

## 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/Triratna 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 Triratna 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 [Triratna 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

### WOMEN'S ORDER CONVENTION 1987

### QUESTIONS ON ART AND THE ORDER

**Those Present:** The Venerable Sangharakshita, Punyavati, Dayanandi, Mallika, Vajrapushpa, Ratnasuri, Padmavati, Bodhisri, Sridevi, Tarasri, Ashokasri, Gunavati.

(NB: I can't sort out Bodhisri, Sridevi, Vajrapushpa and Gunavati for certain.)

**Sangharakshita:** Five questions. First one:

*A question has arisen about the rupa created by Do Phillips in the shrine room at Taraloka. We have heard that in your opinion this rupa is not appropriate for a public shrine room, on the grounds that it expresses too personal a view.*

Yes.

*Could you define the process, the point, where the personal crosses over and becomes the universal?*

I'm not sure that I understand the question embodied in the last sentence. One could say that 'the point where the personal crosses over and becomes the universal' is the point where the personal crosses over and becomes the universal! What does the question really mean? I'm not clear about that, I must say.

**Tarasri:** I think it means we don't appreciate where that point would be. What are the criteria?

**S:** I suppose that raises the question: what does one mean by the personal and what does one mean by the universal? It seems to me that in this question, taking the question as a whole, 'personal' is used in two quite different ways: 'personal' in the sense of perhaps idiosyncratic, and 'personal' in the sense of individual. Maybe I'd better go back to the introductory bit. 'A question has arisen about the rupa created by Do Phillips in the shrine room at Taraloka.' That's quite correct. 'We have heard that in your opinion this rupa is not appropriate for a public shrine room on the grounds that it expresses too personal a view.' I'm not sure if I used the word 'personal', but anyway we'll let that pass.

So think of a public shrine room, and think that one needs an image for that public shrine room. What sort of image would you require? Supposing you need a Buddha image - what sort of image would you require?

**Mallika:** One that inspires.

**S:** One that inspires; inspires who?

**Dayanandi:** Everybody.

**S:** Everybody. Would it be sufficient to have one that inspired just a few people but didn't inspire the majority?

\_\_\_\_\_: Not in a public place.

**S:** Not in a public place. So that means that the image would have to have a sort of general appeal; in a sense would have to be standard, if not universal, at least standard. Or it shouldn't in a sense distract people, shouldn't divert their attention from what the image really represents to something as it were accidental. We find this nowadays quite a lot in the West with regard to Christian art, because there's a lot of experiment going on in the field of art, including the field of religious art. So sometimes you find, or you read about it in the newspapers, that a certain church or a certain cathedral has installed a crucifixion which just upsets everybody. It certainly represents the artist's vision of the crucifixion, and perhaps that is a perfectly valid vision, but the function of the crucifix is to act as a sort of focus of devotion for a number of people, and if they find it unacceptable, for one reason or another, it doesn't any longer fulfil that function. If the artist's vision, though valid, is so individual to him or to her that other people cannot, as it were, share in it or participate in it. This has happened a lot with regard to Christian religious art in recent years.

So I'm concerned about much the same thing in connection with our public shrine rooms: that the image must embody a vision, if you like, of Enlightenment as embodied in a particular human form, which people can share in and appreciate. So the artist's vision shouldn't be too individual, in the sense of idiosyncratic. It shouldn't be the artist's distinctive vision to too great an extent - not to an extent which other people find it difficult to share in. The artist, in a way, has to make himself or herself the vehicle of tradition and try to give a representation of Enlightenment in human form which is as it were generally acceptable.

Of course, it's possible to go to the other extreme and just produce a standard piece of work which is devoid of inspirational value; that's the opposite extreme. So the

artist has to be concerned to follow a middle way - keep his or her individuality under strict control, or make sure that the individual vision subserves the vision of the spiritual community as a whole, place his or her skills at the service of the spiritual community, rather than trying to present the spiritual community with his or her individual vision.

So what I personally felt was, in the case of Do's work was that, though it was a very good piece of work artistically considered, it did represent her, in a sense, idiosyncratic vision more than was suitable for the shrine room of a public Centre; because too many people seemed to feel 'The Buddha couldn't have really looked like that', sort of thing. So that's what I meant before when I spoke of a distraction; because instead of just focusing on the image you start wondering why the artist has represented the Buddha in that particular way. It has nothing to do with the artistic value of the image at all, simply with its suitability for that particular function. I personally think that that particular rupa is a very good one, and I personally like it; but it's not suitable for that particular place. I'd be happy to have it in my own room, but not in a public shrine room.

But then there's this knotty question of the personal crossing over and becoming a universal. So what does one mean by 'the personal' in this sense? Here the personal is more the individual. Perhaps one can think of it more in terms of literature, more in terms of poetry; perhaps that will be easier. Supposing you give expression to your own individual feelings, your very own individual feelings, in a poem, and you give adequate expression. Well, the fact that they are your individual feelings as a human being will mean that the poem is accessible to all other human beings who are capable of those feelings. In that way, though individual, the appeal of the poem is at the same time universal. The individual, in a sense, is the universal. But the poem can only be universal by being truly individual. If you try to present in your poem, say, the common denominator of the sort of feelings that people have on a certain occasion, you won't succeed in communicating your feeling. You'll be neither individual nor universal. But if you're truly individual you'll be universal too - taking the word universal in a somewhat restricted sense, meaning you will give expression to the sort of feelings which are common to human beings in that sort of situation.

If, of course, your experience is so unusual, even though you are able to give adequate expression to it, it won't be universal because hardly anybody else will have had that experience. So that's why all the greatest poetry seems to be concerned, to the extent that it expresses emotion, with quite basic human emotions - of loss, bereavement, separation, joy - not more subtle, sophisticated, idiosyncratic emotions.

**Vajrapushpa:** Of course, I think a good poet should stretch the reader a bit.

**S:** Yes, indeed, but would stretch the reader from where he or she actually is, not make them feel that they've got nothing in common with the feelings of the poet, as some modern poets probably sometimes do.

**Ashokasri:** That's interesting, when you're talking about the artist serving the spiritual community .....

**S:** Yes, that was something different; I've got away from that now.

**Ashokasri:** Yes; but in a way I saw a connection in terms of you talking about the poem - how it's communicating in relation to the individual, or to other people from their starting point - connecting with their starting point. I was just thinking of the place of - you talk about those modern poets who don't do that, and perhaps an artist would do a very good painting, but paintings that aren't really acceptable to people at the moment, but maybe in the future, and still communicate some vision.

**S:** Because we see, if we look at all the great ages of culture in the past, it's usually happened that the artist - whether painter or poet or musician - has shared in the general assumptions of his age, so that he is in harmony or he is in tune with his or her audience, as it were; going with it, not against it; going with it even though he or she goes beyond it at the same time. It's going further, but going further in much the same direction, not going in a totally different direction, in such cases. Sometimes, of course, you do have a period when there's no generally accepted cultural or spiritual values, and then the artist is much more isolated and has to produce his personal values, as it were, and communicate those. But then I think the artist is in a much more difficult position than when he shares the assumptions and attitudes and values, broadly speaking, of his age.

**Vajrapushpa:** We discussed being in tune with the spirit of the age, to be able to communicate through art one has to be in tune. But on the other hand maybe one can go even against maybe sometimes, like Blake. Didn't he go against his age, in a sense?

**S:** In a sense, he did. But then again Blake had a tradition behind him, even though it was a minority tradition. And also there were some people at least in his time with whom he was in close sympathy. There was, for instance, Swedenborg, whose life overlapped with Blake's. There was Thomas Taylor the Platonist; he was also alive at that time. But yes, Blake was more than usually isolated. But he did establish connection in his work with a quite important, even though relatively minority, tradition, an alternative tradition, one could say.

**Vajrapushpa:** Do you think that it's a question of artists and writers within the Movement to find a tradition within our culture to which to attach themselves in a way - with which ..... ?

**S:** I think the question arises - and it's a very basic question - do we have a culture, in the sense, say, that the middle ages had a culture, or that Periclean Greece had a culture? Do we have a culture in that unified sense?

**Vajrapushpa:** I was thinking exactly that ..... what is there to find, what elements of tradition, either past or present, are there in a way to live with.....

**S:** Yes. But some people try to salvage bits and pieces of tradition, or to establish connection with a particular tradition. T.S. Eliot did that, didn't he? He decided in the end that he was - what was it? - Anglican in religion, royalist in politics and classicist in literature. But he was very much in the minority.

But, coming back to Blake, I think that though he made a noble effort, and though his was a very great achievement, I think he suffered from being in a minority, or suffered in being so much out of tune with his age. He had to forge a mythology of his own, which isn't very easily intelligible, which seems quite bizarre to the casual reader; and there are very great passages in his works, but did he actually produce a unified work of art, except in a few lyrics? It's very doubtful. He had just to struggle against so much, and so much of his creative energy had to go into that struggle, it seems.

So I think an artist is very fortunate if he is in harmony with his age, broadly speaking. A lot of your work is done for you then. I think the modern view of the artist as a solitary, lonely voice is just the product of our particular situation, it's not representative.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Isn't it also a question of being in harmony with a style, I was thinking our ideals are not in harmony, I don't think, with the age -

**S:** There isn't a dominant style for the writer or the artist to be in harmony with, is there? Because nowadays we are quite sophisticated and we know all about the styles and so on of past ages. If an artist wants, he can produce pictures in ancient Egyptian style or neo-classical style or medieval style or nineteenth-century style, or eighteenth century or whatever he pleases. We don't have a style of our own, it would seem, or at least if we have the possibility it hasn't yet been discovered. Look at all the different movements in painting, to narrow the field down, in the course of the present century.

**Vajrapushpa:** But one couldn't paint a picture like the pre-Raphaelites, for instance. It just wouldn't .....

**S:** Well, no, I'm not so sure about that, because the other day in Manchester I went along to an art gallery, and I found a beautiful pre-Raphaelite painting, as I thought it was, which I hadn't seen before; and on looking at the date I found that the painter had died in 1964. I was really quite surprised - yes.

**Vajrapushpa:** Maybe it applies more even to literature. One couldn't write like Milton now. ....

**S:** Well, one could write in that sort of style; whether one could write with that sort of genius, of course, that is quite another matter. [Laughter] But in the last century you've got people writing in Shakespearean blank verse, Miltonic blank verse, with more or less success.

But we don't have a dominant style. Think of the Gothic style, how characteristic that is in architecture; but do we have an architectural style which is characteristic of this age? We don't.

**Mallika:** But don't we have a recognisable, for example, fifties style in architecture? Thirties style?

**S:** Yes, well in a way that proves my point, because if styles change with that rapidity from decade to decade, it means in a way that there isn't a style. It doesn't go very deep, doesn't last for very long.

**Bodhisri:** Bhante, what about abstract art that was created by .... ?

**S:** I understand from my artist friends that abstract art is now old hat. There are different kinds of abstract art.

**Bodhisri:** The idea of abstract art in itself, not having to tell a story.

**S:** Mm. But a lot of modern art does tell a story. It's not just abstract art which is characteristic of our century. For instance, I think it was last year or the year before last, I went along to the exhibition of modern German art in London. It was mainly inter-war art, but very little of it was abstract art at all. Abstract art didn't seem to have reached Germany at that time, or to have been at all important. It was all representational. So it isn't as though even abstract art, even in that particular field, dominated the scene completely. It was just one element among so many others.

More recently, just the other week, I saw the neo-Romantic exhibition in London, and very little of that is abstract; and that is an important segment of art in the thirties to fifties in Britain - mainly representational art.

\_\_\_\_\_ : But there is that possibility, which wasn't there before the twentieth century - so that free verse and abstract art seem to have emerged.

**S:** Yes, but not, I would say, as dominant, in the sense that analogous styles were dominant in previous centuries. I'm not even sure it's a style; perhaps it's just a technique.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Maybe it's a new age of lack of style.

**S:** Well, a new age of chaos.

\_\_\_\_\_ : So does that mean we have more freedom as Buddhist artists for instance?

**S:** No, I don't think - it might seem that we have more, but I think actually we have less. It's like trying to speak or to write a poem without observing the laws of grammar or rules of grammar; that doesn't enable you to say more, it enables you to say less. The rules of grammar enable you to say more, to express more.

But anyway, we've strayed away from this point of 'Could you define the process, the point, where the personal crosses over and becomes the universal?' I'd say - if I had to say something at all - it's the point where the personal, in the sense of the individual, becomes the most personal, the most individual; where you give the strongest and most intense and clearest expression to your own individual feeling. That becomes universal. Everybody with those feelings, with those emotions, can participate and can appreciate.

How did this question arise out of the first part, out of Do's image?

**Dayanandi:** We were wondering what it was about the image that made it not universal .....

**S:** Ah, but, yes, there's a confusion in the sense of Do, because I'm not saying that the image wasn't universal - yes, I think it was universal to the extent that it expressed someone's genuinely individual vision. But it wasn't a vision in which a sufficient number of people, apparently, were able to participate. It raised too many questions, as it were.

**Mallika:** Yes, that's how it arose. Because we'd heard that many people objected to it. We had quite strong feelings about it ourselves.

**S:** I didn't know about reactions to it here, but I knew about reactions to it in Norwich.

**Ratnasuri:** There are objections here, too.

**Dayanandi:** Very strong, one way or the other.

**S:** Yes. So it's not enough that it should be universal. If it is to be a rupa in a public shrine room it must also be general, which is somewhat distinct from the universal.

**Dayanandi:** What's the difference between general and universal?

**S:** I suppose in this context it means that the majority of the people using the shrine room with that image in it should be able to appreciate the universal expressed in that particular individual way. If they can't, however good the image is and however adequately it expresses the universal from the point of view of the artist, it isn't suitable as an image in a public shrine room. It may be, in some cases, due to lack of aesthetic appreciation on the part of the generality of people. It's not that the artist is wrong; it's just that the image is not suitable. It's not a value judgement but a judgement of practicality.

**Vajrapushpa:** It's a personal interpretation of that image. Surely the image itself is archetypal. The Buddha figure is ....

**S:** Well, in a general way the Buddha figure is archetypal, but if it's treated in too individual a way by the artist it ceases to be archetypal, it becomes too much - if it's too naturalistic, as it were, if for instance it's modelled on some living human being too closely, then it loses the archetypal quality. Perhaps that's also an important factor or an important consideration. It shouldn't look too much as though the artist has copied someone actually sitting there in front of her or in front of him.

\_\_\_\_\_: I think the big LBC's image is on the borderline in that way.

**S:** Mm. Those rupas are very finely done, the features are very finely drawn; perhaps too finely drawn for it to have a very, as it were, archetypal quality. Anyway, perhaps we should pass on.

*a) When the artist is pursuing art as a path, and in the process has to go deeply within herself, and because of that there is a danger of isolation, even alienation, from the Sangha, how should she deal with this danger?*

*b) Historically speaking, women have rarely produced great works of art. Would you comment on the tendency of women not to want to isolate themselves in order to produce greater art?*

I think there's a big assumption here. I think the assumption is that in order to produce great art you have to isolate yourself. I don't think this is historically correct. One can cite examples of writers, for instance, who haven't had to isolate themselves. What about Jane Austen? Under what conditions did she write her novels? No one would dispute that they are masterpieces; under what conditions did she produce them? Did she even have a room of her own in which to write? She wrote at a table in a corner with the rest of the family all around her, and if she was called upon to do something she just hid the writing and went and did whatever she was asked to do. And she produced what everybody agrees are masterpieces; not a single person, I think, would disagree.

It's the same with Walter Scott, whom I've been reading recently. Apparently he wrote in his study, but he never minded his children coming in and romping around, and he'd pause from his work and talk to them and tell them stories, and then he'd go back to his work. And sometimes people were laughing and joking in the room, eight or ten of them perhaps, and he'd just carry on with his writing.

**Vajrapushpa:** Very unusual. Have you read Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own'?

**S:** Yes, I did years ago, yes. But perhaps that's a bit precious, that sort of attitude, I mean. So therefore I think we can't assume that it's absolutely necessary to isolate oneself physically from other people in order to produce greater art. So therefore I don't think that the reason why women don't produce greater art is that they don't want to isolate themselves. I don't think that's an adequate explanation. But anyway, go back to the first part of the question: 'When the artist is pursuing art as a path' - it isn't clear what that means - 'and in the process has to go deeply within herself' - well, that's necessary, surely - 'and because of that there is a danger of isolation, even alienation, from the Sangha, how should she deal with this danger?' Well, when you are actually creating you do go deep within yourself and broadly speaking you don't want to be interrupted. But are you always in that state? Do you necessarily write or paint all day, every day? We may for a certain period, but I think, my own experience is that usually one works for part of the day and, at least in the evening, you quite welcome contact with other people. Isn't

that what usually happens?

In the past, have not artists, writers, painters, poets, often been quite sociable people and have spent quite a lot of time with others? Have they always locked themselves up for years on end to produce their masterpieces? One or two have done that, but there were some who led a notoriously sociable existence. Think of Byron.

I think perhaps this is an image of the artist which has developed in modern times - that he, or even she, is someone cutting themselves off from the rest of society, a very isolated figure, at odds with his or her age. Is it necessarily so? It might be so to some extent in our day and age, but perhaps we are not very representative.

**Vajrapushpa:** We felt it was necessary to go deep into ourselves, to produce anything worthwhile, and for most people it seemed necessary for that to have some physical solitude.

**S:** Yes, that's fair enough, but it doesn't mean you have that physical solitude all the time, or to such an extent that you become really isolated, even alienated, from your friends, especially your spiritual friends.

**Vajrapushpa:** Don't they also talk about the artistic temperament? It does seem to happen that if you are - well, maybe there's a danger of being individualistic ..... individuality.

**S:** But is there such a thing as the artistic temperament? Look at the different temperaments of people like Jane Austen, Scott, Jane Eyre (sic) , Virginia Woolf, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Bach, Milton: they all seem to have very different temperaments, but all to have been artists in their own way. Is there such a thing as 'the artistic temperament'? Again, perhaps we've got a stereotyped view in recent years of the artist as some wild bohemian figure at odds with society, leading a grossly immoral life. But if you look - what sort of life did Wordsworth lead? What sort of life did Milton? What sort of life did Byron? They all led very different kinds of lives, had different lifestyles. Sometimes were very respectable members of society. Look at Bach, often considered the greatest musician, the greatest composer, the West has produced: look at his methodical life, two wives, about 20 children, teaching choirboys, rehearsing, composing music for the local church or chapel; a steady, hard worker. Look at - well, there are so many like that. Look at T.S. Eliot in our own day, working most of the time in a bank -

\_\_\_\_\_ : With his rolled umbrella.

**S:** With his rolled umbrella.

**Mallika:** We talked about how we lack, as women, the singleness of purpose that there seems to be in many of the men that you've mentioned, and the women; that seemed to be the main -

**S:** Again, I'm not sure about that. I was reading a very interesting article recently in a magazine, I think it was - the London Review of Books, I think it was - the writer was discussing the Victorian novelists. And he was comparing the men novelists and the women novelists, especially the good ones. And he pointed out that, in most cases, in almost all cases, the male novelists had only turned to novel-writing when they failed at something else which they considered important; whereas the women novelists had known from the time that they were girls that they wanted to be novelists, and went straight ahead and were novelists, and produced book after book, in some cases for the greater part of their lives. There seems to be, in their case, greater singleness of purpose than in the case of the men novelists, which was quite interesting. The Bronte's, they were all of this type; Mrs. Gaskell; and he mentioned many, many minor novelists, some of whom had their novels published from the age of 18. The big exception, of course, was George Eliot, but even she started writing her sketches reasonably early; but she was apparently greatly lacking in self-confidence.

But nearly all of the Victorian women novelists knew exactly what they wanted to do, and went ahead and did it, whereas the men novelists, in almost all cases, turned to novel writing only when they'd failed at something else. Novel writing was a second best for them. So that's quite interesting.

**Dayanandi:** We found a little tendency amongst us to think in terms of just nurturing outside ourselves. If someone else needed something to be ready to go out from ourselves and not really our creation so much, or not to be ruthless enough to just pursue it but to maybe think in terms of being useful to other people at the expense perhaps of our own creation.

**S:** But look at Jane Austen. She was at the service of her family, but she pursued her writing none the less, and had done so since an early age.

**Dayanandi:** I'm just saying that we did find that tendency, that we felt that was the problem. (?)

\_\_\_\_\_: And maybe also - women seem to have been more successful at writing, because that's possible; one can compromise. You can't sculpt like that, for instance.

**S:** Well, sculpture is often a very strenuous occupation.

\_\_\_\_\_: Yes, and you must have a studio and big tools and -

**S:** Yes. But if women don't engage in that it's just due to social conditions rather than any inherent lack of talent, presumably.

\_\_\_\_\_: Well, but many women maybe didn't have the courage to pursue that art form because it requires - you can't compromise.

**S:** Well, men too are sometimes lacking in courage. So anyway, what is the question? 'Would you comment on the tendency of women not to want to isolate themselves in order to produce great art?' Well, I've commented. I think the question rests on an assumption which is unproven.

And as for the previous question, whether there is a danger of isolation, even alienation, from the Sangha - I don't think that that need be so. I think one can write, one can paint, one can sculpt and all the other things without necessarily losing touch with one's friends, one's spiritual friends. Very often, of course, one's friends may be among those people who are engaged in the same thing; think of the various literary and artistic brotherhoods that there have been - think of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, think of the way in which, say, in France writers have mixed in cafés and engaged in so much of discussion and dispute and so on. No lack of social life and contacts. Even in the case of poets, you read of poets holding weekly receptions, and other poets and writers going along.

I think it's a bit of a myth that the artist has to be isolated, has to be virtually alienated and work alone. When you're actually working, unless it's a co-operative venture - yes, at that time you may be isolated, but you're not working in that way all the time, by any means. Some writers, artists, and so on, have lived very sociable existences. Think of Rubens: he was a diplomat, and at the same time as he was painting pictures he was conducting various diplomatic missions.

\_\_\_\_\_: Maybe it's even necessary for the artists to get together with other - like in our Movement -

**S:** Sometimes it is. Some artists - including writers - like to talk over their work with others; some don't. I personally, with regard to my own writing, I don't feel any need to talk it over with other people; never have done. It might be just a habit that I've got into, but I feel no need to talk about my work. Though as my work for the day is done I'm quite happy to meet people and socialise and talk with them and so on.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Would you like to socialise with other writers?

**S:** Not particularly. [Laughter] It would depend on the nature of the writers, their temperament, their interests apart from their writing. I don't feel any particular need to socialise with other writers at all. Perhaps one has had enough of writing for the day, and would like to meet other people.

\_\_\_\_\_ : ..... meeting with your friends, other people could also be means of relaxation and inspiration ..... Charles Dickens used to go around .....

**S:** That's true, with his public readings -

\_\_\_\_\_ : - watching people, most of the time, .....

**S:** Yes, especially if you are a novelist, presumably you need to mix with other people and mix in society and observe people. Novels aren't written in isolation, I think, not total isolation.

Anyway, perhaps we'll leave that one. It's not really answering questions, but at least we're discussing them.

*Will you give us your view - [oh dear!] - on the connection between the 'vidyadharas' and art?*

I'm not sure why 'vidyadharas' particularly, and art. Why not Bodhisattvas? Anyway:

*What use can we make of the 'vidyadharas' and how do they relate to the 'dakinis'?*

I really don't know. I'm not quite sure what the question is getting at, or -

**Vajrapushpa:** Well, on the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead' seminar you made the comment in connection with 'vidyadharas' that it relates to art.

**S:** I wonder how I made that connection. I'm afraid I've forgotten all about it. You'll have to refresh my memory.

**Vajrapushpa:** I think you were talking about communication -

**S:** Ah, I see. Ah, the 'vidyadharas', yes, that's right, yes. It's a question of communication in general, isn't it, in the case of the 'vidyadharas'? I suppose if

there is a connection between the 'vidyadharas' and art it is because 'vidyadharas' are associated with the throat centre, which represents communication, and art is a form of communication, I assume - not that the 'vidyadharas' of, say, Tibetan or Indo-Tibetan mythology or symbolism have as such a precise definite connection with art; not that. That's taking it all too literalistically. But certainly, to the extent that 'vidyadharas' symbolise communication, they have a connection with art inasmuch as art itself is a form of communication, or can be a form of communication.

So 'what use can we make of the *vidyadharas*'? I'm not sure how one makes a use of them in this context. 'And how do they relate to the *dakinis*'? Well, one could say, I suppose, that if the 'vidyadharas' represent or symbolise communication, the 'dakinis' represent those emotional energies or forces which are behind the communication. One could look at it like that if one wanted to. But I think one mustn't look at these sort of figures too literalistically. In a sense they mean whatever you want them to mean, they mean whatever they mean for you. One works out one's own analogies and connections and so on. It isn't all sort of tabulated and ready to be learned. We're not dealing with facts, we're dealing with symbols.

**Vajrapushpa:** Could one say that the 'vidyadharas' are the masculine side of inspiration, and the 'dakinis' the feminine side?

**S:** I'm not sure about that.

**Vajrapushpa:** Govinda's book -

**S:** If the 'vidyadharas' represent communication, I suppose one could say that that was masculine inasmuch as it was active. I suppose one could, but I don't feel any inclination to! [Laughter] I suppose it's up to you. You can make them mean what you like, provided you establish an emotional connection and are not just playing around with the ideas in a -

**(End of side 1, side 2)**

in a purely theoretical way.

**Vajrapushpa:** Govinda has a mandala of 'vidyadharas', and their consorts are the 'dakinis'.

**S:** That's fair enough, within the traditional context, but here one is trying - in these questions - to go outside the traditional context. You could say, if you want

to summarise the relationship, no communication without inspiration. If the 'vidyadharas' represent communication, all right, 'dakinis' can represent inspiration. You can speak of masculine and feminine if you like.

All right, question 4.

*If we assume that talent is innate and can be developed with skills, would you give us your definition of talent, and advise on how we recognise whether we have it?*

I say: if you're bothered about whether you have it or don't have it, you just probably don't have it! (Loud laughter.) Because, if you can see, you don't ask yourself 'Can I see or not see?' You very quickly find out what your talents are, I think, in most cases, unless circumstances are very much against you. But even then, if you really do have the talent, it'll find its way - don't you think?

\_\_\_\_\_: Sometimes people discover it quite late in life.

**S:** Well, sometimes they haven't had time before. Think of Grandma Moses. When did she take up painting? How old was she - 75 or something like that? That poor old lady, she'd brought up all those children and all those grandchildren, she hadn't had a moment to herself until she was 75, and then she thought 'bit free now, what do I want to do? Oh yes, I'd like to paint.' And, yes, she had the talent, and she did it. The fact that she did it at the age of 75 showed that the talent was really there; she didn't ask herself: 'Do I have the talent or don't I have the talent?' No, she had the time, and one morning she just got out some brushes and some old canvas and she started painting, and that was it.

\_\_\_\_\_: If you had a talent for a particular thing, you'd be drawn to it, I think.

**S:** Of course, the word talent itself is a bit ambiguous, and sometimes we speak of talent, sometimes we speak of genius; and genius is generally considered, in England at least, to be a stronger word than talent. But I think if you have a very definite talent, the feeling at least to exercise it will be there, even though perhaps circumstances don't permit. I think the way to recognise whether you have a talent is whether you have the feeling to exercise that particular talent, to do whatever it is the talent represents, and whether you're able to persist even in the face of difficulties. Look at the difficulty some painters have had, some writers have had.

**Dayanandi:** It's the driving force behind talent.

**S:** I don't think you just have a talent in an abstract way. The urge to exercise the talent is part of the talent itself.

\_\_\_\_\_: Would you say exercising it is part of you becoming a true individual?

**S:** To the extent that becoming a true individual involves the development of all your positive higher potentialities, yes.

\_\_\_\_\_: So could you be a true individual if you did(n't?) have the circumstances to fulfil your talent?

**S:** I don't think you would be a full individual, no. I think there'd be some narrowing down of your individuality. Perhaps you'd have to develop compensations if you could. You could say the Bodhisattva was one who on account of his previous meritorious actions had created for himself in this birth the conditions which he needed to manifest fully his Enlightened individuality.  
[Pause]

Anyway, last question:

*As a result of our discussion group on Art and the Order, we have formulated the idea of establishing an Arts Centre in London which will provide artists in the Movement with a place to work and produce. -*

- artists in the narrower sense of visual artists, presumably: painters and sculptors, not writers?

**Mallika:** Oh yes, all the arts.

*We see this as being started and run by a management committee of women Order members. The Arts Centre would offer courses in the arts -*

- including writing? Ha ha, I'm very doubtful about the value of such courses. But anyway. I think visual arts are another matter, with certain technical skills and all that, and other things that you need.

*- taught by the artists to the general public, both men and women. Would you comment on this idea and give us your advice on how to provide this service for the community?*

The idea is a good one, undoubtedly, but as for how to provide this service for the

community, I'm not so sure that I can offer any advice, because I've never started an Arts Centre. I'd say, first of all, you need to get your women Order members. Then you'd need to get a place; and then you'd need to get a lot of money. Even I can see that.

**Mallika:** Assuming that we have all these ....

**S:** Well, fine, I'd say go ahead. I don't know how many women Order members you'd need - maybe half a dozen. I was going to say - I'm not sure what sort of place - you need a big place, and that presumably means a lot of money, and that presumably means approaching local authorities, charitable foundations, and so on. If I was an artist, I must say I'd just stick at my desk and peg away. [Laughter]

I think courses are especially useful where the visual arts are concerned, because you need space, which may not be available at home, whereas you can usually write at home. And you need equipment, you need canvases and easels, which are costly, and you need paints, you need brushes, you need all these things. Whereas if you're a writer, you just need some sheets of paper and a pencil, it's so much more simple. So I think probably the visual arts lend themselves to this sort of treatment, as it were, much more - music, too; because you may not have space for a piano at home, whereas at an arts centre you could have all these sort of things, studios and so on. So yes, I'm all in favour of the idea. I'd like to see it implemented, but I don't have any detailed idea as to how that could be done, just because of my own lack of experience. I can simply see that people are needed, a place is needed, and that money is needed. Those would seem to be the basic requirements. If one has got those, fine, go ahead.

**Sridevi:** Do you think it would be an effective way of communicating what we are doing to the wider society.

**S:** In what way?

**Sridevi:** Well, expressing our practice of the Dharma through the arts - like doing these courses and having exhibitions, having performances.

**S:** But the artists themselves would be expressing something through their work, not you. You'd just be organising them and providing facilities.

**Sridevi:** No, we'd be also the artists. [Laughter] That's the idea! We would have communication with invited artists as well, so there would be more communication with society through the arts.

**S:** Yes; that could be so. Though I'd say, if I was an artist, I'd keep a long way away from any such scheme, because anything organisational, if I was involved in it, would be time taken away from my creative work. I think this is one of the reasons why artists and writers and such people don't usually get together. They are happy to meet people and socialise and all that, but they are not happy about organising themselves as artists or as writers.

**Sridevi:** They are isolating themselves!

**S:** No, they're not. No, they don't find it necessary to socialise with other artists in order to get their artistic work done, even though they may find socialisation with people in general an important part of their lives.

**Sridevi:** It depends. Some artists seem to want this stimulation with other artists, but some don't.

**Mallika:** Maybe women do.

**Sridevi:** - want it more?

**Mallika:** Yes, and an Arts Centre is a place where one can get in touch with creativity - other people's creativity - and develop one's own.

**S:** But there's art galleries - where good work is on view. Wouldn't one normally go along to those?

**Mallika:** We're thinking of this as being a Buddhist arts centre.

**S:** Ah, mm. But then one has to think out - what is the difference between a Buddhist arts centre and an arts centre? What would be the difference in a practical way?

**Mallika:** That it's run by women Order members.

**S:** But that wouldn't be enough, because they'd have to run it in a way that was recognisably Buddhist, and how would they do that, exactly?

**Sridevi:** We thought we actually could have lectures on our vision of the arts, because it seems that there isn't an ethical basis for the arts in society, that we could express one.

**S:** But do we have a vision? Is there an agreed vision?

**Mallika:** Well, we thought this might be a way of developing a vision.

**S:** Yes, that's true.

**Sridevi:** Just reading your essays on the subject seemed to express a certain vision!

**S:** Oh dear! That one little essay written all those years ago! [Laughter]

**Sridevi:** Quite ....., we discovered. We thought this would be quite a positive contribution to the society where there isn't much vision about why arts - and ethics.

**S:** It really means the creation of a tradition, an artistic tradition affiliated, so to speak, with Buddhist spiritual tradition. This is what it really means. Which wouldn't be an easy thing to do, though it would be very worth while doing.

For instance, if you look at the work produced by Friends within the Movement, whether Order members or others - I'm thinking of visual work - does it notably differ from work by non-Buddhists, would you say? Is there anything identifiably Buddhist in it? I'm not thinking of subject matter but of style and feeling and approach.

**Dayanandi:** Positivity. .... anyway.

**S:** Positivity, perhaps. Are non-Buddhist artists normally not so positive, would you say?

**Dayanandi:** There's a lot of negative art about.

**S:** There is, that's true, yes, there is.

**Dayanandi:** We were even talking about the fashion for it to be like that, it's actually accepted, and whether people really did like it or .....

**S:** Indeed, yes. One thinks of other media, too: the film.

**Dayanandi:** Television. Newspapers. Music.

**S:** And fiction. A lot of it is very, very negative. You can even raise the question: can a work of art, a real work of art, be negative? You can even challenge certain

current assumptions. That raises the question: what is art? What is a work of art? Certainly from a spiritual point of view.

**Sridevi:** You could say that it must have an element of Insight, whether it's created by a Buddhist or not. But if we are developing our Insight we should have something to communicate.

**S:** Yes, irrespective of whether you have the talent to communicate it or not. Because lots of people have Insight - well, some people have Insight - but don't have, apparently, the talent to communicate that. Well, not in an artistic form; perhaps in some other way.

**Mallika:** Perhaps in the old days, though, it was communicated - well, historically speaking, it was communicated in the workshops of the great masters.

**S:** Indeed, yes, no doubt - they very often did have their workshops. Raphael had a workshop, Rubens had a workshop. Michelangelo didn't. Leonardo had a workshop. Workshops were very common, especially in the case of popular artists who had many commissions, and didn't have time to do them all themselves. They would just rough in the outline, and maybe do the faces, and leave all the backgrounds and drapery to their pupils. It was a sort of communal effort. In Shakespeare's time, plays were very often produced - or written - by two or more playwrights. There was the famous partnership of Beaumont and Fletcher. Quite a few Elizabethan plays were written by three and even four different playwrights working together. There was a predominant style, broadly speaking, so that the audience would not be conscious of any incongruity; not think, when the third act came on, 'Oh, good heavens, there's a completely different style here.' No, there was a general style, though there were differences as between the different writers, but they were differences within a general tradition, as it were.

**Dayanandi:** I think it would be really good to present a very strong, positive artistic image to the world. It would be really dynamic still but positive. The energy seems to be in negativity these days.

**S:** Yes, indeed, very much so.

**Dayanandi:** - and positivity is quite weak and boring, in a way, it has seemed romantic or -

**S:** It shouldn't be bland or anything of that sort. It's one of the things I appreciate about the pre-Raphaelites: they are often very positive. The colours that they use express positivity.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Also the whole idea of the arts can define and heighten your state of consciousness.

S: Indeed.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I don't think that exists outside the Movement, really. ....

S: You're probably right, yes. I must say that I myself have very little contact with the outside world, as it were; I take for granted quite a lot of things which I know are not taken for granted outside, and this is certainly one of them. To me this is a very familiar, obvious idea. But, for instance, I know that quite a few people have come across *The Religion of Art* and have been quite struck by it, in a way that has surprised me - people outside the FWBO; some of them have even written to me and come to see me. And I have been quite surprised, probably because I hadn't realised the extent to which such ideas are unusual, to say the least, in the world outside.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Apparently a woman came to Taraloka who had run Wrexham Arts Centre, and was very inspired to find this vision here, because she was disillusioned with how her friends thought of the arts.

S: Great, great. So one can see, if one had a Buddhist Arts Centre, it would be to encourage positivity and encourage the expression of that positivity through the medium of the arts as a means of helping people develop individually. One wouldn't be interested in experiment for experiment's sake, as some writers and artists and musicians are. It would be very interesting to have an exhibition of work by people within the FWBO. I was quite interested by the exhibition we had last year as part of - was it Wesak or FWBO Day?

\_\_\_\_\_ : FWBO Day.

S: In York Hall. I was quite impressed by that. The level wasn't all that high, considered purely from an artistic point of view, but clearly nearly all the paintings were expressive, I felt, of emotional positivity. I think that is an achievement in itself. I think if one was to organise a decent-sized exhibition, hopefully of work of some artistic value, that would come across very strongly, and perhaps would impress people, communicate something to people in itself.

Not many weeks ago, Maggie Jamieson brought up a whole lot of paintings to show me at Padmaloka, and it was very noticeable how positive they were. I am not able to say how good they were from an artistic point of view, but they certainly expressed emotional positivity, and they were interesting. I think it was Maggie Jamieson - yes.

**Dayanandi:** I think people want to have positive things in their homes actually, ..... you can go to Woolworth's and buy these pictures of horses jumping over surf and being very - quite horrible, but they are very positive in their way, pictures ..... I(?) like living with positive ... happy ....

**S:** Yes, even though the cultural level isn't high, basically it's a quite healthy tendency. But who would want to live, for instance, with a typical or representative Francis Bacon painting? It's bad enough to pass it quickly in the gallery. [Laughter] I always pass on, I don't even stop and look; I don't want to. Perhaps I should linger and look, but I don't.

\_\_\_\_\_: It makes you think.

**S:** I think quite enough as it is! I probably think too much anyway!

**Mallika:** But it might be good to have a place where the young artist could be encouraged to be positive.

**S:** Indeed, yes; because perhaps in the Arts Centre itself you could have a shrine room, a meditation room, and perhaps there could be meditation classes at the same time. Yes, indeed.

**Mallika:** Yes, we talked about that. And that, in a way, it would be hopefully offering to the people who are round about, at lunchtime, people in offices and so on having the possibility to come to a place that was creative, that was positive, that was Buddhist; and that they would be able to find the Dharma in that way.

**S:** That's true. Because this happens in Croydon with the Arts Centre there - or Independent Arts, as they call it now. That is, as it were, what I call consumer-oriented, whereas this would be more producer-oriented. It would be complementary, but I think it does work in much the same way. It isn't all that difficult to make the transition from the arts, in a real sense, to the spiritual life.

So this is going to be a ladies' project?

**Mallika** Yes!

**S:** Well, fair enough.

**Mallika** It's in embryo stage at the moment.

**S:** Suitable comparison, no doubt. It's not going to have any father?

\_\_\_\_\_: No?!

**S:** Well, there is the Buddha, the Buddha is the father.

**Mallika:** There will have to be a Chair -

**S:** Person? [Laughter]

**Mallika:** Yes.

**Ashokasri:** Mallika, did you not have a question on the discriminative faculty?

**S:** What was that?

**Mallika:** We had a question on the discriminative faculty. Was it not on the list? Then I must have missed it out.

\_\_\_\_\_: Can you remember it?

**Mallika:** If we have time to ask you - We discussed the discriminative faculty in relation to appreciating art, and to be an artist, and in producing your art, applying the discriminative faculty. In other words, you've discovered your talent and you have the urge to make a communication with your work of art. There is a problem in applying the discriminative faculty, and we wanted your view on how one applies that.

**S:** What does one mean here by discriminative faculty?

**Mallika:** In deciding whether it's good enough to communicate with. And, also, how one as the person who is viewing, the person who is receiving the communication, applies discriminative faculty there.

**S:** I think you can do that only with reference to a spiritual standard which exists outside the arts. Otherwise art becomes just a question of taste. I have found in the past that some of the most violent objections I've heard from people are with regard to matters of taste, because they feel that they have an equal right, so to speak - sometimes this is the actual language they use - as you do - to say what is art and what is not art. For instance, supposing you were to say that Raphael really is art but Francis Bacon isn't; someone else might say, 'Well, I feel that Francis Bacon is even better, even greater, than Michelangelo. Who are you to say that he

isn't?' In other words, they make it purely subjective. So if art is autonomous, as art has become nowadays, there is no way out of that difficulty. But if art is related to, or even expresses, an objective spiritual standard, then art can be judged by that. If you don't have that sort of standard, you can't even object to negativity in art, because, taking art as an autonomous discipline, you've no reason to object to it, but you can object to it on spiritual grounds, and you can say on spiritual grounds that a negative art isn't fully and truly art. But on purely artistic grounds I think you can't really say that.

So I think you can only discriminate in regard to your own aesthetic experience, your own work, and works of art in general, if you have a spiritual standard to fall back on outside that particular discipline itself. This is not at all in accordance with the modern outlook with regard to the arts, as I understand it, but I think this represents the Buddhist outlook.

\_\_\_\_\_ : There is the question of technique as well; how good is that, how well it's executed.

**S:** Well, that's a quite separate matter, and quite easy to deal with; because a painting which was quite negative in subject matter and effect could be technically quite accomplished, and you could recognise that accomplishment. And a work which was otherwise worthy and communicated a spiritual message could be very weak in technique, and that would weaken the effect of the picture, and you could quite easily point that out. Someone might not have got his perspective right, or have a very good colour sense, and so on.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Would that spiritual standard relate to levels like the positive *nidanas* and *dhyana* states?

**S:** I suppose ultimately it would, inasmuch as they represent a progressive series, and the spiritual standard would have to be related to spiritual life and spiritual progress. I must say I haven't thought about this very systematically, so these are just ideas, as it were.

**Dayanandi:** So it's as though you embody the spiritual standard yourself, somehow, in discriminating?

**S:** You do, yes. In a way, your own discrimination reflects that spiritual standard, yes.

**Mallika:** And if it's going against the current tide, then - ?

**S:** Well, so much the worse for the current tide, yes. For instance, when, say,

you're confronted - well, we've taken the example of Francis Bacon, so let's stay with that - supposing you confront a painting by Francis Bacon, you can go by your immediate emotional reaction: you don't feel happy with it. Well, you can justify that, as it were, by reference to a spiritual standard: that this particular painting has an emotionally negative effect, whereas art, as I understand it, a true art or art in the full sense, does not have that sort of effect; it's part of a progressive upward movement, which in the more specific sense is the spiritual life itself.

\_\_\_\_\_: Bhante, what if Bacon's art, for instance, doesn't have a negative effect?

**S:** Oh, I'm just taking the example of a rather unpleasant picture by Bacon. I'm not saying he's painted nothing but that.

\_\_\_\_\_: I was just thinking that maybe he is seeing things as they really are or something like that, maybe a certain part of the Wheel of Life things do look like that and maybe he's just showing what they look like in a certain part of the Wheel. Maybe he could be quite positive while he is showing it.

**S:** I wonder. Yes, because certainly you can paint, say, a picture of an execution in such a way that it is uplifting because it reminds you of impermanence and so on. But the sort of picture I'm thinking of is the kind of picture - you don't get it just in the modern period - which seems to indulge in the negativity or to enjoy the negativity. You get a lot of this in late Renaissance and baroque religious painting, where there are so many crucifixions and martyrdoms and chopping off of heads, and you feel that the artist, or perhaps the artist's public too, has a very unhealthy interest in that particular material.

It's very interesting to go, for instance in Italy, through an art gallery - and there are lots of them in Italy - where you start off with the early medieval period and you go right through into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it's very interesting to see the deterioration of feeling, and its increasing preoccupation, especially after the - what do they call it? What came after the Reformation? (blank silence) Oh dear, I've forgotten the term - Renaissance, Reformation - what came after the Reformation, sponsored by the Council of Trent, that movement in the Catholic Church, what was it called? - which is anti-Reformation?

**Mallika:** Counter-Reformation.

**S:** Counter-Reformation! Yes! From the time of the Counter-Reformation you see such a change; a coarsening of feeling, a preoccupation with scenes of

martyrdom, lots of blood, realistic depictions of severed necks and things of that sort.

\_\_\_\_\_ : We have that now.

**S:** So it's not just a representation of it in the interests of reality, it's a sort of pandering to a very depraved taste; and I think the two are quite distinct. And I think - I won't be too sure of this, but I think that in at least some of his paintings Bacon is wallowing in negativity. Perhaps he doesn't always do it; I don't know.

**Sridevi:** I find some of Bacon's paintings seem to give this feeling that material objects aren't fixed, that he's trying to show that - don't take things as different to me (?) .....

**S:** Well, one can sometimes do that; but one can, for instance, do it with an orange, or one can do it with a tree. It doesn't have to be a chopped-off head, for instance. I'm not saying he does do pictures of chopped-off heads - it's an illustration. But one can recognise when someone has a vision of Reality which may involve aspects which are unpleasant to the ordinary person, one can distinguish between that and someone's actual almost revelling in negativity and destructiveness, and even enjoying it. And I take Bacon as an example of that sort of thing - whether justly or not.

**Ashokasri:** It's interesting that he doesn't seem to work like that. He seems to communicate himself very positively as a person.

**Ratnasuri:** Yes, that's ..... He enjoys people not liking his paintings, .....

**S:** Oh dear, he seems to have some sort of complex; seems to have a martyr complex. Seems to be a bit of a masochist. Or perhaps he's one of these over-individualistic people who think that the more individualistic they are the greater artist they must be. If they are offending everybody, they must be original, and if they're original they must be great. I'm just speculating; I don't know really enough about Bacon's work, but I've seen examples of it from time to time. It did seem emotionally quite negative.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I think of that more in modern music, where they've actually moved away from the more formal construction of symphony or -

**S:** And where sometimes the music is quite painful to listen to.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Yes. Sometimes I wonder, because one has to move on with time

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**S:** Does one? Oh dear, does one? I wouldn't agree at all! Why? I want to go back, I don't want to move forward!

\_\_\_\_\_ : ..... prefer the old traditional, but I have tried to listen to it, but it's very painful, because there isn't any construction, there's no poetry.

**Sridevi:** That's what people said about Mozart first, because they hadn't learned to listen.

**S:** Oh, did many people say it, or very much? He was on the whole very popular in his day. Otherwise he wouldn't have survived, because he had to sell his music. No, occasionally he indulged in a chord which at that time was considered to be - what's the opposite of harmony?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Discord.

**S:** A discord, yes. But that was quite occasional and quite exceptional. On the whole his music was greatly appreciated. The same with Beethoven. The same with Haydn.

\_\_\_\_\_ : But they did create something new. You can't stand still.

**S:** Yes, that's true, but it wasn't so new that people couldn't appreciate it. Usually they did appreciate it. I think in modern times we overdo the idea of the unappreciated artist. In former times very often the artist depended on his art for a living. If he didn't please people he starved.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Some people who understand it. (?)

**S:** I've been reading about some of the women novelists - maybe we should end on this note - I've been in a way surprised by the way in which they were appreciated from the very beginning, even some quite mediocre ones, as we would say now, where sometimes the feminists would give you to understand that a woman's work was never appreciated; but history doesn't really bear that out. The Brontes were appreciated, Mrs. Gaskell was appreciated. I don't cite the case of George Eliot because she published originally under the name of a man, but even when it was known that she was a woman there was no loss of popularity whatever. Jane Austen was appreciated, Fanny Burney was appreciated - very much so, from the very beginning. They were hailed as great writers almost from the start.

So I think it's a bit of a myth, the unappreciated artist, whether male or female. Some artists have been unappreciated, but I don't think it's a general rule by any means. If you think of the occasion when Cimabue painted his Madonna and the ordinary people of Florence were so delighted with it they took it in procession. Think of the response of ordinary Athenians to the great sculptures that were produced in their city. They may not have understood them fully - well, certainly they didn't - but they understood enough of them to appreciate them. And they appreciated the dramas of Euripides and Aeschylus and Sophocles; these were mass entertainment. They weren't rarefied products just for a few connoisseurs. Think of all the people who appreciated Dickens - maybe not always for his highest qualities; all the people who appreciate Shakespeare. Shakespeare is not rarefied, though there are depths in him that not everybody can fathom, by any means; but most people understanding English can appreciate a Shakespeare play. He is not rarefied in his appeal.

So I think we have overplayed this idea of the misunderstood, unappreciated artist. There have been some such, but I don't think they have been the general rule, by any means.

\_\_\_\_\_ : In a way they wouldn't have continued creating their works if they were unappreciated at the time.

**S:** Some might have done; some did. But think of the enormous popularity of Scott; Thackeray; Dickens. It's interesting that the greatest writers of the last few centuries have been among the most appreciated and the most popular. There have been sometimes others who were not nearly as good, but were more popular for various reasons. But none the less the greatest were not by any means the least appreciated.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Seems nowadays that film has that kind of popular mass appeal. A lot of films are very negative, but also there are some quite good, positive films, and they are .....

**S:** Yes. I sometimes think that the medium of the century is this film, not the novel. The novel is old hat. The last century was the century of the novel. I think probably really creative work is being done in film.

**Mallika:** Well, the novel becomes the film, and -

**S:** Yes, yes indeed.

**Dayanandi:** I think there's some quite popular sculpture, if you think of the

outdoor sculpture that children play in, and those kind of popular -

**S:** Hm. I find it difficult to believe that a heap of bricks is a work of art. (Laughter.) I'm sorry to be so old-fashioned. I hope I won't walk into your Arts Centre one day and see a great heap of bricks and say, 'This looks very untidy', and take a closer look and see '*Exhibit 23: Difficulties in Meditation.*' (Roars of laughter.) Or walk a little further on and see an old drainpipe lying across another one, labelled '*Relationship*'! [Laughter] No, I don't want to see that sort of art.

**Mallika:** I don't think we have that in mind.

**S:** Or a portrait of Mallika with three noses, and half an eye '*Mallika, 1988*'. We shall see, won't we?

**Mallika:** Well, it certainly won't be a self-portrait.

**S:** Are you going to be an actual contributor to the work of the centre, in the artistic sense?

**Mallika:** In the management sense, to begin with.

**S:** But not just managerial?

**Mallika:** No.

**S:** And would there be scope for poetry readings?

**Mallika:** But of course!

**S:** Good. I must get in my own little ..... [ sounds like 'whore' ]

**Mallika:** You talked about classes in creative writing: I think that we would see the creative writing that's done in terms of it being the base for *Dakini*, and encouraging people to write, and get ..... begin to -

**S:** Quite cunning. Do you know, by the way - this might be of interest to you - about the Naropa Institute? Is it Naropa? - Ginsberg is associated with a sort of creative writing institution in the States, set up under Trungpa's general auspices. They've got a temple, what is that? - oh dear; I can't think of it at the moment. But there is an institute where they hold their classes and courses in creative writing, and get people mainly from the alternative literary scene to come and talk and read their work and conduct workshops. It's something to do with - it's poetry mainly,

but also other forms of literature. You haven't heard of it? Oh dear, I'll think of it at some time. But it might be interesting to find out about that. It's the School of Something Something Poetics - not alternative poetics, but something like that. So there is an association there - this is perhaps the significant point - of the arts with Buddhism, because Ginsberg is into both, and -

**[end of side No second tape made]**

*Transcribed by Joyce Mumford  
Checked and Contented by Silabhadra*