

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

Order Questions and Answers, National Order Weekend, June 1985

The Past and the Future of the Order - Part 2

Surata: Bhante has once again kindly agreed to do some questions and answers for us on the same theme as the theme that we had, I think, on the last National Order Weekend on 'The Past and the Future of the Order'. I'll be pleased to see him back on the rostrum answering questions again, so I'll hand straight over to him.

S: As I think I mentioned last time, I was going to deal with the left over questions on the occasion of the convention. But after thinking the matter over I decided that I probably would be having quite a lot of questions especially for the convention anyway, so that I perhaps ought to dispose of these questions left over from the last Men's National Order Weekend this weekend. So thus it comes about that I'm standing here at the rostrum again this evening, perhaps somewhat unexpectedly. But I thought perhaps I'd better get these questions all out of the way before proceeding on the convention to deal with a new batch. I think I've got about twenty questions altogether. I'll deal with them as fully as I can within the time at our disposal.

The first question reads;

*'Kalyana mitrata is the whole of the spiritual life. Since it is so important, could you expand on, and explain, the new guide-lines for kalyana mitras in this month's **Shabda.**'*

I don't know how familiar people are with these guide-lines which appeared, of course, in the April 1985 *Shabda*. I think the best thing I can do is to read them out and comment as I think necessary. Actually I think that very little by way of expansion and explanation is necessary. I think really that the guide-lines are quite clear in themselves for the most part, bearing in mind that they are after all guide-lines. So let's see what they are.

First of all as regards the mitra, there's three guide-lines here. *'Since the taking of two kalyana mitras is seen as a step towards ordination, if the mitra has not yet asked for ordination then he/she should be thinking of doing so in the long run.'*

That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? Especially in view of the fact that more experienced, more senior, Order members capable of acting as kalyana mitras are, let us say, comparatively few. So if one is thinking of, so to speak, taking up an Order member's time in that way, expecting that degree of commitment from an Order member, it should mean, it should imply, that you as a mitra are very very serious about being a mitra. So serious in fact that you could almost be expected to be thinking of ordination. So that in a way, practically speaking, asking two Order members to be your kalyana mitras and beginning to think in terms of ordination, more or less go hand in hand. So this means that if, say, a mitra approaches you and asks you to be one of his two kalyana mitras, if that mitra is not already beginning to think about ordination, perhaps you shouldn't consider his request that you should become his kalyana mitra too seriously. Even though, of course, you should keep up with him whatever friendly contact you can. Your more serious energies of that sort, or in that direction, should be reserved, so to speak, for the mitra who is beginning to think in terms of ordination, or asking for ordination.

Then two; *'He/she should be on positive terms generally with Order members.'*

This might seem to be a truism but a few mitras, a small minority of mitras, do seem to have difficulties with Order members generally. Order members, so to speak, collectively. Sometimes they've got, as we know, a thing about authority. So that doesn't create a very favourable climate for asking two Order members to be your kalyana mitras.

And then thirdly; *'He/she should have the beginnings of real friendship with both the proposed kalyana mitras.'*

It's not a question of the mitra seeing an admirable Order member, or two Order members, from a distance, not having known them or spoken to them before and then approaching them and asking them to be his kalyana mitras. No, there must be the beginnings of a friendship, an ordinary friendship first. Something that you can work on, something that you can work with before the mitra asks the Order members concerned to be his kalyana mitras. Again, that should be clear.

And then the Order members; *'Both should regularly attend chapter meetings.'*

For a mitra, his kalyana mitras, if he has them, are his main link with the Order. If there's any misunderstanding about the Order or about being an Order member that he wants to clear up well it's to the kalyana mitras that he will go. And, as we've already seen, a mitra with kalyana mitras is almost by definition already thinking in terms of ordination, or asking for ordination. So, it's very important that inasmuch as for him those kalyana mitras are his links with the Order, those Order members who are his kalyana mitras should themselves be in good, I won't say contact, that's far too weak a word, but communication with the Order, with their chapter. Even more than that, not in good communication with it even, because that suggests a certain degree of externality, but very very much part and parcel of it, fully and effectively. So both should regularly attend chapter meetings. Regularly attend chapter meetings. So that if you, for any reason, are conscious that you are not regularly attending chapter meetings, you don't really qualify as a kalyana mitra.

And similarly; *'They should regularly attend both Regional and National Order Weekends.'*

I'm afraid I'm still quite disappointed at the low turnout for both Regional and National Order Weekends on the part of men Order members. The women Order members have got a rather better record. There is so much that has been said on this already, I don't want to go over ground that we've already covered before. But do please bear this in mind, that if you are not a person who regularly attends chapter meetings, Regional and National Order Weekends, well you don't really qualify as a kalyana mitra. You can't, in a sense, inasmuch as you are not sufficiently part and parcel, not sufficiently effectively part and parcel of the Order, you can't, as it were, act as a link between your mitra and the Order.

And then; *'They should be in good and regular communication with Bhante.'*

Well, again, that probably doesn't require explanation.

'They should generally be in good communication with other Order members.'

That is, other Order members individually. There shouldn't be any, as it were, unfinished business between them and other Order members. Mitras very often, and very rightly, have a very, as it were, idealistic view of the Order. They've been taught, as it were, to look up to the Order in the sense that they know that the Order represents a very very high ideal. And mitras can be deeply disappointed if they learn of disharmony between Order members. And it's

especially important therefore that a mitra's kalyana mitras should not be on bad or unfriendly or not fully positive terms with any other Order member. So if an Order member is not on good terms with a fellow Order member that's something that needs to be cleared up before he is able to become a kalyana mitra.

'They should maintain their daily meditation practice.'

Otherwise, what inspiration would you have to give your mitra?

'They should be generally emotionally positive.'

Not subject to fits of gloominess and depression and all that sort of thing, otherwise again, how can you keep your mitra inspired? It's rather unfortunate when, as occasionally happens, one sees the Order member, even, looking for support, emotional support, to the mitra. Well perhaps better than looking elsewhere but even that isn't by any means good enough. They should be generally emotionally positive.

'They should be free from gross micchaditthis.'

Subtle micchaditthis will disappear only when you enter the transcendental path. But at least Order members who are functioning as kalyana mitras should be free from gross micchaditthis. Otherwise, far from correcting the mitra's micchaditthis, far from helping him to clear up his mental confusion, they may even add to it or make it worse.

'They should both already have the beginnings of a good friendship with the mitra.'

That's already been covered.

Then striking a rather different note;

'A woman who is pregnant is not considered to be able to function as a kalyana mitra and should not be proposed as such until at least six months after the birth of her child.'

That doesn't directly concern any of you.

'Ideally a kalyana mitra will have been ordained for five years. In exceptional cases those who have been ordained for shorter periods may be considered.'

In other words there's a certain amount of experience, a certain amount of maturity, is necessary before you can be a kalyana mitra to a mitra.

And eleven; *'The proposed kalyana mitras should not have any debts, including unpaid Order fees.'*

Because, again, the mitra will be looking up to you, and it's a great disappointment, as I've said, to a mitra to discover that Order members, and especially the Order members who are his kalyana mitras, are not fulfilling all their duties and responsibilities as an Order member. It doesn't provide him with much in the way of inspiration.

Twelve; *'Neither one of them should be planning to move to another country or distant city within the period in which one would reasonably expect the mitra to become ready for ordination.'*

Unless, of course, the mitra is happy to move with him perhaps.

And thirteen; *'Neither should be involved in a neurotic sexual relationship.'*

Well, we've already had quite enough to say about that, I think further comment isn't necessary.

And next; *'Both should be generally willing, free and able to give the necessary contact to the mitra.'*

A mitra is a very big responsibility, not just for his kalyana mitras but for the Centre which is responsible, in a sense, for making him a mitra. Mitras belong to or are attached to Centres and communities, so those Centres and communities, the Order members in those Centres and communities, have an absolute duty, an absolute responsibility, to keep in touch with those mitras, look after those mitras, and provide them with whatever they need in the way of Dharma study, inspiration, friendship, guidance, counsel and so on. It really is quite a dreadful state of affairs as sometimes happens, when mitras are neglected by Order members and Order members seem, or give sometimes mitras the impression that, they don't have time for them. So this is not only a responsibility that rests with the kalyana mitras - it rests specifically with them or especially with them - but there is a responsibility resting on the whole of the local chapter to see to it that mitras are given both the friendship and contact and guidance and help that they need.

And then coming on to the combination of kalyana mitras;

'There should be no serious communication problems between the two Order members.'

Again for obvious reasons. They need sometimes to talk over their mitra.

'Wherever possible there should be a good balance of qualities provided by the kalyana mitras.'

If one is an introvert it's a good idea to have the other as an extrovert, and so on. If one is a science man, well let the other be an arts man. If one is very young perhaps the other should be rather old, and so on.

Three; *'Where a mitra is involved in a dependent sexual relationship at least one of the kalyana mitras, though preferably both, should be completely free from any sexual involvement with members of the opposite sex.'*

Again, that just seems a matter of common sense.

And four; *'Where two Order members share obvious weaknesses of some significance this would not be a desirable combination.'*

Because it might give the mitra the impression that those weaknesses were quite acceptable in an Order member and therefore in himself if he saw that both his kalyana mitras were afflicted by that particular weakness. Supposing both of them had a bit of a drink problem, though perhaps even one with a drink problem wouldn't really be acceptable, but it's just a sort of rough illustration.

But anyway, these are the guide-lines which I just run through in this way. As I said I would have thought that they were reasonably clear and self-evident in themselves. Therefore I've

not really lingered over them too much but the question has been put so I've endeavoured to say at least a few words.

All right, let's come on to the next question.

'As regards the past, do you feel that you have done the best thing in spending most of the last eighteen years in England, or do you sometimes feel that you might have developed the Order more easily in some other country?'

So whether I've done 'the best thing in spending most of the last eighteen years in England'. Well I hope so! [Laughter] Otherwise it might have been eighteen years not exactly wasted but which I could have spent better elsewhere, but I must say I don't think I ever think that I might have developed the Order more easily in some other country. I think if there'd been any prospect of developing something like the Order say in India twenty years ago, I doubt whether I would have come back to this country or decided to stay in this country. I liked India. I had friends there, all sorts of contacts. There was a lot of work to do, especially among the ex-Untouchables, but it did not seem that I was going to be able to establish anything very concrete which could subsequently grow and expand. It seems to me that I could go on functioning in a very ad hoc sort of way, but yes usefully, but not doing anything really substantial. Giving a lecture here and a lecture there, well lectures in hundreds of places, but without all the activities that I was engaged in really adding up to anything coherent. It was because I saw the possibility of creating something more coherent, as I've called it, in this country, in England or in the U.K., that I decided after my initial two years in England to settle here, and to start up.

Fortunately things happened in such a way that I was able to think in terms of setting up something quite new, something that would be a new and an original departure. So actually I think that I probably have done the best thing in spending most of the last eighteen years in England. I don't think that I would have done any better staying in some other country. I certainly don't think that I would have developed the Order more easily in some other country. If I couldn't have done it in India, if it wasn't possible for me to do it in India, I don't see that it would have been possible for me to do it in any country other than England. So I have no regrets about spending the last eighteen years here from that point of view.

And then

'As regards the future, what barriers if any do you see to the movement becoming increasingly international and less centred on England?'

One of the things that worries me a little bit is that so few Order members know any foreign, especially any European languages. I think this is certainly a barrier to our wider development. One or two Order members are setting an example in a way, one or two mitras. One or two people are learning such languages as French, German, Italian, Spanish, but this development has taken place comparatively recently. But until we've got Order members able to go out from this country speaking the different European languages we're not going to get much of a foothold in these other countries. We are going to get perhaps a few people coming from those countries and staying with us here and then going back, but that'll be a much longer process. It's already happened for instance in the case of Vajragita who's gone back to Holland. It's happened in the case of Jayapushpa who's gone back to Malaysia, but they're just solitary individuals and it's not going to be easy for them. So I see the lack of languages as a great barrier to the movement becoming increasingly international and less centred on England.

And of course one big difficulty always is just nationalism. I've had some rather hard words to say about nationalism in my lecture on "*Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War*". I've distinguished it from patriotism in the sense of a feeling for the place where you were born and where you grew up and where your friends and relations and associations are. That sort of love for the soil. I distinguish that from nationalism which is a sort of more political, ideological sort of development. I have been aware that sometimes countries are a bit resistant to being as it were penetrated by people coming from another country. They don't like to think that they're indebted for whatever they are learning to someone from some other country. They like to think in terms of them getting it say from their own nationals. To some extent this is understandable because, yes, your national, your fellow national, does speak your language in more ways than one. He's got the same cultural background, but sometimes the resistance say, well let's say to English Order members in countries other than England, sometimes goes beyond that sort of thing.

So I think nationalism, not necessarily on the part of the English Order members, is going to be a bit of a barrier, and I think we have to be quite patient and tactful in trying to overcome it. And also I think we have to be quite careful to make sure that in going to foreign countries, even if we do speak the language, we don't sort of unconsciously adopt or continue with, attitudes which don't have any necessary connection with Buddhism. Sometimes you might find people thinking that you're being very English when you're only being very Buddhist. Because your attitude is something different, so instead of thinking well it's a Buddhist attitude they may try to say well it's just an English attitude, especially if that particular Buddhist attitude is for one reason or another not very acceptable to them. They might try to rationalise the matter by saying well it's nothing to do with Buddhism, that's just your English attitude, and that may not be the case at all.

So on the one hand one will have to deal with, to sort out, one's own sort of nationalistic conditioning and then be very patient and persistent in dealing with, and putting the Dharma over in spite of, the nationalistic conditioning of the people of the countries to which you as an Order member go.

There are all sorts of barriers to the movement becoming increasingly international and less centred on England. Many of which we ourselves haven't created. I'm thinking of the literal difficulty of getting into certain countries. The Muslim countries, the Communist countries. It's not easy to get into those countries due to no fault of ours. They try to keep out people like us perhaps in some cases. So we have to be quite cautious and quite sort of circumspect and get in where we can and function maybe as unobtrusively as we can, though obviously a point may sometimes be reached when we can no longer function unobtrusively and then perhaps the real difficulties will begin. Difficulties such as we haven't yet experienced anywhere in any country so far as the FWBO is concerned.

Yes, I would say on the whole the barriers are external barriers which we shall have to learn to circumvent. I think I've got a question or two in the same area later on so I shall move on.

Schism. People seem a bit concerned about schism at the moment. Perhaps rightly. This question is headed '*The Future of the Western Buddhist Order*':

'In your lecture, 'The Meaning of Spiritual Community', you say that the main danger facing any spiritual community is that it will revert to being a group. Clearly the general antidote to this tendency is for Order members to push ahead with the development of their own individuality. But can you say something more specific. What weaknesses do you see in the WBO, dangerous tendencies to which we need to guard against in the future to prevent the Order's division or dissolution, and how can they be prevented from undermining the Order?'

So 'dangerous tendencies'. I think the dangerous tendencies are really quite obvious. That is to say that Order members, for instance, don't belong to, regularly attend, a local chapter, don't attend regional order weekends or national order weekends - that is a dangerous tendency because if long continued by a sufficiently large number of people, it can only result in at least a degree of disintegration.

Another dangerous tendency that I've talked about a bit recently is for Order members to overidentify with a particular Centre or particular community. Identify with it to such an extent that they think of the FWBO, think of the Order itself in terms of that particular community or that particular Centre. Identify with it to such an extent that their main loyalty is there, that their loyalty is to a Centre rather than to the movement as a whole, rather than to the Order. I think this is certainly a dangerous tendency. Because in the case of some Order members they are functioning all the time around a Centre, they are concerned with Centre activities, or they live in a particular community, so for them that Centre, that community, is the movement, or even is the Order, and they lose sight of, or even become a bit indifferent to, the wider movement and the wider Order, and this is a very dangerous tendency indeed that we need to guard against.

But how can they be prevented from undermining the Order? Well I think again that is quite simple. That Order members have to function individually as Order members, be concerned with their own spiritual development, keep up their regular practice, be mindful of their commitment, increase their positivity, sense of responsibility, all those sort of more individual things. At the same time keep up as much contact as they can with other Order members either on an informal basis or via chapters, via regional Order weekends and national Order weekends, and be constantly on the alert so that they don't overidentify with the particular Centre or the particular community with which they're connected or to which they belong. It's really all quite clear one would have thought, and quite straightforward.

All right a further question, I think of the same kind. Perhaps I don't need to answer this at great length.

"To what extent do you foresee the danger of disunity or even a schism in the Order occurring, especially after your own death? What measures can or should we take to avoid this possibility?"

Well I think I've already answered these questions. Be an Order member in the full sense of the term. Be an individual, be one who is committed, be one who has Gone for Refuge fully and effectively, and keep up formal and informal contact regularly with fellow Order members in smaller and larger numbers. It really is as simple as that. There's no sort of magic solution, no special technique that can replace these measures, or be a substitute for these measures.

We're still on the same subject with this question.

"The Order presently unites both members who live with wife or husband and children and those who are intentionally celibate. Contact between Order members is likely to be deepest when it has greatest time and opportunity to develop, in communities and co-ops and Centre teams. Is there not a danger of a gap developing between those Order members who live in single sex communities and those who remain with their families? How can we prevent the Order from polarising into monk and lay as happened after the death of the Buddha?"

Well in a way again the solution is simple. If let us say the married Order member fulfils all

the requirements that I've already outlined and if the celibate Order member also fulfils all the requirements that I've outlined, inasmuch as they will be fulfilling the same requirements which involve meeting one another quite frequently, a schism or division on that sort of basis cannot develop. But having said that I think I must say that in the case of those who are married and have children and especially those who have got a job in the outside world, the pulls which are as it were pulling them away from the Order, from fellow Order members, are, other factors being equal, likely to be stronger, and therefore perhaps those who are married and who have children, who have regular jobs outside the movement, will have to exercise all the more care that they don't get out of contact with what the questioner calls the celibate Order members.

But having said that, again, this is not to say that a celibate Order member is necessarily, by virtue of the fact that he's a celibate Order member, more in contact or more deeply in contact, with fellow Order members than the married Order member. It still depends upon the individual effort and the individual initiative. You can't as it were rest on your celibacy and think that being celibate solves all problems. Well it solves one big problem but it doesn't solve all problems! It doesn't solve this particular problem by itself. So even though perhaps the married person with wife and family and job needs to be more careful, will in fact perhaps have to make more of an effort to keep up regular contact with the rest of the Order and even though the celibate Order member may perhaps be freer to do so, the latter certainly must be very careful to keep up his effort too to maintain depth of communication with fellow Order members.

This does seem to be a question of in a way lifestyle. How do Order members following different lifestyles safeguard their mutual contact. But even though one's lifestyle perhaps is more conducive to the leading of a spiritual life than another, even that fact does not absolve the individuals concerned from the necessity of making a very definite, a very positive, a very deliberate, individual effort to keep up contact. If that is done I don't think that even though people within the Order are following different lifestyles there will be that sort of polarisation into monk and lay as happened after the death of the Buddha.

In the time of the Buddha of course there were a large number of followers of the Buddha who were living as what we nowadays call monks and others who remained at home living as householders, so there was actually quite a difference between the two groups. Nowadays of course the difference is not quite so pronounced. There are many more sort of intermediate degrees. In India in ancient times and even today you were either married with a family or not married and not having a family, but nowadays it's not always quite so straightforward as that. You may for instance be married and you may even have children but you may live in say a men's community and you may be spending all your time around the Centre. Well you're not quite married in the sense that someone was married say in the Buddha's day - Five Hundred BC - you're a different sort of fish altogether. In some ways you are neither a monk nor a layman.

So there are quite a number of people in the Order who sort of follow a lifestyle that isn't strictly lay in the traditional sense and isn't strictly monastic either. They're sort of somewhere not exactly in between but they're just a new species as it were. I believe that that new species is probably truer to the Buddha's original intentions than the greatly polarised division that we do get in many Buddhist communities between the monk and the layman, where too much emphasis seems to be placed on lifestyle and not enough on common commitment.

I think the real solution to this question is for everybody regardless of differences of lifestyle to emphasise or to concentrate on the common commitment and look after that. If that is looked after everything will follow. If you're really and genuinely trying to go for refuge all

the time, if you're really and genuinely trying to observe the ten precepts, if you're really and genuinely keeping up your daily meditation practice, if you're really and genuinely making every effort to attend Order meetings at every level, then whether you're a so-called married person or whether you're a so-called celibate person, there will be no danger of schism because the common basis, the basis which is common to the different lifestyles, will be firmly maintained. So that I think is really the solution of this problem or the answer to this question.

All right, practicalities in the future of the FWBO.

"How far ahead have you planned or considered the future of the FWBO? What sort of portrait of the movement do you envisage at that time or several hundred years ahead?"

Hmm. I think actually it's always been my policy, or if you like my attitude, just to proceed a step at a time or a few steps at a time. I don't think I've ever tried to plan very far ahead in a more concrete sense. Obviously one would like to see hundreds of Centres and hundreds of communities, if not thousands, all over the world, but I don't have a definite concrete plan of that kind. I think I tend to think in more organic terms of the movement growing and developing and putting forth shoots and buds and then flowers. I think I tend to think that if we sort of keep up the general pressure - that we open as many Centres as we can, that we're always on the look out for opportunities, that we encourage Order members to go out and start up new centres, that we run as many classes as we can at our centres or if we encourage people who go off on tours to different parts of this country or even to other countries, and if we increase our publications and do all those sort of things, well yes if we just keep up all the time and are always looking out for opportunities to expand, we will just find them. Expansion will happen, expansion will take place.

I don't think you need a sort of five year plan. Though I don't altogether close my mind to this sort of possibility. You might perhaps have a five year plan or ten year plan that say this year you'll start up two Centres in let's say Uganda or the following year you'll set up two Centres in Spain and the year after that two Centres in some other part of the world, or three Centres. You could do it in that way and deploy your resources accordingly, but that hasn't been my own particular tendency. I'm not saying things couldn't be done in that way. In future the movement may decide to do things in that way but it hasn't been the way in which I have done things or it's not the way I think that I naturally think in terms of doing things in.

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'What sort of portrait of the movement do you envisage at that time or several hundred years ahead?' I really don't know because who knows what's going to happen in the meantime. I hope the world is still in existence. The question marks are as big as that. I hope the world is still in existence. I think it will, but we can't be completely sure. So how can one envisage the movement, give a portrait of the movement in several hundred years time? I think I wouldn't like to risk a portrait of the movement in ten years time or even perhaps in five years time. For instance just recently the last few days we've had what may well be a very significant opening in the United States. Now this is not anything that was planned. It was simply that Manjuvajra was travelling around and meeting people and was in a very enthusiastic state apparently, a very positive state, and he impressed certain people - those people happened to have a property that they were keen that a movement like the FWBO should take over and they are willing to give us quite easy terms, but still we have got to do quite a lot - so in that way an opening has occurred which was not planned, but fortunately there was someone there to take advantage of it and in fact the fact that he was there to some extent created the opportunity because he was that sort of person.

So I think things are probably more likely to happen in that more organic way than by way of five year plans. In most countries I think on another level five year plans have not been particularly successful [Laughter] but that's another story.

All right future centres of activity.

"Bearing that plans are now afoot for the establishing of the movement in other parts of Britain and also in Canada are there any other countries and/or cities that you consider to be worthy of priority for the further establishment of the FWBO?"

'Worthy of priority' - I'm not quite sure what is meant by 'worthy of priority' because all the countries in the world contain people and you could say that all people are worthy of the Dharma. How is one to establish priorities among those people? For instance how could you decide whether if you were in a position to take the Dharma to only one of them, the people say of France should have priority over the people of Germany or the people say of North America over the people of South America. How does one establish that sort of priority because all people surely are worthy of hearing the Dharma.

So I don't think the question be taken to literally, because yes all people one might say are in a sense equally worthy in the sense that they could all equally use the Dharma, they could all equally benefit from the Dharma, they could all equally develop if the Dharma was made available and accessible to them in a way that they could appreciate. So let's change the question a bit.

It's more perhaps where we could at this stage most usefully deploy our resources. We've got a very limited number of Order members and those Order members have got perhaps a fairly limited range of talents between them still. A lot of them don't know foreign languages so would it be for instance the best use of our resources to send Order members who don't as yet know any foreign language to work in those countries where a knowledge of foreign language was necessary. Perhaps the best use of our resources in some respects, or at least the best use of a good part of our resources is in those areas, those countries, where we're likely to encounter least as it were cultural resistance, and where they speak the same language. In other words countries like Canada, America, Australia, where of course we already are, and so on. Perhaps we have to think in those sort of terms, not in terms of the worthiness of certain people to receive the Dharma, because they're all equally worthy, but in terms of where we could best deploy our existing resources, where the talents that we at present possess, whether linguistic or of other kinds, could produce the greatest and the best possible results. Do you see what I mean?

So I think we have to consider the question rather in those terms, and I've indicated that yes, in the case of the majority of English speaking Order members, well clearly they could be most useful in English speaking countries, and perhaps one could work out a few more applications of the same principle along those sort of lines. However let's move on.

"I've heard it said that you now think that the idea of teams forming to start new Centres either in the UK or abroad is not the best approach as the history of such attempts seems to indicate that they fail to fulfil their potential. Is this so and what approaches do you favour instead?"

I haven't changed my mind about teams forming to start new Centres in the way that the question seems to suggest. It is true that we have had one or perhaps even two failures, but we can't generalise from those. I still think the best way of starting up a new Centre,

especially in a new country, is for a team, at least a small team, of Order members to go there, but in the light of experience it would seem that before going there to that new situation to work under those new conditions, those Order members making up that team, need to have spent quite a bit of time together already. Problems of communication and approach and so on need to have been sorted out before they go, to the extent that that is possible. I think if that is done that the team as a team is much less likely to fail in the country to which it goes. This is not to say that individuals, just going by themselves and starting up new Centres can't do perfectly well. After all this is what I myself did, but I don't think I would really recommend it. It's possible but I don't think it's the best way in the sense of the - well I was going to say easiest way but the - way that imposes least strain on the Order members concerned. I think if you can form a team and if before you go off to your new country or your new part of Britain, the team is already a harmonious entity, then that is a very much better way of doing things than just for one Order member, however good, however brilliant, however talented, going off and doing things on his own. Yes it's possible for someone to do that but I think the best way is for at least a small team to go forth and start up the new activities in the new country.

"And do you think that the structure and style of Centres in the UK reflects especially English approaches and needs, and that therefore Centres outside the UK need to develop different lines of approach, for instance that single sex communities are needed in England but aren't so relevant in New Zealand, say." [Laughter]

I think in some ways this isn't a question we need bother about too much. *Do you think that the structure and style of Centres in the UK reflects especially English approaches and needs?* I think to some extent that is inevitable but it mustn't be made too much of. When Order members go to a foreign country they should try to see the actual local situation, the needs of the local people, as clearly as they can and think of satisfying those in terms of the Dharma. I think if they try to do things in that way there will be very very little danger of their carrying over so to speak especially or specifically English approaches and needs, though as I mentioned earlier some of the people in those other countries may try to deflect the impact of Buddhism as we have understood it, by saying that this is a purely English approach or that it corresponds to the needs of English people or that people in this or that country, they don't need say meditation, only English people need meditation or they don't need single sex communities, only English people need single sex communities. I think one has to be very careful of that sort of rationalising reaction.

But yes if one is a sincere and experienced Order member and is genuinely trying to communicate the Dharma, just the Dharma, I don't think there's any real danger of your importing into the new country specifically English attitudes and needs. There may well be an English flavour in your personal style, but that's a quite different sort of thing, and of course as you stay longer and longer in the other country you'll lose that to a great extent. Perhaps we need not say more about that.

"Could you outline your vision of the role of an FWBO Chairman? Do you feel that to some extent Chairmen at present fulfil that role or do you feel that fundamentally they/we have not yet grasped the point?"

This is more a question for the Chairmen to answer than me I think. *Your vision of the role of an FWBO Chairman.* Well my vision - I don't like the word 'role'- but my vision of an FWBO Chairman. Well first of all he must be mature and responsible. He must obviously be committed to the Three Jewels, he must keep up a regular meditation practice and he must observe the ten precepts quite faithfully and quite strictly like every other Order member. I think ideally he lives with the people with whom he works in and around his Centre. I think

it's very difficult especially if you've got a big Centre to work successfully with the people that you don't actually live with, so I think ideally the Chairman, who needs to be really in touch with things and in close contact with his team, needs to live with them or with most of them at least in a community. I think the Chairman needs to have a reasonably good grasp of the Dharma. I think he needs to be quite a good speaker, I think he needs to be able to give lectures and to take the chair and give votes of thanks and all that sort of thing. He needs to be able to conduct meetings, he needs to be able to keep people to the point, he needs to be businesslike and practical in his approach. At the same time not to lose touch with his imagination! He needs to be tactful and patient because he's going to have to deal with all sorts of people. He is going to have to be a quite good counsellor - people are going to come to him with their problems. Members of his team are going to come to him with their problems. He needs to have some sort of grasp of accounts and finance I think, even if to be able to keep track of what his treasurer is up to or to be able to analyze a balance sheet. Things of that sort.

He needs to keep in touch with what's going on in his locality, the particular city where the Centre is situated. He needs perhaps to be in touch with prominent local people. If the Centre is big or central enough he needs to keep in touch with the national news, what's happening even on the international front. He needs to know how various developments in the area, social and political, will affect his Centre and what he's trying to do. So you can see that the Centre Chairman needs to be well a really quite exceptional sort of person.

Of course this is my vision of the FWBO Centre Chairman. We have in some cases to opt for something a little less than that, but that's my vision. In other words a Centre Chairman, to sum it up in traditional terms, needs to be a sort of bodhisattva, with all the sort of skills and the qualities and endowments that a bodhisattva is traditionally regarded as possessing. Perhaps above all a Chairman needs to have vision, he needs to have a vision for his Centre, he needs to have a vision of the direction in which his Centre is moving, and perhaps even more important than that if one can say so, he needs to have a vision of the connection between his Centre and all other Centres. He needs to be able to see his Centre as part of the wider FWBO movement, and he needs to be able to keep all the people in his Centre, or coming along to his Centre, whether Order members or mitras or Friends, aware that they are part and parcel of something which very much transcends their particular individual Centre or their particular individual community.

So these are at least some of the things that a Chairman needs to do and they add up to my vision of the role of an FWBO Chairman.

Do you feel that to some extent Chairman at present fulfil that role or do you feel that fundamentally they/we have not yet grasped the point? I think Chairmen generally have grasped the point. I assume that the question is concerned mainly with the public Centres. Some of the public Centres are bigger and some are smaller and the bigger ones will have a much wider range of activities and responsibilities and therefore call for a much more experienced and talented and many-sided, many-faceted Chairman. Smaller Centres can no doubt sometimes get by with Chairmen having a more limited range of talents.

Perhaps another point I should make is that the Chairman should not allow himself to get so bogged down in the day to day running of his Centre that he loses sight of the wider perspective, that he loses his vision of the direction in which his Centre as a whole is moving, and loses sight perhaps of its connection with the rest of the movement. When you are very very busy and when there are a lot of things to be done, a lot of letters to be written and phone calls to be made and programmes planned and people to be seen you can very easily get sort of bogged down in that and almost remain if not chained to your desk at least have

your vision very very limited, so that you don't see over the edge of your desk practically. A Chairman, above all perhaps, has got to avoid that.

But I think in theory in principle Chairmen have got a pretty good idea of what is expected of them and no doubt when they have their secret conferences they sort of compare notes among themselves as to the extent to which they are living up to the vision of an FWBO Chairman or not, and this is one of the functions of the Chairmen's meetings, that they can keep one another up to scratch. I'm sure they're doing that more and more effectively.

All right.

"Have you had any further thoughts on the issue since your talk "Buddhism, Peace and Nuclear War", and how do you see the Order having more effect in this area?"

I'm afraid I haven't given very much thought, in fact very very little to this issue since delivering the lecture. There's been a certain amount of follow up. We had two or three reviews and letters from outside the movement and of course I was struck by a few things. In fact if or when a new edition comes out I'm probably going to add an appendix or preface dealing with some of the points that were raised by correspondents, especially this grotesque misunderstanding about what I meant by 'objective truth'. Some people tried to read all sorts of metaphysical abstrusenesses, if one can use that expression, into that simple phrase, but apart from thinking those things over, I really haven't had any further thoughts on the issue.

I have been thinking though - this is related - quite a bit about violence, partly because of what's been happening in connection with football matches. I've had a few thoughts on that, especially in the last few days which perhaps I could take this opportunity of getting onto tape, even though perhaps a little irrelevant, but not altogether so. One of the things that has struck me over the years in fact is that when there is an instance of hooliganism at a football match the concerned authorities - I'm not quite sure who they are, they are usually gentlemen who sound like bookmakers for some reason or other, who seem to be running these football clubs and so on. [Laughter] Well you know what I mean by a bookmaker. He wears a sort of lounge suit, rather crumpled and he smokes cigars and he's bald and is a rather seedy sort of character generally [Laughter] - I imagine maybe quite wrongly that these are the sort of people who run football clubs and buy and sell players for enormous sums. I must say I very much object to this terminology of 'buying' a player and 'selling' a player. It seems to be quite degrading but then again I'm getting off the track. But what I thought was this that when there's an instance of hooliganism at once these gentlemen protest that these people are not genuine football fans, that you can't blame the hooliganism on the fans or the members of the club, and they seem to think that by dissociating themselves in that way they've washed their hands of the problem and it isn't their problem - the problem is for the police to deal with or the government to deal with - but what I have thought is that this is really quite specious.

So I formulate it in this way. That football hooligans are an integral part of the football scene. Now how do I arrive at that conclusion? I hope I'm not offending anybody who regularly supports their team or anything like that. Football - I think no one will disagree with this although they might feel Bhante's getting a bit out of his depth [Laughter] but anyway football is a spectator sport - football is competitive, well it's a game first of all but it's a competitive game. Is that not correct, even if I'm putting in this sort of simple way? Football is a competitive game. In other words you've got two teams and these two teams are out to defeat each other. They do it I think by putting a ball through something called a goal in between three sticks. I could go a lot into that too but we won't [Laughter] but football is a competitive game and it is played by teams of people who are trying to beat each other, defeat each other. And these teams generally come from a particular locality, a particular

area. So in that particular area they've got their friends and they've got their supporters. So a football match played by two teams of players with their respective supporters is an essentially competitive situation, and perhaps one might say essentially a highly competitive situation, because not only do the two teams want to win, their supporters want them to win. Their supporters identify with their teams very strongly, and sometimes they will want them to win at all costs. They identify with them so strongly and victory is so important for their team and for them that their emotions often get out of control, and if they are people not of any great self control at the best of times and if they are slightly rough people, slightly crude people, slightly coarse people, as sometimes they are, and if they've had a bit to drink, and if their feelings of competitiveness and rivalry and aggressiveness are inflamed, well what else can you expect but hooliganism?

So it seems that hooliganism therefore is an integral part of football, and that the hooligan is an essential part of the football scene. So if you want to solve the problem of hooliganism in a way you've got to banish football. But this of course is a solution that no one ever contemplates apparently. It's really hurt them to ban, apparently, British teams or English teams at least - I'm not quite sure which - from European football for one miserable year. It's really hurt them to do this. But it seems to me that you have to recognise that football hooliganism is a manifestation of aggressiveness which exists in varying degrees not only within every football player and supporter but within every man at least, and probably quite a lot of the women, in the community. So you are really up against the question of an aggressive element in almost human nature itself, and you can't solve the problem of football hooliganism by just sort of trying to segregate or punish or disown the minority that commit overt acts of violence. The whole situation really by its very nature, encourages that indirectly at least.

So either you've got to sanitise the game so that you have - well this has been suggested - you've got these slightly aggressive people on the pitch, but elsewhere you've got just very gentlemanly people just watching a game of football just like in the old days they used to watch a game of cricket. Not really minding who wins and who loses, and perhaps you've not got to allow territorial representation as it were. But it's a territorial game one might say also, and you've certainly not got to allow alcohol and you've got to have separate seats with numbers and tickets, just like you have for a concert. You never have riots at concerts, not even at the Albert Hall! Because there's nothing competitive even though there are lots of people and all that sort of thing.

So I think that the fact that football is essentially competitive, that teams are locally based and excite not feelings of local patriotism but I would say regional nationalism, though that's a contradiction in terms, well it's a recipe for violence and people really ought to be able to see that. I don't think we'll begin to solve this problem of football hooliganism until they do begin to see that. No doubt there's a lot more that could be said on the subject but these were just a few thoughts that occurred to me, and perhaps it'll spark off discussion among Order members and others, maybe contribute to livelier Chapter meetings! [Laughter] Not too aggressive I hope.

But certainly I think this is quite a serious problem. I think one cannot but be aware that there's an element of, for want of a better term, aggressiveness in every human being, certainly in every male human being. I tend to exempt the women to some extent - they don't seem to function in quite the same way. So I think it's quite important that people individually identify this element of violence in themselves and learn to bring it under control, because given the right circumstances, given the right, or rather the wrong, situation, you could be a football hooligan, or some of you could perhaps under very unfavourable circumstances which played on your negative emotions. It's not impossible because in the

case of those who haven't entered the stream well these things are possible, if you get into circumstances which encourage you or incite you to act in this way or you get carried away by mob feelings and so on. Anyway these were just a few thoughts that occurred to me in connection with that matter of topical interest.

All right,

"If the visa problems for Britons in India continue would it be appropriate for all Order members here to consider serving a six month tour of duty there?"

I think so, yes. Assuming that they are of a certain level of maturity and experience. I've already started encouraging one or two Order members to think in terms of going and having a six month tour of duty. Six month because you go on a three month tourist visa and you get a three month extension while you are there, it adds up to six months. Nagabodhi wrote a book while he was there, as well as doing one or two other things, and you can do a lot in six months. As a visiting Order member you can help Indian Order members and even English Order members who are out there to feel more closely in touch with the movement in Britain and in other countries if you happen to go from another country like maybe Australia or New Zealand, and you can do a lot of good in the way of going around giving lectures, taking study groups, just meeting people, talking to people. With a bit of enterprise you'll be able to go into villages where they've never seen a member of the Western Buddhist Order before. A very few perhaps where they've maybe never seen anyone from England before or spoken to someone from England, or met another English Buddhist and are very very happy to do so.

So even a modestly talented Order member, if he has got maturity and grit and can put up sometimes with fairly uncomfortable conditions, can do a lot of good in India, probably out of all proportion to the amount of good he's able to do in this country where things are so much easier and tepid in a way and moving much more slowly, and where the whole situation is much less so to speak existential. You will also no doubt be able to go on pilgrimage and spend a few weeks at least travelling around the holy places, seeing Buddhagaya, Sarnath, Kusinara, Lumbini, perhaps even going up to Kalimpong and paying your respects to Dhardo Rimpoche. But certainly I would encourage any reasonably well qualified Order member to have a six month tour of duty, as the questioner's called it in India. Not only a tour of duty, you will find it a tour of pleasure and a tour of inspiration, and I'm quite sure even though you give quite a lot you'll probably find that you gain at least as much if not more.

All right,

"You have asked that contact between the WBO/FWBO and other Buddhist organisation on an organisational level be maintained solely by the Order Office. I have heard that this is because you feel that most Order members are not sufficiently au fait with the broader Buddhist world. Would you think it appropriate for Order members generally to be educated or at least informed about the relevant issues, perhaps by the Order Office, if it had time? Could you briefly outline or list the relevant issues which you do not think are sufficiently understood by most Order members?"

Hmm, that's rather difficult. There are all sorts of things one could mention in a way. I think I'll deal with the more general issue, especially this question of 'Would you think it appropriate for Order members generally to be educated or at least informed about the relevant issues perhaps by the Order Office.' I think Order members should be educated about certain relevant issues. I think not only Order members but mitras and possibly even some Friends, and this brings me to the subject of the *FWBO Newsletter*. I think Nagabodhi's present isn't he? Ah yes. [Laughter] It's a wonderful coincidence that this question comes up

just as Nagabodhi comes back [Laughter] but - I assure you it is a coincidence, I didn't even look at these questions until a short time ago - but I've been thinking quite a lot about the future of the *Newsletter*. I've been thinking for years about the future of the *Newsletter* and so have several other people, but the last few months while Nagabodhi's been away, and this is entirely coincidental, I've started having more definite ideas. My main idea is this. That the *Newsletter* should be much more a medium or a means for the education of the movement about where we stand on certain important issues affecting the movement itself, the Buddhist world, even the world in general. For instance something happens in a certain Buddhist country, something of interest or relevance to us, well we use the *Newsletter* to comment on that, to explain our attitude to what has happened, how we see it as the FWBO. How we see it in the light of Buddhism, whether positively or negatively, or both or neither even, and in this way we educate, we help educate readers - Order members, mitras and Friends - about what the movement is all about and therethrough what Buddhism itself is all about.

For instance - this is just an example that occurs to me - supposing we read in the paper that certain people attending a certain meditation group or centre suffered mental breakdowns and had to be taken to mental hospitals and given treatment, well we reproduce that item or we summarise that item and we comment on it, and then we proceed to say well what went wrong? We give our analysis what went wrong, why were these people disturbed in that way by that particular practice, what was wrong with the practice and why we don't follow that sort of practice; What meditation is like in the FWBO and why. Do you see what I mean?

We take up things of that sort, commenting on things that have happened, either in the outside world or within the Buddhist movement and so on. We might for instance hear that - this is something I read about recently - a certain Chinese Buddhist philanthropist is going to finance the translation of the Chinese canon into English and they're going to make a start next year. Well this is something that we could not only report but comment on from our point of view, why we think it's important to have the canon in English, especially the Sutras in English, why we think it's important to study them. In this way we educate our reader about our attitude. Similarly through book reviews and articles, as in fact we are already doing. I feel the articles do need to be made more readable, in a way more entertaining, though without losing any spiritual quality or substance, and perhaps shorter, maybe a greater variety of material. Less perhaps, somewhat less parish pump type news, especially when it's six or eight months old. Do you see what I mean?

And if we can change the *Newsletter* in this sort of way possibly by the beginning of next year or at the very outside Wesak next year, well we could then start calling it a magazine rather than a Newsletter and having a sort of title.

I don't see anything especially wrong in the present format, the layout. That's reasonably all right. Maybe there's room for improvement here and there, maybe better quality paper, thicker paper when we can afford it, better quality illustrations but that will depend upon resources available and that will depend upon number of copies sold and that will depend, to begin with, on all of you especially. You will have to really push the *Newsletter* as much as you can, not only in the future but push each issue as it comes out now.

So these are the sort of thoughts I've been having, and I think in this way Order members especially will be educated about the sort of issues that they may have to deal with. For instance I give you another example. Someone wrote to me from *Vajraloka* that they'd had a visit from the local Catholic priest who was quite interested in them, interested in *Vajraloka* and Buddhist meditation and he asked lots of interesting questions and one was 'Is the FWBO recognised' or he might have said 'Is the WBO recognised, by other Buddhist groups?' I don't know what the Order member replied but I know that this question has been asked before. A

lot of people are not clear about the whole question, so they give a sort of hesitant fumbling sort of reply, and that is not very good. What one really needs to do is to look at, or ask the questioner to look at, the whole question of recognition. What does one mean by one Buddhist group recognising another, or one Buddhist Order recognising another? What is involved? Very often people assume that there's one great Buddhist Order outside in the Buddhist world and then there's the Western Buddhist Order, so how do the two relate? That is not at all the position, because there are dozens, there are scores of Orders in the East which - well do they recognise one another? What does one mean by recognition? Do they recognise each other's ordinations? They don't in all cases. In some cases if you go from one to the other or you go from one monastery to another you would have to be re-ordained, because the second monastery does not recognise the first one or the second Order does not recognise the first one in that sort of way. Do you see what I mean?

So it's not as though there's one great unified Buddhist Order out there and the poor little FWBO here, and there's no question of whether the poor little FWBO is recognised by the great big Eastern Buddhist Order. That is just not the position at all. The position is that there are lots of Orders in the Buddhist world, not all of which recognise one another. They are all perhaps on friendly terms. They certainly don't persecute one another, they don't abuse one another, but technically they do not always recognise one another. Do you see what I mean? For instance if, even in the Theravada Sangha, well there is no Theravada Sangha there are a number of Theravada Sanghas, not all of which recognise one another. So you need to know all these things in order to be able to answer that sort of question properly and satisfactorily.

So I'm hoping that the *Newsletter* could be developed as a sort of instrument for the education of its readers in these sort of respects.

[End of tape one tape two]

I only hope I've been able to communicate something of what I see. I don't think that we can really have people ringing up the Order Office and say I'm dashing off just now to give a talk say to the Bahai's or the Mormons, what's the official FWBO line about them, and they expect Subhuti to tell them in two minutes on the 'phone what the official line is. Well you can't really do it in that sort of way. I think one has got to do it more systematically and a little bit more in depth. But anyway this perhaps more or less answers this question.

All right I'll try and get through the others a bit more quickly.

New Society.

"The gap between the FWBO as it is and the new society as it could be seems very large. What must we do to spread the Dharma more widely than we have? Is very widespread change possible? Do you see the social, economic and cultural institutions of this society fundamentally changing to become a new society itself or will the spiritual community always be a minority within the larger group?"

Well that involves predictions and I don't know whether I can predict. What must we do to spread the Dharma more widely than we have? Well, you must spread it more widely! [Laughter] How do you go farther than you've gone already, well you just keep marching on in the same direction don't you. So that's what you've got to do. There's got to be a wider outreach. Each Centre, each community, each individual has just got to redouble its or redouble his or her activities in all possible directions. That's the only way that one can really develop and expand. The only way of growing is just to grow. Of course I can't go into

exactly how that should be done because that will depend on particular localities and even countries and the nature of the Centre, the nature of the community. One does things a bit differently in England from what one does in India for instance. At present the new society is very much a minority within the larger society, but it is growing and what the limits to that growth will be no one can predict. I don't know. But I think all that is up to us to make sure of is that yes, we are growing all the time so that even though we're a minority we are constantly becoming a bigger minority and that we are growing as rapidly as we can. That we are expanding as rapidly as is consistent with a reasonable degree of consolidation at the same time. So if every Order member, every Centre, every community thinks in those terms well these questions will be answered.

I've got a rather long question that I think I'll pass over now. I might keep it for the convention. I've also got some questions which were handed in at the last minute. I'll try to deal with them all.

"As spiritual movements have historically tended to grow in size they have become first institutions and then self-perpetuating groups without any vision. Is there any way to ensure that this does not happen with the WBO? Is size not inherently inimical to spiritual vision? Should we perhaps be more like the Sufis who have very little supporting structure and work without permanent Centres and property?"

So the central question seems to be is size not inherently inimical to spiritual vision, but size of what? It's the individual who has the spiritual vision, isn't it? So if you've got two individuals both of whom have spiritual vision, in what way is the fact that they are two inherently inimical to spiritual vision? Do you see what I mean? If you've got your individuals first, however many individuals you have it doesn't become inherently inimical to spiritual vision. So there's no contradiction between, I think, having spiritual vision and having a large number of individuals because by very definition a large number of individuals, however large, doesn't add up to a group. So it's a question of individuals being individuals or people who are not individuals becoming individuals. In that way there's no inherent danger of numbers being inimical to spiritual vision. If you've got a group, the group as such is inimical to the emergence of spiritual vision, inimical to the production of individuals, though some groups less so than others, but a larger number of individuals is not more inimical to spiritual vision than a smaller number, because where individuals are concerned you can't in a sense really speak of numbers, because you're not concerned with a group. Does that seem logical? Yes, so the concern must be that the individuals should be individuals or that individuals should encourage those who are not individuals to become individuals. If this principle is kept in mind I don't think there's any danger of the WBO becoming just a group.

As for the Sufis, 'should we perhaps be more like the Sufis who have very little supporting structure and work without permanent centres and property' - well I'm afraid that just isn't true of the Sufis. I've read a bit about the Sufis and they seem to have had quite a lot in the way of supporting structure, and they certainly had permanent centres, hundreds and thousands of them. They had communities and they certainly had a lot of property. Many of the Sufi orders were disestablished in Muslim countries which became rather secularised like for instance Turkey. That was the extreme example and their property was taken away from them and the Sufi orders were disbanded, but the Sufis were definitely organised into orders with hierarchies and spiritual lineages and institutions, buildings, property, wealth of various kinds, and at the same time the Sufi movement was no doubt a spiritually quite alive movement. The questioner might be thinking of certain little Sufi groups in the West, but they're not regarded I think as genuinely Sufi by Sufi groups in the Middle East.

All right, the questions that were handed in at the last minute. Someone says,

"I live in an urban community, practise one meditation a day, work the rest of the day and support three classes per week. Someone living in a monastic community lives a life of meditation and study. Am I going to develop as much?" [Laughter]

Well you may! The question is are meditation and study the only things that are needed? You might say in principle yes because you'll do your meditation, your samatha, vipassana, you'll study the Dharma and you should just be evolving, just developing. That does not necessarily happen with all individuals. It does seem that some people at least need other facilities. Some people find it very difficult just to meditate and study the whole day. Maybe they're young, maybe they've got surging physical energies, maybe they need to work, maybe they need to be involved in all sorts of practical activities. Maybe they are rather introverted people and they need to be more objectively oriented, they need to consider more the needs of the objective situation. Maybe that is what is going to help them to grow and develop in some cases rather than a life of meditation and study which is actually not so easy to live.

So I would say that the person who lives in an urban community, practises one meditation a day regularly, works the rest of the day, assuming it's right livelihood, and supports three classes per week, assuming as I think must be the case that they're classes at the Centre, I think that person is almost sure to develop. I wouldn't like to say as much as someone who is living a life of meditation and study, assuming that person is really able to lead a life of meditation and study, but the person who's living in the urban community would not necessarily develop as much or more if he was transplanted into another situation where he just meditated and studied all the time. He might not find he was able to do that. He might well find that either it was beyond him or he had needs which were not being met by that particular situation.

So I know sometimes it's tempting if you're living and working in an urban community and Centre to hanker after the life of meditation and study in a country retreat centre, birds twittering in the trees, gentle breezes blowing, cups of tea brought to you in the middle of the morning and the afternoon, but the reality's not really quite like that. It's a much more difficult life than one might think, especially if it's a life that you lead month after month and year after year. It's not really a life which is suitable in the fullest sense for everybody. But no reason why even if you are living and working in the urban situation you shouldn't go off to Vajraloka, go off to Blaenn Ddol, even come up to Padmaloka from time to time for comparatively a life of meditation and study.

All right,

"What differences are we likely to see in the Order if Order members succeed in developing more mindfulness? How can we do this under the conditions in which we usually have to live and work?"

I'm not too happy about the second part of that question but I'll come to that in a minute. I think the question arises from the fact that I've been rather harping lately on this theme of mindfulness in everyday life. You are probably familiar by this time with the fact that from time to time I harp on certain things, perhaps to the extent of actually boring people, but yes I have begun to harp on the theme of mindfulness in everyday life and I must warn Order members and others that they are probably going to hear me harping on it quite a bit more, quite a bit longer, until I see a definite improvement all round. I'm not speaking of mindfulness of breathing, I'm speaking of mindfulness carried over into the affairs of everyday life - that you walk mindfully, speak mindfully, eat mindfully, drink mindfully,

attend or take part in council meetings mindfully, chapter meetings mindfully - that you know what you are doing all the time, that you are mindful of your emotional state, are mindful of what you are thinking about, are directing your thoughts.

So if Order members really succeed in developing more mindfulness, there surely will be differences. So the question is well what differences are we likely to see in the Order if Order members succeed in developing more mindfulness? The question is what differences are we likely to see in the Order, not in the individual Order members, that's pretty obvious, but in the Order. I would say if there is more mindfulness in the case of individual Order members then in the Order there'll certainly be more harmony because people will relate to one another more mindfully. They will speak to one another more mindfully, respond to one another more mindfully, they won't react so hastily. If for instance someone ventures a criticism or points out a weakness they won't react because they're mindful. They'll consider the criticism objectively. They'll think about it, and if there's something in it they'll accept the point and change themselves accordingly. So I think that if Order members succeed in developing more mindfulness we will certainly see at least one big difference in the Order, that is that when Order members get together either in their local chapters or on regional Order weekends and National Order weekends, we'll see a greater degree of harmony, perhaps a greater degree of refinement, if you know what I mean. When I say refinement I'm not speaking of social graces, though you may see some changes in that respect too - I'm thinking more of a refinement in respect of mental and emotional level. Less crude unrefined behaviour and modes of speech, and that cannot but be good from a spiritual point of view.

So if there is more mindfulness in the affairs of everyday life in individual Order members, there will certainly be a greater degree of harmony and refinement we can say at the very least in the Order as a whole.

But what about the second question or second part of the question? 'How can we do this', that is to say develop more mindfulness, 'under the conditions in which we usually have to live and work?' But how else should you do it? Because you have to be mindful regardless. In a way there is no situation that is conducive to mindfulness, because mindfulness is something that depends upon you. Whatever happens externally or however unfavourable the external conditions are, however unconducive to spiritual life, you can still be mindful of that fact, and mindful of your reactions to that situation. People like to be selective, not only about mindfulness, about other things. For instance they might want to practise patience, but there are certain things that they're willing to put up with and be patient with but not other things. But that is the essence of patience, that you are patient with things you don't want to be patient with! That's the essence of the matter. So in the same way with mindfulness there's no question of the sort of situation that would be more conducive to the practise of mindfulness. By the very nature of the situation you've got to be mindful of the situation that you are in. That is what mindfulness is all about. You can't select the situation within which you are to be. You've got to make the effort to be mindful regardless of the situation that you're in. Maybe the phone is ringing all the time, maybe lots of people are coming to see you - that's where you've got to try to practise mindfulness.

Of course you may find it's quite impossible and of course you may decide to transfer yourself to some other situation or some other scene, but that won't solve the problem - you've still got to be mindful within that other situation on that other scene.

So even if you're not coping, even if you're losing your temper in the more urgent or more demanding situation, you can still remain mindful of the fact that you're not coping, that you've lost your temper, your nerves have become frayed. So long as you are aware of that, well you're still keeping up your practise of mindfulness, you've still got that thread of

connection as it were, and I think one can usually do that at least. You can at least be aware that you are failing. So the practise of mindfulness one might say is possible under all circumstances, all conditions. Whether those conditions in themselves are ones that you should be in or are best for you, that is another matter, but you can never say well I can't practise mindfulness in this situation or I can't practise mindfulness in that. You can change the situation for other reasons, but not because in another situation it would be possible for you to be more mindful. You can be mindful in any situation.

All right, only two more questions.

"Given the amount of work most of us are involved in could we meditate in a more systematic and effective way?"

Well I think this is very much connected with the question of mindfulness. If you manage to keep up more mindfulness in the affairs of everyday life, when the time comes for you to sit and meditate you will be able to meditate more effectively. But if you are immersed in things and don't give a thought to meditation and don't even try to be mindful and then suddenly the bell rings, oh five o'clock, you ought to drop everything, rush into the shrine, sit down, meditate - you are not going to be able to do very well. You've got to keep up a thread of connection and you've got if possible to slow down a bit before the bell rings for meditation and be mindful and aware during the whole of the day.

But I think regularity is a very important thing. I mean in my own earlier days I certainly found regularity very important. If you keep up a regular practice well when the appropriate time comes - when I say regular I don't just mean every day, I mean at the same time every day -if you keep up a regular practice in that sense well when the time comes you will find yourself getting into that mood, that mental state, and you'll find it more easy to meditate for that reason. So I think if you possibly can, see that your lifestyle permits you to sit and meditate at the same time every day. I think this is quite important for those who are as it were stationary. If your work, whether Dharma work or some other work obliges you to move around well then the situation is more difficult, you have to meditate when you can. But I think very often even when you're moving around you can sometimes plan your day in such a way that you can still stick to the same regular meditation time. You usually manage to stick to the same mealtimes even when you're travelling around, why not the same meditation time? You usually have your breakfast or your lunch at the same time so why not your morning or your evening meditation session?

But yes I think regularity in the sense of at the same time as well as every day, is very important. So

"Could you give some practical ideas for keeping a meditation diary?"

Last question. I would have thought it was really quite simple but perhaps it isn't. Practical ideas. Well first of all you get a good big notebook [Laughter] I suggest a foolscap size one. In my own earlier days, to refer to those, I kept a meditation diary for long periods. I've only got one of them left. I threw them all away or nearly all. I've got one that I kept about thirty years ago perhaps over a short period. But yes a good, big, thick notebook and write it up every day. I think this is quite important. Even if nothing much happens well just mention that nothing much happened. You should give the time that you sat to meditate, maybe sometimes where; the length of time for which you sat, and how the meditation proceeded - whether you had a good concentration or not, whether you felt in a positive mental state or not, whether you felt buoyed up, whether you had any ecstatic experience, whether you experienced priti, whether you were subject to distractions, if so what sort of distractions.

Whether you had any visions, whether you had any particular sensations, or whether any flash of insight occurred to you or any deeper understanding of things. Whether you felt a gravitational pull in any particular way. This is the sort of information that you should record.

You perhaps have already found that even if you have a quite striking and important experience in meditation, if you don't write it down, it's to some extent as with a dream, you can forget about it very quickly. So one of the reasons for keeping a meditation diary is that say after two or three months you can look back over it and you can recall and recapture positive experiences which you would otherwise perhaps have forgotten, especially in the nature of insights, and can reflect further upon them and make them more of an integral part of your whole conscious attitude.

Also of course if you look back and read over your meditation diary you can sometimes see a pattern emerging, you can see ups and downs. You might even notice that around the time of the full moon you don't have particularly good meditations or you have very good meditations. You can observe patterns of that sort.

So I think it is quite a good idea to keep a meditation diary, especially on a meditation retreat or solitary retreat and, as with other diaries, in that way you record a lot of information, some of it useful, that otherwise you would very likely forget. Once the meditation diaries have served their purpose you can burn them, you can throw them away as I did with mine. There's no point I think in hanging onto them unless there are very special insights which you want to preserve or in that case of course you could just copy them out separately in another book. You might even hear words, you might even hear phrases in the course of your meditation, giving you as it were teachings. You might like to write all those down as special notebooks so they're always with you for reflection. Otherwise odds and ends of distractions you need not preserve for posterity! [Laughter] Not even for yourself. Once you've overcome the distractions it's best maybe to forget all about them. But I believe there has been some small move in the movement recently in the direction of keeping a meditation diary and I certainly think it's a good idea. But I think it's good if you can keep it up regularly. I think therefore it's good if you write it up every night. I remember that when I was keeping one I wrote up my meditation diary after each session, immediately after or at least a few minutes after, after I'd sort of had time to emerge from the meditation, I at once wrote down an account, as full as I could, of how the meditation session had gone.

I think if you leave it till later on in the day well other things will have happened and the clarity of the impression will have been blurred and you'll definitely forget things. You can forget very very quickly. You won't be able to remember whether you were distracted by hatred first and lust afterwards or lust first and hatred afterwards! You'll get it all mixed up. So your diary won't be a faithful record. So write it all down as soon as you can after the actual session.

Again this is an exercise in mindfulness one might say, that you're more mindful of your own meditation experience and that cannot [sic] be good for you and good for the movement at a whole, for the Order as a whole.

So I think that'll be all. I didn't deal with the one longer question. It was quite a long question. At least that question I'll keep until I'm behind this rostrum again in the context of the convention.

End of Session

Transcribed by Paul Dore

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