

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

QUESTIONS ON SEX, CELIBACY AND RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE ORDER

[Women's Order Convention 1987]

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Gunabhadhri, Parami, Marichi, Vidyavati, Sarvabhadri, Kalyanasri, Anoma, Ratnamala.

Sangharakshita: Five questions on sex, celibacy and relationships within the Order. So let's see what we can do with these questions. Let's see what we can make of them.

So one.

It seems celibacy can lead to personal autonomy.

A cautious statement. I wouldn't disagree with that, yes.

Is celibacy a necessary part of the process of becoming an autonomous individual, or is it merely one method among many?

Becoming an autonomous individual, hmm. I suppose to some extent it depends on what you mean by celibacy, especially in the sense of whether one is thinking of indefinite celibacy or celibacy for a specific length of time. I would incline to say that celibacy in the sense of celibacy for a limited period is part of the process, is in fact a necessary part of the process of becoming an autonomous individual, if it's only to the extent of really knowing and really, as it were, assuring yourself that you can be autonomous in that respect. Otherwise you don't really know. The instinct is so strong, the tendency is so powerful and it does undermine one's autonomy because one can become, through one's sexual instinct or the satisfaction of it, so totally dependent on another person, and clearly there is no autonomy there.

So I think that a period or perhaps even periods of celibacy are necessary so that you can be sure that you are developing as an autonomous individual. Otherwise it's so easy to fool yourself. I've known many cases of people having sexual relationships and assuring me that they were not in fact dependent on their sexual partner, but when the relationship has broken up, well they've broken down very often. So yes. I wouldn't say that indefinite or permanent celibacy is a necessary part of the process of becoming an autonomous individual. I think that would be to overstate the case, but certainly I think periods of celibacy are necessary, so as to clarify within one's own mind whether one is an autonomous individual to that extent or not, and so as to give oneself an opportunity of experiencing oneself fully on every level, as when one is on solitary retreat just as a single, solitary individual, able to depend for emotional support and nourishment on oneself, at least for a reasonable length of time. It is of course one method among many, if you look at it as a method, but we need to apply, no doubt, a number of different methods at the same time. We need periods of meditation, intensive meditation. We need periods of work, we need periods of celibacy, need opportunities of testing our self confidence, as when we give a talk, having never given one before, and so on.

So it is one method among many, but I think it is a necessary method if one takes it in the sense of periods of celibacy. The length of course depending on circumstances and the

temperament, the spiritual stage, that the individual has reached. But maybe we should look a little bit more at this question of celibacy as leading to personal autonomy. I think that is quite important. That is of course celibacy of the non neurotic sense. I think it is probably important to stress that. Not stressing giving up sex simply, but trying to increase one's personal autonomy and increasing one's personal autonomy doesn't mean cutting off from other people, because the more autonomous you are as an individual, the more truly you will be able to relate to others, assuming that they too are individuals and autonomous.

So

Is celibacy the preferred lifestyle of the WBO?

This question can be taken in two senses, one normative and the other factual. "Is celibacy the preferred lifestyle of the WBO?" could mean is it the lifestyle which the majority or the greatest number of Order members prefer or whether it is the lifestyle which is to be preferred.

Parami: To be is what we intended.

S: So does celibacy here mean permanent celibacy or occasional celibacy?

_____ : As a goal perhaps.

Parami: That would mean permanent.

_____ : Semi-permanent.

S: I think it's a natural progression that as one gets older and, at the same time spiritually more mature, sex becomes more and more peripheral and eventually disappears over the periphery as it were, but I think this should be a natural process rather than something that is imposed upon oneself prematurely. I think it's a preferred lifestyle in the sense that it's the lifestyle that all Order members should end up quite naturally leading, just because they feel it's the best and happiest and most natural lifestyle for them. It may take some longer than others. I know there are some who can't even think of it at fifty. Others are thinking about it quite seriously at thirty five or forty. I doubt whether anyone under thirty can think about it very seriously. Sometimes people in their twenties come to me and say they're thinking of taking a vow of indefinite celibacy but I don't well I don't exactly discourage them, I certainly don't encourage them. To take a vow for a month or three months, even six months, that's one thing, but indefinite celibacy when you're very young is probably asking or expecting too much of oneself. Though there may be a few people, a very few people who are sort of naturally celibate, even when young. Maybe through intense idealism, so one certainly shouldn't discourage such people, but I think they always will be in a minority.

Marichi: Wouldn't intense idealism lead to... this idea of the emphasis on one area ought to need correcting later on?

S: I think not necessarily. If someone is intensely idealistic in the sense of living much more in their mind and emotions than in their body. I don't mean in an alienated way. They may experience their body in an quite adequate fashion but experience their ideals much more intensely. I think some very young people are like that, so I think that they shouldn't be discouraged from being celibate.

So I think one could say that celibacy was the preferred ultimate lifestyle of the WBO. I think I'd be surprised if people over fifty weren't very definitely heading in that direction. I don't expect it really of very young people, except for periods of say up to six months or even a year, depending on circumstances and their individual natures. But certainly everybody should have periods of celibacy. I think a lot of people do naturally when they go on retreat, on solitary retreat. It just happens, or when they happen to be separated, for one reason or other, from their sexual partner. They should be able to take that in their stride.

Marichi: Isn't that slightly different if you know that the backup of a relationship is suspended so to speak?

S: Yes, psychologically it is, but sometimes that doesn't make it any the easier physically, yes. You have got the psychological backup. So from the point of view of physical celibacy it does help, it does give you the experience of it, the confidence that you can be physically celibate for a while, even if it is with the support of that knowledge that there is the possibility of the relationship in the background.

Is celibacy a goal of Buddhism?

Well yes and no. If it's a goal at all it's only an approximate goal. It's not the ultimate goal because the ultimate goal is enlightenment. So I think one must be careful not to... important as celibacy is... not to, as it were, define the ultimate goal in those sort of terms. Though I think, I suppose one can say that the majority of those who gain enlightenment will be celibate, but that is not to confuse the two. One isn't necessarily enlightened because one is celibate obviously.

Is that enough on question one do you think? Is it clear? So two:

Could homosexuality rather than heterosexuality be seen as a movement towards freeing us from our biological basis?

Probably yes and no. [Laughter] Because homosexuality is still sexuality isn't it, and sexuality is still biological. I have I think said in the past that in a sense heterosexuality is more basic than homosexuality because clearly sexuality is a mechanism for the sake of the reproduction of the species. That's obvious, so you could say that homosexuality from that point of view was a displaced heterosexuality. So inasmuch as it's a displaced heterosexuality, it does represent a movement towards freeing us from our biological basis. But inasmuch as it is still nevertheless sexuality, you are still, as it were, tied to that basis to some extent at least. Perhaps to the same extent.

_____ : It's kind of hierarchical.

Marichi: It's displaced.

S: It's displaced, yes.

Marichi: It's a substitute activity that doesn't really change anything except for the possibility of procreation.

S: Yes, because obviously there can be heterosexual relationships which don't have any biological fruit, and they are still biologically based. So I say that I don't think there's all that difference if any, between homosexuality and heterosexuality in that respect. To the

extent that homosexuality is a displacement of the fundamentally heterosexual instinct. It could be seen as a movement towards freeing us from our biological basis, but I don't think in itself it does constitute such freedom, even to a very limited extent.

_____ : So you could even say it is a perversion. Not seeing your biological instinct clearly.

S: Well it's a perversion in the sense that it's a displacement, because sexual activity is basically heterosexual. It fulfils a biological function. One certainly didn't have homosexuality first and then heterosexuality! It was very definitely the other way around. Yes. One could say that perhaps in the case of someone who was formerly, so to speak, heterosexual - not that I really like this terminology but let's use it for the time being - one could say that in the case of someone who was formerly heterosexual and had considered themselves heterosexual in a very narrow and exclusive sense, to engage in some form of homosexual activity might result in the sort of loosening of the sexual instinct from the biological basis. Perhaps one could say that.

But basically, as I said, homosexuality is still sexuality and sexuality is basically biological. But to the extent perhaps that homosexuality is a movement towards celibacy, it could be a movement towards freeing us from our biological basis but homosexuality very often is far from being a movement towards celibacy. Is that clear?

Parami: When we discussed it there was another element, if I remember rightly which maybe people feel they need clarifying, which was the area in fact that in heterosexual activity the fact that you have a biological man and a biological woman, some people felt increased the polarity in that relationship.

S: I think that is true but then it would increase it, as it were, only on the psychological level presumably. Because even within the context of a homosexual relationship you can still have a very definite polarity.

So I'd say on the whole homosexuality cannot be seen as a movement towards freeing us from our biological basis. It might in a very few cases function in that way but I think normally it wouldn't.

All right onto three, something quite different.

Could erotic fantasy be used creatively by unhooking that energy and refining it?

This is a question quite a few people have asked. I'm not quite sure about this I must say. Assuming for the sake of argument that erotic fantasy can be used creatively at all, I think it would be quite difficult to know or to be sure whether you were in fact using that erotic fantasy creatively or whether you were just indulging. How would you know, how would you be sure?

Marichi: Is this to do with erotic fantasy thrust upon one, so to speak?

S: Involuntary. Mmm.

Marichi: Rather than thinking 'I'll have a nice fantasy now'.

S: Then the question arises exactly how would one do that. I suppose that the only way in which you could use the erotic fantasy creatively would be not just unhooking it but

hooking it onto something of a more ideal nature, presumably that. Presumably you could quite literally refine upon the fantasy. Maybe to begin with it was a crudely erotic fantasy and you just refine it. As in the Vajrayana they sometimes speak of sexuality in the form of sexual intercourse, then in the form of simply embracing, then in the form of just holding hands, then in the form of just looking at each other. So perhaps in the course of your erotic fantasy you could just lead your fantasy from level to level in that sort of way. That, presumably, would be using it creatively.

But I don't think you can simply unhook it from its gross form. You've got positively and creatively to develop a more refined and positive form.

Marichi: Another possibility was detaching the emotion from the sexual aspect of it. It seemed to be to do with emotion more than a physical sensation.

S: I think that would happen if you ascended through those levels in the way that I mentioned, yes.

Marichi: Presumably if it's physical sensation it's a bit more complicated and you suppress it.

S: Yes, because obviously the mental and the physical are interconnected. Probably the first thing to do is to get oneself firmly onto the mental level and then gradually refine one's erotic fantasies on that level. If for instance your erotic fantasies are associated with a particular person, perhaps you could, as it were, fantasise or imagine yourselves or yourself and that person, following the spiritual path together, or imagine yourself growing old with that person and the purely sexual side of the relationship diminishing and fading away, ending up with a very positive happy, friendly, but still intense relationship with that person which carries you into quite a different world. Then you can fantasise about being reborn together, reborn in a devaloka where there was no distinction of gender but where you would still be very great friends. You could fantasise hopefully in that sort of way.

So yes, I think erotic fantasy can be used creatively, but it hasn't just to be unhooked from its grosser forms but hooked onto more subtle and refined forms.

Then:

Does taking the anagarika precept mean you suppress erotic fantasy altogether?

Well strictly speaking, if one takes it just literally the anagarika precept is a precept to abstain from physical sex in all its forms. It is a body precept, as it were. But clearly there's very little point in engaging in erotic, which I presume is sexual, fantasy while just observing bodily celibacy. So one needs to bring one's fantasy under control at the same time. Not by just suppressing it - I don't know whether this word is used deliberately - but certainly by using it creatively so that in the end you transcend it. I think people taking the anagarika precept will at least from time to time, I imagine, have to have recourse to the creative use of erotic fantasy so that they can maintain their state of physical celibacy without too much strain. I imagine that to be the case.

Vidyavati: Do you think it actually is possible to suppress erotic fantasy? Can it be suppressed?

S: I think it can be, at least for short periods, but whether it's wise is another matter.

There are skilful as well as unskilful ways of suppressing it. You can suppress it by engaging in an alternative activity and reading for instance a book that you're very interested in or engaging in some physical activity as a result of which you'll just forget about the erotic fantasy.

_____ : To go back to the first part of the question about unhooking erotic fantasy from a particular person....

S: I mean, I did speak in terms of unhooking from the grosser form and onto the subtler form. So if one's erotic fantasy is hooked onto a particular person, I don't think it's so much a question of unhooking it from that person, as hooking it onto a subtler and more refined version, as it were, of your relationship with that person.

_____ : So it's not an abstraction.

S: Not an abstraction. Yes, I think that would be rather difficult. I mean you could say in theory well unhook your erotic fantasy from that person, just fantasise about enlightenment, but that doesn't work that way. That's why you could perhaps, if you find yourself involved in a gross erotic fantasy with a particular person, well just start fantasising about going on retreat together and fantasise about meditating together and so on. Rather than try to put that person altogether out of your mind. I doubt if that would work for very long. So in a way it's a question of unhooking from the grosser form of that person and therefore from the grosser form of your own relationship and fantasy, and hooking on to a subtler form of that person. In a sense you see that person in a different way, as a sort of companion on your spiritual quest, rather than just as a sort of sex object or object of your crude sexual fantasies.

_____ : I suppose that if one's projecting some aspect of yourself, if you could unhook that projection, in some way you are giving away something of yourself if you're projecting on somebody else.

S: Yes.

_____ : So somehow you could stop giving away that part of yourself and own it...

S: I think that happens naturally, as it were, as the projection or the hooking on becomes more refined. I don't think you can unhook or withdraw the projection all at once. I doubt very much if that's possible in most cases. So just refine and subtleise. If you do fantasise in the way I've suggested and you and the person about whom you are fantasising go on retreat together, you can go through all sorts of details, and in the end sort of fantasise the retreat ending and your going happily your separate ways. (chuckles)

So have I dealt with this question, 'does taking the anagarika precept mean you suppress erotic fantasy altogether?', is that adequately dealt with do you think?

Marichi: What about just sexual feeling that hasn't actually got an object. People continue to be plagued by that.

S: Well perhaps you can turn that into a fantasy, or perhaps one can I imagine relieve the physical tension by transposing it to the mental level and taking up an erotic fantasy. I think usually the physical sensation will be accompanied by a degree of sexual fantasy, won't it? I would imagine so.

Marichi: Not necessarily.

S: Well if it isn't I think perhaps then - this is assuming that it is just a temporary difficulty and you really are suited to being an anagarika - I think that then perhaps you should start up, as it were, an erotic fantasy to take the pressure off....

Marichi: To make it less physical.

S: Yes, to make it less physical. But I think if you suffer in that way too much you should really start questioning whether you have not taken up the anagarika precept prematurely.

_____ : I asked that question in a more general sense. As to mean that an anagarika presumably has been celibate for some time.

S: Yes, quite a few people recently, or relatively speaking, have asked if they could take up the anagarika precept, but I've said usually well experiment for six months or a year, but in some cases they've already experimented for several years and have no difficulty. In those cases - there are two or three like that who will be taking the precept as soon as I can get around to giving it to them. I think there's two men and one woman.

Anyway onto four:

Sexual relationships are a touchy area in which most people are not receptive to feedback, nor very flexible to making changes, even when feedback suggests it.

This is what you've all found in your personal experience perhaps, possibly when dealing with fellow Order members and mitras.

_____ : Or possibly when they deal with us! [Laughter]

S: Yes. So I think this is generally agreed.

In discussion we felt this was for several reasons. Sex is an instinctual drive and often unconscious, and therefore very strong. Sexual relationships usually involve projections and criticism of that relationship and especially of that partner is often taking as criticism of oneself.

Yes, I'd agree with that.

Sexual relationships express a need for caring, love and acceptance. Any questioning of one's relationships is therefore threatening to oneself.

Yes, inasmuch as it seems to deprive one of that care and love.

For these reasons it is an area in which we tend to be insecure and the more insecure we are in any area the more difficult it is to cope with feedback.

I think that's all very true.

So can you shed any further light on why sexual relationships are such a sensitive area for feedback?

I would have thought that was more than enough! [Laughter]

Marichi: Perhaps how to deal with it.

S: So

How can we encourage more openness in this area?

Hmm. It's as though one's sexual relationships or sexual experience is very often the last refuge of your privacy. [Laughter]

Parami: The last vestige we thought.

S: It's the last stronghold, yes. I don't know how it is among women but men often talk about their sexual experiences but it's not in an open way. It's in a way of boasting, of conquests and all that sort of thing, so that isn't really expressive of genuine openness. Very often it's just the opposite.

So how can we encourage more openness in this area? I doubt very much if there's anything you can do specifically in this area. I think you can only encourage openness in general and hope that it will gradually spread to this very sensitive area also. I don't think you can expect someone to open up to you about this intimate area of their life, as it were, cold. You've got to develop a good friendship with them. You've just got to, and in some ways the friendship has got to be in its own way, as close, as intimate as the sexual relationship. Otherwise why should people open up? They'll open up with their sexual partner about you, but unless you've got an equally close friendship with them they won't open up about their sexual relationship with you.

So I think it really is a matter of developing friendship and mutual trust. Otherwise people, circumstances being as they are, will just not open up about that area. It's the last thing that they will do. Open up in a genuine and sincere way.

Also of course it is a sort of instinctual and unconscious area. To open up means you talk about it presumably, but that means you must have brought it up into consciousness to some extent, but that is again one of the last things that people do. They don't think about it. They just allow it to remain unconscious. Even though it may be a very big part of their lives. It's just not acknowledged. They don't think about it, they don't reflect upon it, they're not aware of it, so that makes it very very difficult to be open about it. So awareness in all aspects of their life needs to be encouraged too. Very often they don't think of that aspect of their life as a suitable object of awareness.

_____ : Because you don't want to change it, quite often.

S: I think that's an additional reason but I think initially it is simply because it is a largely unconscious, well I won't say activity but and activity in which we engage for reasons of which we're not completely conscious.

_____ : And also the point that people aren't aware of how much (unclear) and what effect it has.

Parami: And so it could be seen that to encourage awareness in that area, as with other areas of life, to suggest that (unclear)

S: Yes, and be more reflective about.....

Parami: It will lead to more openness generally.

S: Yes. Not that one wants to lose one spontaneity. D.H.Lawrence has a lot to say about and against sex in the head. One can appreciate what he was getting at, but one doesn't want it to be a completely sort of automatic activity.

Parami: It's interesting because at one point in our discussion, I think it was yesterday, I was saying that I feel that the fact that we have such an emphasis on single sex activities in the Movement is one of our strongest features, and I'm just wondering now as you talk that maybe that emphasis causes us in some way to look at that area very well, not so much in terms of sexual relations but generally our relations.....

S: I'm sure it does, yes.

Parami: ... and that's maybe another feature of that which is quite important.

S: I think perhaps that is one of the reasons why some people, newly come into contact with the Friends, feel a bit uneasy or a bit uncomfortable about this whole question of single sex activities and communities and retreats.

Parami: It's interesting that it's oftenthe most controversial area for a lot of people, and almost from that point of view I think it's good that we've got them, almost because it forces people to....

S: Even if they end up in the same situation as they are already, at least it is in a more aware sort of fashion one hopes. As a result of conscious choice rather than just automatic..... just accepting what people usually do accept. And sometimes one can feel that even if someone is talking about their sexual relationship they're not really talking about it in a sincere and open way. You get the feeling that in their heart of hearts they've almost made up their minds, almost consciously, they're just not going to take what you say seriously, they're just not going to listen! [Laughter] Yes! You can feel it. I've certainly had this experience with people.

Parami: I suppose it's a step in the right direction.

S: They can be outwardly amenable but you can see in their heart of hearts they're determined not to change one iota! Not even to consider it. (chuckles) So I don't know if I've shed any further light. I think I've simply confirmed what you've already been thinking and saying.

Marichi: We thought kalyana mitrata was obviously a solution but again it's what you say, it provides something that's very strong.

S: Right, yes.

Marichi: You don't always seem to be able to do that.

S: Because very often a characteristic feature of the sexual relationship is its exclusiveness, and the fact that it embodies or represents almost all the relationships in that person's life. They don't have a spread of relationships so that particular one becomes overloaded. I'm sure this is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why people experience so many difficulties in their sexual relationships. If they were more relaxed, because they had other important relationships, I'm sure their sexual relationships would

be more satisfactory. Not only just from a narrowly sexual point of view but as human relationships. I think quite a few people have discovered that for themselves.

Parami: We did talk a little bit about often when one wants a sexual relationship, it's not just the sex but you want to be special to somebody, so we talked a bit about how that enters, which is also connected with exclusivity, and how that enters kalyana mitrata relations. Is it all right for a mitra to feel that they're your special mitra.

S: (Laughs) I'm a bit suspicious of these special feelings!

Parami: Yes, we were a little.

S: I'm only asking a question here so don't be quick to react but are women more prone to this than men?

Parami: Possibly.

S: I must say looking back over my own career in this respect, limited as it has been, I can't ever remember wanting to be special to anybody in any way. I haven't heard men talk about this among themselves.

_____ : I think it's more women.

Marichi: Women are more open about it in discussions.

Parami: I think maybe men sometimes, in my limited experience, want you to be special, if you see what I mean.

S: Ah right, yes. They want you to be special for them, yes, right. Yes, that's true. Yes maybe in their case it takes that other form, yes. Yes you're bound in the same way. Yes that's true.

Parami: Which obviously connects with the idea of becoming a more autonomous individual. Presumably if you're an autonomous individual you don't need to be special to somebody.

S: Or you realise you're just special in yourself. Everybody is special, everybody is unique, and you appreciate your own uniqueness as you appreciate everyone else's uniqueness.

Just reflecting on what you said about men, look at the way that some men who can afford it load their wives with jewels and furs. It's because they want to, not exactly make them something special, to show that they regard them as something very special.

Parami: Enshrine them as special.

S: Yes.

_____ : So we ought to have close intimate friendships that aren't special.

Parami: Or very special.

S: Yes. You can't have, of course, too many because you just don't have the emotional

energy but at least there should be perhaps three or four or maybe even five quite important relationships in your life. Maybe one or two of them would involve relationships with blood relations, that have gone just beyond that biological level. Yes, you shouldn't really put all your eggs in one basket, should you.

Marichi: We all obviously need appreciation and somebody to care for us.

S: Yes you need honest appreciation, and from as many sources as possible.

Parami: Something that you said before about encouraging openness and that that openness will happen as you have more strong friendships. It just made me think that it's interesting that people are sometimes more easily open to their sexual partner, and just talking about being special makes me wonder if it's because they feel whatever they are they'll be all right because that other person has a vested interest in them. So it's almost like when we try to develop friendships we're changing the whole basis of something. That's quite a lot, and I suppose it's not surprising that it takes time for that to happen with people. If you could use an habitual....

S: Habitual reserve.

Parami: It's not going to just happen because you're told it's a good idea or something.

S: Also if anything is of real importance to you and really is part of your intimate life, well as I said you can't talk about it, as it were, cold. It may be not just your sexual relationships, it may be your religious convictions or it may be your aesthetic experience, your feeling for a particular picture or sculpture. You can't just talk about it cold as it were. There's got to be a definite rapport between you and the person you're talking to. It's not simply with regard to sexual relationships.

Parami: But the other thing that I was thinking about as we talked was there's been talk recently of confidentiality and that sometimes breaks down within a sexual relationship. An Order member perhaps.

S: Yes, well there is this point that in sexual relationships very often there is a lot of mutual confidence. It's very easy to.....

[End of side one side two]

... give one's confidence, at least momentarily in that sort of situation. Even to blurt out something that you regret having blurted out in retrospect. But then what happens when the sexual relationship ends, as it sometimes does, and what happens when it ends negatively? Well the confidences that you have imparted can be used as ammunition against you, and this is what you get, very often, in divorce proceedings, which is very unpleasant. So yes, people do have a tendency to a breach of confidentiality - confidentiality with regard to other people - within the sexual relationship, but then when the sexual relationship breaks down the confidentiality within that relationship is no longer respected very often, which is really quite a shameful thing. Things just get blurted out in the divorce court which ought never to be really spoken about in that way. But you were looking at it from a slightly different point of view.

Parami: Yes, I was thinking of cases where Order members have sexual relationships with mitras and perhaps - I know there have been a few cases where the Order member has been open to the mitra maybe and in that case it has been quite inappropriate, and how

that affects that mitra's relationship with other Order members.

S: Right, well this raises the point of where your greatest responsibility lies. If you are 'open', single inverted commas, in that way, as an Order member to a mitra, it really means that there's some imperfection at least in your Sangha refuge on a certain level. Because, in a way you are going for refuge to your sexual partner, you are most open with them, which is, in a way, quite wrong. I mean it's inappropriate too because actually if you, yourself are spiritually committed, there are certain matters about which you cannot be fully open, with the best will in the world, to someone who is not spiritually committed. So you may speak certain words but you haven't really confided in that person. Or if you have it means that for the time being you've lapsed from being an Order member. You've sunk, as it were, to the group level for the time being.

So I think it requires quite a lot of strength of mind to resist the importunities of your sexual partner - 'Oh do tell me, why don't you tell me, don't you trust me' etc., etc., as Samson and Delilah. You all remember that don't you. I wish I could think of another example the other way round but I can't. Years ago there was this sort of talk in the papers about in the secret services homosexuals being security risks, but heterosexuals are no less risk, if not more so - Mata Hari, yes, and the mistress of the French Prime Minister at the beginning of the war. You know the famous story involving Churchill. I think it was when there was some discussion going on between Churchill and the French Prime Minister, and he had a mistress who always interfered in politics and had a lot of influence over the prime minister. So she apparently persuaded the French Prime Minister to do something that Churchill was trying to dissuade him from doing, so Churchill had to report this in the Cabinet. So he reported it and then one of his Cabinet colleagues said why weren't you able to persuade the French Prime Minister? So Churchill said Madame so and so had arguments at her disposal which were not at my disposal! [Laughter] So sometimes it happens like that doesn't it.

So you need to be very strong minded and therefore to put your sexual relationship in its right place in your mandala, if you are to be able to resist those sort of solicitations.

Parami: Though I think to be fair sometimes it isn't always that way round.

S: No, I'm not saying that it is.

Parami: What I mean is sometimes I think there's a desire to communicate because of there's a lack of communication on the Order level.

S: That could be so, but even so one should be strong minded in these matters.

Parami: I think it isn't always somebody saying tell me, tell me. I think sometimes there's a desire to communicate.

S: In that respect it's even worse!

Marichi: You had a rotten time at the Order meeting...

Parami: And so and so was horrible.

S: Yes. So it does really mean a recognition that your deepest relationship is really with fellow Order members, and that your basic loyalty is to fellow Order members. Otherwise you're putting a biological relationship, a sexual relationship, at the centre of your

mandala instead of your spiritual relationships.

Parami: But it's interesting. We discussed this issue at the LBC....

S: I know that women Order members have been concerned, at least I believe they've been concerned, about the number of women mitras who are in sexual relationships with men Order members. I saw a report or something where an actual figure was quoted. I must say I was really quite surprised, yes. I couldn't help thinking that it isn't always a good thing from the point of view of the woman mitra, because I think it gives her in some cases a distorted picture of the Order itself. Everything is filtered for her through that male Order member who is important in her life, and perhaps sometimes she thinks oh well I'm so close to this particular Order member I don't need to bother very much about being close to women Order members.

Marichi: Probably end up with a sense of having one foot in the Order.

S: Yes. I think, if you don't mind my saying so, that traditionally, maybe due to cultural conditioning, women do have a foot in this camp or the other through their sexual relationships. Maybe sometimes it's been the only way that they could have a foot in anything. But there is that sort of tendency. The Cleopatra complex or Madame Pompadour complex or syndrome you could say.

_____ : It breeds complacency.

S: Yes indeed. It's also a part of a tendency, whether due to cultural conditioning or not I'm not sure, to live your life through a man instead of living it yourself. Years ago, not recently but years ago, I have had women say to me - this was before we had a mitra system - I don't really need to be ordained because my husband or my boyfriend is ordained and I'm an Order member through them. I don't think any woman - even a mitra - would say that now.

_____ : Do you think the men Order members are aware of this difficulty. I had a relationship with a male Order member for quite a long time being a mitra, and *****'s just kept right out of that whole area and said whatever I sort out is with women and....

S: Yes sometimes they take up that attitude, but sometimes they go a bit to extremes in that respect. But that is better.

_____ : I was just wondering how clear men are in that area.

S: I don't think they're all very clear, to be frank. I don't think they are. I don't think they think about it very much. I'm afraid more often than not they just follow their instincts and hope for the best.

Parami: I think also there's a certain amount can get invested in having that kind of relationship where somebody does experience something through you.

S: Well yes you can experience something through another person. On a certain level that's very valid, but you can't experience your own spiritual commitment through another person. That has to be your own. So perhaps it's unavoidable, but I think for a woman mitra to have a male Order member as a boyfriend is probably a complicating factor for her. But on the other hand what is she to do when she doesn't want perhaps to have a

relationship with someone outside the movement, and male Order members seem to be rather easily available.

_____ : Sometimes it's their introduction to the movement.

S: Yes, sometimes. Though I think that's less and less the case now. More and more women find their way along quite independently which wasn't the case years ago.

_____ : I suppose they might have a relationship with a man mitra and the mitra becomes an Order member.

S: Yes. That is perhaps a little different, but I think there are many instances of men Order members forming a relationship with a woman mitra. But then they themselves would say in self defence well we don't go outside the movement, we live and work within it, what other women do we meet? They would say I'm sure, and that's true to some extent. Some men Order members who run classes at centres take a vow that they will not have a relationship with any woman actually coming to any of the classes which they are taking, well that's a step in the right direction. I think that started in Glasgow and spread to one or two other centres.

Parami: So they come to other centres and have relationships.

S: Well perhaps that does simplify things a bit.

Parami: Except that it leaves the people in the other centres to mop up.

S: I think women Order members ought to be able to tackle men Order members about these things in the interests of their mitras, women mitras, if necessary. There should be that degree of openness possible.

Parami: That's another bit of the question that we've had already. That sexual relationships are a difficult area to communicate. I think it's equally true in the Order.

S: I think it's probably difficult if there isn't at least some friendship to begin with.

Parami: I have done that on a few occasions, talked to a man Order member that's having a relationship with the mitras that I have contact with.

S: Sometimes in ordinary life it happens that a man finds it more easy to discuss his sexual relationships in a serious way with a woman rather than with a man.

Parami: It maybe takes a bit of courage to go in on that though. I suppose if we take the KM relationship seriously you'd find the courage somehow to do that.

S: And also of course one needs to encourage the woman mitra to look at her relationship seriously and objectively. It doesn't mean necessarily to give it up but at least to be aware in that particular area.

Anyway fifth question which is the last one:

As one becomes more and more a true individual, is there less need for intimacy, even of a non-sexual kind, as in a very close friendship, or does intimacy then fulfil different functions in each companionship which is still necessary?

Well I think we all understand what is meant by true individual. I'm not so sure what the word 'need' means here, and also what exactly does one mean by 'intimacy'. I suppose intimacy really means just openness, mutual openness. Because I think there can be physical intimacy without any real emotional and mental intimacy at all. Physical intimacy's just a mechanical sort of thing. It doesn't really add up to much in the long run, because it can be superseded by very negative feelings.

I wouldn't say that as one becomes more and more a true individual there is less need for intimacy. Yes, less need in the sense of intimacy as usually understood, but in a sense a true individual is more capable of intimacy, because he or she is more open.

Marichi: So you're not dependent on it in the same way.

S: It's a natural expression of the fact that you are a true individual. Supposing if you are a true individual and you meet another Order member, maybe that you've never even seen before, well you can be open with them straight away, quite naturally, quite spontaneously. You don't have to go through any motions of physical intimacy or anything of that sort. You're just mutually open, because you're both true individuals. You don't feel any need for it in the subjective sense, but when you have the opportunity you respond to that opportunity. It's a situation perhaps or a condition it's not easy for us to imagine sometimes. Also if you're a true individual, even if you're not quite a true individual, there's a pleasure in being open. Not having to hold back, being able to say what you think, what you feel.

Vidyavati: The question here did mean intimacy with like a special friend, do you think there would still be a need for that?

S: Well if there was well then anybody who was also a true individual could be for the time being your special friend. (chuckles)

Parami: It wouldn't have to be the same special friend all the time.

S: Yes. It's not that there's the need but that you are just given the opportunity of unfolding another, perhaps a deeper, aspect of your being with someone who is also a true individual. Because real openness has to be mutual, doesn't it. Otherwise you could go and be open with a tree! Tell the tree what you really think, but to tell another human being is a different experience altogether. If it's another individual, assuming yourself to be an individual, again it's a totally different experience. I think perhaps we tend to think of intimacy too exclusively in physical terms. That by itself is just bodily juxtaposition you could say or bodily consecuity, it's not real intimacy. Intimacy is of the mind and the emotions, and it can be reflected in bodily intimacy but I don't think there is such a thing as bodily intimacy really by itself.

I think within the Order at least nowadays people are relatively clear about these sort of issues compared with what they were a few years ago. Even a lot of mitras are reasonably clear.

Parami: You mean these issues in general?

S: Oh yes. I think so.

Parami: Because it was interesting. We had, I felt, quite good discussions over the three days but it was quite difficult to come up with questions, because we felt in many areas

we were able to come up within the group...

S: Yes, there doesn't seem to be great confusion or anything like that. It's just a certain maybe confirmation needed or a little bit of further clarification or the connecting of one thing with another, and of course you probably know that there's going to be an issue of 'Golden Drum' on Buddhism, Sex and Spirituality. In fact two issues, one featuring an interview with me, and the other featuring articles by different people on aspects I haven't touched on, at least not in the interview as edited by Nagabodhi. I think it is good that things can be brought out much more into the open and we lay our cards on the table and say well this is our position. I think that's much better.

Because I've said different things from time to time, in the odd lecture or the odd discussion group, but I've never been interviewed on the subject systematically, nor have I written anything on it very systematically. My remarks in the Eightfold Path lectures were based on tradition and were very very brief and not really very adequate for the movement now. So I think it will be quite interesting to have everything spelled out, as it were, in a more connected sort of fashion, though Nagabodhi's used only about a third of that interview. It lasted six hours altogether.

Marichi: Did you keep thinking of more things to say?

S: Actually yes. Yes, it developed very well, very spontaneously and he thought of more things to ask me, yes. But he didn't want everything to be covered just by me. He wanted to have some follow on by other people, so what I had to say on various subjects I think like marriage, he asked other people to deal with. But he does think he might one day edit the whole of the interview and publish it in some form. I certainly enjoyed the exchange with him.

Marichi: Have you had other thoughts subsequently or have you managed to cover everything?

S: I think we did manage to cover everything, because there were three sessions with I think a couple of days in between two of the sessions, [and] I had time to think and to add things and I knew he was going to edit it all and organise it, so I didn't bother about it being out of place or anything of that sort. But I've often thought it is an aspect of life that is very important for almost everybody and it's an aspect of life from which people often expect so much but it does seem a pity that it's so often a source of suffering and trauma rather than anything else. That does seem a pity.

I think probably the biggest part of the solution is just multiplying one's relationships, not one's sexual relationships but one's human and, if possible, one's spiritual relationships, so that that particular relationship isn't overloaded and you don't invest in it too much. You're sincere in it and loyal to it but not investing so much of yourself in it that you're devastated if ever it comes to an end. Even apart from its ever coming to an end you can see people sometimes being so possessive and so jealous and often that works against the relationship because people sometimes don't like to be possessed or to feel that your eye is always on them because you don't trust them, or that they don't have any real freedom.

Parami: It's interesting saying that it's one of the last vestiges. It seems to be almost one of the last areas that come to maturity.

S: That's true. I think one has to admit that in the case of an awful lot of people, there are some highly infantile elements in their sexual relationships.

Parami: Even when the person seems very mature and organised in other areas.

S: Oh yes! Oh yes indeed! I don't know about women so much but I certainly know that that is so in the case of men. Well why do lovers engage in baby talk. Tell me that. Well they very often do, don't they. [Laughter] So one has heard. [Laughter]

Parami: Marichi doesn't engage in baby talk perhaps. [Laughter] And also, since we're on the subject, one is quite surprised to hear about all sorts of very odd sexual practices. Again I think this seems to me - I've better information as regards men, but there seems to be an awful lot of these bondage parlours and things of that sort around. Well why? What has gone wrong?

Parami: I thought you meant in the FWBO.

S: No, I mean just in the outside world. What has gone wrong. It seems really odd and strange and weird, and it's very extensive, so what on earth has happened? One can't help wondering. I've no answer to this as I'm sure you haven't either, probably.

So it is a tricky area and maybe these sort of things also go back to childhood, to infancy, maybe they represent and infantile element.

_____ : Perhaps it is difficult for people to be seen as infantile. It seems more sophisticated. The society sees it as being sort of connection.

_____ : I think as the society's more complex it's harder to mature.

S: Right, yes. I'm sure that this is what is, as Parami said, one of the last aspects of one's nature, one's being, to come to maturity. I think actually a mature sexual relationship is a very rare thing, or a mature sexual attitude is a very rare thing.

Vidyavati: How would you describe a mature sexual attitude?

S: Well I suppose essentially it would involve, or it would be, a relationship or an attitude which did not occupy the centre of your mandala, putting it in our familiar terms. A mature sexual relationship would be one which had its appropriate place within your life, your relationships generally, which wasn't obsessive and overly important or overloaded with significance or overinvested in. That wouldn't mean that you weren't caring or that the relationship didn't mean a great deal to you but that you just didn't overvalue it. And also obviously that it didn't contain these infantile elements, or that it wasn't satisfying needs which it, in a sense, wasn't meant to satisfy. Say need for security.

Parami: intimacy.

S: For intimacy. Well intimacy, even intimacy is not incompatible with a sexual relationship but the physical intimacy, so called, doesn't guarantee the mental intimacy.

Parami: And perhaps also it's the only relationship where (unclear)

S: Yes, right.

Marichi: A question about companionship.

S: I think it revolves on this question of need. Because if a number of individuals, true

individuals, come together so that you have a sangha, they don't need one another in the ordinary sense but they do experience in one another's company a delight that they don't experience in any other way. It's not that they're attached to the delight or that they hang onto it, but when they have the opportunity of experiencing it, well they embrace that opportunity very happily. But they're not unhappy when they don't have it. It adds an additional dimension to their already happy state.

Parami: You can understand that rather lesser level. Like sometimes when I come on an Order thing I just feel such a relief just to be among Order members and I've heard other people say that, and it almost doesn't matter which Order members.....

S: Yes, in a sense it doesn't even matter whether they're particularly good Order members, strange to say! If you know what I mean, taking my words not too literally. [Laughter] I notice this at Padmaloka because in the Order Office community we've got only Order members. Sometimes it happens that we have a mitra to stay or a mitra there for a meal. It makes an enormous difference, you know. It may be a very good mitra in a very positive mental state but it makes a very perceptible difference.

Parami: I've got some very strong friendships with mitras but I'm just aware that there's a whole difference when I come in these kind of situations.

S: I was talking about this sort of thing with someone, it might have been an Order member in Rivendell, and I was saying for instance that I find it's a quite different experience, as I've already said, being with a group of Order members and being with say a group of mitras, but I also said that that it's a very different experience being with a group of women Order members from being with a group of men mitras. The topic of discussion with that particular person was closeness. I think they assumed that I would feel closer to a group of men mitras because they were men, than to a group of women Order members because they were women, but that isn't actually my experience at all. I certainly feel closer spiritually to women Order members than I do to men mitras, and it is because of that spiritual factor.

So this particular woman, I forget who it was, was somewhat surprised I think to hear this.

Parami: That's quite interesting.

S: I don't think she was very surprised but a little surprised. Perhaps she just assumed that the relationship with someone of the same sex was the relationship, but actually it isn't. From a spiritual point of view the real relationship is a spiritual relationship, regardless of the sex of the other person. Sometimes men - I think not Order members - tend to assume that I cannot but find the company of women Order members a bit boring, but that isn't the case at all! I assure them of this but I don't know whether they always believe me but it isn't the case at all. Sometimes I find the company of men boring which women might find difficult to believe but they can be. [Laughter] They start talking about cars and things, I'm not in the least interested.

But I think it is important, winding up this whole discussion, that one just places more and more emphasis on the spiritual element and especially as one gets older, I think all of you will find as you get into your forties and fifties that you'll find relationships with Order members of the opposite sex more and more easy and the sexual element will in the end become virtually irrelevant. This would be a sort of natural progression. But when you're very young, committed though you may be, you cannot help seeing a male Order member

as a male Order member or female Order member as a female Order member, but hopefully that won't be forever. And by that time hopefully you will be not just older but more mature in every way and more balanced, more androgenous and not so concerned about your biological opposite. More concerned about the spiritual relationship, which one can have with any Order member.

So in that sort of way celibacy becomes a more easy and natural thing. Otherwise, especially when you're young you cannot but see a member of the opposite sex in terms of a potential or not potential sexual partner. It's always at the back of one's mind when one is young, or even when one is not so young. But I think gradually one does get over that. I don't think you get over it simply by growing old. No, I think the ageing process has to be backed up by definite spiritual practice and experience. I think age by itself doesn't always do the trick.

_____ : You just lose the energy that's all, the older you get.

S: Yes, yes. I can remember an eighty odd year old woman saying 'I may be eighty but I have my feelings you know!' [Laughter] But as regards this whole question of openness with regard to this aspect of life, I think it can only be on a basis of quite firm friendship, especially when it comes to discussing things and being open with someone of the opposite sex. Or discussing say with a male Order member his relationship with one of your women mitras.

_____ : Do you think one has to have friendship with that Order member to be able to do that?

S: It makes it easier. I think there has to be at least some element of friendship. You may not have a very close one, and your own approach must be friendly and unthreatening because he may feel very threatened indeed by any enquiry into that aspect of his life.

_____ :

S: Yes, but less so perhaps if it's a woman Order member.

_____ : No authority in women.

S: I think men are more likely to regard another man or another Order member as an authority figure, than a woman. I think. Unless they have peculiarities in that area. [Laughter]

What time is your puja?

Anyway it's nice to see another little area tidied up a bit. I suppose it just means that collectively the Order is becoming more mature. It means just that. OK.

End of Session