

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

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[Women's Order Convention 1987]

Those Present: All those attending the Women's Order Convention.

_____: has already led or taken seven question and answer sessions with us in small groups on particular topics, and this evening he's agreed to accept general questions. So Bhante - Questions and Answers.

Sangharakshita: I think they're miscellaneous rather than general. [Laughter]

We start off with something quite nice and straightforward.

Order members seem to be travelling around the world visiting Buddhist temples. We may want to express that we are more than just Buddhist lay people. What sort of ritual expression could we use to show our respect and to other Buddhists? Should we try to adapt to each local tradition or we should we have a unified way of expressing ourselves?

I don't think the situation is really so difficult as the question perhaps suggests. I think the most important thing is that when one enters a Buddhist shrine or temple, that is to say wherever there are images of the Buddha and/or Bodhisattvas, one should show one's respect in some quite definite traditional manner. That is one should show it either by prostrating oneself or by just a very deep bow at least. Usually there will be facilities for lighting candles, incense sticks, and even for making other offerings. If you're just a little observant you can see what the local custom is.

I must however warn you that in most Buddhist temples you are expected to bring your own candles and incense, or if they are available on the premises you are expected to pay for them. Usually in the FWBO we provide them, as it were, but that isn't the general custom in the East. One must remember that. Otherwise people would think it extremely odd you helped yourself to the candle and incense and didn't pay for them. So I think these are the main things. In many Buddhist countries you find there's no, as it were, congregational worship. People, whether lay people or monks and nuns, are free just to go along to the temple and just worship as they wish. If the place seems fairly frequented and if you, and perhaps other FWBO Friends, other Order members who may be with you, wish to perform a puja of your own, say the Sevenfold Puja, it probably would be advisable just to seek out the monk or priest or nun in charge and just ask if they'd mind you doing that, and say it will take about twenty minutes or half an hour, just so that you don't interrupt anything else that might have been planned. I know that in the Centres, in the temples, of the Mahabodhi Society in India, that was always possible, it was always happening. Different parties of pilgrims would be performing their own devotions in the shrine room, but usually it's advisable to check one isn't going to clash with any regular puja or regular ceremony that may be held there. One shouldn't really have any difficulty at all.

And also, of course, wear your kesas. Perhaps wear them anyway when visiting a temple, just to make it clear that you aren't just a tourist, not even just an ordinary lay Buddhist. Otherwise if you just walk in in slacks and a shirt, well who's to know the difference

between you and an ordinary tourist, especially if you're carrying an camera and wearing sunglasses [Laughter] or something of that sort. At least show that you are a committed ordained Buddhist in that sort of way. I don't think there's any real difficulty, and just be a little sensitive to local customs. In some Buddhist countries they remove their shoes. Not only before entering the temple, even at the gate in some cases, so just keep an eye open, either for notices to that effect or for other shoes just to one side of the gate. You then know that you should remove yours. Just check whether there's anybody in charge to look after them, so that they're not stolen while you're inside. That does sometimes happen. Yes, I'm afraid. I don't think there's any real difficulty at all.

With regard to adapting to each local tradition, I don't think that really matters very much. The variations aren't really so great when it comes to bowing or prostrating or chanting or offering candles or offering lights, even if there is some difference in your way of doing things. People understand that you are doing basically the same thing. I don't think there would be any difficulty in this respect. Is that quite clear? I think very often people will be only too glad to see Buddhists from the West paying their respects to the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas in that way.

To experience joy in dependence upon faith one needs a clear conscience, however, although faith may be present, one's conscience may not be completely clear due to past negative mental states and actions of which one may not be fully aware. I have found it helpful to recite confessional verses on a regular basis. To what extent would you recommend the extended practice of reciting confessional verses as a means of clearing negative mental states accumulated from the past? Could you suggest any other practices which would particularly help in this regard?

I think it's a really very good idea to recite confessional verses, especially perhaps those from the Sevenfold Puja and/or from the Sutra of Golden Light. There are verses there which we know very well, with which we're very familiar - recite them as often as one feels the need to do so. In Mahayana countries it's very often a practice not only to recite confessional verses but, at the same time - I don't mean literally at the same time but in that same connection - to light incense and to make a number of prostrations. So that also is a useful practice, and of course the recitation of the Vajrasattva mantra, as well as the visualisation of Vajrasattva and the reciting of the connected verses and so on. All these things one can do. One can take it that there are negative mental states and actions coming from the past, sometimes the pretty recent past, of which one needs really to purge oneself. So the recitation of confessional verses, as well as all the other things I've mentioned are really very useful, even necessary.

Yes, one could also perhaps suggest - this is a common practice in some parts of the East, that before reciting the confessional verses, depending on circumstances and exactly where you are, you have a wash - at least wash your hands and face, even a bath, especially if you're in India - Indians normally do bathe before undertaking any religious practice. That does certainly help create the right sort of mental attitude.

In a recent article in 'Shabda', Sasannaratna wrote that he thought many friends, mitras and even Order members seemed to lack a real enthusiasm and love for the Dharma as a source of personal happiness and that they often show a split between a grosser kind of hedonism and a rather wilful and sombre approach to spiritual activities.

I haven't noticed it this week. [Laughter]

He thought that a healthy hedonism was lacking in the movement and that we could encourage Friends and mitras to develop a more pleasure seeking attitude towards spiritual growth, and to be less problem oriented. Do you think that there is something in this point of view? If so what can be done about it?

I think perhaps we are still a bit too problem oriented on the whole. I think it is important that we do learn to delight in the Dharma, to rejoice in the Dharma and really enjoy the Dharma. I think there are all sorts of ways in which we can do that. Well obviously you should enjoy every aspect of Dharma life and Dharma activity - even perhaps the confession of sins. Faults, sorry! [Laughter] You can enjoy decorating the shrine, you can enjoy performing a puja, you can enjoy meeting your friends, you can enjoy a Dharma discussion, you can enjoy going for a walk with someone, you can enjoy being alone, you can enjoy meditating, you can enjoy reading the sutras. If the Perfection of Wisdom is a bit too heavy, well never mind, read the Jataka stories! [Laughter]

I was thinking recently we ought to make much more of the Jataka stories. I don't think we read them enough. It did occur to me the other day, and here I'm expressing a completely new idea that no one has heard before, [Laughter] which is to the effect that we could regard the Jataka stories as the Old Testament of Buddhism.[Laughter] Now, what on earth do I mean by that? You know very well - those of you who were once upon a time, Christians or something of that sort - that in the Christian religion there's a bible isn't there, you all know that I think, a book called the bible, [Laughter] a fat book. Well it's divided, in case you don't know into two main parts [Laughter throughout]. One is called the Old Testament and one is called the New Testament, and the Old Testament consists of a number of books produced by the Jews. The New Testament consists of books centring upon the life and teaching of someone called Jesus who was a Jew but he was a rather different kind of Jew [Laughter] because unlike other Jews he rose from the dead [Laughter] which was rather extraordinary. Some people have been talking about it ever since! [Laughter] But anyway, these two parts each consisted of a number of different works of very different theories and in very different styles. Things like poetry, history, biography and so on, so they're all bound up and called 'The Bible'.

Actually the Old Testament is very different from the New Testament, as those of your who've ploughed through the whole work might have noticed. In a way the Old Testament or the books of the Old Testament are much more general. They appeal to much more basic human emotions. Not always to very positive ones, whereas broadly speaking the New Testament is more refined and spiritual. So in much the same way, the Jataka stories are more down to earth. They're not philosophical, they don't contain always very lofty spiritual teachings. There's often a sound moral but there are also very interesting stories, interesting anecdotes, character sketches, all that sort of thing, even verses. So they've a much wider appeal than some of the more, as it were, sophisticated or profound works with which we are perhaps more familiar. So just as some Christians find it easier to read the books of the Old Testament than the books of the New, we perhaps in some cases might find a sort of refreshment in the Jataka stories, of which there are five hundred and fifty, that we don't find always in the sublimer scriptures. Some of the Jataka stories are very down to earth indeed and give you a very vivid picture of social and religious life in the period probably just before and just after the time of the Buddha. You probably know from '*The Eternal Legacy*' that Jataka stories are mainly stories taken from Indian folklore, legend and so on, and sort of incorporated into Buddhism by making the leading character, the Bodhisattva, that is Shakyamuni, in a previous existence. But that's very important actually, because it shows that - I think I've mentioned this in my paper on '*The Bodhisattva, Evolution and Self Transcendence*' that in each story, or nearly every story

there's a sort of growing point. That growing point is usually embodied in the figure of the Bodhisattva. So you get the impression as though in every single human situation, even though sometimes it's a bit murky, sometimes even with a criminal element or an element of definite unskilfulness, there is a growing point, there is a point of connection ultimately with the spiritual path, and this is really quite encouraging. Because sometimes, in certain moods, you don't want to preoccupy yourself entirely with the spiritual path - you want something a bit more entertaining in certain moods, but you want to maintain the link with the spiritual path at the same time, and I think the Jataka stories are very useful in this respect. They've all been translated. They're all in print in English, so they're the sort of thing that we can dip into. So yes we can enjoy them. They're excellent stories, some of them. Some are very funny, some are quite gruesome, but they're all very human and yes, as I said, we can really enjoy them and take delight in them.

So yes I think, probably in the FWBO, in the movement as a whole, we need to enjoy our spiritual life much more than we do. I wonder why we don't. Is it a hangover from Christianity? Is it because we're burdened with so many psychological problems, or is it because we haven't really realised yet that the spiritual life is enjoyable. The Dharma is enjoyable and every aspect of it is enjoyable. Anyway perhaps enough about that.

Perhaps I could also suggest that if you're in a more studious mood, you read the book review on '*Hedonism and Spiritual Life*' in '*Alternative Traditions*' - I think that makes things rather clear, from a more theoretical point of view, that the spirit of enjoyment and pleasure even needs to be associated with, even wanting to harmony with, the spiritual life. Spiritual life can't be just a matter of duty.

All right.

I recently experienced a death in my family. Since the person was old, faced death positively and I was in good communication with her, her death was a positive experience for me. However, I am finding it difficult to come to terms with the fact that her death is final - I shall not see her again. Since I have no recollection of previous lives or of ever having known anyone I am close to now in a previous life, I cannot see that I will meet her again in a future life in any recognisable form. So it seems that she, with all her particular qualities is gone for good. Is this a nihilistic view? If so, how can I develop a more positive view or a different perspective on this aspect of death?

So yes, I think it is true that she or whoever, with all her particular qualities, is gone for good so far as we are concerned, because we don't see her again, as far as we know we won't see her again, and usually when one thinks of a person, well one thinks, among other things, of the physical body and that is an important part of their personality. That's certainly gone. But I'd look at it, and do in fact look at it, in a different sort of way. If you've known somebody, whether for a short period or a long period, even when the association comes to an end, nothing can take away from you the fact that you've known that person. And with regards to any human experience, whether it's that of friendship with another person or anything else, it must come to an end. It cannot but be finite, but at the same time, it is, so to speak, a permanent part of what we may call the structure of the universe.

_____:

S: Well, if we look at something that is past from the standpoint of the present, well it's

past. But why should we look at it just from the standpoint of the present? From a point of view, we may say, outside time, outside past, present and future, everything is present. The past is past only from our particular limited point of view. So there is a sense in which everything that has happened always happens, and always will happen. It's always there in a sense. Not in time but outside time. So nothing is lost. They don't have to go on existing in order to exist. The fact that they have existed means that they do exist. In other words we shouldn't be so limited by our time vision. We shouldn't identify ourselves with the present as much as we do. Time is ultimately, I suppose, a subjective point of view.

I became very convinced of this at a relatively early age because I had some precognitive experiences. I think I've spoken about these before. That is to say they all happened between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and they used to occur quite spontaneously and I'd see what was going to happen. Nothing extraordinary about it. I'd usually see what was going to happen about half an hour before it actually did happen, and sure enough after half an hour, those things would happen. For instance people would come into the room and say certain things. I knew exactly what they were going to say because I'd seen it all before. And the precognitive experience was just like watching a film. I'd as it were be looking, like this just in thin air and I'd see this sort of film, and I'd know that that was going to happen. This happened to me a number of times and, as I said, quite spontaneously, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. So this convinced me that time was subjective. This is what I concluded from that. That I could experience in the present, so to speak, something that was, so to speak, in the future. The difference between past, present and future is made by the mind. Time is subjective or, in Buddhist terminology, the terminology of the Abhidharma, time is a Prajnapti, a concept, it's not a thing. It's just part of the way in which we perceive existence. It's not an existence itself, except to the extent that the way in which we perceive things, as a way, does exist.

So this may sound a bit philosophical but actually it's really quite practical. Just reflect when you've lost someone, so to speak, well the fact that they don't continue to exist doesn't invalidate the fact that they have existed. Nothing can undo that ever. Nothing can undo the fact that they have existed and that you have known them. So in a sense so long as you exist, they exist. I think one should reflect in this way. Perhaps the physical body isn't there now, but it isn't just that there's a memory of them. There is a memory of them but there's more than a memory of them. You recognise, you realise, that inasmuch as they existed in the past, in a sense they always exist, and they can't die. So I think in such cases, well with regard to all experiences, especially all precious experiences, one can reflect in this way. You can't lose that.

_____: How does that link up with fidelity? (*obscured by microphone noise*)

S: I think it goes deeper than fidelity. If you really realise this it goes deeper than fidelity, because fidelity in the sense that I've explained it so far, exists within time, doesn't it, and space. You realise the extent to which you're conditioned by those things and you just try to rise above them or especially above space. The fact that you're physically separated from the other person doesn't mean that you no longer bear them in mind. You don't have to perceive them with your physical eyes in order to be aware of them and to maintain your relationship with them.

Marichi: There's a sort of similar difference with memory and saying that this is deeper in memory.

S: Yes, because to realise it fully you really need to have an experience of going outside time. Well you could say with regard to fidelity you, in a sense, go outside space. In this

case you go outside time, so in a way they're complimentary. Because I have sometimes reflected that - I haven't thought about these things for years - here we are now, we are together in the same space and the same time, aren't we. Well all right, you can be together in the same space but not in the same time. You can also be together in the same time but not in the same space. So when someone is dead, what does that mean?

_____ : That you're not in the same space.

_____ : You're not in the same time.

S: But in the case of absence what does that mean? They're in the same time but they're not in the same space, so there is that kind of difference. So I think if you realise that someone, though they have died, they haven't, in a sense, ceased to exist, you have to go beyond space and time, as it were. Whereas in the case of fidelity it seems you only have to go beyond space. But yes you could speak of a fidelity beyond space and time. Also a fidelity to those who are dead as well as to those who are living. You don't forget them because they're dead - or it's not simply that you don't forget them, they are still alive for you, because they did exist, they always exist.

_____ : I was just thinking about bad experiences in connection with people who are (). Is this how karma is () somewhere. Those things could never....

S: Yes you can never undo what you've done, good or bad. You could look at karma in that sort of way. You are never free from it. It's always got to work itself out. Well perhaps that's a slight overstatement because, according to the Abhidharma, there are weaker forms of karma which exhaust themselves anyway, even if they haven't actually borne fruit in the form of a vipaka. But all serious karmas must, sooner or later - usually sooner - bear fruit, yes. So the fact that an action was committed in the past doesn't mean that it's negatory, doesn't mean that it's not going to have any effects, yes. So in a sense it still exists because it's still able to produce effects. In some cultures people are very aware of the presence of the dead. They feel a sort of communion with them, a continuity with them. They feel themselves surrounded by them. Sometimes they think of them as continuing to exist as spirits, as the ancestors. We don't have perhaps that so strongly nowadays. But even that isn't quite the same thing as what I was talking about.

So we need to realise that time is subjective. It's not an absolute, it's relative.

Would you comment on the significance of women ordaining women, historically and otherwise?

I'm not quite sure what the question means actually. Significance? of women ordaining women. I suppose one thing means that that they are able to ordain them or qualified to ordain them. Does the question mean only women ordaining women? Because it says historically. What is the Buddhist tradition in this respect, at least the Theravada tradition? Does anyone know?

_____ : Women don't ordain women.

S: Yes they do.

_____ : It's backed up by men.

S: But it's backed up by men, yes.

Parami: It's not only women.

S: It's not women only ordaining women, whereas in the case of the Western Buddhist Order we have had women only ordaining women without the necessity of any backup from the men. Miss Horner goes into all this in her book, *'Women under early Buddhism'*, yes. So if one is asking about the significance of women only ordaining women I suppose it represents, in a way, the spiritual autonomy of women. I suppose you could say that. But did the questioner have anything else in mind?

_____: I was interested to know about the historical perspective. When you decided this would happen.

S: That what would happen?

_____: In the Western Buddhist Order. I wasn't aware how it linked up with tradition. Was it the first time in history or not?

S: Well, it depends what one is asking about. If one is asking about Bhikkhunis, well the tradition is, certainly in the Theravada and the Sarvastivada, that Bhikkhunis are ordained, not jointly but as it were successively, by men and by women. That the ordination by women has to be ratified, as it were, by the ordination by men. But in the Buddhist world there are other - how shall I say? - kinds of 'nuns', as we would call them in English, who are not Bhikkhunis in the full sense. I believe that sometimes they have been ordained just by women, but I won't be sure of that. Certainly sometimes they're ordained only by men. For instance Dharpo Rimpoche once ordained a French woman as a sramaneri. She couldn't be ordained as a Bhikkhuni because there were no Bhikkhunis to give her the necessary ordination, but he and other Bhikkhus, Tibetan monks, ordained her as a sramaneri, but there was no ordination for her, even as a sramaneri, by other ordained women.

So in a way, yes, I suppose it does represent not a complete breach with tradition because women were ordained by women in the past, even in the case of bhikkhunis, but they weren't ordained only by women. That is where I think the innovation comes in. But I think it is an innovation which is in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism. I think it's important that, on the whole at least, women should be ordained by women and men by men, because usually women get closer to women than do men, and men get closer to men than do women, inasmuch as they live in single sex communities usually, go on single sex retreats and so on. So it would be a bit odd if you were ordained by someone with whom you had had very little contact, inasmuch as they belonged to the opposite sex, unless the ordination is to become a pure formality which probably wouldn't be desirable.

So I think it is a quite practical arrangement. An arrangement which is in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism, though it may not be fully in accordance with the letter of Buddhist tradition that women are ordained by women and men by men. I wouldn't like to rule out the odd exception. I wouldn't like to make necessarily a hard and fast rule, but I think that broadly speaking the arrangement that we seem to be developing is the best one in the circumstances. When we did have those ordinations in India they seemed to go off very well and everybody was happy with them, men and women alike.

_____: I got the impression from *'Golden Drum'* that other Buddhist groups might question it because it was a breach with tradition. I think it's important.....

S: They might but what about their breaches with tradition in various ways!? Yes! Also

I think we need to be clear about the fact that in the East, in the Buddhist East, there isn't just one completely unified Sangha, rather like the Roman Catholic Church in the West. There are a number of different Sanghas, all of them mutually exclusive, in the sense that they don't confer ordinations jointly. For instance when I was ordained as a bhikkhu there was a Tibetan incarnate lama present, but he wasn't admitted inside the 'Sema', the, as it were, consecrated area within which the ordination took place, because his lineage was not recognised. Had he sat within the consecrated area it would have invalidated the ordination. In Theravada countries you find that bhikkhus belonging to one Nikaya do not perform 'Sanghakammas' as they're called - official acts of the Sangha - including ordination, together. They perform them separately. This is not generally known in the West but this is the position.

And what about those who develop quite different traditions like the different Zen schools. They don't have an ordination similar to that of the Theravadins. The Theravadins wouldn't recognise their ordinations. What about the Shin Shu people? They don't have ordinations in the strict sense at all. They regard them as belonging to the path of self effort and they follow the path of dependence on the other power.

So throughout the Buddhist world you've got a number of different Sanghas. observing in some cases different rules, and they don't recognise one another in the sense of recognising one another as properly ordained according to their criteria, but they're polite to one another and they're friendly when they meet. Not like followers of different churches in the West until fairly recently. So the Western Buddhist Order takes its place from a general Buddhist point of view as one Sangha among a number of Sanghas, and there's no reason why we shouldn't be friendly towards them and why they shouldn't be friendly towards us. So it isn't that there is the one great unified Sangha in the East and we are out on a limb somewhere - no! That's not the position at all. It'll take them a little time to get used to us just because we're new. Twenty years is not a very long time in the history of Buddhism. In a way they're quite right to wait and see how we develop. Maybe they'll wait a couple of hundred years. Never mind, we'll just carry on. There are other Sanghas newly formed. Look at Fujuguruji's Sangha. That's a new Sangha, which has branched off from the main Nichiren stem. Look at Lama Govinda's 'Arya Maitreya Mandala' - that's a Sangha. Look at Jiu Kennett's reformed Soto Zen school - that's another Sangha. Then there's the 'Diamond Sangha' somewhere in America I think it is.

So yes, there are these Sanghas, these Orders, in different parts of the Buddhist world, so, as I said, we take our place among them and let's see what influence, if any, we have on the others. Or perhaps what influence they have on us. But the Theravadins unfortunately often, despite their own internal differences, regard themselves as The Sangha in a really quite arrogant way sometimes and don't like to recognise others as connected in the way that they are. This is rather unfortunate but they are learning to respect other Sanghas, not only ourselves but Mahayana Sanghas. Within my memory Theravada bhikkhus wouldn't recognise Tibetan monks as monks, because they wore maroon robes instead of yellow ones, but broadly speaking, they do recognise them now.

So I think it's important when one does travel around in the East, to make it clear that one is not just a lay Buddhist, but one does belong to an Order, and wear one's kesa and, if one has an opportunity, make it clear exactly what that Order is. I think we're unique in being a unified - maybe not quite unified - I was going to say being a fully unified Order - I think Jiu Roshi's reformed Soto Zen Order is a unified Order. That is you have one Order for both men and women. Not separate Orders.

_____ : Is the kesa recognised? Would people recognise the kesa in the East?

S: Not necessarily. People connected with or having some knowledge of Japanese Buddhism would certainly recognise it, but people in Theravada countries wouldn't be familiar with it. But they'd recognise the Three Jewels if you pointed them out, I think, and you'd have just to explain your position. Making it clear that you were neither nuns, in the case of women, nor lay women, but you were committed and ordained Buddhists. In Theravada countries this is a category they don't understand. They have difficulty in understanding it. In Mahayana countries it's not quite the same because there the Bodhisattva Ideal and Bodhisattva Ordination act as a unifying factor. But eventually even the Theravadins will learn. They may not agree with us but at least they'll perhaps have a clear idea of what we are and what we represent.

Jayaprabha: What was the name of the other unified Order that you mentioned?

S: There was Jiu Roshi's, I think they call it 'The Reformed Soto Zen Order', and then there was Lama Govinda's 'Arya Maitreya Mandala' which describes itself as a Vajrayana Order. I also mentioned the 'Diamond Sangha' which is a Zen Order in the United States. I think we're the only Order though that is based on the Going for Refuge and the Ten Precepts.

Parami: Rather than lifestyle.

S: Rather than lifestyle and also rather than the particular type of practice. In the case of Fujiguruji's Sangha, well it's based on a particular practice, that is to say the recitation of 'Namyé Ho Rengye Kyo' and beating the drum. In the case of Jiu Roshi's Reformed Soto Zen Order, it's definitely based on the practice of Soto Zen, especially Soto Zen meditation. In our case we're just Buddhist, that's another unique factor or quality, and we base ourselves on what we believe to be fundamental in Buddhism, and also common, did they but know it, to all Buddhist schools, all forms of Buddhism, all Buddhist Orders in fact. So we give what is central the central place. Though from our point of view some of the other Orders give a central place to something which is not really central.

[End of side one side two]

Parami: You said that this innovation in terms of women only ordaining women, although not in the letter of the tradition is very much in the spirit of Buddhism. Could you just say - maybe it's obvious - why?

S: Well Buddhism is concerned with the individual and the development of the individual, and Buddhism or the Buddha recognised that women were capable, as men were capable, of higher spiritual development. So that being the fundamental position, it isn't really logical to exclude women as such from exercising certain responsibilities. In this case the responsibility of ordaining, by themselves, so to speak, other women. If someone is an individual well they're an individual and they enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of an individual. I think the Theravadins are going to have a lot of difficulty here, because in the Theravada tradition, whether it goes back to the Buddha or not - that's another matter - but in the Theravada tradition all women are subject to all men, and all nuns are subjected to all monks, and I think, even if it was a right attitude, it probably could not be accepted by people in the modern world. So the Theravadins are stuck with that. I think it's going to give them some trouble.

The Padmasambhava mantra used to be in the puja only on special occasions. Now the mantra is included as a matter of course. Is there a reason for this? Does Padmasambhava have a special relationship with the

Order or with or for you?

What does one mean by the 'Padmasambhava mantra used to be in the puja only on special occasions'? Because it was introduced into pujas a very long time ago, during the Archway period. That was when we started, when we incorporated it into pujas.

Marichi: I can remember it being occasional.

S: Is it so? Hmm.

Marichi: It was put in at festivals.

_____: You mean the extra chanting before the concluding mantras?

Marichi: Yes.

_____: Not in the concluding mantras?

S: I can remember leading pujas at the Archway centre and the chanting of the Padmasambhava mantra being included as far as I remember as, so to speak, a matter of course. So in that case I can't really say. There was a time, when it actually was introduced and became more common, there was a time when we didn't recite it. That is true, yes. But yes Padmasambhava seems to be popular in the movement. A lot of people seem to be attracted to that figure, not surprisingly. I certainly was strongly attracted. I think I've described it somewhere in my memoirs. It's in '*The Thousand Petalled Lotus*' isn't it. No, sorry it's in the second volume. [Laughter] I described my first visit to a temple in Darjeeling where there was a huge Padmasambhava image. It impressed me immensely in a quite extraordinary way. Yes, there has been a definite association. I'll tell you a little story which you can take how you please, because the question is 'does Padmasambhava have a special relationship with the Order or with or for you?'

Well I've suggested Padmasambhava has some special significance for me but I'll tell you a bit more about that. Perhaps before I mention that I should say that when I was in Kalimpong I did receive the Padmasambhava initiation from one of my teachers. Years ago I used to go down to Brighton regularly to take a class for the local Buddhist group. It was run by Karl and Violet Ragg. They were sort of Buddhists. They had been spiritualists, and they were good friends of mine. They were both in their seventies. I had an unusual experience with Violet after her death. I've spoken about that sometimes haven't I. She was a very sensitive sort of psychical woman. Anyway this particular incident took place I think when I was still at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara or else very early in the history of the Friends, because I remember we were then meeting not in their house as we did afterwards but upstairs in a tea shop in Brighton. I used to travel down by train late afternoon and go back late the same night after taking a class.

Anyway after I'd taken one class, Violet said 'Do you mind if I ask you something, Bhante?', so I said, 'All right, ask me'. She, said, 'Well as you were speaking and answering the questions', I was standing up by the way, 'I saw a figure standing behind you and I just want to describe that figure and ask if you recognise because I just don't know who it could be'. So I said, 'well all right just describe the figure'. So she said, 'well it was the figure of a man. He was dressed in red robes and he wore a strange kind of hat' which she described, 'and I'm not sure whether he was Indian or whether he was Chinese, sort of a bit of both'. So I said, 'Oh yes! [Laughter] It sounds to me like Padmasambhava'. So she said 'who's Padmasambhava?' She hadn't heard of him actually, and so this did

seem very odd. So she said she'd seen this figure standing behind me, as it were in her words, 'inspiring me'. Now I must say I hadn't felt anything like that but it was rather odd, because, yes I do feel a sort of link. But anyway I just tell the story for what it's worth since the question has been asked.

_____ : Does he have a connection with China then?

S: The Vajrayana has a connection with China, according to some accounts, but iconographically Padmasambhava is represented as sort of half Ariyan and half Mongolian. According to some traditions he comes from Bengal. Many Bengalis are racially quite mixed, especially Eastern Bengal, there's a strong Mongoloid element. So if the tradition of his being a Bengali has any historical basis, that could account for the fact that he looks sort of half Ariyan and half Mongolian.

In India the movement is called Trailokya Bauddha Maha Sangha. However on the kesas all Order members still have the red lotus for Amitabha, Buddha of the West. Would you comment on the deeper than geographical significance of 'West' for the vision of Western Buddhist Order?

I suppose one would have to make the link via death, because the West is where the sun sets. We have the colloquial expression, 'Gone West' or 'Going West' meaning dying. So inasmuch as the West is where the sun sets, the west is associated in many traditions with death, and from a spiritual point of view, therefore with spiritual rebirth. So that is quite universal. So the West is the place of the setting sun, it's the place of death, it's the place of spiritual rebirth, and in Buddhism that spiritual rebirth is associated with meditation, rising to a higher state of consciousness and Amitabha, the Buddha of the West, is shown in meditation posture. So one could make a wider more universal connection in that sort of way.

Would you talk about the connection between Amitabha and Padmasambhava?

I spoke about that temple in Darjeeling which I visited. Some of you may even have visited it. It's the temple of the Tamang Buddhists of Darjeeling. Tamang Buddhists are followers of the Nyingmapa school, and this particular temple is a three storeyed temple, it's a sort of pagoda. On the ground floor there's an enormous image of Padmasambhava, with his two dakinis, Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyal. Then on the first floor there is a figure of the Thousand Armed Avalokitesvara, and on the second floor, the top storey, there's a figure of Amitabha. These three figures represent what is called the Nyingmapa trikaya. For the Nyingmapas, Amitabha represents the Dharmakaya; the Thousand Armed Avalokitesvara, the Sambhogakaya, and Padmasambhava represents the Nirmanakaya. So basically this is the connection between the two, and of course between both of them and Avalokitesvara.

You may remember at the beginning I think of the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava, or maybe it's another version, a ray comes from the heart of Amitabha and falls on that lotus on the Dhanakosa lake.

Can the Bodhiangas - Seven Factors of Enlightenment - be regarded as a complementary sequence to the positive nidanas on the spiral path? There's a little chart to illustrate that. In a broad sense the first three Bodhiangas seem to have tend to be more investigative elements and the first three

nidanas more experiential.

I think one can say very broadly speaking - I'm not going to go into this in detail - that both sets of terms represent what is basically the same sequence of positive mental states, the same spiral sequence. I don't think you can work out an exact one to one correspondence but broadly speaking they are concerned with the same sequence. There are other lists elsewhere in the scriptures which also represent that same sequence. The Five Spiritual Faculties even, considered serially, represent it.

All right,

In an early pamphlet about Vajrayana initiations etc., you described the three yanas, Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana, as being like a telescope, each contained and rising out of the other, and each not discarded but developed as basis for the other. You also said elsewhere that the ideal person for the yanas were: one, the Arahant, two, the Bodhisattva, three, Tantric Yogi/Yogini. Could you expand on this as it relates to the anagarika/anagarikā way, and where does this fit in with the Bhikkhu/Bhikkhuni and the Tantric Yogi/Yogini?

I think one must realise, first of all, that in the Western Buddhist Order, we've, in a way, unified the three yanas. We don't for instance see the arising of the Bodhicitta as a separate event occurring after the Going for Refuge. We see the arising of the Bodhicitta as the altruistic aspect of the Going for Refuge, and so on. So one could say that in the case of the anagarikā way, as in the case of the Dharmachari and Dharmacharini way, all three yanas are unified. You have the Arahant as your ideal in certain respects, the Bodhisattva as your ideal in certain respects and the yogi or yogini as your ideal in certain respects. Do you see? You don't see them as three ideals, three different, separate ideals, any more than you see the three yanas as different, separate yanas. So there's difference in this respect between the Dharmachari and Dharmacharini on the one hand and the anagarikā and anagarika on the other, except that the latter, obviously, observes celibacy and therefore, ideally, are.... well let's say more absorbed in dhyana like and androgynous states. That's the real difference I suppose.

So it isn't a question of fitting the anagarika/anagarikā into a sequence because there is no sequence, because what was regarded as a sequence or stages in a sequence are seen as different aspects of one and the same thing.

Would it be possible...

Well here's a teaser!

.... for a Dharmacharini - follow this carefully - who had been celibate for a number of years, to be able to take the anagarikā ordination if she lived at home and still had children growing up and/or lived with her husband, albeit in a celibate marriage. How much is the readiness for this ordination determined by mental attitude and how much by lifestyle?

Oh dear! [Laughter] She'd seem to be a rather hybrid sort of creature. [Laughter] What would her husband say about it? [Laughter] What to speak of the children. Would she wear her robe when doing the washing up?!! [Laughter] I must say I really don't know. I tend to think of the anagarikā as not just being celibate but following a particular lifestyle. Not only chaste but celibate, that is to say separated from family life. I think -

this is my present thinking which may change in the future - because I haven't really thought about this before, that if a woman living at home wished to take a vow of celibacy, well yes, I'd encourage her to do that, but not actually as an anagarikā, because living in the family situation with her children, with her husband, she might well change her mind after a while. [Laughter] Yes, and if the children were young well it suggests that she is still young, and at present I'm rather inclined to let people reach a certain mature age before they become anagarikas or anagarikās. So let's wait and see. I maintain I think an open mind but I think it would be unlikely that a woman in that situation would appropriately take an anagarik ā -not ordination - I try to avoid saying 'anagarikā ordination', but the anagarika vow.

Marichi: (Unclear).

Parami: Young children.

S: Oh and/or. Hmm. Well I suppose you could say that if she was old and her husband was old and they didn't want to separate. Perhaps they might be too old to go forth, might be in their eighties. Well yes, it might be possible for her to be an anagarikā. I'll wait until someone actually comes..... [Laughter]

Would you comment on the following verse from the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava, particularly the two last lines. Is there a connection here with what you said on the preordination course recently about the words of the Dharma being regarded as samayasattva? The quote is:

I am Padmasambhava, maker of gods.

Mine are the counsellings of the holy luminosities on the plane of essence.

Concerning equanimity, that chart of the mind, I write the letters that make up words to bear the meaning.

It's as though the words or the letters represent the samayasattva and the meaning, the jnanasattva. You could certainly look at it like that, yes. There is definitely a correspondence I think.

_____: This thing about the equanimity being the chart of the mind.

S: I really don't understand this. It is a translation of a translation. If I thought about it a lot I could probably get a meaning out of it but it doesn't seem clear at the first reading.

_____: The two sattvas. I don't quite understand what they are.

S: Samayasattva and Jnanasattva. These are Vajrayanic terms. The Samayasattva is the visualised Bodhisattva, and the Jnanasattva is a real Bodhisattva which, as it were, descends into that Samayasattva, that visualised Bodhisattva, in such a way as to constitute for you a transcendental experience, an experience of Insight.

Anyway I think we come onto the last question now. This deals with that same question.

On the Rivendell retreat this year, you talked about the visualisation of the Bodhisattva in our sadhana being the Samayasattva, which is a basis for the manifestation of the Jnanasattva, i.e. the descending of the transcendental.

Yes.

When asked this year why the Green Tara practice is said to be the quick way to Wisdom, Dhardo Rimpoche spoke about the offerings to the Bodhisattvas and the white light streaming down from their hearts into the TAM in Tara's heart as being the most important part of the practice, thus associating this part of the practice with the quick way to Wisdom. Would you agree with this?

I couldn't disagree with Dhardo Rimpoche, could I!? [Laughter] You wouldn't expect me to, would you? [Laughter]

Could one say that this part of the practice symbolises the descending of the transcendental element, the Jnanasattva, into the Samayasattva.....?

One could certainly say this. The Samayasattva in this case being represented by the TAM,

and that it is at this point in the practice that Insight is most likely to arise?

I think I'd agree with that, yes. Yes I don't think I can say more than that. It is really quite straightforward? Any supplementary on that, or is it clear?

All right then, so we'll finish on time. OK, thanks.

End of Session