

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 [Mitrans](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

QUESTIONS ON RITUAL AND CEREMONY IN THE ORDER

[Women's Order Convention 1987]

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Parami, Bodhishri, Punyamala, Vajramala, Dhammadinna, Dayamegha, Aniketa, Gunabhadri, Dayanandi, Gunavati, Marichi.

Sangharakshita: All right.

In your reading from work in progress on Sunday evening, you mentioned having a rupa consecrated by Dhardo Rimpoche. How important is it to have a rupa consecrated? How can a rupa be consecrated? Could it be done by Order members? Is there a way of telling if a rupa has already been consecrated? Could the consecration of thangkas and malas help our practice, for example by helping us to develop a more devotional attitude?

All right, how important is it to have a rupa consecrated? Hmm. I think one has to distinguish here between objective and subjective attitudes. By objective attitude I mean the idea that a rupa is consecrated in the sense that it now possesses, having been consecrated, a sort of magical quality, and constitutes almost a sort of magic charm. You don't bother so much how you behave or your attitude towards it, you're just glad to possess this magical object, which you believe, well at the lowest you believe brings you 'good luck', or whatever. But then of course there's the more subjective attitude which consists in thinking or feeling that the attitude that the rupa is 'consecrated', single inverted commas, by your own devotional attitude. If you genuinely regard it as a reminder of the Buddha, and if you use it as a focus of devotion and if that helps in your spiritual life, well that's what is important. You consecrate the rupa in a sense by your attitude. So clearly if one puts it in that sort of way the second is more important than the first. And the first, I think we can say, is of importance only to the extent that it does help with the second. Because one has heard of Tibetan Buddhists in the old Tibet possessing these specially consecrated images and even other things, magic pills, which they believed offered them protection in their worldly life, but didn't influence their life at all. You found even, apparently, bandits and robbers proudly possessing these consecrated objects of various kinds, sometimes believing that they'd offer them protection in battle and all that sort of thing.

So, even though it may be important to have a rupa consecrated in a more objective sense, it's really of importance only in so far as it assists your subjective attitude of devotion and your actual practice.

So how can a rupa be consecrated? There are various ways of doing this of course. Here, of course, we're speaking of the objective consecration. As the question mentions I spoke of having a rupa consecrated by Dhardo Rimpoche, and I don't know exactly what he did on that occasion, but I know that the general procedure follows the Vajrayana tradition, and one consecrates a rupa or other object by visualising the Buddha or Bodhisattva that that rupa represents in the same way that you normally do, and you then visualise that visualised figure descending into the image and you, as it were, fix it there, and there are sometimes accompanying rituals, and that is a Vajrayana consecration, whether of an image or a thangka or a pill or whatever it might be. So I assume that that was what Dhardo Rimpoche did.

Could it be done by Order members? Well in theory or in principle it could be, but clearly they would need to be proficient in that particular visualisation. I do have the necessary texts for this which Dhardo Rimpoche gave me shortly before I left Kalimpong, but I've never passed them on to anybody.

Is there a way of telling if a rupa has already been consecrated? In the case of Tibetan rupas, if it has been consecrated the bottom will be sealed. Sometimes what happens, but this is a more specifically Nyingmapa tradition, sometimes what they do is - I have done all this myself - they get a little copper pot. In that copper pot various substances are placed. The seven precious things for instance, and then one makes a sandalwood stick of the same length or height as the image and places it in the pot. On the side of that stick various mantras are written, then that is inserted inside the image. That represents the sort of, what does one call it? - the *susshumna* - the median nerve, as it were, because the consecration makes the image alive, so one inserts this and then seals it up. Very often if you shake a Tibetan rupa which has been consecrated you feel something, hear something, rattle inside. Sometimes relics are put inside of various kinds.

So in the case of a Tibetan rupa, if the bottom is sealed, and usually there's a double vajra put on it at the same time, then it has been consecrated. In the case of a *thangka*, if you look at the back, if it's been consecrated you'll find *Om Ah Hum* written against the three centres. You know then that it has been consecrated. If the artist is a lama he does it himself after painting the image. Otherwise he takes to an incarnate lama and asks him to do it. It can be just a very brief ceremony, or the person for whom it's been painted takes it along to his own lama. This is the general custom. Years ago people used to ask me to do this sometimes.

So could the consecration of *thangkas* and *malas* help our practice, for example by helping us to develop a more devotional attitude? Well it could be. It depends very much how you regard the whole thing. It's not a question of thinking 'oh I've got a consecrated object' as though it's a sort of more expensive type of rupa or a rarer kind of rupa and this puts you a notch above other people who haven't got that sort of rupa. You've had it consecrated, maybe it was consecrated by the Dalai Lama, so you're rather proud of that. Do you see what I mean? Essentially it's your own subjective devotional attitude that is of importance. If you feel that having a rupa consecrated in any way does help, well fair enough, get it consecrated by all means.

There are also ceremonies of blessing images. You do find those in Theravada countries too. In some Theravada countries - I know in Sri Lanka - they have elaborate ceremonies for blessing an image, especially a big public image, after it's been completed. That consists mainly in the painting in of the eyes. I suspect that that ceremony is really of Hindu origin though it is a part now of popular Theravada Buddhism. There's nothing about it in the Pali scriptures of course.

Dayamegha: Is that what happened at the opening of the LBC with the rupa?

S: That wasn't really a Vajrayana type consecration. It was more like a blessing you could say. I did encourage people to copy out texts and put them inside, because the image represents a focus of devotion. In some ways it's very much a personal matter, how you feel about having something consecrated in this way or that, whether you really do feel it helps you in your devotions. Some people don't feel that. Some people are quite happy picking up a battered old wooden buddha image and just having that, and maybe a few flowers and pieces of grass around it, and they don't feel any need for any ritual consecration. Well fair enough. It depends on the effect the image has on their minds. Others attach tremendous importance to having something properly consecrated, well that's all right too, if it does incite greater devotion.

As regards *malas* - these are also mentioned - they too can be, as it were, consecrated, though it's more like a blessing. Sometimes people bring *malas* to me and ask me to keep them and bless them, though very often they're not sure what they mean by my blessing them and I don't usually say but what I usually do is I keep them with me for a few days and I use them myself for a few days and then I give them back. So if it helps people to use their mala more frequently well fair enough.

_____ : I suppose one's own mala, if you use it a lot is.

S: Yes, well it is, as it were, energised, you could say. Yes indeed, yes. If you had the divine eye you might even be able to see it giving off rays of light after a few years. There is such a thing as psychometry - I'm sure you've heard of that, yes? - I had an experience of that sort, though it

was a negative one, which showed to me that there was something in psychometry. I had someone staying with me in Kalimpong years ago, as often happened, and one day a letter came for him. It was with the post. The post all came to me and I was looking through it and I saw this letter for him, but as soon as I touched the envelope I knew that it contained something evil, something harmful to that person, so I kept it with me for a few hours and I pondered whether I should give it to that person and whether perhaps I shouldn't open it and have a look. But anyway the person was an Englishman, so I thought well English people being what they are perhaps I'd better just hand it over. So I handed it over and a few minutes later this person came running to me with quite a white face and it was an anonymous sort of poison pen letter he'd received. So I had that experience quite decisively. So I'm quite sure therefore the opposite thing can happen.

Maybe you've experienced if you receive a letter from someone who's written it with much mettā, well when it comes into your hands, even if you don't know where it's come from or who's written it to you, you might experience a sort of lighter more joyful feeling. So if you've used your mala for years together, and maybe used it regularly every day and told so many mantras on those beads, well something must cling, as it were. It's not anything spiritual - it's perhaps on a lower level than that, but it is a sort of emanation of the spiritual, if one can use those terms. And using the same mala I'm sure it helps you if you have the same mala over the years. I have some very ancient malas, some of which I've used for decades. I usually keep two or three which I vary.

_____ : Do you do different mantras on different malas?

S: No, I just pick them up as I feel like. No, I'm not as well organised as that! [Laughter] I'm quite whimsical. You may think Bhante's always very rational and logical, but he does have his whimsical side, you know! [Laughter]

Dhammadinna: The malas might get confused!

S: So there's no reason at all. I just feel like using this one for a few weeks or that one for a few weeks. I have two or three or sometimes even four in my drawer. Occasionally I give one to somebody and someone occasionally gives me one and I add it to my collection, as it were. But I usually have at least two or three with me.

Dayamegha: What would you usually chant?

S: Again, I'm whimsical [Laughter]. It's usually either the Tara mantra or the Manjughosa mantra or the Vajrasattva. I think those are the ones I recite most frequently.

Anyway let's pass on to two.

In the group we discussed the area of ritual and group ritual. There seems to be, on the one hand, unconscious ritual which enhances group values. On the other more conscious ritual which helps us to develop individuality. In trying to break away from the group, many of us also discard group rituals, for instance marriage. We felt this leaves a gap, perhaps in terms of rites of passage into adulthood. Would there be a place for developing more social ritual within the movement? Are there any areas that you feel would be of particular importance?

I think there is a place for developing more social ritual within the movement. I myself normally do perform name giving ceremonies, don't I. I'm quite happy to perform those. Well why do we have name giving ceremonies? Why not just start calling him James or Johnny or Ruth or Mary or whatever and leave it at that? Well parents, especially mothers, are quite keen on these name giving ceremonies. What do you think it represents?

Dhammadinna: Isn't it an inclusion of that child into the positive group.

S: Positive group, watch your terminology here! [Laughter]

Dhammadinna: Sometimes it's into the Order as well.

S: Yes, but it's more than the positive group in a way I suppose because if it's just the positive group, well why do you have people reciting the Refuge and Precepts and all the rest of it?

Dhammadinna: It's into the influence of the Order.

S: It's the influence, yes, because as I have said, you can't have a really positive group for very long without a definitely transcendental underpinning, as it were. So I think the name giving represents the acceptance of that child into the positive group. Positive group in the sense also of a group which is open to ultimate spiritual values which that child will grow up with the possibility of approaching, if he or she so wishes.

_____ : I think once there was a case for a ceremony for those children later to have an initiation into adulthood. Not into the Friends as a Buddhist, but with those same people.

S: But what is adulthood? When does it happen?

Voices speaking together: (Unclear)

S: Sridevi lent me a book to read - 'The Wise Wound' - and in that the point is made that, in the case of girls in many primitive societies, the first menstruation is the occasion of a ceremony or, in a sense an initiation. Well we don't have that at all. We don't have anything corresponding to that for boys when they reach a certain age, though in many communities they do, and in Hinduism in the case of the Dvijas(?) meaning the three upper castes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, there's the investiture with the sacred thread. The Zoroastrians have their [ritual that] corresponds to that and Jews have their Bah Mitzvah, don't they, in the case of boys. I don't know if girls have anything.

Parami: They do.

S: They do. I think in the case of Brahmins at least they can have their Yajnopavitam, their investiture with the sacred thread, I think any time after the age of eight but it's usually I think thirteen, fourteen, that sort of age. In the case of Jewish boys they have their Bah Mitzvah I think at thirteen. That is the age for Parsis. But these are all ethnic things but they have their value on their own level obviously. So perhaps something like that could be developed within the Buddhist community on a sort of group level. But then what about the feelings of the children? Would they be happy, would they feel it was all rather silly and wonder what their school friends would think? You see what I mean? It's not such a simple situation. If you're in a unified cultural community with strong ethnic roots that's one thing, but we're not like that, we're fragmented and divided and subject to all sorts of influences, and the children might say well what's all this, we've never seen it on TV, it doesn't exist really!

Marichi: We thought that if it was simple and it acknowledged that the children were actually growing older, they might find it acceptable.

S: Perhaps it could take the form of a sort of party or reception, *(murmurs of approval)* something of that sort. Something with a little bit of solemnity about it. We do have in Britain or in some social groups the 21st birthday party. But that's leaving it rather late I think really. It's a bit out of tune with modern developments.

Marichi: We thought it might help parents with adolescent children as well.

S: Well that's the time when they actually leave. What 12, 13? [Laughter] But I think this needs to be discussed. We can think about it. We've got a few years left, haven't we.

Parami: I think we were kind of exploring the area, like you have a universal religion, you have a positive group, and the kind of correlations between them.

S: Yes, right. You see in Christianity you have confirmation, which does mark, in a way, adulthood, though it is a definitely religious ceremony, but in many Christian societies it has more or less a social significance. Similarly the first communion, especially for little girls. They dress up like brides in white. [Laughter] They look so sweet! Looking as though butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, yes. I believe in the old days in British public schools, you got confirmed automatically. The bishop just came round once a year and did it.

Parami: He slapped your face.

S: I think this needs quite a bit of discussion, but then there's the death ceremony or the after death ceremony. I think this is much more straight forward because it is not so ethnic in the case of a Buddhist. It has much more of a religious, even spiritual, significance, doesn't it. Because it serves as a reminder to everybody taking part, and you can also rejoice in the merits of the deceased person, especially if they're an Order member.

Parami: There are quite a few levels of that, isn't there, in the death ceremony. Like arranging for an Order member. Sometimes we're asked to do them for people who are ethnic Buddhists.

S: Well we can certainly do that, yes. It gives some consolation to the relations. But I think, to digress a little, if it is a digression, I think we should have a bit more ceremony in a more general way. For instance I think that if you've got a well established community and a new person joins the community, have a sort of formal welcome, or if someone leaves the community. We've developed this now at Padmaloka. All birthdays are now celebrated, and if someone leaves the community - we haven't yet had an actual welcoming in - not in the case of the Order Office community, but if someone leaves or goes away for a long time or comes back after a long time, there is always a special meal, cards, presents, speeches, and this does help create a very positive feeling within the community.

So I think we should do these things much more. It also occurs to me. I don't think we've done it yet, but when a new chairman is installed, do that in a ceremonial sort of way. I can't think just off hand exactly how it would be done but let there be a certain solemnity around it. It is a quite important thing that a new chairman takes over so let the old chairman go, as it were, in ceremonial fashion and be thanked, and the new one properly installed and perhaps speeches delivered or even little presents given or afterwards have a puja or something of that sort, or meditation.

Parami: I think we've done that kind of thing with the going chairman but maybe not welcoming....

Dayamegha: I was just thinking of transferring keys. [Laughter]

S: Well you could almost do that, yes.

Parami: And welcome the new Order member to the chapter.

S: Yes, that does happen to some extent, yes indeed. Or if someone goes back to their own country. Not only leaves the community but say, in the case of Britain, leaves Britain, well give them a really good send off.

Parami: I think we do do all those things but maybe we don't think of them as ceremony.

S: Well you don't have to think of them as ceremonies, provided you do what is necessary, but perhaps try to bring out the significance to a greater extent.

Dayamegha: We were talking about these as rites of passage, weren't we.

S: Perhaps there should be a special celebration for anagarikas. [Pause] Yes, I'm still very much in two minds about marriage. What is marriage anyway? What would constitute marriage in this case? Is there such a thing as Buddhist marriage? I'm really rather doubtful.

Marichi: I mentioned what about divorce?

S: Right. I think there is something to be said for that. I think this is beginning to be more widely recognised, yes. Because sometimes there are all sorts of loose ends that haven't been tidied up and it would be good to do that.

Marichi: One can see that if you can have a marriage you can have a divorce if necessary.

S: I'd be happy to write a divorce ceremony! [Loud Laughter] 'Do you want to be divorced? - Come to the FWBO!' [Laughter] But I'm quite clear about name giving, I'm quite happy about that and I'm quite happy about the after death ceremonies. We have to think about the others, especially about a ceremony for the attainment of maturity or adulthood, or young adulthood.

Yes,

We also discussed the importance of marking beginnings and endings. We have the dedication ceremony to mark the beginning of a retreat or the use of a shrine. Are there any specific ceremonies to mark endings, e.g. of a retreat or a centre on moving a shrine?

Well we don't have any at the moment but there's no reason why we shouldn't develop them. Oh yes, I did hear about something that happened in Manchester the other week. They had - I don't know what they called it if they called it anything - they had a ceremony of some kind in the shrine room - I didn't get any details, it was just mentioned in passing - but they all had bottles. I think they sort of invoked something into the bottles and sealed the bottles and all took their bottles home and are going to open them in their new shrine room. I hope I've got it right but that was the impression I got.

_____ : When we left our premises in Hobson Street we had a special ceremony and we had crystals which we put in a box and they were to be....

S: It's like taking the atmosphere that you've built up with you. It symbolises that I suppose, or perhaps there's something in it that can be taken quite literally. But maybe you should ask Suvajra. Those who are on the rites and ceremonies committee, [Laughter] yes. Yes I didn't have an opportunity of asking exactly what happened but I just did hear it referred to. They all came with bottles. I think it was bottles. I think they've taken the bottles and kept them on their shrines until they have the new centre.

Parami: It's quite nice just having that touch.

S: Yes, it's a devotional approach, yes. Perhaps we don't have enough of that kind of thing.

Parami: We thought that.

S: *If we want to explore this area of ritual and ceremony more deeply, do you think there is value in short ritual retreats, or would an ongoing ritual community be more appropriate?*

Well one step at a time. I think perhaps there should be short ritual retreats, where people discuss ritual, where they practice particular rituals, demonstrate them and so on. And a ritual community. Yes, there could be a ritual community, just as there is a meditation community or a team based right livelihood community. I don't know if you know it but I'm thinking of some of the Catholic orders. Some of them are much more liturgically based. Their whole life is devoted, to use that term, to ritual.

Parami: Like chantries.

S: Well chantries are for masses for the dead. That's rather different, but I think originally the Benedictines were like that, and others followed their example. There were the seven Canonical Hours and each hour during the day has its own specific ritual or observance, and the full monks who were called choir monks spend a greater part of their day 'in choir' engaged in the liturgy. They don't spend so much time meditating, if at all. They don't engage in good works, they don't teach children, they're just engaged in the maintenance of the liturgy and that is their contribution to the total life of the church. So we can certainly have liturgical communities where pujas are going on regularly throughout the day. Maybe conducted by different teams of people.

Dayamegha: How much meditation do you would need as a balance? Could you do pujas and chanting all the time or....

S: I think for some that would be a way. You can also of course intersperse periods of meditation, especially perhaps guided visualisation.

_____ : We could certainly have retreats like that.

S: You could, yes. I'm sure ritual and so on appeals very deeply to some people. They get a lot out of it, and perhaps we need to develop that particular approach more than we have done. Never think that the FWBO is a finished product and that there's nothing more to be developed. We've only just started. There are lots more things to be developed. Perhaps we've developed only one percent of what is to be developed.

Dayamegha: Would you have any guidelines for this sort of retreat?

S: At present I can't say because I haven't given it sufficient thought but one could improve one's chanting. One could practise performing a puja more mindfully, one could give thought to ritual accessories, the careful choosing of vases and water bowls and consider also what dress you should wear, whether there should be a robe when you're performing the puja. Whether in accordance with the kind of puja or the particular buddha or bodhisattva who was being worshipped on that occasion, there shouldn't be some changes in the shrine. I've often had thoughts about these things but I haven't been able to do anything about them. For instance I thought that if you had a Green Tara puja well decorate the room with green. If possible have green hangings or a green shrine, perhaps even wear a green robe. It all helps I'm sure.

Parami: We've done that with retreats sometimes with say the five Dhyani Buddhas.

S: Yes, that's happened also at 'Il Convento' most years. I think it would be good to have at least weekend ritual retreats, because I think very often the Sevenfold Puja comes in at the tail end of the day, often when people are tired, and you're not able to do justice to it.

Parami: We talked quite a lot about the fact that it sometimes feels that everything else has quite a lot of preparation and the puja's tagged on at the end of the day.

S: Yes indeed, yes. That's why it's sometimes good to have a Sevenfold Puja in the morning. I rather like having the Sevenfold Puja immediately before the public ordinations because it means it's celebrated for once in the morning when everyone is fresh and bright, and not either when they've just crawled out of bed or when they're dying to get into bed. [Laughter]

This ties up with the next question.

We now take the training of meditation and study leaders more seriously. We felt that ritual is not given this emphasis.

This is true.

Could we have puja leaders, i.e. people at centres who specialise in ritual, and how would we train them?

Again I've not had any definite thoughts about this but I think we certainly could have puja leaders in this sense and presumably we'd train them, to begin with, by holding retreats for them, even weekend retreats would be quite enough to begin with. Just giving them practice and giving them feedback. Some people gabble through the Sevenfold Puja, others go much too slow or chant in a dirge like sort of way. People need to be given positive feedback about all those things. Some mispronounce Pali or Sanskrit words, others aren't very good at selecting readings. One could discuss things like the arrangement of the shrine. Whether there should not be three steps and whether one should have water bowls or not. I often see water bowls that are half empty. That is not the tradition, by the way. The water bowls should be kept full of water and the water should be changed every day. In very strict Tibetan monasteries, especially the Gelugpa ones, they empty the bowls at twelve o'clock. Now why do you think that is?

_____ : Is that to do with they're offering to an honoured guest and.....

_____ : The Buddha doesn't eat after midday.

S: Yes, the Buddha doesn't eat after midday. Shakyamuni doesn't, yes. So some of the offering are food offerings, so you, as it were, especially in monasteries, you remind yourself about that twelve o'clock rule, or at least you pay lip service to it or you honour tradition, honour the Vinaya, by emptying the bowls at twelve o'clock, and then you used to just stack them upside down, not the other way round. Shramaneras, novices in Tibet, I'm told are told by the older monks that when they've filled the puja bowls with water, they must fill right up to the brim, because if there's any little space left, a devil will get into it. [Laughter] Tibetans, I gather, are quite afraid of devils. So they keep them well filled up, and they sometimes repeat mantras when they fill them, the offering mantras.

All right,

Is there a definite value in doing visualisation practices collectively out loud?

Have you found it to be so?

Dhammadinna: We've never done it, I think.

Parami: I had once when Ajita led some people in Glasgow through the Avalokitesvara sadhana in call and response and I found it very powerful.

S: We can only experiment. I've done it sometimes in Tuscany. People say they have found it very helpful. Not so much the visualisations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas but the Six Element practice. In fact the first few Tuscanies I regularly did that with people. Then I handed it over to the other Order members.

Marichi: This isn't so much leading somebody through it as actually doing it together out loud.

S: Ah I see. I'm not sure about that.

_____ : When you see Tibetans in films of rituals they all seem to be reciting the aspects of visualisation.

S: That is very often the case, yes.

_____ : At great speed!

S: They usually just recite. They don't attempt to visualise at the same time.

_____ : Ah.

S: Usually that's done only by people who are on retreat and meditating by themselves. They chant and they visualise at the same time. The liturgical chanting is more just part of the liturgy, part of the puja. In a way it represents a slight debasement of the practice because it is a guide to visualisation. But it is said, at least in theory, that the Rimpoches, the incarnate lamas, do actually visualise at the same time, so one hopes that they do. I also have heard - yes this reminds me of something - that if someone who has been on retreat and actually visualising those deities, comes and joins in the chanting, when the visualisation texts are recited, his presence and his participation makes a tremendous difference to the whole performance - which one might say is to be expected.

How much personal leeway should there be in a visualisation practice?

What does one mean by that? Leeway in what sense, in what sort of way? It's a nautical term, isn't it, leeway, but anyway..

Marichi: Just embroidering on the basic practice.

S: Yes, I think I've always made that clear, that when it comes to visualising perhaps the scenic background or details of flowers and ornaments, well, it's good that you do embroider. It helps release your creativity you could say, and therefore helps to involve your energies and to assist your concentration. So all that is to be encouraged.

Parami: I think it came out of discussing the fact that sometimes when people get together and discuss their sadhanas, their practices that they have in common, there seems to be quite a wide range of approach to it all.

S: Well that's quite acceptable. Some people may wish to follow the text very strictly, others to introduce small variations. That is quite acceptable. But you should be careful of individualism creeping in, because sometimes people say, 'oh I want to do it my way', and that isn't necessarily a good approach.

All right,

In our discussion group, there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction with our large inter-Centre festivals. Some people felt they were too cerebral and would like to see more ritual and more room for active participation. What do you think about this?

Well I'm quite happy about it. I'm quite happy that there should be more ritual and more room for active participation. Presumably by active participation meaning participation in the ritual itself. Yes, I'm quite happy about that.

_____ : What about sutra recitation and chanting?

S: I think that there needs to be a wider awareness within the Order about these things. I suspect that if, for instance, - I know it does happen already - that in the case of a Wesak festival or Wesak day, you have period of chanting, a lot of Order members will think, oh not much point in going along just now, there's only the chanting going on.

_____ : Yes.

S: Is that not the attitude? Why is that?

_____ : I was wondering whether they feel that there's more sort of Dharma in a talk or there's more Dharmic significance in a talk, in that more intellectual side, rather than the actual

devotional side.

S: Perhaps they do, perhaps there needs to be an upgrading of liturgy, puja, devotion....

[End of side one side two]

..... in general.

Marichi: Sometimes there's a sense that that's the background activity and they've decided they're going to do (unclear) rather than the more foreground.

S: Yes, but I think perhaps if we begin to have say ritual retreats and things of that sort, people will begin to see that ritual has a value and a status of its own. It's like a third or fourth leg of the stool, not just a little optional extra.

_____ : Perhaps also people feel well the puja they can do at home in their usual place and don't value the puja enough.

S: That's true only in a sense, and up to a point, because, yes you can perform the Sevenfold Puja by yourself and it can be very valuable, but when you perform the Sevenfold Puja along with a hundred other people, it has a quite different sort of value which you also should appreciate and experience. I think part of the difficulty is when a puja is left to the very end of the day. I certainly have experienced that myself because I've often found that, come the end of the day, I have to lead the puja as I always used to do, formerly, but then I often feel really quite tired, so I lead it but then I do feel tired, so I don't enjoy it as much as I would otherwise have done, and I'm conscious of the fact that well people would really like to go to bed and we're now much stricter on the Men's Events at Padmaloka, sometimes speakers would go on and on beyond their limit and speak for twice as long as they should have done, with the result, instead of finishing at nine o'clock, having the puja at nine fifteen, we finish at ten o'clock, have the puja just after ten, which is much much too late for all except those who got up very late and missed the morning meditation. [Laughter]

So I think that if we are to place more emphasis on puja it shouldn't always come in at the very end of the day. Nowadays at Padmaloka I very rarely lead the last puja because I'm just too tired by that time, because I've been busy usually all during the day and I don't feel that I really want to lead a puja at ten o'clock at night, or even at nine o'clock nowadays, unless I've rested during the day or had an easy day. I suspect that applies to others as well.

But with regard to inter-Centre festivals, yes I think puja should feature and I think perhaps we have to give some thought to this question. I've given a little thought myself but I haven't been able to give nearly enough, and we should have amplified pujas. Not just special readings, but I did even some years ago and I believe somebody else has done this recently, I did take out verses from the Sutra of Golden Light and compile a Sevenfold Puja from them. So that we had something different sometimes. One doesn't want to encourage distraction but perhaps we do need alternative Sevenfold Pujas especially for use on special occasions, or perhaps we need to introduce extra items. This has happened to some extent in the course of our Tuscanies. For instance people have introduced prostrations. I introduced some time ago, but it sort of died out after a while, that when we recited the salutation somebody came forward and did three prostrations, so that introduces a more ritual element. And then of course more recently, and this is something that has stuck, we've had individual offerings during the chanting of the Avalokitesvara mantra. There the only difficulty is if you've got too many people it takes too long, and especially if it's late in the evening, well it's almost boring to have so many people coming up and making offerings. Sometimes we just have one person from each study group or something of that sort, so that it's within more manageable limits.

Dhammadinna: We also wondered about the place for drama possibly on a festival so it's not just three or four talks in a day but different ways of expressing....

S: One could certainly look into that. Though of course in the case of drama there's the performers and the audience, whereas in the case of a puja there is something for everybody to do and I think that is better.

_____ : On other festivals we seem to be having ongoing chanting and puja all day and additional things happening elsewhere.

S: Yes, well sometimes I know at the LBC there's been chanting or sutra reading going on throughout the day, but on the whole usually quite poorly attended, as though puja is the sort of cinderella of the spiritual practices.

_____ : I think with the festivals there's a bit of tendency to want to have a bit of light hearted fun and the talk may seem more - you just go in and it's a bit like watching television I was going to say - you can sit back and feel as though you're enjoying it and with the puja and chanting well they're practices and you may feel that you don't particularly want to do that or that it's more the place for both.

S: Well perhaps we need to do a bit more experimentation. It all takes time because we need to make emotional connections. You can't just legislate for these things.

Parami: Perhaps people who genuinely feel there is a connection have to come up front a bit more as well.

S: Yes, right.

Parami: Make suggestions and offer suggestions.

S: All right seven,

It emerged through discussion that not everyone was familiar with certain ritual etiquette, e.g. not hanging garlands round rupas.

You know the reason for that, don't you?

Dayamegha: Nothing sticks to....

S: No, no it's not that at all.

_____ : Is it a Hindu custom?

S: No, it's not really that at all. In Theravada countries they usually have just the image of the Buddha and the Buddha is seen as a monk. He wears the monastic dress and he's seen as observing the monastic rules. So monks are not supposed to wear garlands. Even for sramaneras there is the rule - Mala ganda velapanna dhana mandana vepushnatana (?) - to abstain from the use of mala, which is garland, ganda which is perfume, velapanna which is scented ointments and dhana mandana vepushnatana, adornments - how would one say - ornaments. So in Theravada countries garlands are never placed round the neck of the Buddha image for that reason. Similarly in Tibet, if they're very strict, if it's a Shakyamuni image wearing monastic robes, they won't put any garland - in any case they don't have flowers. They don't usually have flowers in Tibet. So that's the reason for that observance. In India very often Buddhists put garlands around the neck of the Buddha image, but that's just the result of Hindu influence. It's always discouraged by Theravada Buddhists. But of course there's no objection to hanging garlands around the necks of bodhisattvas, because they're represented as laymen. You see what I mean? It's just a question of how closely you want to stick to tradition.

_____ : (unclear) dhyani Buddhas who are already decorated(?)

S: Hmm. Of course in the Theravada countries they don't have dhyani Buddhas, but yes, as they

aren't historical, they're not strictly speaking wearing monastic garments, I suppose you could put garlands on them. I think they do that in Nepal for instance.

A manual inclusive of shrine room etiquette and basic ceremonies, for instance death and baby naming, would be helpful.

Yes, I think that's true. We did start trying to compile one years ago but - I think Gotami started - but it never got finished.

Who would be the best person to compile such a book?

Well Bhante, obviously [Laughter] but Bhante doesn't have any time for these things, so you'll have to find somebody else. Perhaps one of the ladies could compile it.

Marichi: Don't you have copies of most of these ceremonies at the Order Office?

S: Yes I do, and they have been given to people from time to time.

Have you got any suggestions what else to put in it for it to be comprehensive?

Well at the moment, no. I'd have to sit down and think about it. It would be a sort of supplement to the puja book, wouldn't it. The puja book anyway does contain the ceremony for dedicating shrines, which I wrote for the dedication of our very first shrine.

At some Centres on festivals, beginners have been involved in extensive chanting. An impression was that some of them seemed rather alienated.

Well what do you expect!?! [Laughs] Well the poor beginner who still has got one foot in the world, or maybe one and a half or one and three quarter feet in the world. Maybe they've still got a full time job and all the rest of it, and not very much in touch with their emotions, so, again, what can one expect? Clearly Order members and mitras will do much better.

So does the practice of chanting need a basis of commitment to be of constructive benefit?

Not necessarily, though clearly the stronger the basis of commitment, the better, and the more you'll get out of the chanting, other factors being equal.

Dayamegha: That arose out of Bodhishri telling us about....

Bodhishri: In Finland people seem to expect a kind of a trance, or to get into a kind of a trance state to make it a good festival.

S: What do they mean by a trance state? Do you mean a dhyana like state or....?

Bodhishri: Not really. It's kind of alienated where they can lose themselves in a way.

S: Well it's interesting that people should want to lose themselves. I think the desire to lose yourself is not probably a very healthy one. It's a sort of psychological equivalent of getting drunk. [Laughter]

_____:

S: Is it so, well there you are. You've probably hit the nail on the head.

Dhammadinna: We don't do much extended chanting in the Friends as a practice, do we.

S: I think you have to be careful, or at least some people have to be careful, well not in a sense

almost to get into a trance. I've seen that happen in India in a not very healthy way.

_____ : We've been talking about the Nichiren movement where they chant for about an hour and a half.

S: That's I think quite reasonable, yes. I'm sure we could do more of that kind of thing. Children like joining in chanting very often. If it's going on in the context of a festival, well they can come and sit for five or ten minutes and join in and then wander out. They usually enjoy that.

_____ : This was a six hour session I think. Mantras, that was too long anyway.

S: I think probably it would be, yes.

_____ : Gunavati and Parami like it!

S: Ah, good. Well she's probably got a strong basis of commitment and devotion! Good, yes. I used to experiment a bit like this in Kalimpong. In fact I've done it in England once or twice. I experimented with the chanting of the Heart Sutra a hundred and eight times, yes, and after each chanting of the Heart Sutra, chanting the concluding mantra, the Gate Gate, a hundred and eight times. I forget how long it took - five or six hours or more perhaps. So you chant the Heart Sutra, then a hundred and eight mantras, and then again you chant the Heart Sutra, then again a hundred and eight mantras, and you do that a hundred and eight times. It was very good indeed I must say, yes.

Marichi: Did you chant in English?

S: In Sanskrit, yes in Sanskrit. Yes, that was very good. There were some other things we did. I can't remember now but that was the main thing.

Parami: When Padmasiddhi died in New Zealand, at the LBC the Order members met and we chanted at the same time as the funeral which meant it was actually at about midnight, a hundred and eight Vajrasattva mantras all together and that was very powerful.

S: Yes, that's very good yes.

_____ : What's the difference between almost like an occult trance?

S: Well a trance is I think a state of alienation from yourself, whereas in dhyana it's a heightening, one might say, of one's self and a refinement of one's self.

_____ : So why would people feel so good after this alienated state?

S: Well, first of all why do people want to experience it? They want to get away from themselves. Perhaps they dislike themselves or they feel themselves to be a burden. So having had a holiday from themselves they feel better. [Laughter] But they don't really do anything about the roots of their dissatisfaction. This is why people like to escape into all sorts of mass experiences. Mass movements, well football matches, political rallies, where they can just forget about themselves. When you forget about yourself, you are not responsible any more. This is why crowds can do all sorts of unskilful things that individuals find more difficult. The individuality is in abeyance, so you are freed from the burden of responsibility, which weighs heavily on some people.

_____ : That's why a spiritual (unclear)

S: Well I think I can introduce even a third category. Well there is the healthy group - when I say group I usually mean the healthy group but you've also got the mass, in which even such individuality as one possesses within the group is submerged.

Parami: I think that's why sometimes people are a bit scared of collective practice, because they feel they might lose their individuality.

S: Well I think in some people's case that is justified, because it seems that their individuality is quite fragile. I think that accounts for quite a bit of unreasonable reactivity. People are trying desperately to preserve this very fragile individuality.

Dayamegha: What about the more ethnic rituals that you hear about in Tibet where a monk will prepare himself for quite a long time to then take on one of these characters who then goes into a trance?

S: Ah, that is the Oracle. Yes, well that is an experience of alienation because the conscious personality is completely displaced. What it's displaced by is difficult to say. Whether it is another entity altogether or a deeper aspect of one's own being, it is very difficult to say, but certainly the conscious personality is in abeyance, and to that extent it's a state of alienation.

Dayamegha: Do you think sometimes people who are rocking in meditation are inducing the same sort of thing?

S: No, I think that's infantile. When you're a baby mother rocks you. It gives a sense of security. I think that's what it is. I think that's regressive, rocking in meditation, yes.

_____ Or rocking and chanting.

Dayamegha: No, I meant in meditation because I think rocking and chanting is....

S: Yes I think rocking in meditation is regressive, it's a bit infantile. So watch it! [Laughter]

Dhammadinna: Somebody else needs to watch you.

S: I think in most people there are still persisting deeply infantile tendencies which we have to be on the lookout for.

Dayamegha: What are the manifestations to look for?

S: Well in clinging on to other people. Infantile attachment. Investing one's security in other people. I think that's deeply infantile. I think in most intimate relationships, especially sexual relationships, some infantile element is almost always present.

_____: Did you say that rocking and chanting and rocking in the puja is also infantile?

S: No, I think not necessarily so because, as was pointed out, that is rhythmical and when you chant there is a rhythm and there is a tendency on the part of the body also to want to participate in the rhythm as when you dance. I think that's acceptable, though you mustn't rock back and forth too violently! [Laughter] It does look a little out of place. Just a little gentle rock, perhaps. Certainly no rolling! [Laughter]

How do you feel about the following customs which have emerged in the Movement? - Bhante's picture on shrines, public and personal. People no longer standing up with Bhante after a meditation or puja. Present and thanksgiving bowing during the puja offerings to Bhante and more generally to the puja leader.

I don't have any very strong feelings about any of these things. I think the main thing is that all the positive things that have been mentioned, say Bhante's picture on shrines, present and thanksgiving bowing during the puja offerings to Bhante and more generally to the puja leader - these are all quite traditional things. So to that extent, if people are happy with them well there's no reason why they shouldn't be encouraged.

But people no longer standing up with Bhante after a meditation or puja. I think probably meditation or puja are different things, because some people may not have ended their meditation or may want to go on sitting. I think probably in the case of a puja it is best, unless there are very good reasons to the contrary, that everybody gets up when the leader gets up, because that's the end as it were, and you bow to the shrine. I think in the case of meditation it's rather different, for obvious reasons.

I notice on the various Tuscanies that these customs and so on vary very very much indeed, so I think perhaps it's not a bad thing to leave it to people's feeling to some extent, or even to a great extent. For instance on some Tuscanies I have found that whenever I've led a puja, everybody has bowed to me after bowing to the shrine during the Avalokitesvara chanting, and everybody has offered me a flower. On other Tuscanies nobody has done it! [Laughter] So one become philosophical about [Laughter] such things! So I don't mind. I mean some Tuscanies seem sort of quite overwhelmed with a wave of devotion, as it were, other Tuscanies seem a bit cool in this respect. I don't know whether certain people present set the fashion or a dominant trend. That is possible. It's difficult to say, or different people have different feelings. I remember there was one occasion, a retreat at Padmaloka, where it was reported that instead of bowing to the puja leader after making his offering at the shrine, somebody kissed the puja leader on the cheek, rather to his surprise. [Laughter] Especially as it was a men's retreat! [Laughter] But that was quite unusual. I think it was discussed afterwards and it was agreed that that sort of thing wouldn't happen again! [Laughter, including Bhante]

But yes I do gather that on men's retreats presents and offerings to the puja leader have become very common, and I think that's quite a good thing in the case of a men's retreat, because often men are rather backward in showing appreciation and devotion. Women seem to find it more easy to do. Don't you! I was quite impressed at some of the ordinations, especially one that we had at Battle at the end of a women's retreat, when the women who'd just been ordained sat outside on the grass and I watched this growing pile of presents. It was amazing. I went and told the men Order members about this and said 'look this is how the women do these things' whereas many a man has been ordained and not got a single card or present. Men apparently didn't think of these sort of things, but they do now, yes.

Dhammadinna: Apparently in India, we sent presents to the Indian Dharmacharinis and some of the men said they were surprised.

_____:

S: Yes, they must have noticed it. But it has become quite general within the Movement now. If I remember some of those women on that occasion must have got nearly eighty cards! It was so amazing. I thought it showed a very good spirit.

Anyway any further points. We've got a few more minutes left. Anyone thought of anything they didn't think of before? [Pause]

_____ : I have a question about the Buddhist flag. Whether to use the Buddhist flag.

S: I'm quite happy for the time being at least to use the Buddhist flag, because it is a flag that's been internationally accepted by all Buddhists, as far as I know, and it is good to indicate our, as it were, solidarity in principle with them. I don't at present feel the need of a separate FWBO flag. I'm quite happy that we just use the international Buddhist flag, the five coloured flag. Make sure you get it right and the correct version. Oh yes I'm quite happy about that. You can decorate the Centre with it, carry it in processions if we.... ah processions! [Laughter] That's all part of ritual isn't it.

Well in the trades unions it's the women who embroider the banners. They're very elaborate works of art, especially those from the last century. Oh yes and high church ladies and catholic ladies embroider banners of the Blessed Virgin Mary, yes. We could have Tara banners and so on, yes.

Didn't someone mention sometime ago something about - it might have been in a reporting in in 'Shabda', about a Tara festival? There was some reference to that. Somewhere I read.

_____ : We should have one of those.

S: But anyway what about processions?

_____ :

S: You need a proper space, don't you. If you've got a great big cathedral, clearly you can process round the cathedral but it would be a bit difficult doing it even round the LBC shrine room or Padmaloka barn.

_____ : They're usually public, aren't they.

S: Yes, yes. In Buddhist countries and catholic countries you have processions.

_____ : You can keep the banners at Padmaloka.

Dayamegha: We could do it round York Hall at a festival.

S: Well perhaps you could for instance have the eight offering goddesses processing in from the back, couldn't you, two by two, and make that more of a ritual, as it were. I personally have always liked the idea of offering goddesses but I'm never able to get it right, that is according to my satisfaction. I remember the first time I organised it I felt deeply frustrated because I had a vision of beautiful sixteen year old girls floating forward in rainbow scarves, and I asked a certain person, who shall be nameless, who isn't any longer with us, to try and enlist attractive young girls from the retreat, and, well I was sitting there all expectant! [Laughter] and along she came floating, and she was about forty and pimply and that wasn't at all what I had in mind! I don't want to depreciate ladies of greater maturity but [Laughter] according to tradition offering goddesses are sixteen years of age, and I'd like, if at all possible, to stick to tradition, and even if they don't have long black hair floating out behind well never mind but let them at least be sixteen years of age.

Parami: But we don't have any! [Laughter]

S: Ha, ha! Well look like sixteen years of age. Some people have tried to introduce young men. I'm not too happy about that because I don't think the symbolism is the same. It doesn't seem quite right. What to speak of elderly men, that would be awful! [Laughter]

_____ : Do you think we could wear masks of sixteen year olds?

S: Well one could consider. Masks do have a definite ritual significance. Yes, you could think about that quite seriously and experiment a little. There's been some experimentation with masks at Padmaloka in the theatre group. One could think of all sorts of things. I think best would actually be sixteen year old girls, if you could find them.

Parami: If we ever manage to get eight sixteen year old girls on a retreat you can call me! [Laughter]

S: Well I'm sure we will one day. I'm sure we will one day. I'll come in my wheelchair. [Laughter]

_____ : Maybe we could enlist some teenage daughters of some of the elderly ladies who....

S: Probably that's the way to do it. We'll have to just wait until we've got teenage daughters.

_____ : Just as they're beginning to react against.... [Laughter]

Marichi: I think they might like dressing like that.

S: If you have proper rainbow garments they'd probably love wearing them.

Dhammadinna: So do you think it's best not done unless it's....

S: Well you can have offerings but if it's offering goddesses the symbolism isn't fulfilled if you have fat, elderly ladies waddling forward [Laughter]. No. Not being disrespectful but..... Or women wearing spectacles or with handbags. Symbolism is symbolism. It's just a question of appropriateness.

_____ : Bhante, would they correspond to our eighteen year olds now?

S: Might be. I'm not insisting on sixteen years, just young and beautiful. Even fourteen, fifteen, fair enough.

On a full puja it would be very nice to have at least eight youngish women coming forward and making offerings and maybe processing into the hall in the appropriate way. And also they should be instructed how to put out their offerings. On one occasion it was done all wrong. So the first person shouldn't put her offering bang in the middle. She should put it to the left and they should go on and form a row.

Parami: We'd have this in our ceremony book.

S: Right indeed, yes.

_____ : That's also to do with the placement of () on the line, where things are placed.

S: Or how they're placed, not Plonk!

_____ : Like you were saying about this three tiered sort of impression and placing what is appropriate to the appropriate level.

S: Right, yes, and having sufficient space to accommodate all the images. Usually, on Tuscanies, towards the end especially, people have put all their individual, or their personal, images onto the shrine for a particular occasion. That's sometimes looked very beautiful indeed.

Marichi: Bhante do you feel the three tier (unclear) should be there all the time?

S: Not necessarily. I don't feel very strongly about these sort of details.

Marichi: What do the three tiers represent?

S: Sila, Samadhi, Prajna? Have eight tiers if you like. Fifty two. Well in the case of Sila, Samadhi, Prajna, it is three progressive steps, or you could even see the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha in that way. The Sangha, then the Dharma, then the Buddha.

Dayamegha: Have you done a lot of the ritual yourself in the puja?

S: No, I haven't actually. Not as much as I would have liked to have done.

Dayamegha: Did you study any with Dhardo Rimpoche?

S: No. I did observe him though very carefully because I invited him to perform ceremonies at

the Triyana Vardana Vihara a number of times and he always came. His movements were very graceful but something that did occur to me when I spoke of Plonking things down on the shrine, you shouldn't Plonk things down at any time. I really notice this - I'm sorry to say so - in men's communities. I hope the ladies don't do it. When the table is laid or when food is served it's Plonk! The plate is banged down. I really think this is quite dreadful. Things should be done a little gently and gracefully. A certain amount of feeling. One shouldn't just sort of throw knives across the room - sorry not across the room, across the table.

They certainly don't do things like that in Zen monasteries. It's all applied mindfulness, applied awareness. I think it's very important in communities to cultivate these things. Not just slam doors. It took me years to get the Padmaloka community not to slam doors. I don't know why it was so difficult.

Parami: Ritual seems quite a good area for that because it seems to me there's a lot of energy involved in ritual but there's also a lot of procession.

S: Yes, that's true. I really saw this in the case of Dhardo Rimpoche. He was so good at the performance of ritual. It was such an aesthetic experience just to see him performing. Not all incarnate lamas were as good as that by any means. I think he was one of the very best. He synchronised things beautifully. For instance I've mentioned this before. He'd chant from a book, from a text, and this text would of course be wrapped up in a piece of silken cloth. That cloth was always folded in a very elaborate way, so towards the end of the puja he'd be chanting, he'd be performing certain mudras and he also would be folding up that book, and the last ring on the bell, the last word of the chant and the last fold of the cloth, all coincided, yes.

Parami: Maybe someone could go and study ritual with Dhardo Rimpoche.

S: At least observe him or take a videotape. And also there's the question of music. We've talked about this quite a lot, or I've talked on various occasions. We need to consider the place of music in ritual. That'll take, I suspect, a long time to work out and develop.

_____ : We ought to perhaps experiment with starting the chanting in the puja doing four different tones.

S: Right, yes. I think one needs to experiment a bit in little groups or in communities before one introduces anything new on a public occasion, and then introduce it only in consultation with all the Order members involved. One shouldn't experiment on public occasions, no. Experimentation should all have been done beforehand and you should have become quite sure that something was appropriate, or would very likely be appropriate.

Dayamegha: When you say music in the puja had you envisaged more the whole puja being chanted perhaps differently or the chants being different or....

S: Possibly, eventually. I think we have to start in a very simple way, perhaps with a little drum accompaniment or something of that sort, in the Chinese or Japanese way. Experiment with tunes, like we have tunes or semi-tunes for chanting the various mantras.

Dayamegha: How important is it that we chant. We were talking about there being a difference between chanting and singing and that perhaps our tradition is much more of a singing tradition, but chanting presumably is to do with.....

S: When you say our tradition what do you mean?

Dayamegha: Western.

S: No, the Western religious tradition, especially Catholic and orthodox tradition is chanting. Even the Church of England did have Gregorian chant I think. There is singing too. Perhaps we should experiment with that. I don't think it's a good idea to suspend the puja and someone sings

a little song. I don't think that's a good way of doing things. It must be really intimately part and parcel of the ritual itself. I have sometimes had visions of musical settings of the Sevenfold Puja, as you have musical settings of the mass, but you'd need good composers, and maybe a lot of experimentation before we came up with anything really worthwhile.

_____ : The chants that are to do with the sound touching the different centres, is that...

S: Well that's in the Tibetan tradition. It's not so with all Buddhist traditions. That's another problem in a way. There's the Ceylon style chanting, the Thai chanting, the Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan style chantings, they're all different. We've got our own Western musical tradition, both religious and secular. So there's a lot of work here for someone, and it's not all going to be done in my lifetime. Maybe not even in yours, but we've got to make a start.

Marichi: In order to give the puja another dimension.

S: To give it a greater richness. Well not everybody might like that. Some people might like plain pujas, just as in say the Christian tradition, you've got some people who prefer Quakerism, the Quaker approach, absolutely unadorned, and some who like the very elaborate, colourful Catholic ritual. Perhaps we won't have any one uniform standard but having different things on different occasions or in different Centres. Some Centres may be less ritualistic than others for instance. But all should be appreciated, at least in principle, even if they don't all appeal to you equally.

_____ : Where does the chant that we have for the Refuges and Precepts come from?

S: That's of Sinhalese origin. Among the Theravadins, the Sinhalese are the best chanters, undoubtedly. The Sinhalese monks that is, chant extremely well.

Dayamegha: Do they always chant with one tone?

S: It's not just always one tone but two sometimes or even three, depending of the different kinds of chant. Usually it's more or less a monotone.

Dayamegha: Not a lot of harmony.

S: Oh no, and not singing, no. No they don't harmonise, no. Some people could go to Buddhist countries or at least get records and listen and experiment. Yes, you can get usually records quite easily, tapes, of all these different kinds of chanting.

Marichi: We wondered a little about the fact that chants change (unclear) each time it was different.

S: Ah, that's not intentional. I think that is just someone leading a lot of chanting at a particular Centre and having his or her own style and people following that and gradually styles diverging.

Marichi: Do you think that matters very much?

S: I think we should try to keep it a bit uniform so that it's not too disconcerting to people coming from other Centres. Certainly for the basic things, the Refuges and Precepts and Sevenfold Puja.

Any further point? All right. Go forth and chant then! [Laughter]

End of Session