

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

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH NEW ZEALANDERS - 1985

Loosely based on the booklet "The Bodhisattva, Evolution and Self-Transcendence" with additional discussion about the best conditions for visitors to the FWBO from outside the UK.

Those Present: (names taken from 'voice print') Steven, Satyananda, Murray Wright, Prasannasiddhi, Timothy, Matthew, Mark Dwyer, Dharmadhara, Vijaya.

Prasannasiddhi: So, the first question is a technical question, or I think it's more a technical question.

S: Say first of all whether the question arises out of any particular passage or text.

Satyananda: The question arises out of the Bodhisattva, Evolution and Self Transcendence. The bottom of page 15 and it's just a technical question. You list the nidanas as faith, tranquillity, satisfaction and delight and rapture etc., etc. I just wondered why that list is different from ...

S: Ah. I think there's, no, I think this question was asked in Tuscany. I think it is simply a mistake in copying or typing. (Pause) You just check it with for instance the list contained in 'The Three Jewels'. I have an idea that what happened was that delight and rapture really represent one and the same nidana. I think that's what it is but one nidana has been, appears as it were twice, in English. Do you see what

I mean? I think that what it is simply. There is, in fact, no difference

between the series of nidanas here and the series of nidanas anywhere else. Do you see what I mean? Give me 'The Three Jewels' and I'll ...

Prasannasiddhi: Well, 'The Three Jewels' is faith, joy, rapture ...

S: Just a minute. Let me just get it here. (Pause) Yes, (Bhante quickly reads to himself from the text) ... faith, yes ...

Prasannasiddhi: You've got tranquillity with joy, as the second, and then rapture.

S: Ah, yes, I think it is tranquillity and tension release. Tranquillity - calming down - is the same thing as what Guenther calls, I've quoted his translation here and that's why I've got it in inverted commas, [2] 'tension release'.

Satyananda: So that tranquillity should be way over after rapture.

S: Yes. Really it means that it's tension-release or tranquillity, the nidana being one nidana. There's no difference, there's no difference intended here. It's the standard series of nidanas.

(Pause) And satisfaction, and that was all right, rapture.

Prasannasiddhi: The others are OK.

S: The others ... yes it is those two. (Pause) Yes, it should be tranquillity or tension-release. It's representing prasarabdi.

Prasannasiddhi: The second question was to page 5. The second question is from Murray.

Murray: I'll read the relevant passage. "We're living in the midst of a great debate. It is a debate which, in one form or another, has been going on ever since simple consciousness evolved into reflexive consciousness or, in other words, ever since man became man. All civilizations have been involved in this debate; all cultures and all religions. Some of the greatest triumphs of the human spirit are the product of this debate and some of its most terrible disasters". The question is: "Is it possible for there to be a, in inverted commas, "triumph of the human spirit" collectively and or individually within the context of armed conflict, for example, the Spartan defence of Greece against the Persians at Thermopolai?"

S: Well, it depends what one means by triumph. Obviously there can be such a thing as a moral triumph or a spiritual triumph in the sense of an inner as distinct from an external triumph. So by the triumph of the human spirit one does not necessarily mean a material triumph. One might say that this particular question is connected with the question of what is sometimes called, in connection with the ecclesiastical affairs, and especially in connection with the history of the Roman Catholic church triumphalism. Have you ever heard this term before? Triumphalism. It is a term which was much used at Vatican II. For instance some critics of the existing ecclesiastical structure were of the opinion it was characterized by too great an extent or too great a degree by three things. That is to say: centralism; authoritarianism; and triumphalism. And triumphalism very broadly speaking though I don't think there's any really precise definition of the term, triumphalism very broadly speaking means the tendency to identify the 'success', maybe single inverted commas, of a religion or of a religious movement or a spiritual movement with external success. That is success in the outside world, success in the secular world. So that for instance, if you've got lots of buildings, if you're ministers with highly influential positions, if they can influence the government, if they can influence legislation, well then you are successful. That sort of tendency, the tendency to think that way is triumphalism. So this is really a very dangerous tendency. So when one speaks in terms of a triumph of the human spirit, one is not thinking in terms of triumphalism. Because there can be a triumph of the human spirit in the midst of material disaster. In the case that you mentioned, well, if you think of it as a triumph of the human spirit, but in so much as there's violence involved so people might question that, but by taking it as an example of the triumph of the human spirit, it was at the same time a military defeat. But you could say it was a moral victory. Do you see what I mean?

So it is quite important to realize that there can be a triumph of the human spirit even when to all external appearances there is complete disaster, that you've been beaten, that you've been defeated. Of course, there is again a danger here that you sort of try to turn failure itself into some sort of victory. We've talked about this on a number of occasions. You attribute some sort of value to the defeat because you are not able to accept defeat on that level. So that must be very carefully distinguished from a genuine, as it were, spiritual victory in the midst of real material disaster.

You're not trying to make out that the material disaster is not a material disaster and it is not in fact a disaster on that level, you fully accept that. But at the same time, on a quite [3] different level, on a quite different dimension, you have in fact triumphed. So this is what I'm thinking of when I say "some of the greatest triumphs of the human spirit are the product of this debate". I'm not thinking of, as it were, triumphalist terms. Of course, it may be that a triumph of human spirit is accompanied by some measure of external success but it's certainly not to be confused. We can see this in the case of some of these modern cults and religious, or pseudo-religious (), they have a measure of, as it were, success, but does it represent a triumph of the human spirit? That's quite another matter.

Prasannasiddhi: We were just wondering as to war, as in a way war seems like a sort of group activity. We were just wondering if one could speak of the human spirit and individuality in the context of war. That was the sort of question.

S: I think that the human spirit can't be excluded entirely from that situation. I mean, for instance, one can read the about, say the trench warfare during the First World War. Well the First World War was a war, and everybody who was involved in it, to that extent, was involved in a violent activity. Was involved in acts of violence but nonetheless, even though one was so involved, in the midst of that involvement sometimes, the human spirit in a more positive sense did manifest itself. For instance, there were well-known occasions when there was an unofficial armistice on Christmas Eve. I'm not sure whether it was in all years, but certainly some years, and soldiers on both sides, both German and British crossed into no-man's-land and fraternised and exchanged cigarettes, at least on that day. You see what I mean?

So that you could say represented a triumph of the human spirit or if for instance in the course of war you risked your life, as many soldiers did to drag one of your comrades out of the reach of say machine gun fire, or something like that. So even under those unlikely circumstances there can be a triumph of the human spirit, at least to some extent. Whatever the sort of horrible situation your karma so to speak might have landed you in, it's always possible that you can modify that to some extent, at least for the future, by some genuinely human act.

Prasannasiddhi: Even if it's fighting to defend your country, actually killing people in defence of your country?

S: I'm not saying, we must be very careful, I'm not saying that killing them can represent a triumph of the human spirit. No, I think that can never be the case, but in that situation which is geared to killing where you're not actually killing, because human nature is so complex you can still, to a limited extent perform an action which does represent a triumph of the human spirit, as for instance, when you risk your life for the sake of one of your friends, in that sort of situation. Clearly you are accumulating or creating a very mixed karma. The fact that you're engaged in war at all, in acts of violence, is unskilful and you will suffer for that in due course, but the fact that in the midst of that generally unskilful situation, you are still capable of some skilful acts, at least to some extent, well is as I said skilful and you will reap the consequences of that.

So I think no situation probably, no general situation, I'm not talking about specific acts, but no general situation is so unskilful as to altogether exclude the possibility of any skilful act on

your part. You may be in the army, you may be in prison, you may be in hospital or you may be with very unpleasant people, but the possibility of some measure of skilful action is never excluded.

Dharmadhara: What about in the situation where you have a civilized culture defending itself against a barbaric culture? I mean, could you consider that as being a triumph of the human spirit if they successfully defend themselves, the culture or civilization?

S: They've defended themselves and in fact they triumphed but in another sense they've been defeated. Because in order to preserve their culture they've had to descend to a barbaric level, that is to say the level of war. So in a sense what you gain in one way you lose in another. You've preserved your culture in a sense but you've preserved it by descending to a level which is lower than the level of culture. I think that is the great tragedy in a way of all wars or conflicts of that kind. In order to defend culture against the barbarians you have [4] unfortunately to become a barbarian yourself. So you've preserved your artefacts but have you preserved your civilization? Do you see what I mean?

Dharmadhara: Could I ask could there be a triumph of the human spirit individually or collectively. Could there be a collective sort of triumph?

S: Well, here we have an ambiguous term, because I've said that in English we don't have a term for a 'collection', inverted commas, of individuals. That is represented by Sangha in the highest sense. So if you can have a triumph of the human spirit in a sense, of the triumph of an individual human spirit, well yes, you could have a collective triumph in the sense of the triumph of a number of such individuals, but whether you could have triumph of the human spirit in the collective sense, i.e. group sense that is quite another matter. Well on the group level you might say you can't have a human spirit at all in that the two things are mutually exclusive. So it's a matter of how you define collective.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think you could give an overall judgement? On the one hand you are defending your culture and on the other hand you're resorting to barbarism. Do you think one can make a general summation and say well, on the whole it was good or on the whole it was bad?

S: In theory yes. It might be very difficult to do in practice because you also have to consider the degree or level of the culture, the extent of the barbarism, how many people were involved in it etc. So in theory yes, but I think in practice it might be very difficult actually to arrive at such an assessment.

Prasannasiddhi: The next question doesn't refer to the booklet. It refers to last year's Tuscany. The question is from Tim.

Tim: The question I have is: "The universe if left to its devices would become unethical. Man is basically pulling down on us". What I'm wondering ...

S: Say that again. Is that an actual quote?

Tim: No, it's paraphrasing. It's not a quote.

S: So let me have it again because it sounds rather curious in a way.

Tim: OK. The universe left to its own devices ...

S: I think one would have to look into the meaning of that. It reminds me, you know what Carlyle once said. Carlyle was told that there was a well-known, I forget what her name was, but she was a sort of follower of Emerson, in America, and this good lady, I think she was a Unitarian or something of that sort, she said once "I accept the Universe", so Carlyle said, "My God, she'd better!". [Laughter] Well, there's no alternative. Here is the universe, you've no alternative! There's no question of you having any other universe. So in the same what is the phrase?

Tim: So the universe if left to its own devices ...

S: Well, yes, what else can it do except leave it to (Laughter) its own devices! You can't really do anything else. All right so, carry on.

Tim: Well anyway, will become unethical. Man is basically pulling down. (Pause)

S: I think someone has jotted that down in a rather a hurry and perhaps missed out some pieces. I think I vaguely discern what we were talking about, or what I was talking about. (Pause) If we look at the universe, as it were, objectively, that is to say, the non-human universe, that is to say excluding human beings and human life, it doesn't appear to exhibit any ethical characteristics. It doesn't seem very kind, for instance. Of course, this has always been one of the great problems of theism. According to theism, God has made the world. According to theism God is good, God is kind, you know, God [5] is holy. So this being the case, how is it that there is so much evil, so much suffering in the world. Surely a God who is not only good but also all-powerful and all-knowing could have ordered things in a better sort of way than that. So broadly speaking, one might say, leaving aside man, leaving aside the human race, the non-human universe exhibits no ethical qualities, no ethical characteristics. Ethics, one might say, comes in with man.

In a broader sense, of course, man is a part of the universe, a part of nature, so you could say that nature manifests ethical qualities through man, but apparently only through man, very broadly speaking. So when, if I did or if anybody did speak of the universe being left to its own devices, it was a reference, so to speak, to that sort of distinction. Left to its own devices means without man and without the ethical qualities that man embodies or that man represents. You see what I mean? What was the other bit?

Tim: So, so, man is basically pulling downward. What I was wondering here or therefore has a natural tendency to not evolve.

S: Yes, man is being pulled down as it were by nature to the extent that he is a part of nature. On the one hand, say, he is an animal. He's "red in tooth and claw", just like an animal. On the other hand, he's a human being with human ethical, even angelic, qualities, or at least potentiality. So there's a constant conflict between the two things.

Tim: I see the urge to evolve as also the urge to (connect with) the natural state.

S: Yes. Everybody experiences that surely, every day, if not every hour, every minute. So I think don't take this phrase about the universe or about leaving the universe to its own devices too seriously, or too literally. It means that the universe considered so to speak, apart from man, and especially apart from the ethical values that man represents.

Prasannasiddhi: The next question is from me. It refers to New Zealand.

S: Not to the book?

Prasannasiddhi: Not to the book. It's not much to do with the book in any direct sense. What would you consider to be the strengths, if any, and weaknesses, if any, of the New Zealand character with specific reference to the FWBO?

S: Well, I think the first thing that has to be determined is is there a New Zealand character? And if so what is? Because this question of national characters is a very tricky one. But there are a number of books that have been written on different national characters in Europe. Say on the German national character, the Italian national character, the French national character, the Spanish national character and the, and this is where it gets a bit more complicated, the English national character, Scottish national character, Welsh national character. So I think first of all one would need to, sort of, decide well whether there was a distinctive New Zealand national character and if so what it was? What its distinguishing features were? So I think it's perhaps important to try to arrive at some sort of consensus about that first. I can't say that I've made a detailed or systematic or scientific study of the New Zealand national character, though I have become aware at least of certain characteristics of certain New Zealanders, old and young, male and female, from both islands, from time to time. So it might be idea if we were to go round the circle and each person could tell us in turn what he felt, first of all whether there was a New Zealand, you know, national character, and if so what were its characteristics? At least mentioning one or two, and in that way you might be able to get some sort of consensus and then it might begin to be obvious how that related to the FWBO.

At that point I might be able to say something. But I think to jump right in and say, well, the New Zealanders have a national character, this is what it is and this is how it relates to the FWBO or whatever the question was, it might be premature, and possibly even a little risky. So could we go round and see? Don't go into too much detail, but just [6] mention. First of all say whether you feel that there is a New Zealand national character or not. You may not even think there is. And then secondly say what you feel are those characteristics, mentioning just those that happen to occur to you, then we'll see. (Pause)

Prasannasiddhi: I feel there are some New Zealand national characteristics .. (Laughter)

S: Which may or may not add up to a distinctive New Zealand character.

Prasannasiddhi: One of those is a very definite outgoingness and appreciation for the outdoors. A second characteristic I feel, resulting from that and relating to that as well, a sort of, a tendency towards individualistic tendencies or tendencies of an individualism. I feel those are two I'm aware of. (Pause)

S: Someone's making a list of these by the way?

_____: Yes I am.

Satyananda: The one that comes to mind for me is the idea of a self-made man, which is particularly strong in New Zealand, the idea much more so than in England. The idea of the sort of a pioneer, because I think that it is such a young country ...

S: Pioneer?

Satyananda: Yes. I think that this is such a young country there are so many opportunities, encouraged to be your own man. I think that out of that comes the sort of jack-of-all-trades. New Zealanders don't tend to be quite as specialized, at least, in the past they haven't.

S: Are we talking about the New Zealand woman as well as the New Zealand man? Or have we forgotten them? (Laughter)

Satyananda: Well, I suppose it's the same to some extent. You can't be a self-made man unless everyone agrees with that.

S: Unless you've got a woman to help you? (Laughter)

Satyananda: Yes that's what they like, you know. (Laughter)

Murray: I'm not sure about the idea of a national character, in inverted commas. I think there seems to be general tendencies. On the negative side, I think that New Zealanders can be a bit insular.

S: Well, they do live on an island, well two islands.

Murray: A bit insecure nationally. A tendency towards individualism I suppose. Or individualistic-ness. But it can be a bit baggy or sort of superficial. I think positively, generally they're a bit simpler, a bit more initiative. Seem to be, generally seem to be more, sort of, practically-minded, or pragmatic, sort of in the same way the Chinese are as opposed to the Europeans or the English.

S: That would suggest a really rather practical in a rather special way. Because, I mean, the British are not usually considered impractical, are they?

_____: Not by any means.

_____: Just talking with other New Zealanders that has struck a few New Zealanders that the English are ...

S: The English or the English that are in the FWBO in England.

_____: Well, there's specifically the English in the FWBO. They do have, well less practically-minded from our point of view. But of course these are generalizations. (Pause)

Prasannasiddhi: I think that on the whole a general character sort of emerges from the general body of New Zealanders. I think that generally they're quite physically healthy and not to say,

robust.

[7]

S: Looks like it. (Laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: They're outdoorsy. (Laughter) I think there's a tendency for New Zealanders to live in a sort of bubble of their own. They've got their own sort of bubble that they go around in. They don't really sort of contact other peoples' bubbles whereas I think in other ...

S: Nonetheless they are outward-going? Or is it that the whole bubble moves outward?

Prasannasiddhi: I think maybe the bubble sort of. I think that there's two forms of outward-goingness. There's outward-goingness in the sense of going outdoors and sort of going to the beach and getting fresh air and then there's outward-goingness in the sense, kind of, going out and meeting people and talking with people.

_____: () personalities which doesn't really apply.

Prasannasiddhi: Personally I think there are some extroverts in New Zealand but I think introversion is quite a characteristic, perhaps the predominant characteristic and although there may be outwardgoingness, I question how deep the sort of contact made on the basis of that outwardgoingness is. I think there's a tendency for the New Zealanders to be more bound up on the material plane. That that's to do with their experience of the outdoors and also in the sense of building houses and having good businesses and sort of making money, and that sort of thing and I don't think they're quite so sort of intellectually inclined. (Pause) And I think that's what I'll say.

_____: We're running out of things now!

S: Repeats itself really. You can say what previous people have said, because we're trying to arrive at a consensus.

_____: I sort of feel that New Zealanders have a sort of a democratic, I don't like the word, but it is used in New Zealand - an egalitarian view of life.

S: Maybe democratic in Walt Whitman's sense let us say.

_____: And almost a bit reactive against authority. I think that this is both a New Zealand and Australian characteristic. That () as good as his master, he's as good or he knows as much as the next man.

S: Of course that suggests you've got a master.

_____: Yes. I suppose so. I was using that more as a ()

S: But just to diverge or digress a little bit. If anyone has a very strongly anti-authoritarian attitude, that would suggest that at sometime in their life they've actually experienced the exercise of authority in an oppressive way. You see what I mean? So, assuming, as you seem to say, that New Zealanders have this anti-authoritarian attitude, who is it that has exercised

authority in an oppressive way with regard to the New Zealanders? How do they arrive at this particular condition, if that is in fact the case?

_____: I'm not too sure myself. A bit of xenophobia, I thought, that what had been mentioned, a bit of a fear of the outside world. This complicated view of life, as I say, doesn't (). It's a little bit innocent, I think, of the world at large. And also they don't seem to have very sharp, sort of incisive intellects. Intellects that work, but intellects that don't seem to be capable of really incisive thought. ().

_____: There's two different kinds of New Zealanders as far as I can see. There's rural and urban. And they both have quite different characteristics. The first thing I've got is stoicism and I think that's a characteristic of rural New Zealanders. People who've had a very hard life in the sense of particularly in the early days, people who had a very hard physical life. It's tended to harden them and also this sort of work where people are working with animals and I think that tends to ...

[8]

S: Just to introduce little bit of personal experience and I must say I noticed this on my first visit to New Zealand. When I went down by train, on the Silver Fern. Is it Silver Fern? Yes. From Auckland to Wellington and this train stopped at all sorts of little stations along the way and at every station, oh, droves of people came either to meet people getting off there or to see them off if they were getting on the train. I really noticed what those rural people were like. They really did look as though they worked hard. Their faces were really quite tanned. They looked really healthy, a bit lean, as far as I remember. They weren't very well dressed. They were almost shabbily dressed, almost like in their working clothes. But some of them looked quite gnarled, weather-beaten and you felt that these people were... First of all my impression was, and I'm only speaking about these particular people I saw on this day. First of all they were healthy. Two, they were quite happy and very hard working. That was the sort of predominant impression I got. So they were no doubt rural people. Anyway carry on.

_____: So that can also have a negative effect, that sort of life and particularly where people have worked with animals or are working with them. That's their livelihood, say sheep farming. I've personally had experience of it with my father's rural background.

S: As I say you get on better with sheep if you're not careful than with human beings.
(Laughter)

Murray: Sheep can't talk.

S: Can't they? (Laughter)

_____: Also, going through the rural characteristics, I was thinking about this thing of extroversion and introversion, I think they tend to be introverted, rural people and there's a sort of fear, fear of culture. I suppose you get that in rural people everywhere. And also I think in the rural areas you tend to get a bit of resentment towards the English.

S: I think I should introduce a qualification. I think you get resentment towards culture in rural people everywhere where culture is regarded as a sort of essentially urban phenomenon. You see, for instance, I'm thinking of people in an Indian village. They're rural. They've got

nothing against culture because they've got their own traditional rural culture. Quite definitely. You see what I mean? They don't identify culture with the city. They don't regard it as an essentially urban product. Anyway carry on.

_____: So you get a bit of sort of resentment towards the English in rural areas. I suppose that's to do with the fact that they've got more of a connection with their ancestors and the fact that the rural ancestors were more working class English who were shoved out there, as it were. My own great grandfather, he was sent out to New Zealand because his family didn't want him around. He was a disgrace to the family.

Well, vagueness, I think that's another rural characteristic. Just the fact that people aren't educated and don't want to be. I think actually there's a general reaction towards education and that's partly because the people who are actually running the education system, having got a very strong connection with European culture, to start with, so they're not coming across in a very inspired way, and that tends to rub off on the children and it carries on like that. Naivety would seem to be a characteristic.

Dharmadhara: Can you say anything positive? (Laughter)

S: Well, naivety is a positive characteristic isn't it?

_____: Yes. So is innocence you could say. Easy-going. I mean, quite a ... I'm not sure about that term because you can call someone easy-going but it doesn't necessarily mean that they're actually open.

S: They worry about different things from you. Rural people worry about the crops and the weather and the animals, but they don't worry about the state of the world or anything like that.

[9]

_____: "She'll be right" is a common New Zealand slang ...

_____: It's quite interesting this development, just to sidetrack, this development with the nuclear issue there. It seems a lot of consciousness raising has been going on there in the last few years. Which, I mean ten years ago I just got the impression that people just weren't aware of the rest of the world I'm interested that that seems to be happening. I think that the Springbok tour was a major turning point in the sense that people actually had to decide on an issue, on an ethical issue. It really seems to have shaken people up. (Pause) That's all I've got really.

S: Well, you didn't come on to the characteristics of the urban New Zealander.

_____: The urban New Zealander. Well, I suppose more outward going. Yes. I think New Zealanders have got a very good reputation for, a lot of New Zealanders travel and are quite courageous in that sense. You always seem to be bumping into them and I suppose that's partly because New Zealand's culture-less more or less. Anyone who's got any inkling of a desire to learn or to experience culture has to leave. Whereas here it's right in front of you. They don't even... They don't think of the cathedral three times in their life. So perhaps there's more of a demand.

S: Yes, I remember Vajrasuri saying to me. She must have been nearly fifty when she said it. "Do you know I've never seen a Gothic cathedral in my life." And she was aware of that, being an artist and so on. (Pause)

_____: I think generally, just bits of what's already been mentioned. They're maybe not so scholastically inclined on the whole, I don't think. A lacking in say roots or culture in New Zealand as a whole. I think, on the whole, I sort of see New Zealanders as, say really happy, a happy level, and quite intuitive, I think quite in feel with nature, with the outdoors, with wide open spaces. Most people I think are quite at home

(End of side one) (Side two)

I think most people around are quite at home in the outdoors and so I think as a consequence, maybe as a consequence of that and because of the sort of life style we're physically quite well I think on the whole, and quite robust, quite sort of rugged in just the way that they look, they look quite like the Scottish people actually. Think they quite remind me of some of the Scottish people. And they have that pioneering spirit like the New Zealanders. Lots of young New Zealanders travelling around the world and I think on the whole to be quite hard working. That's the sort of impression I got from people who've been overseas and worked and that thing of some sort of innocence, like just that thing of, say lacking in culture, lacking of experience, () number of people.

S: In connection with what you've just said, I'll mention just with one thing I've noticed about New Zealanders, though whether it's a national characteristic I wouldn't like to say, I've certainly noticed in comparison with other people, though that New Zealanders always pay their way. Do you know what I mean by that? Paying one's way. They never expect others to pay for them. Whatever they get, whatever facilities they enjoy, they're very prompt to pay for them, to pay up, to pay what they owe. They do it, as it were, automatically.

_____: They like to seem self-sufficient.

S: I think it's probably connected with that, but it's quite noticeable that they pay their way. They don't, I won't say they don't like to be beholden to other people but they don't even, it doesn't occur to them, it seems, to be beholden to other people, or to be dependent on other people in this sort of way. I've noticed this. Anyway that's by the by.

Just to give you a small example. Order Members in New Zealand are always the first to pay their Order fees. Yes. Order Members in New Zealand. (Laughter)

Satyananda: It's got its advantages. I mean I paid last year's before [10] they put the price up. (Laughter) (Pause)

Dharmadhara: Well, we've probably said enough now. Can I just say I think that if there is a New Zealand character I think it's changing. It seems to be have been more obvious in the past. When it was more dependent on Britain it seemed to have had a sort of inferiority complex to some extent. Possibly through being colonial. But now I think the future could turn more towards the Pacific Basin to some extent. The arts have a low profile in general. I think, generalizing here, the New Zealand character could be less reserved, possibly I'm talking more about the urban, for example compared to the British characteristic. More

outgoing, more outdoors, possibly. (Pause) There's less tradition so there's more practical initiative.

S: Yes, in New Zealand you're unlikely to get people say, 'oh well that just isn't done!'

_____: The first thing I'll say which hasn't been said the press all take it for granted is that New Zealand is probably the most English country outside of England of any size. And it'd formed mainly of English people through its short history, two hundred year history and with its close links with England and the way the Order's developed there are over twenty New Zealand Order Members already says something.

_____: I don't think there's a lack of culture in New Zealand and I think that it's something we used to put ourselves down for some reason. I think culturally it's less complicated and less sophisticated than in rural areas, yes, definitely, there's really no culture to speak of, no indigenous culture, there's church, chapel, and hotels. But I think per head of population since I came to this country has got in an area like Tower Hamlets which must be getting near to quarter of a million people and it's a cultural wasteland.

S: The whole of South London. South of the Thames where I was born and brought up a cultural desert even today.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, there is a sort of folk culture, like the West Indians around Brixton got their own reggae music and popular culture.

_____: To draw this distinction per head of population I think in New Zealand there is the culture, there is the intellectual life, in fact, New Zealand universities overproduce qualified people who have to go abroad to get work. It's just that there's not the intensity because you don't get such large urban situations that you do get, so you don't get intensity and fusion that you get in places like this which I think leads to an illusion which I and many people suffer from in that everything's happening up in the other end of the world. I think from coming here I've found it actually more difficult to maintain good cultural connections and have the time to keep them up. You have the choice of, you're spoiled for choice here - people have sophisticated events if you want to go out, but I've found on the other hand, I think I've probably had a more satisfying cultural life in New Zealand. I agree with what Dharmadhara had to say about the changing too. It's definitely a young country so the pioneering spirit is much in evidence and you do find a significant proportion of New Zealanders travelling the world at any one time and I think they will adopt new ways of living, new life styles. The country now standing its ground with the nuclear issue shows that it's willing to be forward thinking, and I think New Zealanders will adopt a new way of life if it seems immediately to them to be more practical, more sensible and more healthier even. And they'll adopt it before other countries because of the fewer traditions of New Zealanders. There's less to actually stop them from adopting them which, I think, is a very positive thing.

I also think of the sea when I think of New Zealand. Zealand in Holland is a country where its people have just fought to regain their land from the sea, the sea's marched over it and they've fought back. New Zealand takes its name from that. I don't know why I love the sea. I think a lot of New Zealanders do and I've not met such large numbers of people as I have in England who live right beside the sea, who have nothing to do with the sea. Whereas New Zealanders living by the sea would regard it as something to play with or to enjoy.

[11]

S: It's warm. (Laughter)

_____: That's something I find interesting. I think New Zealanders are quite efficient workers generally except when it comes to say perhaps very sophisticated cultural sorts of work that appears in older sorts of countries. I think New Zealanders are fairly straightforward and uncomplicated and if they've got a job to get on with they generally get on with it. It's a generalization, but true.

Prasannasiddhi: Can I add one point that I've reflected on? It seems to me that the one characteristic of the more outgoing pioneering spirit of the New Zealander is that they merge with just about any society. In my own travels I just found New Zealanders in sort of all necks of the wood, and all different countries. A lot of them appeared to leave New Zealand and merge with the different societies that they find an affinity with. There's not sort of a great pulling in a sense back. They don't seem to have that sort of roots, your roots aren't sort of fixed, as it were. They're quite prepared to move.

_____: One more point. New Zealand and Australian people. I find they're really warm-hearted people. There's a certain warmth that comes across in a very immediate way.

_____: I think they like to talk about themselves! (Laughter)

Satyananda: Basically we're just wonderful. (Laughter) (Pause)

S: That's what fairly representative selection of New Zealanders think about themselves. But now we have to relate that back to the second part of the question. So it does seem to be generally agreed that there is, I think that it was only Murray who possibly questioned this to some extent, that it seems that we generally agree that there is roughly speaking such a thing as a New Zealand character or the New Zealand character. And the various characteristics or qualities that have been mentioned all do seem to sort of hang together. They all do seem much of a muchness. They seem like a sort of family of characteristics. Though probably it isn't very easy to sum them all up, just in one or two words, and to say well, the New Zealand character is this or the New Zealand character is that. But let's at least try to relate some of those more prominent characteristics to the second part of the question which was (Pause)?

Prasannasiddhi: What would you consider to be the strengths if any and weaknesses if any of the New Zealand character with specific reference to the FWBO?

S: So we've heard about strengths, mainly strengths, a few weaknesses. So as related to the FWBO. Let's take up one or two of those characteristics. A few of the characteristics say, in turn, because we can't spend too much time on this and see how they do relate to the FWBO both as strengths and as weaknesses. So what shall we take up? What seem to be most generally agreed upon characteristics?

_____: Practicality of New Zealanders?

S: Practicality? Well, that's clearly a strength and practicality is absolutely necessary in connection with the FWBO. I'd say that in some areas of the FWBO there's not enough practicality. There hasn't been enough practicality, I'm not talking about New Zealand, of

course, but there's hasn't been enough practicality in areas like for instance co-ops. People are just beginning to be really practical in a way that running of co-ops is concerned. So all right mention another generally agreed characteristic.

_____: Pioneering spirit.

S: The pioneering spirit. Well, again that's a strength and again it is indispensable to the spread of the FWBO. If you want just to stay safely and comfortably, where there are lots of other Order Members, lots of other mitras, and lots of Friends and, you know, a really good centre that's down the street, or right on the corner of your street, well, the FWBO is [12] not going to spread very quickly and very far. For the FWBO really to spread there have got be Order Members with pioneering spirit. So yes, pioneering spirit in relation to the FWBO is very much a strength. And one may therefore even find New Zealand Order Members setting up centres outside New Zealand itself. That is quite a possibility. At least one New Zealander has worked in India for a couple of years. That is itself perhaps significant. But perhaps we'll see them doing more than that and pioneering the movement itself, not only in different parts of New Zealand but different parts of the world. So pioneering spirit, yes, definitely, a strength, and definitely what's needed by at least a good proportion of Order Members. What other general characteristics were there?

_____: One of naivety.

S: Naivety.

_____: Ignorant happiness.

S: Naivety. I think naivety is a strength in one's personal life. I think it's good to be naive. But I think it is a weakness in dealing with the wicked world. I think that if you're going to just be confining yourself to the centre or your own community, and maybe just say taking meditation classes, giving talks, or relating to people within your community, you can afford to be naive. But if you've got to go, say, to some foreign country with different customs, traditions, laws, maybe a different type of police, different maybe financial systems, I think you can't afford to be naive.

_____: You have to be quite sharp.

S: I think you need to be quite sharp. For instance some of our Friends have been functioning, are functioning in India. If you're going to survive there you can't afford to be naive. We're in a very difficult position there. Now it's, of course, more difficult than ever because of this visa problem. But I think that if you want to break fresh ground in an unfamiliar situation, a strange country, perhaps dealing with public figures, perhaps dealing with local authorities, dealing with politicians, as you may have to do, you can't afford to be naive. I think if you're naive, you're lost. I've been talking about this sort of thing recently, you know, within the Order Office community in connection with a book I was reading recently on the life of St. Catherine of Siena. I was interested in her partly because I visited Siena and saw the house where she was born and so on. But her life is very interesting but I won't say anything about that in general, but what struck me was that here is a woman who was very saintly no doubt, and who spent the earlier part of her life in a very ascetic fashion, had all sorts of visions and mystical experiences but she was very concerned about peace. She was very concerned with

reconciling neighbours and citizens of Siena who were on bad terms with one another. She was very concerned with ending vendettas and private wars and she had quite a measure of success in Siena in that respect. But when she entered upon a wider field and when she, for instance, tried to help make peace between the city of Florence and the Pope of those days, who were then practically at war, she got into deep waters. She had great sincerity but she was at least politically naive and there was one particular series of events where the wily Florentines quite clearly just used her and used her influence in a way that actually she did not intend it to be used. She was used by them even though she was a saint and, you know, who had insights in many ways but politically she was naive. There she was out of her depth and so there were consequences of her actions which she had never intended.

So I thought at the time, that was a very good example. You can't afford to be merely good in this world. You can't afford, and I've said on a number of occasions, you can't afford to be as harmless as the dove unless you are as wise or even as wily as the serpent. So if you want to pioneer the FWBO outside New Zealand, outside England, well, you've got to join with your personal naiveté, quite a bit of shrewdness in dealing with the outside world, and people that you meet in the outside world. So, yes, naiveté, in connection with the FWBO, although a positive quality in itself, could be a source of weakness under certain circumstances. What other characteristics were mentioned?

_____: The tendency towards individualistic behaviour which has caused some conflict at least.

[13]

S: Well, I'm not personally stating that individualism is a characteristic of New Zealanders but I can say in a general way that certainly individualism as distinct, of course, from being an individual, is definitely a weakness. It does make for success in the world, in an ordinary human life. It does make for material success, business success, professional success, but it is not a quality that makes for 'success', inverted commas, in the spiritual life. In the spiritual life individualism is a handicap and especially it is a handicap when you have to work co-operatively with other people. So if individualism is a characteristic of New Zealanders, then they will certainly experience difficulties in working with one another. So it would be definitely a weakness.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think you could say that that is because the spiritual life is essentially involved with other people?

S: I think it is very difficult to think of the spiritual life in exclusively individual terms. So yes other individuals, or proto-individuals, other people are involved. And if you are too much of an individualist you will not be able to interact with other people in the sort of way that will conduct to your spiritual development and their spiritual development too. If you're too much of an individualist you will relate to others almost entirely in terms of conflict which means almost entirely in terms of the power mode and certainly this will be in itself a weakness and will certainly not be helpful within the context of the FWBO.

_____: Could I raise a question with respect to the need in a sense for a person to sort of break away from the group, from the basis perhaps being an individualist. Is that not perhaps a strength in itself in the initial stages of becoming involved in the spiritual life? I mean ...

S: Well it might be but by the time you as it were arrive at the doors of the FWBO you should have started to getting over that. If you bring that right into the FWBO well you yourself will not be able to develop much as an individual because your individualism will prevent you from co-operating with others and you'll just be a nuisance to other people. So yes it may be that when you originally left your family or your job, even though it was for individualistic reasons, well that might be regarded as having a sort of positive aspect but if you want to benefit from and contribute to the FWBO you'll very quickly need to leave that individualism behind.

Anyway what other qualities, maybe a couple more then we must pass on to another question?

Prasannasiddhi: Outdoorsiness.

S: Outdoorsiness. I remember Buddhadasa wrote something about this some time ago. He thought that within the context of the FWBO in New Zealand this was something that would have to be taken very much into account. I'm not quite sure what he meant by that or how it would sort of work out in practice, the only sort of thing I can think of is that, well, you could have for instance, things like retreats under much more outdoor conditions. I think that I even did mention on some occasion - it might even have been in New Zealand itself - that I didn't see any reason why you shouldn't have a retreat say along the beach. Do you see what I mean? Because those sort of things are possible in New Zealand and I also I think mentioned - it was on the occasion of my first visit - that in some ways that fitted in with the original tradition of Buddhism where you've got the monks sitting and meditating under trees and you had the Buddha teaching in a grove, not within a building necessarily. So I saw no reason why in New Zealand where it was physically possible, the activities of the FWBO shouldn't be fitted much more into an outdoor context than is possible in a country like England for purely climatic reasons. Though of course one would have to be careful that you don't get, so to speak, seduced by the beautiful natural environment and that, yes you find yourself on the beach but you just don't feel like studying. You don't feel like meditating, you just want to lie on the sand. You just want to swim. You would obviously have to watch that. But yes I think it quite likely and quite reasonable that in a place like New Zealand more Buddhist or spiritual activities could take place under open air conditions.

_____: Buddhadasa spoke to me about it as well and I think he [14] was also meaning just basically putting more emphasis on retreats. People are more likely to want to go on retreats than go down the centre.

S: Anyway, we'll just have one more general characteristic.

Dharmadhara: With qualifications a sort of lack of art, lack of culture. Not lack of culture but lack of an indigenous folk culture. People outside of the church or the hotel don't seem to have much to fall back on and I think they're hungry.

S: This applies obviously to the rural New Zealander more.

_____: I think there's a general hunger as well ().

S: I think this is quite a big question because one has obviously to be a bit clear about what is

meant by culture, and that's something that we, you know, can't go into now. But I say, broadly speaking, that probably one needs, whether in New Zealand or anywhere else, to follow sort of middle way. You don't want to be, sort of occupied, or over occupied or preoccupied with culture in a sort of dilettante, almost effete sort of way, as a sort of escape from more basic human activities. Or as an escape from working on oneself in the spiritual life itself. I think you can have too much culture. I think some people in the West, in Europe that is, are oversaturated with culture. You can read too many books and see too many pictures, too many pictures in art galleries. Yes, you can see too many films. You can have too much of culture which means you see a lot, you digest not very much.

So I think perhaps it is not a bad thing to be in a situation like people are in in New Zealand where you can sort of choose the amount of culture that you're going to be involved with. You've got as it were more cultural elbow-room, it's not pressing on you to the extent that it is in Europe. It's available in a sense. I mean some things definitely aren't available in New Zealand because they're just not there. They need to be there physically. I mean the paintings aren't there, the buildings aren't there, the cathedrals are not there but other things are. The literature is there, Shakespeare is as much present as literature in New Zealand as in England. And similarly with music, Bach and Handel and Mozart and Beethoven are as much present in New Zealand, on record, on tape as they are in Europe.

So culture, or at least certain very large and important segments of culture are available and accessible in New Zealand. But perhaps since there is less of cultural tradition, and people are aware of that, they can be more selective about what they see and about what they listen to. And I think that is a good thing.

_____: What do you think about incorporation, at least to some extent, of the Polynesian, Melanesian and Asian cultures into a sort of general overall culture.

S: You say, sort of Polynesian and Asian but I think to link the two is in a way almost, on a certain level, almost laughable.

_____: Well, I see them as being separate.

S: Yes. Because the Polynesians seem to have hardly any higher culture at all. I think perhaps New Zealanders in their search for roots and culture have to be quite careful that they don't sort of idealize the Maoris and their culture. I think that is a definite danger. It doesn't seem that the Maoris ever had very much of a culture. Yes, there were certain positive features but certainly no higher culture as far as one has been able to find out, Certainly no culture that can be compared say with the culture of Japan or China or India. The whole question of Asian culture is quite a different one. It's quite a big one. I think we can't go into now but certainly, there are certain climatic similarities between New Zealand and some parts of south east Asia so it could be that a certain amount of cultural assimilation does take place on that particular level. But how or in what way that would take place in what respect, that's quite impossible in fact to say.

Prasannasiddhi: You don't think though that Asians have got a sort of different style like Japanese painting is quite different from any other [15] type of painting. Do you think this is just due to their temperament?

S: Well, Japanese painting is linked with classical Chinese painting and Japanese Buddhist painting is even linked as least iconographically with Indian Buddhist painting and sculpture. Whether Japanese art or something derived from Japanese art would ever take root in New Zealand. It is really quite impossible to say. I mean Japanese art has had some influence in the West, certain Western artists like Whistler have been strongly influenced by Japanese prints. So it's not impossible that Japanese art has some influence in New Zealand too. Whether it's the more likely to have I'd say Italian Renaissance art or French Impressionist art or English pre-Raphaelite art is quite impossible to say, especially as regards art within the context of the FWBO. One can only just be open to the possibilities, perhaps it isn't possible to say more than that. Anyway perhaps we'd better leave this question of New Zealand national character and alleged characteristics or qualities of the New Zealand national character about which no doubt a lot more interesting things could be said.

Prasannasiddhi: That's been very good. The next question is from Steve. It doesn't refer to the book, it refers to the question of study.

_____: The question is "Do you think it necessary for the movement in New Zealand to concentrate on study? Do we need to develop an understanding in the area of study here in England within the context of contact with the movement before going back to New Zealand or can this understanding be developed in New Zealand?"

S: Let's take those questions one by one, because there's more than one question there. Let's have the first one first.

Steve: Do you think it necessary for the movement in New Zealand to concentrate on study?

S: When you say concentrate do you mean pay extra or special attention or simply to include it along with other things like meditation and so?

Steve: Concentrate to the degree of establishing ourselves, establishing the movement with a good solid base of study which is not apparent.

S: I think study especially Dharma study of course, is an integral part of the Buddhist spiritual life and therefore of the FWBO. And I therefore think that study is as necessary in New Zealand as it is in England or in India or in Finland or America or anywhere else where the FWBO has been established. So what was the next part of the question?

Steve: The next part is "Do we need to develop an understanding in the area of study here in England within the context of contact with the movement before going back to New Zealand?"

S: I must say that broadly speaking I'm not at all satisfied with the level of understanding of the Dharma anywhere in the movement. I think there's a lot of work to be done still in this area. A lot more study is needed. Not study just in an intellectual or academic sense evidently, but study in the sense of developing a real understanding of what the Dharma is all about, what the spiritual life is all about and also the ability the ability to communicate that successfully to other people. I think the movement generally, including the movement in England, is still very defective in this respect and one of the ways in which this shows itself is in the extremely confused thinking that one still finds on the part of many, many people within the Movement, including even Order Members. Lack of clarity of thought. One finds

so much of this inability in fact, to think clearly with the result that, micchaditthis and misunderstandings of the Dharma itself, confusions about the Dharma itself are really quite common. So I think a lot more study needs to be done within the Movement generally. And I think though the level of Dharma study is quite inadequate here in England itself, it think it's probably somewhat better than it is anywhere else in the FWBO, whether India or Finland or New Zealand or Australia, because here we do have at least a small number of Order Members, maybe ten or twelve who have got a particularly good knowledge, a particularly good understanding of the Dharma and they are giving lectures and taking study groups and study retreats, you know, quite [16] regularly, quite constantly, and are available also for personal contact.

So clearly the facilities for the study of the Dharma are better in England than in any other part of the Movement. So I think therefore that it is absolutely essential that as many New Zealanders connected with the Movement, especially mitras and Order Members, as can come to England for an experience of the FWBO here, and especially perhaps for the experience of study here, the more can come the better. I doubt very, very much whether it would be possible for Order Members in New Zealand to achieve the necessary level of understanding of the Dharma by themselves remaining in New Zealand. I just don't see that happening. Some people may be satisfied with their level of understanding of the Dharma but that is only because they just don't know how much there is to be understood. (Laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that people coming over should stay till they had a very comprehensive knowledge or whether they should stay till they picked up the basic attitudes and approaches and some of the basic ideas and maybe they could then go back to New Zealand and finish off their sort of study of the Dharma in New Zealand.

S: I think this is quite a difficult question to answer. One can't perhaps talk about Dharma study in isolation from other things. Perhaps I might sort of stick my neck out a little and say that probably the thing that one, the most needed to do within the more intensive sort of situation that one can find oneself in in England, I mean as regards the FWBO, is to resolve or to overcome or get rid of your individualism before you get back to New Zealand. Because you may be equipped with a good understanding of the Dharma in a sense but if you go back with your individualism intact, I mean, you aren't going to be able really very much good. So yes, I do think at least some people who come from New Zealand to this country would need not to go back before they had a really good understanding of the Dharma. I think, let's say, for the sake of being more precise, I think at least a one third of those who come over to England and have an extensive experience of the movement here should not go back until they've got a really good and really deep understanding of the Dharma, at least a third, however long that might take.

Prasannasiddhi: Five, ten years?

S: Yes even five or ten years. At least a third of them, but I think nobody should go back, you know, who has come from New Zealand until such time as he has got rid at least of the rougher edges of his individualism. I would say in a way that's even more important.

_____: We're encouraged in the Friends to have a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the Buddhist texts as the new mitra suggests too. Is there ever a question of getting certain persons, personalities even to concentrate on certain texts, certain schools of Buddhism have.

It strikes me that a full understanding of the texts, (), should be or could be realized through channelling your ...

S: I think this is inevitable. In fact I think we begin to see it happening already as when we see certain Order Members taking study group on the same text, again and again and again which originally they studied with me and of course, they're going to get more and more deeply into it and understand it better and better. So I think we're going to find it happening anyway. I think it would be desirable. So, as I say, to go back to New Zealand. Supposing you had returning to New Zealand an Order Member who knew the Udana really thoroughly or knew the Bodhicharyavatara really thoroughly, could take really good, inspiring, you know, study retreats on that particular text. Well, how useful he would be. So yes, I have even said at different times that while one should have a good general knowledge of the Dharma there should be certain areas, or even certain texts, that one should specialize in so that everybody has got say one speciality as well as a broad general knowledge. It could be a subject, that is to say, you might concentrate on the study of evolution in relation to Buddhism or you might concentrate on the arts in relation to Buddhism or you might concentrate on say structures in relation to Buddhism or you might concentrate on say, the Dhammapada or the White Lotus Sutra in [17] addition to your general knowledge, or broad general knowledge of the whole field. I think this is something perhaps that everybody should do over the years. Take up one particular topic or one particular text in which he will be, as it were, the acknowledged expert.

So that people might come from all over the world to sit at your feet because, you know, your expositions of the Udana or the Bodhicharyavatara or your explanation of Buddhist cosmology in relation to modern scientific cosmology is the best that is available within the FWBO. You might find such a situation developing so therefore I am quite sure that the day will come when for certain purposes or to sit at the feet of certain Order Members people will go maybe from England to New Zealand or from India to New Zealand as well as in the other direction. I mean this is inevitable once the Movement in any particular country has developed to a particular extent.

_____: Do you think that we should concentrate exclusively on study or that we should be doing the other things involved in the Movement, say in conjunction with running Centres etc. as well as doing the study?

S: Where are you meaning?

_____: Well it seems to me that certain respects there's a conflict in commitments. I mean in order to study ...

S: I think that whoever comes over to this country from New Zealand should stay long enough to be able to have not just a superficial but a fairly deep experience of each and every aspect.

(End of tape one tape two)

S: Not only to go in the case of a man to Tuscany but to spend some time at Vajraloka. To work say for a couple of years in a co-op. To live in a single sex community. To have some experience in leading beginners' meditation classes. Some experience of giving public

lectures both within the FWBO and outside the FWBO. So I think it's not just a question of, as it were, concentrating on study when you're over in England to the exclusion of other things but staying long enough to have a reasonably deep experience of all these important aspects of the spiritual life, all these important aspects of FWBO activities, so that you go back a really experienced and trained person and not trying to run a centre or run a spiritual community in New Zealand when still struggling with the basic problems, even psychological problems of your own development, and are still learning the rudiments even, yourself.

_____: On that do you recommend that, sort of, study in a sense, as a prerequisite to the other activities.

S: Study in?

V: Study of the Dharma, concentrated study of the Dharma as a prerequisite before moving on in a sense to perhaps different, to other activities?

S: I think, that perhaps there are three things that need to be given priority. This is sort of just speaking off the cuff. Three things which are of fundamental importance. It's difficult to say whether one's more important than the others. There's meditation, the study of the Dharma and there's human communication. I think that these are the three things that you must give absolute priority to. Perhaps you can get by without studying Western culture. Perhaps you get by without working in a co-op but you can't get by without a good experience of meditation, a good understanding of the Dharma and a good experience of genuine communication with other people. I think these are the three basics.

_____: It seems, Bhante, more appropriate at least on the surface for New Zealanders or anyone coming overseas to actually go into a very intensive situation over here where you can get as many of these sort of things as possible, I'd say, Padmaloka or ...

S: Well, that would seem natural because the fact that one has made [18] the journey at all means that one is serious because it is not a small thing to leave one's own country and to settle in a foreign country for a number of years. So presumably one is serious. So what's the point of making that long journey and then remaining on the fringes of things? You want to get into the thick of things as quickly as you can, into the most intensive situation. So I would like to see really New Zealanders who are coming over here, whether men or women, getting into the most intensive situation that they possibly can, which means in practice, I'd like to see that the men come in either to Padmaloka or to Aryatara and that the women come in wherever possible to the new women's community that's been set up in Streatham, the new Khadiravani. These seem to be the most intensive situations within the movement of a general kind. I mean Vajraloka is an intensive situation in its own way, a very intensive situation, but I wouldn't recommend a new arrival from New Zealand to go straight there.

I'd also suggest that anyone coming over, comes over ideally with enough money to support themselves for six months at least so they don't have to go straight into a co-op and work there perhaps without the possibility of much in the way of study or meditation as soon as they get here. So I suggest that if one did it, sort of systematically, one came over with enough money to be able to support oneself either at Padmaloka or at Aryatara or at Khadiravani at least for six months. That would give one time to settle in, find out which really was the best place for one to be and then just get on with it.

_____: What else can we () that question is that very thing. It does seem like a perhaps a situation in New Zealand gets bigger and overseas and you are going to get much more people coming. Now either the movement as a more intensive situation's going to grow accordingly here or there's not going to be so many places for them to go. Now I was wondering do you think it's going to be necessary for say us to take the initiative somehow and actually create our own situation here that will actually help ...

S: Possibly. I mean it's not impossible that New Zealanders who already are over here, even set up a special community to receive and accommodate people coming from New Zealand and where they can settle in and where they can be properly oriented and so on. That is not impossible. We're thinking that we might have to do something like that for people from India especially if there are too many visa problems for English Order Members there. We may have to think in terms of Indian Order Members coming over to England, I mean such a different country, such a different culture, so we're thinking in that case, we'd have to set up a special community for them with an Order Member who'd been in India, looking after it and looking after them, making sure that they were properly oriented.

Prasannasiddhi: Would you say after Padmaloka and Aryatara that the other centres are more-or-less of a general ...

S: The other centres all have something to offer but they, as far as the rest they don't have such a wide range of facilities. And also I think again that if possible the new arrival from New Zealand should go into a more rural situation if that is at all possible. I know there are great limitations at present. Not everybody can come to Padmaloka. I think it would be better if they weren't plunged into the midst of the distractions of the big city wherever it was possible to avoid that. At present it isn't always possible to avoid it but I think we should be clear in our own minds what the optimum type of situation is.

_____: Also the situation is that places like, even Aryatara, are definitely looking for stability and in a sense it's like other city centres don't appear to be in a stable as Aryatara.

S: I think it's very important that those come over are in a situation where they can get a lot of functional contact and that is difficult sometimes if you're staying in or near a big city centre, where the Order Members are naturally and rightly busy running classes and giving lectures and doing all those sort of things and not so available for personal contact which is one of the things that you need most. Perhaps we should pass on.

Prasannasiddhi: Dharmadhara has a question relating to the text from [19] page 10.

S: Perhaps we'll have to be a bit brief from now onwards.

Dharmadhara: It's about the middle of the page. There's also a sort of note too at the end of the sentence. In the middle paragraph. "Whereas mysticism represents the extreme of subjectivity and emotion" and then it refers to footnote 2 at the back where you say, "Only some forms of mysticism are instances of extremes of subjectivity and emotion". My question is can you name non-Buddhist mystical traditions which are not an extreme of subjectivity and emotion.

S: I think one must remember that the conference at which I read this paper was a conference

on mystics and scientists. And that I wasn't happy with the term mysticism. Officially I was there representing mysticism, and there were other people representing science and we were supposed to be 'getting together' and having a sort of dialogue but I wasn't really quite happy to be labelled as a mystic. So what I tried to do was to avoid that and to present Buddhism as following a middle path, a middle path between an overly objective attitude and an overly subjective attitude. Do you see what I mean? So obviously for me the scientific approach is overly objective, it excludes the subjective factor. Mysticism is overly subjective because it tends to exclude the objective factor. Now of course I was quite aware that in presenting things in that sort of schematic way I was using the word 'mysticism' in a slightly idiosyncratic way but I was doing that quite deliberately so as to distance myself and distance Buddhism from mysticism which in the context of that sort of conference can have all sort of strange connotations. But I was aware at the same time that well, not all the experiences described as mysticism or described as mystical, necessarily fell into that category of extreme subjectivity but some certainly did. The sort of thing that I was thinking of was not so much a particular tradition but maybe particular mystics. It's where you attach absolute validity to your personal experience. You feel that that sort of cannot be checked, that cannot be subjected to any sort of objective external criteria. Your experience is your experience and as it were to be taken as its face value. So that if you have say a vision of God and God speaks to you well, that is God speaking to you. There's no question of subjecting it to any, as it were, objective critique. So a mysticism of that sort I would regard as representing the extreme of subjectivism, perhaps on a relatively high level. Do you see what I mean?

But I'm quite aware that not everything that is called mysticism could be described as subjective in that sort of way. So yes, the whole thing really refers to the background of the conference itself and my attempt to dissociate myself or distance myself from mysticism in the sense that many people present would have understood the term.

Dharmadhara: I was just uncertain whether you had anything specific in mind ...

S: Not any particular tradition. I mean, if anything more particular individual 'mystics', single inverted commas.

Prasannasiddhi: I have a question related to mysticism. In a way it's an old chestnut I'm afraid and I suppose I had Christians in mind as well with regard to this. Have people outside Buddhist tradition developed insight into the transcendental equivalent to Stream Entry, and could you name some examples?

S: When you say outside the Buddhist tradition, presumably you mean the historical Buddhist tradition. What is as it were officially labelled Buddhism. Well the Buddha himself before he passed away according to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta did say that where one finds the Noble Eightfold Path you will find Aryas or words to that effect. And where you do not find the Eightfold Path you will not find Aryas. So you might say well if you find the Eightfold Path, if on examination you do find the Eightfold Path even outside the historical Buddhist tradition then you have to recognize the possibility of there being Aryas outside the Buddhist tradition. But you notice how the Buddha puts it. I mean, the arising, so to speak, of Aryas depends upon certain conditions and those conditions have to be met. Aryas, Aryas meaning those who have achieved the transcendental path, that is to say Stream Entrants and so on, don't just arise out of the air. They arise in dependence on a [20] certain specific sequence of conditions. If you can find those conditions outside historical Buddhism, well yes it's quite

likely you will find Aryas too.

But you have to ask yourself, well do you? Do you actually find those conditions and do you actually find people of that sort? You can't assume it and the basis of a vague sort of universalism that there must be because all religions are true etc., etc. I mean the Buddha has given that criterion. So all right do you find perfect vision? Do you find perfect emotion? Do you find perfect speech? Do you find perfect action, livelihood and the rest? You have to apply this sort of criterion. But if you do find in any particular tradition or the life of any particular individual that all those things are present, well, there is nothing unBuddhistic in your concluding that yes, you may well find an Arya or may well find Aryas there. I personally believe that this will happen very, very rarely. But the possibility can by no means be excluded completely.

_____: Could it be that sort of people have glimpsed the transcendental, be they artists or poets or some religious ascetic perhaps of another faith and subsequently then interpret that experience within the context of what they are already involved in but perhaps don't go as far as establishing themselves in that, perfectly, more thoroughly?

S: Well, yes and no. Because if you've really glimpsed the transcendental well you've glimpsed the transcendental? So that means you'll be clear in your thinking, so that if you do have to express your vision of the transcendental in terms of say, a non-Buddhist culture, you ought not do it in such a way that the transcendental vision itself is distorted, because the mere fact that you have that transcendental vision will prevent you from doing that. You see what I mean? So therefore it isn't really possible for you, say, to have a transcendental vision or a vision of the transcendental but then, as it were, to express it in terms, say of non-Buddhist tradition, but in such a way that the original vision is completely distorted, that by the very nature of the vision itself is not possible. Of course other people may misunderstand you. That's another matter. Or the expression may be inadequate but you yourself will know whether you've expressed that vision or not because you have the vision.

_____: Would there be more relative levels of this vision compared with a full glimpse of the transcendental in terms of ...

Well clearly yes there are degrees. The mere fact that you've got the different kinds of Arya, that suggests that. I mean, the vision, so to speak, of the Once-Returner is deeper or goes deeper than the vision of the Stream-Entrant and so on.

Prasannasiddhi: Are there any examples of traditions or individuals that you feel may be closer to this experience or may even ...

S: I must say that in the course of my own investigations I have sometimes felt, I won't be too dogmatic about this, but I have sometimes felt that probably the two spiritual traditions that come nearest to Buddhism in this sort of way are at least some forms of Sufism and the more refined forms of Taoism. Though of course one can't altogether rule out the possibility of some Buddhist influence in both cases.

Dharmadhara: Do any saints, Christian saints for example, have you ever considered whether they could have obtained Stream-entry?

S: I think that the Christian saints are a very mixed bag indeed. Some of them are distinctly peculiar but perhaps taking what from the Buddhist point of view might be more favourable examples one, yes, sometimes one does get the impression that some of the saints have had a glimpse of, so to speak, the transcendental but again and again they come up against the Church as an organization, as a centralized, authoritarian, even triumphalist organization, very often, and sometimes they even have almost to deny their own experience in order to survive. And some of them of course, well, who've not been officially recognized as saints, they've been regarded as heretics and burned. So I think this is very much a complicating factor. The position of the saint, of course he's not recognized as a saint during his lifetime usually, at least he's [21] not canonized during his lifetime but the position of the saint vis-a-vis the Church because it is the Church which is the ultimate authority on Christian truth according to Catholicism, not the experience of the individual however devout or however holy even.

So this sometimes acted as a distorting factor. I mean it doesn't seem that any Christian mystic has been ... well apart from a few heretics who were sort of burned at the stake... no mystic who was recognized by the Church as a saint has been so sort of clear and definite in his transcendental vision as to able to go against the Church itself. I don't mean in matters of doctrine but even in those respects where the Church of the time, the Church of the day, was acting in a definitely unethical manner, not in terms of Buddhist ethics but in terms of Christian ethics, in terms of say the Sermon on the Mount. As far as I know (there is no) Christian mystic whose sort of transcendental vision has been so clear and so sure that he's been able to say to the Church, well no, you are wrong. More often than not they acquiesced in the existing situation. I mean, yes they might sort of make some more or less marginal criticism and sometimes they were quite severe but there was never any question of a headlong collision with the Church, however corrupt at the time the Church would be.

_____: Maybe it was just a case of how effective the Church () at burning those who ...

S: Well as an organization it has been in some respects very effective indeed.

_____: () Luther...

S: I think Luther could though having a very intense religious life could hardly be regarded as a mystic. Though he was a very complex character, perhaps there were certain mystical elements in his life but he certainly couldn't be regarded as a mystic in the way say that Thomas a Kempis was or that Jacob of Bemen was a mystic.

Prasannasiddhi: I think in a way we did have some more questions but it is five past six and the other questions were more or less just to fill in within the time, so perhaps we could leave it there?

S: OK. Good.

Prasannasiddhi: I'd just like to say thanks very much. Thank you.

S: Hope we've got it all nicely.

V: I think so.

S: Play back a bit. Let's here what it says. A bit of discussion. Hear what it sounds like. Well, let me just hear it. Are you going to send a copy off to New Zealand.

_____: I think so.

S: You think you dare!

_____: Especially the bits where you're talking about the good qualities!

S: All the nice things you've said about New Zealanders! (Laughter).

_____: All the nice qualities about England as well, encouraging them to come over.

_____: About coming over five or ten years. (Laughter)

_____: You don't want to sort of say a little more about come on over here to England.

S: I think I'd better not.

Prasannasiddhi: It's so clear, I mean it's been really good.

S: [Listening to the tape] Just waiting for somebody else to say [22] something. Well that's clear. Faint but clear. I think they're a bit faint but they're clear. I think it will be possible to transcribe them. OK then.

END OF SESSION

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