 'collective' in inverted commas. 'Collective' harmony. But it was seen that they weren't entirely successful. Perhaps they were during the Buddha's own lifetime when the numbers were comparatively limited but as the centuries went by it became more and more difficult for them, the bhikkhus, to meet together regularly in large numbers, just because there were more of them.

So perhaps one of the things that we can learn is that we need to devise a means or methods of meeting together, I'm thinking especially here of the Order Members, regularly and in large numbers. Meeting together at national level, regional level, and local chapter level. And I mean, this is the only way perhaps in which one can satisfy these two demands, the

double demand, that is to say, of personal autonomy and collective harmony. (Pause)

All right. Now for something rather different.

"Why are there no black African Buddhists in the FWBO?"

(Laughter) Well, it's difficult to say. Because, I mean, why is it that people don't come along? Well, we have had I believe in the past some black African Buddhists and presumably the questioner means black Africans actually from Africa itself, I mean not for instance, West Indians. We did have some black Africans some years ago. We had, in fact, quite a number of them, all from Nigeria. They were quite interested. They came along in the quite early days and they were all sons of diplomats and apparently when their fathers were posted elsewhere they left, we didn't see them again. But I remember talking with them and they told me that they felt that Buddhism, certainly as taught by the FWBO, could have a very good future in Nigeria. They said that the Nigerians were in fact traditionally quite spiritually minded but that they were at the same time drifting away from their old tribal religions and they thought that the FWBO could do very well. But I'm afraid we haven't seen any Nigerians since.

I've sometimes thought about this, why we don't get, not just more black African Buddhists but more black people generally. We do have a few in at least, well we've got black people in at least two centres. But I've sometimes wondered why we don't get more because we don't get the percentage, looking at it population wise that one might expect. One of the explanations I've thought of is that perhaps in comparison with black African culture or the black African way of doing things, the FWBO, having started in England, is a little bit, shall I say, staid. Not very exciting. I remember some years ago I paid a visit to a community in West London and right opposite there was a church hall that had been taken over by black Christians and they were having a wonderful time! (Laughter) Oh, there was so much noise, shouting, music, chanting, stamping of feet. But we just don't things in that way and I rather get the feeling that black Africans associate religion with that sort of approach which they wouldn't find in the FWBO.

For instance, the other day I was listening to the radio news and there was a feature about the Pope's visit to Africa. And of course everywhere he went he was met by African Catholics and apparently in Africa Catholicism has taken over African music, drums and tom-toms, and all the rest of it and apparently there was one occasion in which the mass was celebrated in such an African way that it wasn't possible for the Pope to take part in it. (Laughter) Because he didn't know how to do things that particular way and there were bits and pieces of African masses being broadcast. It didn't sound Catholic, didn't sound Christian, it sounded just African. So it could be, this is one of the explanations I've personally come up with - that our way of doing things is just not exciting enough, in a way not colourful enough for Africans, for black Africans. This is a possible explanation, you could say it's a hypothesis. And maybe we have to look into it further because, I mean, in the FWBO we certainly do want to have people of all nationalities and all races, and all possible social religious backgrounds. (Pause)

All right.

"What importance do you attach to the FWBO becoming financially self supporting in all its activities? Is this a priority? How do you see our achieving it and what implications do you see in relation to ethics, personal effectiveness and practical planning in Order Members relying on State Social Security when responsible for running centres and other FWBO activities?"

Well, actually I've answered this question several times recently so I won't go into it in great detail now. I'll only say that I'm very much in favour of all FWBO activities being financially self-supporting. I've been talking about this with chairmen recently. They're well aware of the need. In a sense it is a priority and I'm not in favour therefore of too many Order members at least, relying on State Social Security. I'd really like to see the FWBO totally independent because if we do have too many Order Members depending on State Social Security, we're very vulnerable and our position actually is quite weak. And I think in any case, even apart from that, just out of, well one might say feelings of self-respect, we ought to be self-supporting.

So I definitely see that as our aim, as our goal and I'd like to see the whole FWBO being as self-supporting in all respects as quickly as possible. How we're going to achieve it I'm not going to try to think. I'm going to leave that to the Order Members and mitras and Friends concerned.

All right last question.

"When a person is considering becoming a mitra he/she has the four criteria as a means to see if he/she is ready. When considering Going for Refuge things are not so clear cut. Could you please give some working guidelines we could use?"

Well, actually it is quite clear cut, I would have thought because when you're considering Going for Refuge, you're considering Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and taking upon yourself the Ten Precepts. So you have to ask yourself, well, what does it mean to Go for Refuge to the Buddha, to the Dharma, to the Sangha. Therefore you have to ask yourself what do you mean by the Buddha, what do you mean by the Dharma, what you do mean by the Sangha? So you have to check if you're thinking of Going for Refuge, whether you know what is meant by Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and whether you know what is meant by Going for Refuge to them and then you have to ask yourself whether you know, whether you understand, the meaning of the Ten Precepts and to what extent you are prepared to try to put those into practice in your own life.

I mean, it is, in a way, it's as simple as that. That's what you need to start with. In a way it's, one might say, right under your nose. A great deal of study actually is devoted to this. So after really understanding the threefold Going for Refuge, really understanding the meaning of the Ten Precepts you have to ask yourself, "Am I or could I become capable of that?" If you feel, yes, I'm capable of it, well then you can feel that you are ready to Go for Refuge and you have to convince or you have to show to others, that that is in fact the case. You have to be able to let them see that you do understand what the Three Refuges mean, you do understand what the Ten Precepts mean and that you are able to act upon that knowledge. That there is actually nothing holding you back at least from making a very good start. So one could say that that is in fact the criterion, or those are the criteria. So perhaps on that note we had better close. (Applause)

(End of tape)

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