

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

THE VENERABLE SANGHARAKSHITA

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
with the EAST LONDON REGION
of the WESTERN BUDDHIST ORDER
at the London Buddhist Centre**

Held on six Sunday evenings from 20 May to 24 June 1990

BRIEF SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS ASKED

Page	Summary
1	What is the purpose of these question and answer sessions?
2	Does Bhante think Order members in the LBC region are questioning his teachings?
4	If so, is this a good or bad thing?
5	If there is questioning of these teachings, what form or forms does it take? How should the single-sex principle be explained to homosexuals?
9	Would a stronger emphasis on single-sex mean an intense but smaller, Movement? Will it be possible to have a broad popular base as well as a committed core?
16	(1) Symbols of transformation in the Life of the Buddha. Correlating wisdoms and poisons. (2) The Tibetan Buddhist practice of "staring" into negative emotions. Staying with the experience until it passes.
21	Experimentation with visualizing seed syllables in Roman script, specifically in the form of the sort of monograms that were popular during the Renaissance.
23	(Based on a quote of Thich Nhat Hanh) Can simple awareness of our mental state lead to a quality of experience not split into subject and object. Is Thich Nhat Hanh describing awareness leading to an Insight experience?
28	Zen and its language of potential Buddhahood. Do Zen groups create an atmosphere of mindfulness more successfully than the FWBO does?
36	Does the need for confirmation [of Insight] imply incomplete Enlightenment/Insight? Is Insight always incomplete?
40	Is Enlightenment an ongoing process which continually evolves?
41	Can and do Order members make a vital contribution to the unity of the Order by doing their sadhana practices on a daily basis?

- 44 Bhante's thoughts on vasectomy and sterilization, and of Order Members undergoing these operations. Is there anything in the Dharma by which this phenomenon might be assessed?
- 47 The elements and imagery of the Buddha being given the milk rice. Before this was the Buddha acting from an alienated idealism, cut off from lower natural energies?
- 56 Is Bhante likely to review his recommended age for taking up the life of chastity again and is he optimistic about the capabilities of Order Members in the West to take up this life. Is he optimistic about the future strength of the Order from this point of view?
- 59 Could it ever be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member to resign from the Western Buddhist Order?
- 59 1) Is there a traditional view or position with regard to someone resigning from an order or Sangha?
 2) What issues have led people to contemplate resignation from the Order?
 3) Assuming that to resign from the Order would not be spiritually advantageous, and assuming that to contemplate resignation would therefore be a personal or spiritual crisis, can Bhante discern any positive or potentially positive elements in such a spiritual or personal crisis?
- 66 The four criteria for becoming a Mitra
- 67 We do not have criteria for ordination, why then do we have criteria for Mitraship? In what sense could the four criteria be said to be absolute?
- 78 Is there a hierarchy of roles within the Order?
 Is there anything unskilful in aiming to become a Preceptor?
 A Master always substitutes a less onerous duty for a more onerous one.
 Comments?
 What are the most important factors in assessing whether someone is worthy to be appointed a Preceptor?
 Given that brahmacarya is imperfectly observed by everyone, by what criteria would Bhante assess whether an anagarika is worthy of being appointed a Preceptor?
 Are the criteria for assessing an anagarika as Preceptor more stringent than those for a simple Order member?
- 83 The relationship between meditation and Dharma practice on the one hand, and psychotherapies of various kinds on the other.
- 88 The Tara Visualization Practice - What is the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice?
 Why did Bhante make it explicit a few years ago that "all the Bodhisattvas" meant these particular eight and what is the significance of us maintaining the tradition of the Eight rather than visualizing others?
 Do the Eight Bodhisattvas relate to the Five Dhyani Buddhas?

- 97 To what extent do we need to be wary of our idealism? Does Bhante feel that we could be effective if we were to use the language of our ideals as opposed to the language of growth and development? Is not the point of the goatherd story that we need each other to nourish us in pursuit of the goal by giving sustenance to our embryonic idealism?
- 112 Does our expectation and expression that the spiritual life will be difficult for a woman add to any difficulties she might have? Does such an approach engender a sense of imagined superiority in men, and how helpful might this be to their development?
- 121 Has Bhante said that sexual relationships hinder the development of true friendship with others, especially those of the same sex? If so, why does Bhante have such doubts about this possibility?
- 124 Bhante's question:
What dharmic material are Order members currently reading?
Cintamaya prajna.
- 131 Changes in Bethnal Green and thinking about how to involve the new influx of people into the area in Dharmic activities.