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 Mitras. These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

THE VENERABLE SANGHARAKSHITA

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

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Session One - 20 May 1990

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Sangharakshita: Everybody can hear me, and also see me? All right, then, we'll begin. Not too many people have sent in questions, but I think we have enough for a reasonably good start. The first question is one that I was going to raise and answer myself anyway, but I am glad that at least one person had perhaps I shouldn't say it, but I'll say it! the intelligence to raise it, anyway. It is a question that, logically, does come right at the beginning. The question is:

What is the purpose of these question and answer sessions? (Laughter.)

I think, though, really, the question is wider than that what is the purpose of having the Puja together, the meditation together, and then, yes, the question and answer sessions? I think one can say that there are two answers to that question. I think the first answer, the real answer, is that there is no purpose to them at all.

There doesn't have to be a purpose. It's a bit like the chapter meetings themselves: you come together just for the sake of coming together, so as Order members people meditate for the sake of meditating together; they do Sevenfold Puja and other pujas for the sake of doing Pujas together; and, in the same way, I suppose, in the same spirit, we have these question and answer meetings. There isn't, in a sense, a purpose outside what we actually have or what we actually do itself.

That is, as I said, the real answer, but I'll give you an easier answer. From my point of view, the purpose of the question and answer sessions especially is so that I can get some sort of idea about where people are at with regard to the Dharma, their level of Dharma knowledge, the sort of dharmic [2] questions they are considering or giving thought to nowadays. And no doubt that will be revealed by at least some of the questions.

So that is the first of these questions dealt with. Incidentally, perhaps I should make one or two more remarks on this whole question of the questions. I would prefer that the questions, over the next few weeks, were of a predominantly dharmic character. Let's try to get, as it were, a bit more deeply into things than perhaps we usually do. And please submit them to me in writing, to reach me not later than midday on the Sunday on which we have the actual session. This will give you an opportunity, if you have to put them in writing, of giving them some serious thought. Another thing which occurred to me was (this does sometimes happen): don't ask me purely factual questions, that is to say the sort of questions you ought to be able to look up in the Buddhist Encyclopedia or in some textbook; in other words, don't expect me to do your homework for you, because that's not the best way of teaching. Also, I

may not always deal with a question which I have received that week on that particular Sunday session; I may keep it for a bit later on, when perhaps there are a few more questions on that same theme, which I can deal with all at the same time.

Perhaps that is about as much as I need to say on that at present. So we come on to the next three questions from the same person, who is, incidentally he has signed his name, so I can tell you Ratnaghosa. The second question from him is:

Do you think Order members in the LBC region are questioning your teachings?

This raises all sorts of questions, in my mind at least. First of all, when one says 'Order members', does one mean all or does one mean some, or certain? 'LBC region,' I suppose, is clear enough; and then (I'll come to 'questioning' in a minute) what does one mean by 'teachings'? Is one referring to all my teachings? Because, if I look back over the last 40 years, I have written quite a few books; there are my teachings in the Survey, teachings in The Three Jewels, teachings in all sorts of other writings, longer and shorter; and then, of course, there are the teachings in all those lectures some of them I've forgotten myself! and there are teachings in all those seminars which people have been urged to transcribe and edit and publish, and quite a few of which are in circulation in unedited form. So there is quite a body of teachings here. So I wonder, if there is any questioning going on, which particular teachings are being questioned, or whether perhaps all of them are being questioned: I don't know. There are teachings about sunyata, teachings about nirvana, teachings about meditation; there is teaching about the three laksanas or the positive nidanas; there are teachings about all sorts of sutras White Lotus Sutra, Vimalakirti Nirdesa. So there are all these teachings; there is quite a vast body of them.

So I think, when Order members raise this sort of question, one has to be clear what exactly one is questioning in the first place. Also I think one has to be aware that all these different teachings of mine, though given at different times and in different places, do hang together, so that you have to be careful when you question one of them that you are not, by implication, questioning others which in fact you, as far as you know, don't question; because in that way you can land yourself in inconsistencies and even in logical contradictions and dialectical difficulties, and all that sort of thing. So it isn't so easy to raise this topic of questioning my teachings, because one has to be clear about what those teachings are in the first place and [3] what exactly among them if it isn't all of them one is actually questioning. And, of course, one has to be very clear about why one is questioning, and, of course, what one's questioning means.

Let's go into that for a moment, this question of questioning: what does one mean by 'questioning'? I know from Shabda that there has been a bit of talk, a bit of discussion, about questioning, but I wonder if anybody looked the word up in the dictionary, just to make quite sure that everybody was talking about the same thing or had a clear idea of what was meant by 'questioning'. Just as a precaution, I looked up the dictionary myself, and I find that there are three main dictionary meanings of the verb 'to question'. ('Question', of course, is also a noun, but we are concerned with it here more as a verb.)

First of all, the dictionary says: 'to put a question or questions', and, earlier on, "question' as a noun has been defined as 'a form of words addressed to a person in order to elicit information or evoke a response.' So: to put a question or questions, a question being a form of words

addressed to a person in order to elicit information or evoke a response. Then the second meaning of the verb 'to question': 'to make something a subject of dispute or disagreement.' And then, thirdly: 'to express uncertainty about the validity, truth etc. of something; Doubt.'

So, when one is speaking of questioning my teachings, or the teachings of the Buddha, or anybody's teachings, in which of these senses is one using this verb 'to question'? Well, obviously it is quite in order to put a question, the purpose of the question being to elicit information. This is questioning in the sense of seeking clarification. (There is a further question, which I'll come to in a minute, about the desirability or otherwise of so doing.) But then what about 'to make something the subject of dispute or disagreement'? Well, presumably one doesn't want particularly to do that; but, on the other hand, 'to express uncertainty about the validity, truth etc. of something; to doubt' well, if one does actually feel uncertainty about the validity, the truth, of any aspect not only of my teachings but of those of Buddhism itself, clearly one must express that. If one has doubt in this sense one must express that.

But at the same time, I think one needs to be quite careful here, because we do know that there is such a thing as reactivity, and sometimes a particular teaching it may be mine, it may be the Buddha's, it may be almost anybody's happens to touch a nerve, some rather sensitive spot; so there comes a little reaction. Sometimes it is a big reaction, sometimes a very big reaction, sometimes a strong reaction. So I think one has to be very careful of that; one has to watch that in this process of questioning.

So one can see, just from these few remarks of mine, that this second question of Ratnaghosa's 'Do you think Order members in the LBC region are questioning your teachings?' implies quite a bit more than one might have thought at first [4] sight. In this connection, I must say that recently I have been a bit surprised to find that a few Order members at least haven't yet got around to reading my Survey. I know it was written quite a long time ago, but I haven't actually disowned any part of it, though I may have elaborated and even modified. So I think there can't really be any question of questioning, in any of the senses I've mentioned, unless one is acquainted, among other things, with that particular text.

But let me go on to part 2 of this second question (the second question being 'Do you think Order members in the LBC region are questioning your teachings?') This second point is:

If so, is this a good or bad thing, in your view?

Well, I think probably that question has been answered; because it depends in what sense or in what way you are questioning. If you are seeking elucidation, fine; you have to do that, you should do that, because not everything is clear all at once; connections of things are not clear, connections of teachings significance, bearing, of teachings are not clear all at once. So you question, and you should question. That is a good thing, a positive thing; one might even say a creative thing.

But then 'to make something the subject of dispute or disagreement'? There seems to be a suggestion in the dictionary that one does it, in a sense, almost deliberately, and clearly one shouldn't do this. And then, thirdly, 'to express uncertainty about the validity, truth etc. of something, or to doubt.' Well, as I've said, clearly it is in order to do this if you do actually feel that uncertainty or that doubt, but I suggest that one should do this in a tentative way: say,

'I'm doubtful about this particular teaching. I'm not sure about it. I'm not sure about its validity': or ask 'What are the sources of it? What is the significance of it?' or 'What are the reasons in support of it?' But, because one does have some uncertainty about the validity or the truth of those particular teachings, [one should] approach the whole matter in an inquiring mind rather than in terms of the previous definition in terms of making something the subject of dispute and disagreement. Just be open to the fact that one may not have understood yet the validity of those particular teachings, or one may not have understood the teachings themselves, or may even have mistaken them.

Perhaps that is another thing I should point out: make quite sure when one is questioning, even in a rightful way, any of my teachings or anybody else's, that you have really understood what I have said or what the person whose teachings you are questioning has actually said. And this really is quite important don't go by impressions. I think a lot of this sort of thing happens, I'm afraid, in the Movement. Not so long ago I had a letter from a woman Mitra in the Croydon area, and she was saying that she had heard that Subhuti had given a lecture on and she mentioned a subject which he hadn't given a lecture on at all. And I assumed it was the lecture that he had given on the obstacles to friendship; but some sort of rumour had [5] reached her that he had given a lecture on a rather different topic, which he may have mentioned in passing but which was not the actual subject of the lecture. So one has to be quite sure that one knows what actually was said. It is best, of course, if one can refer to a text, something printed, something written, but not just go by vague general impressions, or what you've heard I've said or somebody else has said, in the way of a particular teaching.

So, all right, I think it's quite clear by this time in what sense questioning is a good thing or a bad thing, in my view or any other view.
And then:

If there is questioning of your teachings, what form or forms does it take?

Well, I'm not sure about this, because I'm not clear as to what specific questionings, by what specific people, the question itself is referring to. But I would like to say a few words about what form or forms the questioning should take.

First of all, it should be open. It shouldn't be just some muttering to two or three friends in a corner. It should be open. And it should be addressed initially to one's spiritual friends, especially to your kalyana mitras, to senior experienced Order members to whom you look up; and if then still you can't get things clear, or you can't get an answer to your questioning, then you can write to me or you can come and see me. But what shouldn't happen is that these sort of questionings take the form of some sort of vague muttering and grumbling in corners, and never really come out into the open; because this just creates an atmosphere of general uncertainty and unclarity and dissatisfaction, and is quite undermining, even, for the Order as a whole. So these sort of questionings should be clear, they should be based on some sort of solid basis, and they should come out into the open, not just be rolled around, either in your own mind, or just among a few of your cronies. So that should be reasonably clear.

[Then] I'm afraid the questioner jumps to something really quite different, by another of these extraordinarily agile mental gymnastics; and he asks getting, I think, right away from his previous subject:

How should I explain the single-sex principle to homosexuals?

Well, I don't know! I don't know. Not that I am not clear about the single-sex principle I hope I am. If I'm not, I suppose I shall have to be taken to task! But I find these sort of hypothetical questions quite difficult, because I don't know who these hypothetical homosexuals are whether they are male or female, whether they are even Eastern or Western, English or American, young or elderly, or whatever. So I don't think I could say how someone should explain the single-sex principle to homosexuals, or any other body of people, unless I was actually confronted by and [6] could see them, could see what sort of people they were and how one should address them and what sort of line, what sort of tack one should take. So I can't give a sort of recipe for explaining the single-sex principle to homosexuals or to anybody else.

But I want to say a few words, at least, about this subject of homosexuals and homosexuality. I believe some people distinguish between homosexuality and lesbianism, but I am taking it that the terms homosexuals and homosexuality cover both sexes. Quite recently, someone did tell me that they thought that in the Movement there was a definite streak or strain of homophobia: that is to say, strong dislike for those who are or were homosexuals. I must say I was rather surprised to hear this, and also quite sorry, but the person speaking to me about it assured me that, yes, it was actually the case: there was a streak or a strain of homophobia within the Movement and even within the Order itself. So I think we need to take a very careful look at this, because clearly we need to accept people as they are and not share in the prejudices and cultural conditionings of the society and the culture in the midst of which we find ourselves when those conditionings are really quite inimical to our practice of the Dharma. So I think we must be on the watch for that sort of thing. Just as we must be on the watch against any feelings of prejudice on our part towards people of a different cultural background or different colour, and so on, we must also be on the watch for homophobic tendencies within ourselves and within the Movement.

And, not very long after that, I was also told and again this rather surprised me that there were homosexual people (the person putting this to me used the term 'gay'; he didn't say 'homosexuals', he said 'gays') who felt neglected within the Movement. I asked why this was, and this person said that, on a particular retreat I won't give any details on a particular retreat, one particular person was giving expression to difficulties he had had I'm not sure if it was in a sexual relationship with a woman or the break-up of that relationship; but, anyway, he got lots of attention and support and sympathy from Order members present, whereas somebody else also on that same retreat, who was gay and in the same situation, felt that he got no support and sympathy at all; was neglected, in fact. So I felt quite sorry to hear this, and I think this is also something to which we need to give some attention. I do know that, fairly recently, there was a small gay retreat held for men in Castleacre in Norfolk. I think only seven or eight people attended it, but I believe they did find it very useful; and I think several people, in the course of that retreat, expressed the feeling that the majority of heterosexual Order members did not understand the difficulties and problems of gay people, and were not always very sympathetic towards them. So clearly this also is something that needs some attention from everybody within the Order.

So, even though I am not able to say how Ratnaghosa should explain the single-sex principle to homosexuals and I am sure he can find this out for himself, anyway I think it is important that we do consider this whole question of homosexuals or gays [7] within our Movement,

and make quite sure that there is no sort of homophobia, no sort of discriminatory attitude towards them; no neglect, even, and no [lack of] understanding for the quite difficult problems that some of them undoubtedly do face, on account of the very obtuse attitudes and even active discrimination and hostility of the wider society.

Dhammarati: Will you take supplementary questions, Bhante?

S: Yes, I will take supplementary questions, but supplementary to questions which have arisen.

Dhammarati: I was just thinking, ... men's events at Padmaloka, and Suvajra was interviewing you, and you explained one of the main reasons for single-sex events there as moving away from distraction, that people go on retreat to avoid distractions, I mean distractions of the opposite sex. And presumably Ratnaghosa's question is addressing something like that homosexuals who find themselves closeted with their main distraction ...

S: Well, this is one of the additional difficulties, so it is pretty tough. So I would say this. (I'm speaking now more about the situation as regards male homosexuals on men's retreats; I don't think I can say much about the corresponding question for women. I'm not so sure that it is, in a strict sense, corresponding.) But it does seem to me that the solution would not be to send male homosexuals on women's retreats! (Laughter.) Well, the fact that you laugh shows that the very idea is ludicrous, and I think you are quite right. So why is that? I think the reason is that male homosexuals are, after all, men, and they have more in common with other men I think in most cases than they have with women. So, despite the fact that they may get distracted (some of them; I don't think all of them do) on a men's retreat, I think nonetheless it's the men's retreat that they have to go on. But, at the same time, those present must be aware of the situation, and they themselves also should be as open as they can. And the emphasis always must be on the fact that one is there on retreat for the sake of the Dharma, deepening one's practice, and so on, and not for other purposes. I think we just have to consider this another of the difficulties that gay people gay men, certainly do face. Does that go some way towards answering the question? It doesn't solve the difficulty. There is a residual difficulty still there, but I think that has to be borne with by all concerned.

Ratnaghosa: ... explaining the single-sex principle in terms of sexual attraction. It's
Parami: ... contentment as opposed to ...

S: Well, clearly that difficulty will arise in that case, but one also needs to see another, positive aspect of the single-sex principle, which is the development of [8] friendship. Very often, sexual relations between people of opposite sexes mean, in practice, that the development of friendship with members of the same sex is neglected. So I think, in the case of gay people, too, they still need to develop friendships of a non-sexual character with members of their own sex; and, obviously, a men's retreat is a situation in which they can do that, and they can be given to understand that no one is frowning on their sexuality, but it isn't appropriate here. Here is an opportunity for them to develop friendships; and perhaps one could say that for gay people it's very difficult, sometimes, to develop friendships because of the sexual complication, but on a men's retreat they are almost forced into that situation. But I think that perhaps should be explained clearly, and as I said they can be assured that no one is frowning on their particular form or type of sexuality, but here is an opportunity of going

beyond that. After all, they are all men together; whether homosexual or heterosexual they are still men, and they have a lot in common and can relate on that basis. There is no need for them, except perhaps in a very extreme case if the ladies will have them to go on a women's retreat. I can see some of the ladies are a bit amused by that!

But I certainly don't think you should have well, the retreat for gays was a bit experimental; that can't be excluded from time to time. I don't think the solution is to just siphon off the gay people into retreats and communities of their own; I don't think that would be at all a good idea. They would be more like sort of ghettoes than retreats and communities, and that would be just going along with the attitudes of the larger society, which we don't really want to do in this connection.

Any more supplementaries on that?

Ratnaghosa: I'm still not quite happy. It's to do with sometimes explaining the single-sex principle or why people should be in single-sex situations; it's explaining in terms of sexual distraction. And newcomers I've had this in the Centre newcomers coming along who happen to be gay can't quite understand why they're expected to make friends with people of their own sex but not with people of the opposite sex...

S: Well, it's not that gays mustn't make friends with people of the opposite sex, but I think one can point out, as I have said, that in the case of gay men and presumably it's true to some extent in the case of gay women even though one feels sexual attraction for someone of the same sex you still need to make friendships with people of the same sex. Because, even if you are gay, you still get something from a friendship with someone who is like you inasmuch as they belong to the same sex, which you don't get from someone who is unlike you inasmuch as they belong to the opposite sex.

But perhaps, when explaining the single-sex principle to a gathering of people whom you don't know, you can just say that 'If there are by chance gay people among you, [9] this is our attitude in this particular respect' so that they feel acknowledged and they feel that some provision is made and some consideration given to them in view of their particular sexual preference. I think it's good just to speak about it quite openly, as though it's a quite ordinary thing, rather than having it rather sort of hush-hush and not anything said about it. But certainly one should not present the single-sex principle when one is presenting it and explaining it in such a way as to leave any gay person in some doubt as to exactly where he or she does stand. That's why I think it needs to be explicitly addressed. If you know that everybody present is 100% dyed-in-the-wool heterosexual, you don't have to bother, but if you suspect it might be otherwise, well, yes, clearly you do have to bother somewhat about it.

Anyway, let's go on from there on to a question from somebody else. Oh, this one's from Dhammarati. Oh yes, I'm afraid it's still on this question of the single-sex principle. I think that's why I included it at this point, but it isn't really very complicated. Dhammarati says:

A friend of mine from college, interested in the Movement but more or less happily married

I like this 'more or less'!

says that the Movement's emphasis on single-sex makes it difficult for him to feel that he can

ever be more than in effect a 'lay follower', since at this stage of early involvement he does not want to leave his wife. Since this is likely to be a common position in the people who come to the Centre, do you think that a stronger emphasis on single-sex will mean an intense and deep, but smaller, Movement? Will it be possible to have a broad popular base as well as a committed core?

Does one give married well, men; the question is about a man the impression, as soon as they come along, that if they are married they've got to leave their wives? Is this what happens?

Woman's voice: It does a bit of it.

S: A bit of it! Well, that rather surprises me. But, anyway, I've come equipped with my quotation; because I was wondering, well, if you remember or if you took note of what I said in my paper recently on this topic. Does anyone remember what I said about the single-sex idea in my very recent paper, which I wrote very carefully, weighing every word? (Laughter throughout this.) Or have I done my homework in vain? Let me read you what I actually said, so that we're not in any doubt about it:

'For those individuals who Go for Refuge or who seek to Go for Refuge, the best lifestyle, circumstances permitting'

[10]
I hope that's not too big a loophole! (Laughter.)

'is one that contains a strong single-sex element, either by virtue of the fact that one lives in a single-sex spiritual community and/or works in a single-sex co-operative, or by virtue of the fact that one is a regular participant in single-sex retreats, study groups etc.'

So I think that's clear: that is my as it were stated official position. And I very deliberately used this expression 'a strong single-sex element'. So, all right, if your more or less happily-married man comes along, or your less or more happily or unhappily married woman comes along, when you explain to them about the single-sex principle, the fact that there should be a strong single-sex element in their life as a Mitra or someone who has asked for ordination, you aren't necessarily saying that they should leave their spouse, but you are saying: 'Have some experience of a single-sex situation. Let there be some single-sex element in your life, even if it's only going along to the single-sex Mitra study group or a single-sex men's or women's retreat. Let there be that element. This is as it were the lowest level, or the minimum stage. If you can move into a single-sex community, or work in a single-sex co-op, so much the better. But at least let there be a strong single-sex element in the form of attendance at single-sex study groups and single-sex retreats.'

So clearly you are introducing a principle which is applied stage by stage and step by step, like other principles: like meditation. You ask people to do a little meditation; you suggest to newcomers, I think at least, I used to suggest that they try to do 20 minutes a day. You don't suggest two hours a day, just 20 minutes. In the same way, with regard to the application of the single-sex principle, you don't at once start urging married people to leave their spouses; you suggest that they try a single-sex retreat, or they join a single-sex study group. Give them a taste of it in that way. I think once they get a taste of it, maybe they will really start liking it, who knows? So I think that's the principle.

So though you state the principle clearly, unambiguously, without pulling any punches, without any sort of defensiveness or apology, you also make it clear that, like all spiritual principles, they are to be applied I was going to say little by little, but one doesn't want to make it too easy; but that one isn't expected to apply all these spiritual principles, even if one does accept them, fully at once, by any means. So I think that disposes of the man who doesn't want to leave his wife.

But Dhammarati goes on to say: 'Since this is likely to be a common position in the people who come to the Centre' well, I don't see why it necessarily should be, but I know what he's getting at 'do you think that a stronger emphasis on single-sex will mean an intense and deep, but smaller, Movement? Will it be possible to have a broad popular base as well as a committed core?'

[11]
I think one should think here in terms of a pyramid. If your pyramid is high, but has a narrow base, it's quite unstable. You need to have a broad base, but you also need to have height or depth, as you may say. So actually I don't think we can have a committed core unless we have quite a big surrounding pulp, let us say, of the not-so-committed. I don't think you can have just a very committed core existing just in the world like that; I think you need quite a big Movement, actually, to have this more committed core, even if one considers it just from a statistical point of view. I won't go into that at the moment.

But look at it like this: if you've just got a small Movement, and everybody knows everybody else, and you have to have just a small number of classes and a small number of retreats, you have to be dealing with or catering for very different sorts of people, with different degrees of involvement and commitment within the same situation. But if you've got a big Movement, you can deal with beginners here and more advanced people there, and fully committed people there, and they don't see, as it were, too much of one another; so that a teaching which is intended for a more experienced person isn't appropriated by someone who is less experienced, and misunderstood, perhaps, or perhaps it's a source of conflict and trouble to them. So within a big Movement there is much more room for all sorts and conditions of people, different degrees and levels of involvement; so I would say that, far from 'Will it be possible to have a broad popular base as well as a committed core?', I don't think you can, in practice, have a committed core without a broad popular base.

We do see this very much in India: we have got a very, very broad popular base there. We might even say, if you look at it at its broadest, it might even run to a few million. But the committed core is very small; perhaps it's too small. But here, perhaps in the West, the committed core is rather larger, and the popular base is comparatively narrow perhaps it's a bit too narrow.

So I don't see these two things as antithetical or contradictory, the committed core and the broad popular base. I think you've got to have both. If you haven't got a committed core (I'm sorry to mix the metaphors, but this is what Dhammarati has done)(laughter), your popular base will cease to be a base, and it will just disintegrate and dissolve into the surrounding society. But if you're just a committed core, you can't recruit directly from the surrounding society; you've got to recruit from the lower levels of involvement and commitment; you need a very broad base indeed. So let the base be as broad as possible, and the core as committed as possible. No doubt it will vary a bit from country to country, the relative proportions of the

broad popular base and the committed core, but we really do need both, and they need each other. The committed core needs that broad popular base as an intermediary, as it were, as a bolster, as a cushion to change the metaphor again between itself and the surrounding society; and the broad popular base needs the committed core to prevent it, the broad popular base, from losing contact with the spiritual principle [12] altogether.

Side B

Vidyasri: Bhante, can I just ask you something about that? Some people say that we don't have a very broad base in this country partly because some people coming along see the single-sex principle and [that] people living it are quite committed, and although you may say to them: 'You don't have to adopt that immediately,' they can see it there, and feel that it is too big a jump from where they are at present to doing that. Therefore they drift away fairly soon. So, although I can understand what you are saying, I also think it's quite difficult for us to get a very broad base if what people meet is Order members who are living very committed lives, in terms of the single-sex idea, living in communities and so on...

S: So are you suggesting we should have some relatively uncommitted Order members?

Vidyasri: Not really, but it is something that I have come across people saying.

S: No, right. But you did say 'people coming along'; so presumably you mean coming along to the Centre. But, you see, we don't have to operate just from Centres. You can go out to people in their particular situations, and establish contact with them there, without letting on that you are terribly committed, and you live in a single-sex community and meditate for two hours every day. They need not know that. I think this is one of the advantages of holding courses, classes, retreats, and all that sort of thing outside the Centre, not in the Centre situation; and even developing that in a relatively big way, if one can. And then introducing people from that class or that group to the Centre when you feel that they are ready for it.

I think, to some extent, this takes place already; because when you have an outside course or class you don't wear your kesas necessarily, do you? So it doesn't seem too religious. You don't necessarily have a Buddha image, or burn incense, do you, necessarily? Isn't that the case? Or am I out of date?

Voices: That is the case.

S: And you may decide, even by the end of the course, you don't want to introduce those things. Those particular people would find those things off-putting. Do you see what I mean? You certainly don't necessarily make much of the fact that you yourself are living in a single-sex community. People may ask you, 'Where do you live and what do you do?' and you have to tell them something; but you don't necessarily emphasize that sort of aspect of your life.

So I think this is one of the ways in which we can get over that difficulty. Also, of [13] course, by having even at the Centre itself different classes for different types of people, different degrees of involvement, and modulating one's teaching quite carefully. For instance, with regard to the question of the single-sex principle, you don't have to say to a group of newcomers: 'We have a single-sex principle which we apply at different levels.' You don't

have to say that. You can say: 'We've got a men's retreat the week after next, and there's a women's retreat, and some of you might like to go on one or the other.' Some people might say: 'Why do you have men's retreats and women's retreats?' and you just say: 'Well, sometimes it's not a bad idea just to have the experience of being all men together or women together.' You need not raise the banner of the single-sex principle; play it a bit low-key, as though it were a quite ordinary sort of thing which, in a way, it is, or should be. It shouldn't be such a big deal to go away for a whole weekend only with men or only with women! It should be a very ordinary, normal thing. Do you see what I mean? It's a question of tact and it's not even skilful means, it's just ordinary tact and in a sense one could say diplomacy but it's not really that in a sort of cunning sense; you're just showing people what is on offer. If they do say: 'Why do you have men's retreats and women's retreats?' you don't have to launch on a long spiel about the whole philosophy of it. That's very often not called for. Very often they don't want a lengthy explanation, they want just a few words. So just say: 'Well, we find it's a good thing; good to have that experience sometimes. We've got mixed retreats, too, in the summer, that you can go on if you like. They're all on offer.'

Kulamitra: Could I ask a further supplementary? I'd like to preface it just a little, because I find it interesting you said like meditation people don't actually take it that you expect them to do lots and lots of meditation; they find it very easy to accept a gradual principle there. Sex is obviously a touchy subject, because people find it quite difficult, I think even at the stage of Mitras, even sometimes Order members, to have an ideal but not actually to be fully living out that principle at the moment in the way that some people do.

But one thing I have wondered about this popular base of married people is whether we shouldn't have some more explicit teaching for people who are living in that situation and probably will be for quite some time. I don't know exactly what it would amount to; but rather than just suggesting that people go on single-sex activities, not as an alternative but as well as, that we do address their situation and perhaps discuss with them ways that their family life can be more positive and more healthy.

S: You're assuming that they have families. Dhammarati's question didn't mention 'family', he only mentioned 'wife'.

Kulamitra: Yes. That is an assumption. But I think if it's really broad-based, quite a lot of people will have.

[14]
S: I must say I have, in any case, my doubts about the nuclear family. I'm not so sure you can really do very much with the nuclear family! But with regard to people living in a more as it were ordinary situation, the sort of people who might make up a good part of the popular base, I think one of the subjects that one could address more directly to them is the question of Right Livelihood, and make it clear that you are not expecting them to join a Right Livelihood co-op, but you do expect them, if they are involved in Buddhism and the spiritual life at all, to look closely at the ethical nature of the work that they are doing. Because, obviously, even in the world, some professions, some occupations, are more ethical than others, and one should encourage people wherever they can to shift if necessary to a more ethical profession or occupation, within the world itself. Because I think there are some occupations which are relatively ethical. Right Livelihood isn't necessarily confined to team-based Right Livelihood situations; you can have, I think in some cases, relatively ethical

Right Livelihood situations right out there in the world itself. So I think people in that sort of situation should be, among other things, encouraged to move into those.

I think something could also be said about the bringing up of children. I'm not so sure that even Buddhists know how to bring up children. I think something could be said about schooling. I've never felt happy about the idea of a Buddhist school, in the sense of a school just for the children of Buddhists I won't say Buddhist children, because children really can't be Buddhists: they've got to decide for themselves when they are grown up. But one of the things I've thought is that Buddhist parents shouldn't be afraid of conditioning their children. Your child is going to be conditioned anyway. He's going to be conditioned at school, he's going to be conditioned by society, he's going to be conditioned by TV perhaps for the worse; so I think it's your duty as a Buddhist parent to indulge in a bit of more positive cultural conditioning. I don't know whether any of you here who are parents do this, but you shouldn't think: 'Ah, well, I've got to leave my child free. I mustn't try and condition him, mustn't try and impose my Buddhist ideas on him or her; just let them decide whether they are going to be Buddhists when they are grown up.' Because society is not leaving your child alone; society is conditioning him or her in its own way as hard as it can; so I think you've got to condition your child positively, or socialize your child positively, to some extent. I think this is one of the things that can be made clear to people who are part of this broader popular base who do have children: not just to allow your child to be conditioned and influenced by the larger society.

Another thing that I've said is that I thought Buddhist parents should join the Parent-Teacher Associations raise their voice for Buddhist values or spiritual values generally, or at least ethical values within the school itself. I know that's easier in the case of some schools than others, but maybe you can even get on the governing body of the school in some cases; because it's in your interest and in your child's interest that you should do this, and in the interests of the school itself and all the [15] children going to it. I think this is one of the leads that one can give to - not necessarily just Buddhist parents, but parents whose views or whose values tend in the direction of Buddhism.

Vidyananada(?): Do you think there's any scope one of the things that I have wondered about as a general principle one can see that it's better for the adults to practise without children around. I know there's been this idea of children on retreats and things like this which I don't think is a good idea, pressures and things like that, because it tends to destroy anything the adults might achieve during the retreat. But I have wondered, looking back on my own childhood, which was a Catholic one, where I did engage with religion as a child and did get something from religious rituals, engaging in religious ideas. I wonder if there might be scope for something where there were pujas in which children could play a part, where they could experience some...

S: I thought we did have them. I have certainly led Pujas on Buddha Days years ago when children did make offerings. I thought that was part of our way of doing things that on big festival occasions we did have children of all ages along, as far as I know.
Vidyananda(?): I meant on more of a regular basis. For instance, on a Sunday, there's not too much happens here, ... Puja ..., if there could be a half-hour Puja that could be

S: Well, it's worth thinking about. You'd have to consult the children themselves! They might I don't know there might be a TV programme on on Sunday afternoons that they wanted to

watch.

Vidyananda(?): My children always enjoyed things like that. But there's not a lot that you can bring them along to, really.

S: That's true; but also I suggest that Buddhist parents should engage in a bit of indoctrination at home. Tell their children Jataka stories and talk to them about ethics. You can't leave these things to the school or the Buddhist Centre. And make sure your child knows that you are a Buddhist and isn't ashamed of it. I think children will pick up a lot from your attitude; and I don't think it's such a way-out thing nowadays to be a Buddhist or to meditate. I think you can talk to your children about these sort of things.

Anyway, let's pass on to the next question. We have rather lingered over that one, but perhaps it was helpful to do so. I'm not sure whether I'll be able to deal with all the questions, but if not we'll hold them over till next time.

This one is from Cintamani, and it's a bit Tantric.

[16]
Fundamental to the Tantra is the symbolism of the five Buddha Families, each one correlated with one of the five elements, skandhas, poisons, etc. etc. One particular feature of this is the assertion that when one of the five poisons is present in the mind, the wisdom correlated with that poison is also potentially present, because, as one book I have recently read puts it, the poison concerned is simply the wisdom energy of a particular Buddha family element distorted by one's dualistic, egotistical outlook. You yourself have spoken in a seminar (part of the transcript of which was included in the recent Mitrata series on The Tantric Path to Enlightenment, of one seeing jealousy, for instance, as simply the Green Dakini in her unregenerate form. And I have found it fascinating to find out, again in the book referred to above, that not only is jealousy the particular poison correlated with the element Air, and thus with the All-Performing Wisdom of Amoghasiddhi, who is, of course, green, but that the whole of existence, including one's mental states, can be seen in terms of the dance of the Five Dakinis white, blue, yellow, red and green which, depending on one's mindfulness and positivity, one either experiences as something very creative and beautiful or as the onslaught of the five poisons.

Thus presumably one has the prayer in the Bardo Thodol which requests:

May the elements not rise up as enemies,i.e. sources of suffering. And I have also encountered, in the biography of Yeshe Tsogyal, a description of the actual stimulation of the five poisons in order that the Five Wisdoms might be realized. Presumably this takes place only on the basis of a very high order of mindfulness.

That's the preamble! (Laughter.)

My questions are:(1) Could this wisdom/poison correlation and all the practices based on it be seen as an extension of the experience described in the life of the Buddha, when the weapons of Mara's hordes become transformed into flowers when they touch the Buddha's aura?

I suppose the short answer to that question is yes. Except that in that particular account,

which I have referred to in one of the poems I read last week, it's legend, it's myth, it's poetry, it's symbol; so one I won't say one can't take it literally; in a sense one can take it very literally but one can't take it too, let us say, conceptually. But it does seem to refer, in its own way, to the same or to much the same order of experience: transformation, transformation of poisons into wisdom.

(2) In the book referred to above, I read about the Tibetan Buddhist practice of 'staring' into negative emotions. This apparently consists of one first of all identifying one's mental poison as being what it is, and not trying to justify it in any way, then classifying it according to the five-element system, and then, without further conceptualization, staring into it fixedly in order to liberate the energy that [17] it contains. Are we seeing here an extension and systematization of the practice that the Buddha-to-be engaged in when he was living alone in the jungle and faced with fear and dread, i.e. that whether walking, seated, or lying down, he stayed with the experience, as we might say, without either rejecting it or feeding it, until it passed?

I think there are several things that could be said here. I haven't read the book in question, and 'staring' is in inverted commas. It does seem to be used as a technical expression. But the basic point here seems to be 'staring into it fixedly in order to liberate the energy that it contains.' If by that liberation one means transformation of poison into wisdom, then clearly Insight is required; without Insight there is no such transformation. So does that staring involve Insight? I think this is the real question. If it doesn't, there will be no transformation. If one takes the word rather literally, it doesn't seem to suggest very much in the way of Insight, especially as it says 'without further conceptualization'; because conceptualization, as we know, is a basis for the development of Insight. So even though one does think in terms of transforming poisons into wisdoms, and even though that staring practice may be useful, I don't see how by itself it would be sufficient, inasmuch as it doesn't seem to represent Insight, to transform the poison into the Insight.

Yes, the Buddha, we may say, stared at his own 'panic fear and dread', as the text says, but, as you say, he was the Buddha-to-be; he didn't thereby become a Buddha. He became a Buddha only when he sat and meditated under the Bodhi Tree. So staring, if it was analogous to that, in his case was not enough.

I want to make a few more general comments or points here. I'm not quite sure in what order to make them, and time is also running out, but anyway let me just try. The first point is, according to this book Cintamani's recently read, the poison concerned is simply the wisdom energy of a particular Buddha Family element distorted by one's dualistic, egotistical outlook. 'Simply'? Well, maybe; but it's a very big word, it's a very significant word. I think one could go further than that. If one speaks of the wisdom energy of a particular Buddha Family or element being distorted by one's dualistic, egotistical outlook, one is making a distinction between oneself and one's dualistic, egotistical outlook. But is there such a distinction? Is it not that you yourself are that distortion not that you are there and you have that distortion, that here are you and there is your distorted view and there's that wonderful wisdom energy which you have distorted so that you have to undo the distortion? Oh no; you are the distortion.

I think this is a very important point, and it links up with this whole philosophy, if one can call it that, of potentiality: that you are a potential Buddha; that your poison is a potential

wisdom energy. Well, in a sense it is, but I think one must be very careful here. If your poison is just a distortion of your wisdom energy, well, you are a distorted Buddha; because the five wisdom energies are wisdom energies of the [18] Buddha or Buddhahood, and if the five poisons pertain to you. So if a poison is a distorted wisdom energy, and if wisdom energies pertain to Buddhas and poisons pertain to you, then you are a distorted Buddha. A Buddha becomes distorted and becomes you. So those are the two extreme terms: Buddha, undistorted, and you, distorted. So, because of this, you potentially are Buddha, because you've only got to straighten yourself out, and hey presto! you are Buddha.

But I think I have said before that this whole way of speaking, this whole language of potentiality, is very, very dangerous. It is not that it's untrue, but it is dangerous in the sense that it can be misunderstood and misapplied; because there are so many different levels of Reality. You are potentially another level a bit higher than yourself; you are potentially another level even higher than that; potentially another level even higher than that; potentially the highest level of all, Buddhahood. But the danger is that you start thinking of these higher levels as potentialities of you, as though you can attain them, achieve them, appropriate them, while remaining yourself unchanged which in fact you can't do. For you to achieve that particular higher level, paradoxically you have to cease to exist; you have to die.

So I think, if you use this language of potentiality, the language of you realizing your potential, the accent is so heavily on you, is so heavily egotistical, that you can't really do what you are supposed to be setting out to do. So what should you do? I think it's probably much better to put it all the other way round, and to speak not of this higher potentiality belonging to you or pertaining to you, but to think of yourself as belonging to that higher potentiality. It's not that you've got to appropriate it; you've got to give in to it. You've even got to surrender to it. You've got to Go for Refuge to it; not just immediately to the highest level of all, but to the next highest level. I think it's only in that way that you can use that sort of language or develop that sort of attitude. Is this reasonably clear? (Agreement.) Otherwise the egotistical attitude remains unchanged and just goes on appropriating and appropriating; it can't really appropriate, it only thinks it is appropriating, because it's doing it just conceptually, via concepts. But if you really want to realize your higher potential, you must realize and accept, or at least understand, that the higher potential doesn't belong to you, you belong to it; and you have to open yourself to it, even surrender yourself to it, so that you can die and it can take your place.

So that's just a few words about that type of language. But I want to say a bit more about this 'staring', and in connection with something Cintamani specifically mentions, that is, his green dakini and jealousy. Because recently I have been, for various reasons, giving a bit of thought to this whole question of jealousy, especially sexual jealousy, and, connected with that, possessiveness and exclusiveness: i.e. sexual exclusiveness.

One does find, one does know everybody knows that in connection with sex and sexual relations, all sorts of very powerful, very strong emotions arise; one of which, [19] of course, is jealousy and possessiveness. Perhaps they should be regarded as much the same thing. Because you know that if you are attached to something, or you are attached to somebody, especially by way of a sexual relationship, if that possession of yours, if that possessiveness of yours, is threatened in any way, if the exclusivity of the relationship is threatened in any way, you feel very, very bad indeed; it has a very, very bad, a very dramatic, a very horrendous effect upon you. It has an effect which runs absolutely counter to everything that

you are trying to do spiritually; it is undoing everything that you are trying to do spiritually. So I think one has to stare at jealousy; and when one experiences it and I think everybody is going to experience it at some time or other, in varying degrees ask yourself what is happening; just try to see what is happening; and try to see that the jealousy and possessiveness and exclusivity that you are experiencing is telling you something very basic about yourself as you are in your raw egotisticalhood (we may say), and just see that, and see that that is what you've got to deal with, that's what you've got to cope with, that's what you've got to undo, that's what you're up against, that's what you've got to transform, that's the poison that you've got to transform through Insight. So even if you can't develop Insight at that stage, at least sort of stare at it and see what is actually going on.

I must confess that this whole question of jealousy and possessiveness, especially speaking of sexual jealousy and possessiveness and exclusivity, is something I've not really given much attention to; I am not quite sure why. It is certainly not among my teachings which may or may not be questioned! But recently, for various reasons, I have been giving it quite a bit of thought, and it does occur to me that it is one of these neglected topics that we really need to give very close attention to; because sometimes these feelings of jealousy, possessiveness and exclusivity in this particular context, the sexual context, can give rise to great disruption and disharmony and conflict, and even violence, between Order members themselves. So it is something going absolutely antithetical to everything that one is trying to do. One should also, therefore, be very careful about getting oneself in situations where you cannot but experience these sort of emotions; and if you are engaged in any sort of sexual activity or sexual relationship, you must try to see the jealousy that is actually there, potential or actual, and just realize how unhealthy it is, and how much of a poison it is, how inimical to your spiritual life; really stare at it and stare through it, and see how absolutely necessary it is that you should transform this particular poison into the corresponding wisdom by one means or other. I say 'one means or other,' but it can only be by one or other form of Insight, developed howsoever.

Anyway, perhaps I won't say anything more than that at the moment on that particular topic. But certainly I leave it to you all for quite serious consideration. Actually, I think I will close on that note, because there are two other questions but I'd like to be able to go into them in some detail. So I think I will leave those for next week; because, in these sessions, I don't really want them to take the sort of quiz format, with lots of lots of questions being fired at Bhante and Bhante, of [20] course, is very brilliant and quick-witted, and he sort of fires back the answers! I think we have gone beyond that stage. Maybe just go into a few questions, but try to go into them a bit more thoroughly and a bit more seriously than sometimes we have the opportunity of doing. But don't hesitate to submit more questions, after due thought, and we'll go into them as thoroughly and deeply as we can on future occasions.

Dhammarati: Bhante, just before you end up, could I ask something more about the staring? It's going back a step. You were saying earlier when you were replying to Cintamani, that you could only transform the poison into the wisdom if Insight was present. I remember in one of your lectures on meditation you said that if you take awareness into an emotion, it intensifies positive emotion, diminishes negative emotion, and although that's not on the level of transforming a poison into a wisdom I wonder if just in this whole business of the act of taking awareness into an experience that suddenly you actually start to change the nature of experience from a rather negative to a rather positive?

S: I think you can weaken a negative emotion by being more aware of it, sometimes; not always, because negative emotions can be very strong indeed. But don't forget that there are many levels of awareness, and one of the levels is awareness of Reality. It is only when the awareness concerned is or includes awareness of Reality that it does, when applied to a negative emotion, have that dissolving and transforming effect. Otherwise, yes, you are aware of the negative emotion, you can see it, you can see all round, you can see what's happening; nothing changes. So just to see what's happening yes, even that is a step in the right direction. But at some stage or other, you do need to bring in the element of Insight or the element of awareness of a Transcendental principle which is not just an awareness of it as a separate principle out there, but as something at least partially assimilated and one with that awareness. Otherwise, again, no transformation takes place.

Man's voice: When you say Insight, do you mean Enlightenment, or Stream Entry what ?

S: No, I mean Insight in the strict technical sense, into ultimate impermanence, voidness and so on. One or other aspect of the Enlightenment experience itself, whether at the level of Stream Entry or at some higher level. In other words, you can't really which means radically and permanently transform poisons into wisdom unless you are beginning to be a Stream Entrant. This is what it really means. You can hold them in check, you can hold them at bay, you can control them, you can limit them; but you can't do more than that. And your controls and your limits can break down from time to time. So to really transform poisons into wisdoms, you need to be a Stream Entrant; and perhaps that's also a thought to turn over. All right, then.

[21]

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Session Two - 27 May 1990

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Parami: Bhante, just before we start, can I just say I don't know if everybody knows that there was an ordination this morning, there was a woman ordained this morning and she is now called Navacitta.

Sangharakshita: The first question tonight is a fairly lengthy one, but fortunately it is rather straightforward, or at least the answer is going to be fairly straightforward. I will read the question first, which contains a certain amount of preamble. It's from Cintamani.

On an ordination course in Tuscany, you suggested that the Order might experiment with visualizing seed syllables in Roman script, specifically in the form of the sort of monograms that were popular in the Renaissance. I must say that I was personally very glad when I heard this, as I had been finding it hard to associate the Devanagari and Tibetan forms of the seed syllables used in my practice with the sounds that they were supposed to represent. For me there is no intermediate thought process required to link a certain arrangement of Roman letters with the particular sound that it represents, whereas, in the case of, say, a Tibetan Hum, I have to use a certain amount of discursive mental activity to subtly remind myself that this

shape equals this sound. When doing my practice, I must say that I would rather not have to do this, finding that such willed discursive activity detracts from the devotional feel that I am trying to cultivate.

So, when I heard about your suggestion in Tuscany, I immediately revised my practice and substituted Roman monograms for Tibetan and Devanagari characters, hoping that this would help things. To a certain extent, it did; but, unfortunately, I still found myself using some discursive mental activity to unravel all the entwined letters, so that in reading linearly they most easily communicated to me the sound that they were supposed to embody.

We're coming to the question.

As a result of this experience, I now visualize seed syllables in Roman script, written out as words. To stop them looking 'common' and prosaic, I visualize them in the sort of elegant, ornamented calligraphy that one finds in medieval manuscripts. However, knowing that this is a personal innovation designed to fit in with my likes and dislikes creates a slight tension in the back of my mind. Perhaps, I feel, I am being excessively maverick, and though slightly uncomfortable it might in the long run be better for me to bow to tradition or at least your suggestion, and visualize non-linear seed syllables. Could you therefore [22] put my mind at rest and say whether or not you think my linear romanized seed syllables are, in the spirit of tradition, acceptable?

Perhaps I should go back and provide a little bit of background to this material. I am not sure if I mentioned it on that original occasion in Tuscany, but this was the sort of question I had asked Dhardo Rimpoche years and years before in Kalimpong, and I remember his reply. He said that, in his opinion, it was best to visualize seed syllables and mantras in he didn't say Devanagari script but the Indian script which was transmitted to Tibet at the time of the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, which is a rather sort of fancy, I think it was perhaps Nepalese-type character; but certainly based on what is now the Devanagari. He said that was best. Failing that, he said the Tibetan script was best; and, failing that, he said, Roman script. So Roman script came rather at the bottom of the list.

I don't remember that I asked him the reason for his opinion, but I think it is very largely a matter of association: that if you use a sort of archaic script and, of course, the Devanagari script is for Tibetans archaic there are all sorts of associations, perhaps emotional, perhaps devotional, which cluster around it, and presumably do help one in one's practice. And for us, perhaps, or for some people in the Order, the Tibetan script has those sort of associations. But then, if it does distract from your practice and your concentration on the seed syllable to have to visualize it in that comparatively unfamiliar script, well, fair enough, you fall back on Roman. And, yes, on that original occasion in Tuscany, I did suggest that one might make a sort of monogram. I think about that time it was that I had myself been experimenting with these sort of monograms. I tried to find them afterwards, but I didn't succeed; but I remember I did produce myself quite a few monograms for Tam and Hrih and Hum and so on, and I still think that is a good idea.

But Cintamani in this question raises this new point of writing things out linearly. I must say it doesn't really appeal to me personally, though that's no reason why other people shouldn't use it. I was thinking in particular, in the case of the OM AH HUM, if you arrange them vertically then you have them corresponding to OM, forehead; AH, throat; and HUM, heart.

There is a vertical alignment corresponding to the various corresponding centres in the body. If you write them out in linear fashion, you don't quite get that. So I am rather inclined to think that a linear arrangement of letters has a somewhat different psychological-cum-emotional effect from a vertical arrangement of letters. I don't know. But it might be that people could experiment with arrangements of the letters of the bija upright and with them horizontal; I am not quite sure what would be the effect. You might find that if you want to be more restful and recumbent, as it were, psychologically, a linear arrangement would be more suitable suppose you have a very active mind. Or if you need to stand up more, pull yourself together, you might perhaps prefer a vertical arrangement of letters and find that more helpful. I don't see any reason why any particular arrangement should not be in the spirit of tradition, even though it might not quite accord with the letter no pun is intended here!

[23]
So I would just say: just experiment, and maybe some of you, those who do experiment, compare notes, and see whether it does actually make a difference. But, yes, I do quite like the idea of these monograms, and perhaps one could devise the monograms going back to that in such a way that they made an immediate impact; you didn't have to sort of spell them out: 'this is H and this is R and this is I and this is H', but take them in just as a whole, more as it were holistically; not breaking them up into their separate component parts. And perhaps some monograms could be designed in such a way as to make that more easy. I think that the monograms I myself designed were of that kind, though I don't think I deliberately designed them in such a way that they were, so to speak, holistic.

Anyway, so much for that relatively simple question. We come on now to something a little bit more abstruse. I am not sure who it comes from no, he or she hasn't given any name, but oh, yes, it's the second page of something which is from Dhammarati, who is not here this evening, I believe. There are two questions arising out of 'Zen', but I am taking the second one first:

'This follows from Cintamani's question last week on 'staring.' The quote is from Thich Nhat Hanh:

'Whenever a wholesome thought arises, acknowledge it: 'A wholesome thought has just arisen.' If an unwholesome thought arises, acknowledge it as well... Don't dwell on it or try to get rid of it, however much you don't like it. To acknowledge is enough. When we are angry, we ourselves are anger. When we are happy, we ourselves are the happiness. We are both the mind and the observer. Mind does not grab on to mind; mind does not push mind away. Mind can only observe itself. But it isn't an observation of some object outside the observer... 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?'

We seem to be back in the sixties, don't we? (Laughter.) So that's the quote; now for the question.

You were suggesting last week that simple awareness could not transform a poison into a wisdom; that there has to be an element of Insight. The quote seems to be describing a process where simple awareness of our mental state leads to a quality of experience not split into subject and object. Is Thich Nhat Hanh describing awareness leading to an Insight experience, or just something on the level of samatha? On the basis of this quote, do you

think that you and he seem to have a methodological disagreement?

Let's go through this quote a little more carefully. 'Whenever a wholesome thought arises, acknowledge it: 'A wholesome thought has just arisen.' If an unwholesome thought arises, acknowledge it as well.' That seems to be clear? Anything particularly 'Zen' about that yes or no? Have we encountered it or met it outside Zen circles?

[24]
Voices: Yes.

S: Yes, of course, it's standard Buddhist teaching, apparently straight from the Buddha's own mouth. We find it in the Pali Canon: 'Whenever a wholesome thought arises, acknowledge it. If an unwholesome thought arises, acknowledge it.' So, so far, we are on quite safe ground, aren't we? 'Don't dwell on it or try to get rid of it, however much you don't like it. To acknowledge is enough.' To acknowledge is enough? Anyone have any doubts about that, or does everybody agree with it to acknowledge is enough?

Sanghapala: It depends what he means by 'enough'.

S: Yes, it depends what you mean, or it means, by 'enough'. Enough is enough! What else do you think it depends on?

Kuladeva: If it's a negative thought, then it should be enough, but if it isn't, then presumably I think, referring to the Pali Canon, isn't there a reference to different degrees of different methods?

S: Mm, but what about those four right efforts?

Voices: Hm!

S: What about the four right efforts? If you take wholesome thoughts, aren't wholesome thoughts, wholesome mental states, to be cultivated? Are they just to be acknowledged or are they also to be cultivated? So this statement, taken at its face value, doesn't seem quite to square with the Buddha's teaching of the four right efforts.

But it's not really quite as simple as that. It could be enough within a particular context. If you are just sitting and practising mindfulness and not doing anything else, if that is your particular practice at that particular moment, well, then, it may be enough then, within that particular context, simply to acknowledge the wholesome thought when it arises; but it is certainly not enough within the total context of Buddhist spiritual practice. So we have to be quite clear about that sort of difference, that sort of distinction. Otherwise it becomes a little nonsensical, because the quote goes on to say: '...acknowledge it as well. Don't dwell on it' fair enough 'or try to get rid of it.' Well, should you not, eventually maybe not within that particular meditative context, but eventually try to get rid of unwholesome mental states? Doesn't the teaching of the four right efforts prescribe that?

'Don't dwell on it or try to get rid of it, however much you don't like it.' However much you don't like it! it's not a matter of personal preference, it's a matter of quite objectively considered or evaluated skilful and unskilful mental states. That's rather an odd way of

expressing it, I would say - 'however much you don't like it.' [25] Maybe it's grammatically ambiguous; maybe it's 'however much you don't like' getting rid of it. It could be that.

Then: 'When we are happy, we ourselves are' the 'happiness.' Correct? When we are happy, we ourselves are the happiness?

Kulamitra: I think that's a bit simplistic.

S: In what way?

Kulamitra: There can be more than just the experience of happiness present.

S: Right, yes, because mental states can be very complex. So, when we are happy, that experience of happiness does belong to or pertain to us, but it does not mean necessarily that we are totally to be identified with that particular state. So again it's rather loosely expressed. And then we go on to: 'We are both the mind and the observer.' Are we?

Voices chuckle.

Cintamani: According to one school of Buddhism, we are just mind.

S: Yes! So 'we are both the mind and the observer.' Does it mean that there are three things? Or does it mean that there are two things, which are not really two but one, or not-two? So 'we are both the mind and the observer.' We are both the subject and the object, presumably; though the 'we' referred to here is not a separate 'we' from the subject, but is presumably identical with that subject. So, yes, we are on quite safe ground here, actually, because what the text or the quote seems to be saying is that the distinction between the subject and the object is not absolute and that you can identify them and speak of them as being in effect one, though it isn't really very precisely expressed.

So, if that is so, does this pertain we are coming a bit nearer the question to samatha, or does it pertain to vipassana? (Pause.) If you realize that you, oneself, are both mind and observer, subject and object, ...

Voices murmuring: It's vipassana.

S: that there's no real distinction between them, is that Insight, is that vipassana? Yes! So you've got here, in this sentence, a statement of a vipassana experience. You seem to have got to it in a rather odd sort of way: 'when we are angry we ourselves are the anger. When we are happy, we ourselves are the happiness. We are both the mind and the observer.' The link isn't really quite explicit, is it? Coming again to the question: 'The quote seems to be describing a process whereby simple awareness of our mental state leads to a quality of experience not split into [26] subject and object.' It doesn't really describe as leading to it; there's a sentence pertaining to what seems to be one, followed by a sentence pertaining to what seems to be the other, but no suggestion of the process whereby you go from the one to the other. Do you see what I mean? Let me read again perhaps it will be clearer: 'When we are angry, we ourselves are the anger. When we are happy, we ourselves are happiness. We are both the mind and the observer.' So, yes, there does seem to be, if you overlook the looseness of expression, a transition from samatha to vipassana, but we are not told how that transition has come about.

So let's go back to the question: 'Is Thich Nhat Hanh describing awareness leading to an Insight experience?' Well, he seems to be describing awareness followed by an Insight experience, but you couldn't say he was describing awareness leading to an Insight experience. You don't see how it comes about; you don't see the connection. You are not told how to pass from the one to the other. '...or just something on the level of samatha?' No, it doesn't seem to be describing just something on the level of samatha.

'On the basis of this quote, do you think that you and he seem to have a methodological disagreement?' What is meant by 'a methodological disagreement' in this context?

Man's voice: (inaudible)

S: There's no methodological disagreement, because Thich Nhat Hanh hasn't given any method, so how can there be a methodological disagreement?!

Voices chuckle.

S: I don't deny that samatha can be followed by vipassana, but to state that samatha can be followed by vipassana does not constitute in itself a method of passing from samatha to vipassana, so there is no question of methodology; therefore no question of methodological disagreement. Do you see what I mean? So is this a little clearer now?

Ratnaketu: If the first quote is taken so that the method was by just accepting your mental state, knowing that the mind ...

S: Be careful here: the quote does not say 'accept'. 'Accept' is a very dangerous word! It says 'acknowledge'. Anyway, carry on. (Laughter.)

Ratnaketu: That might be the method from one to the other.

S: Just awareness? The awareness when a wholesome thought arises, one acknowledges it that's dualistic. There's the wholesome or unwholesome thought, there are you. You acknowledge; dualistic situation. How do you pass from that [27] dualistic situation, from that dualistic awareness, to a non-dualistic awareness? There's no explanation, apparently.

Cintamani: Perhaps Dhammarati used that quote as an illustration of the 'just staring' at an emotion, which was described last week, as a means of gaining Insight and transmuting it into its corresponding wisdom.

S: Just staring, or just being aware of, may provide a basis for the development of Insight; but the general Buddhist tradition is not that, in itself, it does constitute Insight, though it certainly constitutes a basis for the development of Insight. And for the development of Insight, of course, various methods are available in tradition many of them.

Khemananda: Wouldn't it lead to Insight, possibly, if you gave the experience that acknowledgement, that which gave the experience acknowledgement had been changed? You know, we define ourselves by hatred and greed. So you temporarily suspended that by keeping something you'd either push down or accept or encourage a kind of neutral kind of ... (?)

S: A temporary suspension of an unwholesome mental state is samatha and not vipassana.

Khemananda: Wouldn't it possibly lead to ... ?

S: It would provide a basis for it, but leading to it is another matter. Anyway, why do you think I've taken the trouble to analyse this quote?

Man's voice: To emphasize the importance of understanding what you're reading.

S: Yes, indeed! It is very easy just to read these things [and get] a very vague, general, superficial impression, but not really to get down to the text and really to understand what it is all about. You need to be quite analytical, quite critical, even, in a positive way; not critical in the fault-finding sense, but critical in the sense of having all your critical faculties well alert, and really considering the meaning of what you are reading. I do think that Thich Nhat Hanh does express himself rather loosely, and it may be because

Parami: Translation?

S: There's the translation; there's the fact that originally these things were given as talks, and one can't always be very precise when just speaking off the cuff, as it were. And perhaps the text, not to speak of the translation, has passed through the hands of various editors. I know myself what editors can sometimes do! But all the more reason to read rather carefully and critically; do you see what I mean? Otherwise a text, whatever it may be, becomes a bit popular; people just browse in it, or they just [28] read it quickly and, as I said, there is this vague general impression. But they don't have a very clear understanding of what it is all about.

All right, let's leave that, then; let's take it just as a little exercise in critical reading. I think we really need to develop that much more than we do. We are going now to the first of the Zen quotes another question from Dhammarati. The quote is from Shunryu Suzuki who is not, of course, the famous Suzuki, it's another one:

'Resume the you which is always with everything, always with Buddha, which is fully supported by everything right now. You may say that it is impossible, but it is possible. It is possible in this moment. So if you have this confidence, this is your Enlightenment experience. If you have this confidence, you are already a Buddhist in the true sense, even though you do not attain Enlightenment.

'That's the end of the quote, then here comes Dhammarati's question or, first a comment:

You (meaning myself) have often criticized Zen's language of potential Buddhahood, and I assume that you, on similar grounds, would criticize the language of 'Enlightenment as possible in this moment'. I have wondered, however, if the same language is responsible for Zen's strengths as well as some of its shortcomings. Zen seems to have a strong mindful quality and a strong aesthetic response to life. When Dogen instructs the cooks in his monastery to 'pick up the vegetable stem as a Buddha would turn the Wheel of the Law', and Thich Nhat Hanh exhorts 'When washing dishes, washing dishes should be the most important thing in your life,' the effect seems to [be to] make us more aware of the depth and mystery of the simplest moments of life.

It seems to me that in the situations that I have come across where Zen is practised they create an atmosphere of mindfulness more successfully than we do. Do you think that this is a more positive consequence of the language of immanent Buddhahood and Enlightenment in this moment? Do you think that this language, despite its shortcomings, creates a depth of attention and receptivity to the beauty of the present moment that the more future-oriented language of the Path does not?

So let's go through this in much the same way. First this quote: 'Resume the you which is always with everything, always with Buddha, which is fully supported by everything right now.' I think the general purport is clear; we won't quarrel too much with the language. The general purport is clear? - 'Resume the you which is always with everything, always with Buddha, which is fully supported by everything right now'? In other words, Shunryu Suzuki seems to say 'Realize your own essential innate Buddhahood right now.' This is what he is saying. 'You may say that it is impossible, but it is possible. It is possible in this moment.' Correct?

[29]
Voices: Yes.

S: Yes? Well, yes, I suppose in theory it is. So, yes, 'it is possible. It is possible in this moment.' So: 'If you have this confidence, this is your Enlightenment experience.' Now what do you notice about this? It is possible for you to realize your Buddhahood right now. Fair enough. No one, I think, would disagree with that, within the context of Mahayana thought. But then there comes a qualification or condition: 'If you have this confidence.' If you have the confidence that you are Buddha, well, you can realize, it is possible for you to realize, that you are Buddha here and now. But isn't it a big 'if'? Isn't it a big 'if'?

'...but it is possible. It is possible in this moment. So if you have this confidence, this is your Enlightenment experience.' There is a bit of vagueness here, isn't there, a bit of unclarity? So what is your Enlightenment experience? Is it the confidence itself which is your Enlightenment experience? Because then it would seem that the experience of being Buddha, that you are Buddha, is a different experience from the experience of having the confidence that you are. Because having the confidence well, two contradictory things seem to be said about the confidence: one, that it is a condition precedent for realizing that you are Buddha, and, two, that it is that realization. I don't know whether that contradiction is intentional or not. I suspect it is unintentional. 'If you have this confidence, you are already a Buddhist in the true sense, even though you do not attain Enlightenment.' So there are two things said about confidence again: one, that confidence is initially identified, in one of the two previous statements, with Buddhahood; but later on it is identified only with already being 'a Buddhist in the true sense'. So there seems to be a certain amount of confusion here. Do you see what I mean? Again, I am just trying to read closely and critically.

But we'll leave that; I think I've laboured that point sufficiently. Dhammarati says: 'You have often criticized Zen's language of potential Buddhahood.' Is it especially or specifically Zen's language?

Kulamitra: It's not only Zen's language.

S: It's not only Zen's language. It is the language of some Mahayana sutras. Is it the Buddha's

language, as far as we know from, say, the Pali Canon?

Man's voice: No.

S: No it isn't; the Buddha never uses that. Do you think that language of potentiality was available to the Buddha?

Atula: Well, he used it. In the story of the flower he uses -

[30]

S: I'm speaking of the Pali Canon, which, as far as we know, is the closest to the historical Buddha's actual teaching.

Parami: Presumably the concept was available.

S: Yes, it was available, because it occurs in the early Upanishads: tat tvam asi and all that. It was a well-known mode of thought, or trend of thought, in the Buddha's day, but it would seem that the Buddha deliberately avoided this. He spoke the language of becoming, the language of development; or, in our language, we could even say the language of evolution. It is significant that the word for what we call meditation is bhavana, which means 'to make become' or 'to develop'. So it would seem that this language of potentiality was available to the Buddha, but that he didn't use it; and it's true I do personally criticize the language of potentiality because I think it's quite unrealistic to use it in any systematic way or as a basis for actual practice. You could say, well, yes, in the depths of your being you are identical with the Buddha-nature; sometimes it may be advisable to remember that. But I think the great danger is that you yourself as you actually are, you yourself as you experience yourself here and now or, you could say, your ego, even appropriates that concept as belonging to itself, and this can be disastrous. It is not that you are Buddha. As I mentioned last week, it would be more correct to say that the Buddha was you, rather than that you were the Buddha; or that you belonged to the Buddha, rather than to say that the Buddha, so to speak, belonged to you or that Buddhahood belonged to you.

So I think that this language of potential Buddhahood is in practice quite dangerous, though it may, perhaps, in certain circumstances, be a justifiable language from a metaphysical point of view.

Anyway, coming more to the real question: 'I have wondered, however, if the same language' that is, the language of potential Buddhahood 'is responsible for Zen's strengths as well as some of its shortcomings.' Well, it's reasonable to wonder that. 'Zen seems to have a strong mindful quality' agreed?

Voices: Mm.

S: 'and a strong aesthetic response to life.' Agreed?

Voices: Yes.

S: Though I think it's a moot point whether that does come from Zen or Buddhism itself or

from Japanese national culture. For instance, it occurs to me that the Indians, the Hindus, use this language of potentiality ad nauseam. If you go to India and meet any slightly philosophically-minded Hindu, he will tell you that you are God or that you are Brahman or that he is Brahman; they use this sort of language all the time. It is a very common, a very popular language, a well-worn [31] language. But are the Indians, are the Hindus, particularly mindful?

Voices: No.

S: They're not. I'm sorry to say this, but they're not. (Laughter.) Even some of our own Friends, our own Buddhist Friends, have difficulty with practical mindfulness. And are they particularly aesthetic (laughter), would you say (he laughs)? So I'm not so sure that, even supposing Zen does use the language of potential Buddhahood or the language of potentiality, I am not so sure that, even if it does use that language, you could make a sort of cause-effect connection between the fact that you use that language and the fact that you are mindful and aesthetic; because, in the case of the Indians, the Hindus, we see that, well, yes, they do use this language very extensively, but they are not particularly mindful, not particularly aesthetic. But perhaps the situation is more complicated than that.

Anyway, let's go on: 'When Dogen instructs the cooks in his monastery to 'pick up the vegetable stem as a Buddha would turn the Wheel of the Law' that's a very big thing to say, isn't it? What do you think Dogen's getting at? 'Pick up the vegetable stem, you cooks, as a Buddha would turn the Wheel of the Law.'

Khemananda(?): Value the experience you're having at the time you're having it...

S: Did the Buddha value the experience of turning the Wheel of the Law, would you say?

Khemananda(?): I would have thought so. (Laughter.)

S: Do you think that that was the Buddha's mode of thought? His turning of the Wheel of the Law was a direct expression of his inner spiritual Transcendental realization. So when you pick up a vegetable, let it be an expression of something deep within yourself, on your own level. Though Dogen doesn't say that; that's my little addition.

Anyway: 'When Dogen instructs the cooks in his monastery to 'Pick up the vegetable stem as a Buddha would turn the Wheel of the Law', and Thich Nhat Hanh exhorts that 'When washing dishes, washing dishes should be the most important thing in your life,' the effect seems to make us more aware of the depth and mystery of the simplest moments of life.' So let's look at this: 'When washing dishes, washing dishes should be the most important thing in your life.' Do you think Thich Nhat Hanh is making an evaluative statement here about the importance of washing dishes?

Voices: No.

[32]
S: Well, what's he doing?

Sanghapala: He's talking of mindfulness and

S: Well, yes. I thought, as a precaution, I would look up the passage and see what the context was, because that might help us. I did find it; it's in The Miracle of Mindfulness. It's a quote from some source; the source isn't given. So let's just read it: 'While washing the dishes, you might be thinking about the tea afterwards, and so try to get them out of the way as quickly as possible in order to sit and drink tea. That means that you are incapable of living during the time you are washing the dishes. When you're washing the dishes washing the dishes must be the most important thing in your life!'

Does the context give a slightly different slant to the point? What Thich Nhat Hanh really seems to mean is when you're washing dishes, just concentrate on that. He is not making an objective, evaluative, even metaphysical, statement about the relative importance of washing dishes. So that, when you are actually washing the dishes, it is not that you are supposed to be saying to yourself, 'This is the most important thing in my life'! No; just, when you are washing dishes, just wash the dishes; concentrate on doing that. So I would say that well, obviously, I agree with Thich Nhat Hanh, but I think it could be misleading to put it in this particular way: that washing dishes, when you are washing dishes, should be the most important thing in your life. I think it is quite enough to say, as the more sober Theravada tradition does: when you are washing dishes, when you are doing anything of that sort, just do it mindfully, undistractedly, without thinking of anything else. I don't think it's necessary to put it in this sort of way 'washing dishes should be the most important thing in your life.'

Side B

This, I think, could be misunderstood.

So, when Dogen and Thich Nhat Hanh make these two statements which Dhammarati has quoted, he says: 'The effect seems to make us more aware of the depth and mystery of the simplest moments of life.' Do you think that is correct?

Kulamitra: If it does, I think it's very temporary, because, really, your own attitude is the really continuous active ingredient. I think sometimes people, when they read those things, do temporarily get reminded of mindfulness, but I wonder whether anybody else's teaching is enough to sustain that mindfulness.

S: Well, mindfulness is one of the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path, isn't it? It is the seventh. But we'll come to that in a minute. Further question well, maybe we come now to the real question from Dhammarati: 'It seems to me that in the situations that I've come across where Zen is practised, they create an atmosphere of [33] mindfulness more successfully than we do.'

Well, several questions arise here. Who are the 'we'? (Laughter.) People around the LBC, or Dhammarati and one or two friends, or everybody in the Movement, or...

Parami: I imagine he means our public activities, actually.

S: So 'It seems to me that in the situations that I've come across where Zen is practised, they create an atmosphere of mindfulness'. Would you agree with that, or has anyone any experience of these situations?

Woman's voice: Very little, but that is what comes across from the things that I've been to: quite an aesthetic quality, as much as anything. Dhammarati went to the Zen place in San Francisco quite a bit when he was there, and what he talked about when he came back, [he was] very taken by the aesthetics and the mindfulness of it. So I wonder if he's comparing that with some of our own more public things at festivals. I know he sometimes feels a bit frustrated.

S: Can you have a mindful festival, do you think? Or can you have a mindful party? (Laughter.)

Parami: I don't think he was equating that. (?)

Cintamani: Years ago, back in the seventies, I went to a Zen group in London, and I must say that, although I guess it was certainly very mindful in a very stern, foreboding sort of way, and I got the impression that were I to put a foot wrong it would be like blaspheming; and it wasn't happy at all.

S: I must say that that has been my personal experience not that my personal experience has been particularly extensive. But I remember, in the early days of the Movement, we did have some contact with some Zen groups; and, yes, they were mindful. But it was what I later on described as alienated awareness. I think this is the great danger for a lot of Zen people. And I would go a bit further than that, because I remember I talked about this years and years ago at least 20 years ago and several times since: I noticed on our very early retreats that there was always a swing of the pendulum. To begin with, people would be very unmindful. They would be very lively and active and talkative, and so on, but very unmindful; so one had to point that out, whereupon they became rather more mindful. But they tended to become stiff and self-conscious and a bit alienated at the same time. So, after a while, one would have to ask them to just loosen up a bit; so, after a while, the pendulum would swing the other way. And usually, the pendulum swung back and forth. So it isn't easy to follow a middle way and be mindful and at the same time preserve your liveliness and spontaneity and all the rest of it.

[34]
So I don't think it's just the Zen people who tend to this extreme of stiffness, as Cintamani has called it. I think anybody who tries to practise mindfulness will, for quite a while, oscillate between these two extremes. I think it's inevitable, almost, at least in the West, by virtue of the kind of practice that you are doing, and also by virtue of human nature itself. I think it's very, very difficult to find that middle point and be mindful and spontaneous and alive at the same time. So I'm sure some Zen people succeed in doing this reaching that middle point; I'm sure also that some Theravada people succeed in doing this; and I'm sure some people in the FWBO sometimes succeed in doing this. But one needs to be aware of these two extremes.

And obviously, yes, inasmuch as mindfulness is the seventh step of the Eightfold Path, we really do need to cultivate it. It could be that the particular Zen situations in which Dhammarati encountered it did create an atmosphere of mindfulness more successfully than we do; that is his experience.

So then he goes on to say: 'Do you think that this is a more positive consequence of the language of immanent Buddhahood and Enlightenment in the moment?' I am rather doubtful about this, as I indicated earlier on; because we do find that some Theravadins also have this

emphasis on mindfulness. It doesn't seem to be especially linked with Zen or with that language of immanent Buddhahood and Enlightenment in this moment. 'Do you think that this language, despite its shortcomings, creates a depth of attention and receptivity to the beauty of the present moment that the more future-oriented language of the Path does not?' I don't think the language of the Path should be understood simply as future-oriented; because, as I said, the Path does contain, as its seventh anga, mindfulness, and the way that mindfulness is described in the Pali Canon suggests that it is, to a great extent, a matter of just acknowledging whatever occurs on the appropriate level.

So it seems to me that you need to have both. You need to have the orientation to the future; at the same time, you need to have the as it were timeless awareness in the present. I don't think you should have just either the one or the other. Both are necessary, both points of view or both ways of looking at things are necessary. Do you see what I'm getting at? (Murmurs of assent.)

So I think it is possible to be more mindful and to be more aesthetically aware without resorting to this language of potential Buddhahood. The language of potential Buddhahood may help some people, but, as I have indicated, it is a rather dangerous sort of language to use, for various reasons. I think I would prefer, personally, to stay with the more simple language in this connection of the Pali Canon, and just emphasize the importance of mindfulness in doing whatever one has to do in an undistracted way.

I think also I have to say it is not just a question of doing it with mindfulness. One also has to do it, especially if one is doing it for other people, with a certain amount of affection, a certain amount of metta. If, for instance, you are cooking in a [35] community, you are not just cooking. It is not just enough to be aware of the vegetables; you are cooking for other people. You need to be aware of them; aware of the fact that you are cooking for them, and there needs to be affection in that awareness. I am not saying that awareness and affection or metta are necessarily two quite different things, but there needs to be the experience of metta so that you don't just feel like getting through the job as quickly as possible so that you can do something else; partly because you enjoy doing that particular work, cooking, for other people. It is part of your care for them. It is an expression of your metta towards them. This is one of the reasons why I quite agree in principle with what Dogen says: cooks do need to be instructed. In Zen monasteries in the old days, the cook was the second most important person in the whole monastery, I believe; the most important being the abbot, of course, but the cook was the second most important. I think that is quite significant. So when you have a cook in a community, the way he does his work is a very good indication of the spiritual state of the whole community. Meals don't have to be lavish, they don't have to be luxurious, but they need to be carefully prepared, prepared with metta. They need to be even aesthetically prepared. They need to be prepared with due regard to the balance of the ingredients from the nutrition point of view. And if those things aren't all attended to, something is not right with that particular community. So your cook, or whoever's turn it is to cook, should have the attitude of affectionately preparing and providing food for the other members of the community. If that is not the spirit in which the cook cooks, then there is something wrong with that community, which needs to be attended to, whether by the methods of Zen or by any other methods.

And then there is this question of the aesthetic. I remember I have said something about this, or written something about this, many, many, many years ago, in The Religion of Art. I could

only find the old edition. I'll just read you a few lines as a reminder, because sometimes these books which come out recently are quoted from as though some of the things said are really new discoveries. Well, maybe to the reader they are; perhaps even to the writer. But they are not altogether new discoveries so far as I am concerned. So I find that in The Religion of Art I have written quite a lot about this. For instance - I'm skipping quite a bit - I say: 'Turning from the contents of the home to the home itself, such a devotee' that is, devotee of the religion of Art 'should do his best to ensure that his house is as beautiful outside, in materials, structure, and setting, as it is inside. In this matter, the Indian peasant who lives in a thatched hut, with grey mud-plastered walls, cow-dunged courtyard and threshold ornamented with intricate designs in rice-paste, amid groves of plantain and mango, and with, perhaps, a pool or a tank nearby wherein grow blue, red, or white lotuses, is more fortunate than the well-to-do city-dweller who lives in a house like thousands of other houses, in a street like thousands of other streets, with the smell of factory smoke in his nostrils and the noise of traffic thundering in his ears, with a balcony (if he is lucky!) or a grubby back yard instead of a garden, a compartment in a brick box instead of a home, and more likely than not, a bundle of nerves instead of a soul.' (Laughter.)

[36]
Later on, I say: 'It is difficult for the city-dwelling art lover to beautify his own house without beautifying the houses of his neighbours also, for their ugliness casts as it were a dark shadow over the beauty of his own abode.' So I go on at some length about this. It has an environmental significance, obviously, as well as an aesthetic one.

So, yes, we should be aware of this. I know there is also a financial consideration, because beauty usually costs money. It's all right if you're in India and you've got mud and thatch and you can put them together aesthetically, but we can't quite manage in this country certainly not in Bethnal Green with mud and thatch, however aesthetic. But I think we must pay attention to the whole aesthetic side of things. I do feel this quite strongly. I am glad to say our publications, Windhorse Publications, are becoming aesthetically more pleasing, to a great extent thanks to Dhammarati. I am quite glad that the LBC itself is aesthetically pleasing, that the shrine is aesthetically pleasing; even the various appointments are aesthetically pleasing. So we need to extend this as much as we can, even to the places where we live; even if we can't do very much to change Bethnal Green, though it is becoming a little bit cleaner and tidier than it was. But perhaps we should raise our voices in that particular context, too: if we see rubbish hasn't been collected for several days, complain to the local authority, kick up a fuss about it. I think one would be fully justified in doing that; in fact, I think it would be one's duty. Not let them get away with slackness in this respect.

Anyway, I think that's about all. Yes. We'll just go on to the next question, then. This is an interesting question left over from last week. There are also comments as well as questions here; we'll deal at least with some of them.

Bankai (?), after his Enlightenment experience, had great difficulty finding a master whose experience was such that he could confirm Bankai's attainment. Bankai also laid great emphasis on his willingness to confirm others' Enlightenment experiences. Why does Enlightenment experience need confirmation? Does the need for confirmation imply incomplete Enlightenment/Insight? Is Insight always incomplete?

There are all sorts of further points, but let us just deal with these first. So 'Bankai,' I'm sure

everyone's heard of Bankai after his Enlightenment experience, had great difficulty finding a master whose experience was such that he could confirm Bankai's attainment. Bankai also laid great emphasis on his willingness to confirm others' Enlightenment experiences. Why does Enlightenment experience need confirmation?' Anybody got any ideas?

Kuladeva: It's possible to be led astray. One example that springs to mind is Zengo, when he thought he had become the Buddha Maitreya. So he had had possibly some kind of lofty spiritual experience, obviously short of Enlightenment if he had mistaken it for something else.

[37]
S: But the questioner says: 'Why does Enlightenment experience need confirmation?' So 'Bankai, after his Enlightenment experience - '

Kuladeva: (interrupting): That's only the English translation of, presumably, a Japanese word.

S: So what do you think it would be?

Kuladeva: Satori, presumably.

Parami: Or is it to do with ... Enlightenment isn't You said ... Enlightenment isn't fully experienced until it's expressed. Do you think there's a connection with that?

S: Could be.

Sanghapala: So do you think it's from Enlightenment in that tradition, and therefore that demands confirmation prior to getting your certificate? (Laughter.)

S: But the question doesn't actually say anything about a certificate.

Sanghapala: Yeah, but I thought that that was why the question was asked, though; it was wandering about in the background.

S: It could be. I personally have seen certificates of Stream Entry, and I believe there were, from the same source, certificates of Arhantship.

Cintamani: It begs the question what's meant by Enlightenment in that particular...

S: Right, yes. From the context it does seem that Enlightenment does mean Enlightenment here. But suppose it doesn't? Well, in a way the same principle, one might say, holds good. But what about confirmation? What does one mean by confirmation just taking the English word?

Cintamani: It doesn't crop up in the life of the Buddha, does it?

S: No.

Cintamani: So there's that procedure..

Dayamegha: Confirmation implies there might be doubt.

S: Yes. Why do you think that Bankai, 'after his Enlightenment experience', wanted to find 'a master whose experience was such that he could confirm Bankai's attainment'?

[38]
Voices: To share it.

Ratnaketu: So he could tell other people he was enlightened.

S: But didn't he know? If you are enlightened, don't you know that you are enlightened?

Ratnaketu: Don't know! (Laughter.)

S: Well, let's look at it a little more closely.

Man's voice: Isn't the statement a bit contradictory?

S: It is, it is actually a bit contradictory; because 'Bankai, after his Enlightenment experience, had great difficulty finding a master whose experience was such that he could confirm Bankai's attainment.' Well, how would Bankai know that? If you want someone to confirm your experience whether it is an experience of full Enlightenment or something less than that you need someone whose experience is greater than yours. But how can you know whether his experience is greater than yours?

Marichi: Because you share something and a bit more.

S: You could feel that, yes, you share something but he's got something a bit more. But, presumably, you could be mistaken. He might presumably or possibly bluff you. You don't know. So you can't really know whether your Enlightenment experience, whether Transcendental or otherwise, has actually been confirmed; because you can't know, by the very nature of the case, whether the person you have approached for confirmation is really, so to speak, qualified to give it by virtue of the fact that he is more Enlightened, so to speak, than you. So it does seem to be, to some extent, a contradictory position. So what is this confirmation?

Devapriya: I was going to ask whether it could be that the two levels were equal, and having attained it could confirm it or (?)

S: Well, yes. You might, as a result of your communication with someone, come to the conclusion that his experience and yours were equal. But you still wouldn't know whether that equal experience which you had was an experience of full Enlightenment or not. You would only know that your experiences were equal. So this does suggest that, strictly speaking, confirmation is impossible.

Vimalamitra: Wasn't there some part in the Buddha's story where well, I think I remember it the Buddha knew he was Enlightened, so I mean if you're Enlightened, you know you're Enlightened.

[39]
S: Yes; right. So why should you need confirmation? Did the Buddha look for confirmation?

Marichi: But if you know you're Enlightened, don't you therefore recognize that in somebody else?

S: Yes, indeed. So there can be mutual recognition of Enlightened people. I think here we come a little closer to what, perhaps, it is really all about. There can be a mutual recognition of Enlightened people, or people on the same spiritual level, because you can certainly recognize if someone has the same experience as you, as a result of a certain amount of communication with them. You can recognize that. So the fact that Bankai also laid great emphasis on his willingness to confirm others' Enlightenment experiences could be taken as meaning that he enjoyed that mutual recognition. Because that mutual recognition, perhaps one can only speculate gives an additional dimension to the Enlightenment experience itself. You could almost say that the Enlightenment experience isn't complete until it is shared, or until it is a matter of mutual recognition. But confirmation? That does seem to be a rather tricky word; though I believe that it is a reasonably accurate translation and there is that sort of certificating confirmation or authentication practised in some forms of Zen and perhaps some other forms of Buddhism as well. But I think that whatever truth there is in it is connected with this whole question of sharing and mutual recognition of an experience that you've both had.

Varasri: Would the word 'acknowledgement' be more right than the word 'confirmation'?

S: Yes, yes; indeed. It becomes a bit like recognizing, acknowledging, the fact that somebody else is truly Going for Refuge. (Voices: Mm!) You don't confirm it, but you acknowledge it. You say, 'What I feel within myself is present, I feel its presence, within that other person.' When you get together and talk, you know that. You know that you are coming, so to speak, from the same space. So I think, if we are to make sense of this whole business of confirmation, we need to understand it in some such way.

The question goes on to ask: 'Does the need for confirmation imply incomplete Enlightenment Insight?' Well, if one took it literally and took 'Enlightenment' in a Transcendental sense, yes, surely, it would imply that something was incomplete. Then the question goes on to ask: 'Is Insight always incomplete?' Well, I suppose yes and no. You could say that, in principle, Insight is complete; but then there is an infinity of objects to which your Insight can be applied, and in that sense it isn't complete.

Anyway, there's quite a bit more. The question, by the way, comes from Vidyananda.

[40]
Bankai stressed the unborn aspect of mind, and seems to have always given his teachings in terms of it. Kukkai(?), in his Ten Stages of Mind, places 'the mind awakened to the Unborn' at stage 7, and saw it as an incomplete apprehension of Reality. In a Wesak talk of a few years ago, you said that the Buddha continued to Go for Refuge to the Truth after his Enlightenment. Does this mean that Enlightenment is an ongoing process and evolution, and can Enlightenment be seen relatively as any of an infinite number of higher states which pass beyond the conception of even gifted men? Or can Enlightenment be seen as corresponding to Kukkai's tenth stage, 'the glorious Mind, the most secret and sacred', and can this be viewed

as the opening of vajra doors where for the first time one enters with one's whole being into the mystery of being as one who perceives Reality but does not fully comprehend it a start rather than an end?

There's quite a bit to be considered there. First of all, there is this question of assigning particular experiences to particular stages of the Path. I think we can't take this too literally: the fact that what for Bankai is the highest stage is for Kukkai only the seventh stage. I see it in this way: I remember that, years and years ago, when I was in India, when I was at Benares with Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, I was reading a book on the Nirgunam(?) mysticism, and I came across the interesting term 'ultra-ism'; and this was the term that the author gave to the practice of somebody saying that, in his teaching, there was a higher stage which wasn't in anybody else's teaching. Supposing everybody agreed that nirvana was the highest stage of all; well, in that person's teaching, after nirvana there would be a still higher stage which he alone taught. But then it was also pointed out that another teacher had come along later and said: 'No, that's not the highest. Beyond that there's another.' And this whole process the author of the book called 'ultra-ism'. (Not altruism, ultra-ism.)

So it seems that this is a necessary sort of process. So why is it necessary? Is it because well, supposing a certain stage is posited as the ultimate. Well, yes, it is the ultimate, in a sense. It is given a certain name, a term is applied to it. But, after a while, this name, this term, comes to be taken rather literally; so it comes to mean something less than it meant originally, so you now have to go beyond it with another term; but that term indicates what the first term meant before its meaning became debased. You get that in the Mahayana, say, with the word Arhant. The word Arhant in the Pali texts refers to one who has realized the highest Truth by following the teaching of the Buddha: the highest Truth, the same Truth that the Buddha had realized. But in the Mahayana sutras, it is not like that at all, because in the meanwhile, it would seem, the whole notion of Arhant had become rather debased, so you needed something that went beyond that; and you got that with the Mahayana conception of the Bodhisattva and the supreme Buddha.

So I think that probably something like that happened in Japanese Buddhism with these various stages. I don't think we can take it all too literally that actually Bankai was a lesser realized person and Kukkai was a more realized person, and that what Bankai mistakenly thought was the highest stage Kukkai allocated to its correct [41] position as the seventh stage this is really a sort of literalism and we can't take it too seriously.

And, yes, a few years ago I did speak of the Buddha as it were taking refuge in the Dharma. He didn't speak of taking refuge in the Dharma but of reverencing the Dharma, you may recall: that, after his Enlightenment, the Buddha looked around the cosmos and he saw that there was no being worshipping and reverencing whom he could live. It is as though the Buddha himself, even after his Enlightenment, as I pointed out, felt this need to look up to something, something beyond. But he eventually realized that there was the Dharma, there was that spiritual, that Transcendental law in accordance with which he had realized the Truth, become the Buddha; so he resolved to live worshipping and revering that. And I suggested that we shouldn't think of Enlightenment as a sort of fixed, final, terminal sort of state lying literally at the end of a Path which one gradually approached step by step. That is, up to a point, a helpful way of thinking, but you also need to think of Enlightenment as always there. And you get a combination of the two ways of looking at things in the case of the absolute and the relative Bodhicitta; because the absolute Bodhicitta corresponds to

Supreme Enlightenment itself, Ultimate Reality itself; the relative Bodhicitta to the everlasting process of the continual attainment and, at the same time, non-attainment of that same Bodhi. So you have to have both at the same time, which is not a very easy thing to conceive of.

Anyway, perhaps I'd better not say anything more about that. I think I've got just one relatively short question with which to conclude for this evening. This is one of several questions submitted by Jayamati. I am just taking the last one for the moment; I may deal with the others on some future occasion.

Do you agree that Order members could make a vital contribution to the unity of the Order by doing their sadhana practices on a daily basis? I assume that one way of developing unity [42] within the Order is to daily and collectively make contact with the Aryasangha by our practices.

Well, yes, I agree with that; except that I am a little surprised by the question, because, in the first part 'Do you agree that Order members could make a vital contribution to the unity of the Order by doing their sadhana practices on a daily basis?' well, I assume that they are doing their sadhana practices on a daily basis and thereby contributing to the unity of the Order. It is a bit like the Order metta bhavana; you all tune in to the same wavelength. So when you are doing your sadhana, you are tuning in to Manjughosa or Tara or Vajrapani or Vajrasattva or Padmasambhava. And, yes, there is a difference of form, there is a difference of aspect, but ultimately you are tuning in, so to speak, to the Sambhogakaya, one could say. You are tuning in to Avalokitesvara in his Thousand-Armed form. You are realizing that you are one of the arms, one of the hands, of Avalokitesvara, and you are connected therefore with all the other hands, via, so to speak, the body of Avalokitesvara. Jayamati goes on to say: 'I assume that one way of developing unity within the Order is to daily and collectively make contact with the Aryasangha by our practices.' Yes, one could take Aryasangha and Sambhogakaya as more or less synonymous terms; they are not synonymous in tradition not if one takes them literally but in spirit, yes, they are synonymous.

There has been quite a bit of talk, and quite rightly, about the unity of the Order, and unity of the Order is of course maintained by common practices, by meeting together regularly, by common teachings, studying the same texts, working together and all that sort of thing. But we mustn't forget the more purely mental, the more purely spiritual, side of things: that there is a unity as it were on the spiritual plane. And certainly if all Order members are doing their sadhanas on a daily basis, there must be a definite experience of unity amongst them. They are all tuning in, so to speak, to the same wavelength, or at least to the same band, as all other Order members.

So we shouldn't think of the unity of the Order only in external terms, though that also is necessary. There needs to be external unity as well as inner unity. And we must certainly also think in terms of inner unity, which can only be a spiritual unity, not just a psychological unity. And the spiritual unity is via yes, partly via our sadhana practices as well as our common Going for Refuge and common observance of the Ten Precepts.

So one can reverse what Jayamati says and say that Order members who are not doing their sadhana practices on a daily basis are, to some extent, detracting from the unity of the Order. Because, even though they may be in physical contact, social contact, so to speak, with other

Order members, if they are not in tune on that spiritual level they are not fully in contact, and therefore the unity of the Order is not complete and their contribution to the unity of the Order is not complete.

So I quite take the point, I quite agree with what Jayamati is saying here; and for Order members to do their sadhanas on a regular basis is certainly a means of contributing to the unity of the Order; and obviously all Order members would want the Order to be united, not just so to speak organizationally, not just socially, but really and truly in spirit. And that can only come about by spiritual means. So I am quite pleased that this point has been made and this question has been asked.

Vimalamitra: But if you are only doing one practice a day, you should always do your sadhana rather than the mindfulness of breathing [or metta bhavana]?

S: I think it would be advisable, unless there were very special reasons why you should not. You may, for instance, feel that you really do need to do metta bhavana because you are in a quite angry and disgruntled mental state; well, all right, put the sadhana aside if you can only, say, spare one hour a day, and just do the metta bhavana for a few days or whatever length of time is necessary, and then get back to the sadhana. It is not a question of a rigid rule, obviously.

[43]
Sanghapala: Bhante, do you not think if you are involved in teaching the metta bhavana and the mindfulness of breathing that it helps, it's advisable, if you do that practice, whichever you are teaching, fairly regularly?

S: Oh, well, yes; because if you do your sadhana practice it puts you in touch with your more ultimate source of inspiration; because, when you teach the metta bhavana, even though you teach it to beginners in a very limited way, you are not just thinking it's good for their mental health and it will help them be more efficient in their jobs and so on. They may take it like that to begin with, which is fair enough, but you are teaching it out of a higher inspiration, and you can probably only teach it properly, even on that lower level, if you do have some higher inspiration behind you. Certainly you can only teach it on that lower level, so to speak, for any length of time with that higher inspiration behind you. You would otherwise very quickly dry up. So I think, for all sorts of reasons as well as the unity of the Order, Order members need to keep up their daily sadhana practice. And bear in mind this image which we so often use, as I have said, of the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara, and in one way or another try to contact that. Well, you can think, if you like, of a Thousand-Armed Manjughosa or a Thousand-Armed Tara; but someone with a thousand arms, one of which is you.

All right, let's leave it there.

[44]

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Session 3 - 3 June 1990

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Sangharakshita: This evening's questions are somewhat more miscellaneous than usual, so we shall be rather jumping from one topic to another. But we start off with something relatively simple and straightforward, at least so far as the answer perhaps is concerned, if not the question. It's a question from Cintamani well, it's one of Cintamani's questions. Cintamani says:

You have said in the past that you thought it best not to tamper with nature. In the light of this, what do you think of vasectomy and sterilization, and of Order Members undergoing these operations? Is there anything in the Dharma by which this phenomenon might be assessed?

Yes, it's a quite straightforward question, so I think perhaps I'd better answer it quite straightforwardly. This is a question on which obviously very often people do have rather strong feelings, and perhaps in some cases rather strong opinions; and this is perhaps not very surprising. I must say, in my own case, my feeling and I have to admit it is a feeling is rather strongly against vasectomy, or sterilization for that matter, though sterilization doesn't exactly concern me. Well, not that vasectomy does either, really! But I must emphasize that my reaction is of the type commonly referred to as gut reaction, and gut reactions are not necessarily to be implicitly followed. So I am not saying that, because I have a sort of instinctive, if you like, gut reaction to this whole idea of vasectomy, that is to be regarded as a sort of criterion: that because Bhante isn't happy about it therefore it necessarily isn't on for anybody. Clearly, there are all sorts of arguments in favour of vasectomy, at least as the lesser, or the least, of a number of different evils: for instance, the evil of pregnancy, and what for some people perhaps is the even greater evil of celibacy! So it does seem that one has to weigh up one thing against another, and that isn't always easy because all sorts of considerations do come into play. But, as I have said, my own as it were instinctive reaction is definitely against anything like vasectomy; it is definitely against tampering with nature. Though, of course, one must also recognize that for man it is natural to tamper with nature; the tampering itself is, of course, from another point of view, a part of nature. It is rather like the antithesis between art and nature. Shakespeare says: 'There is an art which doth mend nature, but that art itself is nature.' So you can't really altogether separate what man does, whether in the way of vasectomy or anything else, from nature; it is part of nature.

But nonetheless, I think I understand what Cintamani is getting at: that the human body, the human psychophysical system, has a natural and a normal way of functioning which I think one should not lightly disrupt; and there is no doubt that vasectomy would represent a degree of such disruption, with perhaps more or less [45] serious consequences for different people. One also thinks, for instance, of a similar in some respects similar disruption of the human cycle in the case of, say, abortion. Sometimes women say that it doesn't affect them, but they find out, months and even years later, that it has affected them very seriously and very deeply indeed. Order Members have only just begun to have vasectomies; I don't know when the first one took place, I don't know who the pioneer was in this respect. It couldn't have been more than two or three years ago. So perhaps it is a little early to say what the results of

vasectomies are. In that respect it is not very different from abortion. I remember a woman writing to me some years ago she's a Mitra saying that she had had an abortion and it was fine; she felt nothing whatever. But three years later, it was a very different story indeed. And only a few days ago I had a letter from another woman, I think not a Mitra, who said that she had had an abortion only two weeks earlier and was already beginning deeply to regret it. So there is no doubt that tampering with nature in ways of this sort can, at least for some people, have quite serious not just physical but psychological repercussions. So we have to bear all these things in mind.

I am not saying, therefore, that vasectomy is out, but I think it is something to be seriously considered, not to be undertaken lightly; sterilization likewise; and one factor weighed against another very carefully so that one can arrive at the solution which is the best possible for oneself in the circumstances. I also think that we have to sort of pool information, and people who have had vasectomies should as it were report in, say, after a year or after two years or after three years, on any possible physical or psychological effects. But, as I said, my own instincts are all against tampering with nature in this way.

Parami: Bhante, may I just ask something following on that? I am just interested in your linking it so closely to abortion, because I suppose

S: I'm not linking it; I'm only suggesting a parallel.

Parami: Well, even a parallel because I suppose older women that I've known who have had abortions in the past that after a time have had difficulties, but to some extent it's psychological consequences, but I know there are ethical consequences and it seems to me there's quite a major difference. Having a vasectomy doesn't seem to me to carry the same ethical weight. Would you say ?

S: Well, I'm not so sure about that. It could be argued that one was having a vasectomy so that one could simply indulge in sexuality without any regard for consequences, and that would perhaps make one less mindful or less considerate of other people than one might otherwise have been, and that could be regarded as an ethical matter. But clearly there isn't a resemblance inasmuch as, in the case of abortion, there is, at least according to some people, a question of another life, potentially human, to be taken into consideration. I would say I would regard abortion as a much more serious disruption, as far as I can see, than vasectomy. I am [46] not suggesting that there is a link between them in respect of equal seriousness; certainly not.

Vidyananda(?): I had a vasectomy before I joined the Movement, about nine years ago, and I haven't noticed any physical symptoms that could be related to it. The interesting thing is, when it was discussed early on, they were saying that it had the same sort of physical effects as celibacy in that you continued to produce sperm, but this was just reabsorbed into the body in exactly the same way as what would happen if you were celibate. I am not talking about whether there are any physical drawbacks, but whether there are psychological drawbacks I wouldn't know.

S: Well, as I said, people will have to pool information so that we are or we do become more knowledgeable about this matter, and people could take their own decisions in the light of the accumulated knowledge. Any further point or any further supplementary? Oh, there is a

further question of Cintamani's: 'Is there anything in the Dharma by which this phenomenon might be assessed?' I think directly not, except that perhaps more austere followers of the Dharma in the past might have queried this as it were making sexual indulgence an easier matter; they might have queried that. But I don't think well, this question of the operation itself is not discussed in traditional literature, obviously.

Cintamani: What I had in mind, Bhante, in a roundabout sort of way, was the opening of the Dhammapada, that we're mind basically, and it occurred to me that if one has a problem in a particular area that has a physical constituent, ultimately the solution must be mind-based and not body-based, and therefore to take an operation to solve the problem ...

S: Any comment on that?

Paramajyoti: Presumably, Bhante, if we are talking about disrupting the natural function of the body then we can apply the same things to contraception (S: Indeed), particularly if you are a woman. I mean it is a disruption of the natural function.

S: I suppose that the wider issue is that of our relation to nature. I did say that whatever man does, including vasectomy, is part of nature, but in another sense, of course, it isn't. And perhaps it is a very important question, or very important issue, nowadays: that we have, in so many different ways, got out of touch with nature and perhaps this is just another manifestation of it; not just being out of touch with nature but even alienated from nature, including alienated from nature in the person of our own physical bodies. So perhaps there is this as it were larger context of these more general implications. One could perhaps say that the fact that we consider having vasectomies or do have vasectomies is symptomatic of a certain attitude towards nature: sort of forcible intervention, so to speak.

[47]
Atula: I think I'm like you and have a sort of gut reaction to it. I've always felt that there is a certain kind of conflict that is produced ... sexuality [and I] almost feel that that's capable of producing consciousness...

S: Well, as I said, there are all sorts of factors, all sorts of considerations to be weighed one against another before someone can come to a definite conclusion in this matter, as in so many others. But anyway, I don't think at this moment I can as it were answer the question in the sense of giving a definitive answer; I have simply indicated my own instinctive reaction, as it were, for what it is worth, and suggested that we really do need to know much more about the whole business before we can make a fully informed decision or choice. And I hope those who have had vasectomies will keep fellow Order Members informed about the matter so that we do have an increasing pool of information which may be of use to us.

Anyway, I'll pass on from that. This time not too big a jump: it's a fairly lengthy question. This is from Dhammarati:

I have been thinking about some of the elements of the Buddha's biography. In particular, I have been thinking about the incident where the emaciated Buddha-to-be accepts rice from the peasant girl who tends the cows and is abandoned by the five ascetics. In particular, I have been struck by the plant and animal imagery. The incident takes place in a forest, and I picture the thick growth of trees and bushes. Siddhartha accepts rice from a young peasant, without

higher culture, presumably, without worldly experience. She tends a herd of cows: basic animal energy held in check, order, by her attention, and offers the Buddha rice, a plant, in milk from her animals. Until this point, the Buddha-to-be has been leading a spiritual life in such a harsh and narrow way that his body is like a skeleton. He is on the point of death. This seems to me to be an image of an alienated idealism, cut off from lower natural energies and hostile to them. The five ascetics despise his compromise an image of a particular kind of religious intolerance, where a rigid belief replaces awareness and sensitivity. Without trying to confine this symbol to a single meaning, will you say something about what this incident in the Buddha's biography symbolizes?

Well, of course, it doesn't have to symbolize anything! It could be simply that a young lady just supplied the Buddha with nourishment at a critical moment: one could look at it just like that. Anyway, let's take it that it does symbolize something. I must first of all remark, though, that there are various versions of this particular incident, and it is not perhaps to be regarded as fully historical. Nonetheless, even if it isn't historical it has a value. Different sources give the name of the cow girl differently; in some accounts, of course, it isn't a cow girl but it is a male goatherd who gives goat's milk I don't know whether there is any special symbolism there rather than cow's milk, because perhaps the goat is a more fiery, butting sort of animal. So maybe goat's milk is much more suitable for the Buddha, will give him much more virya than cow's milk, this placid ruminating graminivorous creature [48] called the cow. But perhaps that's taking symbolism a little too far.

But let's look at it; perhaps there is this sort of general significance. Usually, of course, the Buddha is represented as practising austerities in the company of the five ascetics, and then subsequently realizing the folly, the onsidedness, of self-mortification, and begins to take solid food, follows a middle path; whereupon the five ascetics leave him. I want to draw your attention just to one thing here: that is the way in which the extremes are characterized in what appear to be the earlier texts. I am relying on A.K. Warder(?)'s translation, which is a recent one though rather idiosyncratic. The text says:

There in the park near Varanasi, the Master (Bhagavan, i.e. the Buddha) addressed the group of five monks. 'These two extremes, monks, ought not to be pursued by one who has Gone Forth from home, from the world. Which two? That which is among passions, practising the enjoyment of passions, inferior, vulgar, common, barbarian, not connected with welfare; and that which is devoted to weariness of oneself, unhappy, barbarian, not connected with welfare. Monks, not going to either of these extremes, the intermediate way illuminated by the Thus-gone Tathagata, making Insight, making knowledge, leads to calm, to Insight, to Enlightenment, to Nirvana.

Now we notice that there are two different sets of epithets characterizing the two extremes, or rather they are different to some extent. By the way, 'barbarian' represents anarya, usually translated as 'ignoble'. But the extreme of self-indulgence is characterized as 'inferior, vulgar, common, barbarian, not connected with welfare', and the extreme of self-mortification is characterized as 'unhappy, barbarian, not connected with welfare'. So what does this suggest? Which three epithets are missing? Inferior, vulgar and common; so do you think this has any meaning? [Silence.] I'll tell you what the Pali is he doesn't give the Pali, but let's take the two, 'inferior' and 'vulgar': hina and gamo. Gamo is translated by some translators as 'pagan', because gamo is from gama, which is village; it means 'a village habit', a crude, rustic, pagan, uncultured sort of habit. And hina, of course, is 'low' as in Hinayana. So do you think there is

any significance in this, that the extreme of self-indulgence is characterized as low and vulgar or pagan; whereas the extreme of self-mortification is not so characterized?

Cintamani: Self-indulgence usually consists of great indulgence in habit or instinct, and in a sense it comes naturally to most people without any thought, without any awareness ... If you carry on without awareness you usually end up indulging yourself. So perhaps it is connected to instinct.

S: But putting it more broadly and more simply?

[49]
Kulamitra: It sounds as if the first there's no higher life, there's no sense of higher life; whereas in the second there is, but it's distorted. So the first one could be happy but there's no sense of higher life, whereas in the second perhaps there's a sense of higher life but no happiness.

S: Yes, the Buddha doesn't even say that it's happy; he says 'that which is among passions, practising the enjoyment of passions.' He doesn't say that it's happy. That's a rather different thing. But it's quite clear from this that the Buddha seems to regard the path of self-mortification, as we call it, or the extreme of self-mortification, as in a way better than the path of self-indulgence. At least the path of self-mortification is not low; it is not ignoble. There is a sort of idealism there, even though it's what Dhammarati characterizes as alienated idealism. So the Buddha is almost saying in these epithets that if you have to choose between the two it is better to practise self-mortification than self-indulgence. At least if you practise self-mortification it suggests that you are aware of some sort of higher value for which you should strive, even though you are striving for it in the wrong sort of way. Whereas, if you follow the extreme of self-indulgence, you are not recognizing any higher ideal; you are just remaining on the as it were animal level, on the unaware level.

I make this point because I think we tend to think that the extreme of self-indulgence is better; it is better not to subject yourself to all this pain and trouble of self-mortification, and if you have to choose between the two it's much better to choose the path of self-indulgence. But it doesn't seem, judging by these epithets, that the Buddha thought like that. Do you see what I mean? So I think we have to be quite careful how we look at this whole business, because Dhammarati uses the expression 'alienated idealism', which is quite a good expression, but I think we have to be careful that we don't regard idealism itself as alienated. I think there is a tendency I commented on this a little while ago to use idealism as a dirty word; to use the word 'ideal' as a dirty word, and to suggest, almost, that if you have ideals they are almost necessarily alienated, or that idealism itself is necessarily alienated or alienating. And therefore, of course, one tends to go to the other extreme in emphasizing almost self-indulgence.

Let's look again, therefore, at what Dhammarati says: 'Until this point, the Buddha-to-be has been leading a spiritual life in such a harsh and narrow way that his body is like a skeleton. He is on the point of death.' I don't think we are ever likely to be in that position. The Buddha was; but I don't think we are ever likely to be anywhere near that. 'This seems to me to be an image of alienated idealism' well, very likely yes, but as I say I don't think we are in any danger of that at all 'cut off from lower natural energies and hostile to them.' I am not sure whether that was the case with the Buddha, whether he was actually cut off from his lower

natural energies. I'm sure we aren't. It just doesn't apply to us, except perhaps in a very, very minor sort of way. 'The five ascetics despise his compromise, an image of a particular kind of religious intolerance, where a rigid belief replaces awareness [50] and sensitivity.' I think we must be careful not to be too harsh where the idealists are concerned. I think from the perspective of most of us, who are much more inclined towards self-indulgence, even a little bit of discipline, a little bit of control, looks very much like alienated idealism, and I think we have to be really careful of this. I think we have to use the terms idealism and ideal more in the original sense.

I think I've gone into this a bit some of you may remember in Human Enlightenment. I make a distinction between a natural ideal and an artificial ideal. I say: 'There are no actual terms for them in circulation, but we can call them natural ideals and artificial ideals. A natural ideal, we may say, is an ideal which takes into consideration the nature of the thing or the person for which it is an ideal. The artificial ideal, on the other hand, does not do this. The artificial ideal imposes itself from the outside in an artificial manner ... Using this distinction, we may say that Enlightenment is not an artificial ideal; it is not something imposed on man from outside, something that does not belong to him or accord with his nature. Enlightenment is a natural ideal for man or even, we may say, the natural ideal. There is nothing artificial about it, nothing arbitrary. It is an ideal that corresponds to man's nature and to his needs.'

So I think we need to make that sort of distinction, and not use the term ideal or idealism as though it normally did imply alienated idealism or what I have called in that particular talk an artificial ideal.

So where do you think all this is leading?

Dhammarati: I'm not very sure where it's leading but I suppose it sparked off hearing your talk. It seems to me that in this culture maybe it's a more universal thing, but in this culture there is a real tension between one's ideals and if you look at the relationship between the sort of ... Christianity, for instance, and the sort of heavily guilt-ridden state of mind and ... in the culture that that seems to have produced. I guess in my experience I can see people move to the extreme of self-indulgence; probably that is my personal preference. On the other hand, I can see people who are much more idealistic. But I think that the Buddha's epithet 'unhappy' would also apply; it seems to be difficult to have an idealism that is joyful and doesn't set off that kind of hostility ..., at the same time if you have self-indulgence without that idealism there's no practice there ... It seems to me a very important fallacy.

S: I think it is very difficult to have an ideal, or to strive for an ideal, without some element of unhappiness. I don't think it can be entirely a happy and joyful process, because there is so much in us which needs to be, if not, say, brought under control, at least to be transmuted, at least to be transformed. And that is usually a quite difficult and even painful process. So I think we have to be quite careful that we don't adopt the view that if there is any pain or struggle or difficulty in our spiritual life it means that we have an alienated idealism. I personally think that that is not a real, serious danger for many people; not in the FWBO. I think our danger lies [51] entirely in the opposite direction, I think in almost all cases. There are so many things in our environment and our culture to encourage us in that way.

Asvajit: I think also to try and see it in a more positive light it is possible to take a real delight in striving. I think surely that is an experience of all of us: that we get more pleasure out of

striving than out of pleasure, if we are objective about our experience.

Cintamani: In response to that, I would have thought that you could only take that sort of pleasure if you had some sort of (maybe only momentary) vision of something above the level because you can't just strive in the dark, can you?

Siddhiratna: Bhante, a question similar to Dhammarati's has always been at the back of my mind when you have used the analogy of the lotus in the pond it opens to rays of light and to the ideal of Enlightenment. It has occurred to me that it has its roots in, if you like, the mire of samsara, and that, if it were to lose its roots, it would more or less be dashed against the bank and shrivel. And there is something of value there, and I don't quite know how you would transmute the value of that kind of raw, unrefined energy that is almost necessary for the thing to grow in the very first place. It somehow occurs to me that if it becomes rootless, if it is cut off from something, it will inevitably die or shrivel up, and that somehow there has to be some connection there, so that the idea of transmutation, the idea of a lack of tension, in a sense, of the ideal trying to move away from something that is actually a source of energy ...

S: I think the difficulty here is pressing the analogy of growth too literally; because, in the case of the lotus or any other plant, it is after all well, a plant, and the process by which it grows, by which it responds to the sun, is a natural organic one, as far as one knows without pain and without tension. In the case of the spiritual life, there is a certain analogy inasmuch as yes, we respond to the higher ideal in the same way as the opening lotus flower responds to the sun; but I doubt very much if we can follow the analogy all the way through in the sense that we keep our roots deep down in our lower nature and there is a quite easy and painless process of transmutation into the blossom. I don't think it happens like that. So I think the analogy does break down at a certain point.

Siddhiratna: I think the point in Dhammarati's analogy was that it was the lack of tension I accept that what you say is right(?) but there was this notion that somehow when the Buddha was starving etc. and the ascetics moved away from him was that [there was] tension there and alienation etc., and that somehow the cow girl or girl herder, whoever it might have been, somehow seems to symbolize a connection with a lower order which is somehow quite sustaining, and it is that I am quite interested in how ...

[52]
S: But in the case of the Buddha it was, say, much more likely that those who represented alienated idealism were going to look down on someone who followed a middle path; but I think what is much more likely nowadays is that those who are actually following a path of self-indulgence will look down on those following a middle way and accuse them, in fact, of following the path of self-mortification. I think this is more what I'm getting at.

Atula: I don't think there is any danger of anyone dying, but certainly I have pushed myself into a state of collapsing, and I don't think that was ... pushing, real ... but I think a factor which remains, in my case at that time, is what I'd call psychological. I do actually observe a lot of people through years actually pushing themselves to an extent where something is not in balance and then collapsing for a while, withdrawing from being involved. I think that sort of thing does go on all the time, and has gone on through the years, from my experience. I think with a bit more ... it does seem at times to get very alienated; we create a culture of judgement judging one another and turning on one another in a particular way.

S: Yes, that is quite true. But the point I am making is that the judgement can very often take the form of those who are following, as I say, the path of self-indulgence criticizing those who are following a middle path saying that that middle path is in fact a path of self-mortification. In other words, what we see as self-mortification in the Buddha's time would have been seen as a middle path.

Atula: Yes, that's true. It seems to me that there's more images involved than the taking of rice from the cow girl; there's the memory of his childhood experience, there seems to be a whole collection of images that suggest what the middle way is ... creating the context, it seems to be a historical context ...

S: Yes. I remember once upon a time in India discussing this matter with some Buddhist monks when we were talking about the Jains; because the Jains, in the Buddha's day, practised well, they still practise quite a degree of self-mortification; and they criticized the Buddhists, the followers of the Middle Way, of being very lax and being very luxurious. But one might say with some Jains nowadays, even though technically they are supposed to be following the path of extreme asceticism, they have come in many cases to the sort of position of the Buddhists in the Buddha's day, and the Buddhists have come, in some cases, to the position of those who are following the path of self-indulgence in the Buddha's day.

Atula: Personally, I think there is something that happens in the Movement in this part of the world and I think it is around that ... area...

S: I must say my own overall impression, as I have said, is that though there may be individual exceptions we are much more in danger of following the path of self-indulgence. And I think people's as it were threshold of tolerance of difficulty and pressure is in fact very, very low; and I think this is one of the reasons why some [53] people at least don't make very rapid spiritual progress: they are not sufficiently robust, not sufficiently able to bear difficulties.

Devamitra: Bhante, if this is the case, how does one gain that robustness? What would be the best approach to becoming more robust?

S: I think one has to be inspired by the Ideal. I think one has to see the Ideal as a source of inspiration, not as something that threatens you or stops you from doing what you want to do, or limits you or curtails your freedom, or something of that sort. One has got to see the Ideal as something positive, from which one can derive strength and energy. It is obviously not a case of physical robustness, because some people who are physically very weak have got a wonderful spirit.

Siddhiratna: Bhante, I just wondered if there was anything more to be gotten out of that symbol where I'm not altogether sure ... I think, as far as I have understood it, that one reason for the collapse of Buddhism in India would have been retreat into sort of monasticism

S: It wasn't a retreat into asceticism: it was rather the opposite, with the bhikkhus, the monks, leading laxer and more comfortable lives than they had led in the Buddha's day.

Siddhiratna: But within the monastery.

S: Yes; but one says 'monastery', but it had become a very comfortable residence.

Siddhiratna: Because what I was thinking was, I have assumed that once that happened the Hindu revivalists made a big pitch to more or less ordinary people, including kings and princes, and thereby gained the upper hand; and I'm just wondering if that symbolism within that story says something about making sure that one is always in contact with ordinary people. I think that's where the lotus and its roots came from. And there is something to be gained by making sure you don't become alienated from what's going on around you, in the sense that

S: But it depends what one means by alienated; because one can certainly be in touch with ordinary people but without necessarily sharing their particular ideas or their way of life. It is not that one is drawing nourishment from that, but one is remaining in contact with them so that one, hopefully, can communicate something of the Dharma. So that is rather a different thing.

Siddhiratna: They would be your raw recruits ...

S: Well, if they responded they would be your raw recruits, yes. But I was thinking also of something else, because this particular incident or episode mentions food; but in the case of the bhikkhus the Buddha said that there were four basic necessities [54] which the bhikkhus were entitled to expect from the lay supporters: those were for food, clothing, shelter and medicine. So the Buddha recognized that even the leading of the spiritual life was dependent on the material order in that sense or to that extent. But the things which he recognized as really necessary were very basic and very simple indeed

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and nowadays we tend to regard many, many more things than food, clothing, shelter and medicine as being necessary and indispensable. Once again, our whole conception of what constitutes asceticism has changed. What in the Buddha's day would have been regarded as a comfortable life we would regard as a very uncomfortable life (murmurs of agreement), as a life of hardship. For instance, even nowadays, if you go to India, ordinary people in villages never sleep on beds; they just have a rush mat on the floor. No mattress; that's almost unheard of in villages. But they don't regard it as a hardship, but we would. We would regard it as asceticism. We wouldn't even do that on a solitary retreat.

So the basic point that I am making here is that, yes, the incident does symbolize something. It symbolizes the I won't say dependence; that's not quite the right word but it symbolizes the fact that in the leading of our spiritual life we can't ignore our material needs, and food especially is mentioned here. But the whole conception of material needs has changed since the Buddha's day. I think we have to be very, very careful what we take the milk rice as symbolizing. It certainly symbolizes food; it symbolizes clothing; it symbolizes shelter; perhaps it symbolizes books we need those also; books as books are material things. I think we have to be quite careful that we don't regard that milk rice which Sujata offered the Buddha as representing a whole collection of things which the Buddha himself would certainly have regarded as luxuries and unnecessary. Do you see what I mean? And also quite careful that we don't regard that milk rice as representing all sorts of activities which the Buddha himself would probably have regarded as highly unskilful. But the basic principle is

certainly there, that, yes, however spiritual we may be and however much we may meditate and study, we have got physical bodies and they do need to be given proper attention. But no more than proper attention; not indulged.

Asvajit: Could you take the milk rice as symbolizing, for instance, health just a healthy state?

S: Yes, but for the healthy state we need material food! And perhaps medicine too. Perhaps even surgery.

Cintamani: I've made a connection, Bhante, in my mind I don't know whether rightly or wrongly between this episode and the kusa grass that he sat on, and also the incident in the Sutra of Golden Light where the Earth Goddess says she had promised to uphold the bhikkhu who preaches the Sutra. It occurred to me there was [55] some sort of natural supportive relationship between the practitioner ... and nature, there will be support if you live. You mentioned in your book that as the natural ideal ... perhaps mention and respond to that in some way, and support that.

S: Yes. One could certainly look at it like that. Because in the Pali Scriptures there are all sorts of references to nature spirits applauding and encouraging the Buddha and helping him and giving him advice and things of that sort; and not only the Buddha but his disciples too.

Danavira: I was wondering, Bhante, if maybe modern Western Buddhists have to be careful, in this thing about self-indulgence, that in contemporary society has affected modern Western Buddhists (sorry, I'm getting a bit lost here). But part of contemporary conditioning is this may be partly reaction to Christianity would be the feeling that left to itself the body will become harmonious, left to itself nature will find a balance, left to itself nature will lead you to greater Insight and Wisdom and to the nature of Reality; there might be this kind of assumption. But it seems to me that perhaps this isn't actually the case at all; that left to itself nature will just perpetuate nature, perhaps even blindly. But what we do is interfere with that process, and when we interfere in that process there's going to be suffering and tension and we have to accept that if you are going to live any kind of spiritual life there's going to be tension. So I am wondering if this is something that Western Buddhists may have to deal with the residue, you might say, of the distortion of nature by Christianity and industrial ...

S: Well, we certainly will have to deal with it in terms of the environment. We don't yet know, it seems, whether the damage that is being done is irreversible or not irreversible; we don't even know that. But in the case of, say, our own bodies I think there are many cases where, left to itself, a healthy body will right itself without the help of medicine. But I said 'a healthy body', and the difficulty is that our bodies usually aren't healthy; that since childhood, since infancy, all sorts of drugs have been pumped into them. So the body, to some extent at least, has lost its self-curative properties or abilities. So therefore we have to go on depending on these artificial helps, and I think it is much the same with nature as a whole, with the environment. We have got perhaps to a point where we can't just let nature look after us, we have to take concrete measures to undo, at least to some extent, the damage that we have already done.

Danavira: The point I meant in particular was that an assumption is built into people's psychological perspective about growth and development, that if only you go with the flow of things or say you make sure you will naturally grow and develop; and I am wondering

whether in fact that is the case at all.

S: I don't think that is the case, and I don't think Buddhism would say that that was the case. But I think this is the danger of taking that lotus symbol, though it is a quite beautiful one and valid to a certain extent, too literally: that you just leave [56] people alone and they will just sort of blossom into lotuses. But it isn't quite as simple as that. It would be nice if it was if we could just grow painlessly and easily and happily; but there is a lot of tension, a lot of trauma, a lot of conflict inherent in the very nature of human growth and human spiritual development. Perhaps it is inherent even in ordinary psychological development; perhaps even inherent in the ordinary process of growing up into a mature human being, even leaving aside if one can leave aside the question of spiritual life and spiritual development. It doesn't seem that it can be even a relatively painless process.

Anyway, perhaps that is enough on that. I'm not sure what we are going on to next. Yes, we stayed a little longer with that than I intended. I think I will leave one or two questions till next week.

We'll go on to this one from Paramajyoti. Preamble:

Dear Bhante, Some time ago in a talk in York Hall you said that the strength of the Order in the future depended upon Order Members taking up the anagarika vow and relating on the basis of their commitment to it. Also at this time you raised the age you recommended for taking up the life of chastity from 40 to 45, and commented that there were sighs of relief all round. If the Order's strength is to be gained from Order Members becoming anagarikas, we are a weak Order.

End of preamble. Questions:

1) Is Bhante likely to review his recommended age for taking up the life of chastity again, and perhaps raise it to 50, with even greater sighs of relief all round?

Well, of course it can be revised at any time, either upwards or downwards! One shouldn't assume that the revision is necessarily to be in the upward direction. I might change my mind and think, 'Well, no, the Order Members are much more ready for it than I thought they were.' Perhaps it might come right down to 35, with, hopefully, sighs of relief all round! There are two more questions here:

2) Is Bhante optimistic about the capabilities of Order Members in the West to take up the life of chastity?

I wouldn't like to say that, as the questioner seems to imply, it is more difficult in the West than in the East. Some of our Order Members in India don't find this whole question an easy one. I don't think it's particularly difficult in the West as compared, say, with India.

3) Is Bhante optimistic about the future strength of the Order from this point of view?

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Well, perhaps I'd better not even try to answer that, because it does mean taking a peek into the future, which is always difficult. I want just to make one or two more general remarks,

though not anything, really, that I haven't said before, on this question of let's use the technical term brahmacarya.

If one thinks in terms of, say, taking up the life of brahmacarya at 40 or 45 or 50 or 35, it suggests that it is something new: that hitherto you were unchaste and now you are going to start being chaste; before you were not practising brahmacarya, now you are going to start practising brahmacarya. I think I've explained that it isn't really quite like that. brahmacarya is a principle that applies throughout. You are all of you practising brahmacarya to some extent, at least at this moment. Do you see what I mean? It is not a question of either you practise it or you don't practise it; it is a question of degree. Everybody is practising to some extent, and everybody is not practising to some extent. Even anagarikas, if I may say so, don't practise it fully, because there is also the question of mind, there is the question of mental attitude, there is the question of thoughts, that can't be excluded. So don't think of yourself too much in terms of 'Now I'm not practising brahmacarya and maybe when I'm 40 or 45 or 50 I will.' It isn't really quite like that. It's a principle that you're trying to apply all the time at every stage of your spiritual life, by gradually shifting your attention away from your sexual relationships and interests on to the Dharma and reducing or minimizing your sexual relationships and activities and making them more and more peripheral as time goes on. So it isn't as though you have a great big sort of conversion when you reach the age of 45 or 50, and suddenly give up everything; you should be preparing for that relative giving up, even here and now, by trying to practise this as it were step by step brahmacarya. It's the same as with meditation: you don't think in terms of remaining immersed in meditation for days on end, though you think you might be able to do it in a few years' time. You practise some meditation every day, and you try to practise a little more each day; you try to practise more meditation when you go on retreat solitary retreat or other retreat. So it's the same with brahmacarya: you try to perhaps have spells of brahmacarya, at least when you are on retreat; or perhaps sometimes you take a brahmacarya vow for a limited period, just to test yourself out, to try things out, maybe for a month, maybe for three months, maybe for six months, as people used to do. Order Members used to do that, but for some reason or other they seem not to be doing this as much as they did in the past. Perhaps some of them now think it was a question of alienated idealism; I hope they don't think that.

You see what I'm getting at? It's not a question of you're all black until you reach the age of 45 or 50 and then suddenly you become all pure white. No, there's all sorts of intermediate shades of grey or silver, if you like. So I think one has to look at it more in that sort of way.

Paramajyoti: The difference is that if we are actually taking up the life of chastity it means a commitment. I was thinking in terms of that that is the big change, if one is -

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S: That is a big change, in a way, because you sort of nail your colours to the mast. But obviously don't take this as a loophole you shouldn't do it prematurely. Most people, I think, can't just make a sudden switch without a long period of prior preparation, so I think people should test themselves out and have, say, experimental periods of three months, six months, of celibacy before they actually take a formal vow in the form of an extra Precept. There have been quite a few well, relatively quite a few Order Members asking me if they could take the anagarika Precept and take up formal brahmacarya, but I think in three cases out of four I haven't agreed; I've asked them to wait and test themselves, and in one or two cases they've withdrawn their application subsequently, realizing that it was a bit early or a bit premature.

But I think we need to have brahmacarya as an ideal towards which we are working, albeit slowly, even from the here and now; and I think when one is reasonably confident, and one feels one just needs that extra bit of support which the public taking of a Precept can give, then one can take the anagarika vow. But not take the vow without a long period, or a reasonably long period, of prior experimentation, and not expecting the taking of the vow to do all the work for you without that prior preparation.

Parami: Bhante, do you think it's a bit blank and I mean this in an analogous sense rather than that it's directly connected when you talked two weeks ago about single-sex situations, there's a feeling sometimes that people have to be really interested in the single-sex principle, they have to be really completely in a single-sex situation, and you talked about how if that isn't possible yet or appropriate yet you can still go on retreats, you can do different things; I am just wondering if there's an analogy that sometimes we think unless we are willing to take a complete vow of celibacy

S: Yes, right; it's not a question of all or nothing. That's why, as I pointed out the other week, I did phrase myself very carefully in the paper that I did on WBO Day. I said there should be what was the expression I used? [Voice prompting.] A strong element, a strong single-sex element in our life. And I made it clear that that could cover living and/or working in community and co-op or regular attendance at single-sex retreats and study groups. Parami: I wondered if we could have a more conscious, high-profile brahmacarya element, then if one is sincere, even if we don't yet take that as a

S: I think we will get that if there are more people who have taken the anagarika vow; there will be more of them around, and in that way they will give it the higher profile.

Parami: I think one of the things that I wonder is whether we can just in Order situations chant the brahmacarya precept... in most situations you're practising brahmacarya to some extent ..., and just because it makes it more in your mind.

S: I think that is the case at Vajraloka.

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Parami: Yes, I wondered if you could do it just more even than

S: I think it would have to be significant. There wouldn't be much point taking the brahmacarya precept, I think, just for one day in the course of a one-day retreat.

Parami: A Convention or something.

S: I think that would be too as it were mechanical, and it wouldn't really need much thought or choice or effort. But perhaps if one was going on a long solitary retreat, and especially if one wanted to try to restrain one's imagination, one should just by oneself repeat the brahmacarya Precept at the beginning of one's solitary retreat, and make more of a conscious effort to observe brahmacarya, not just in body and in speech but in mind also; not just by way of restraining one's thoughts but occupying one's thoughts very positively with other things.

Anyway, perhaps that's enough about that. Quite a big question here; I think this one is from

Danavira.

Dear Bhante,

1) Do you think that it could ever be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member to resign from the Western Buddhist Order?

2) Is there a traditional view or position with regard to someone resigning from an order or Sangha? Presumably this would be a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni order or Sangha.

3) In your experience, what kind of things, what issues, have led people to contemplate resignation from the Order?

4) Assuming that to resign from the Order would not be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member, and assuming that to contemplate resignation would therefore be a personal or spiritual crisis, can you discern any positive or potentially positive elements in such a spiritual or personal crisis?

I think I'll deal with the easiest of these questions first, to get that out of the way: that's no. 2, 'Is there a traditional view or position with regard to someone resigning from an order or Sangha? Presumably this would be a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni order or Sangha.' Well, yes: if a bhikkhu wants to give up being a bhikkhu, he can. He goes to the preceptor from whom he took the bhikkhu vows, one may say, and he gives them back; and he then takes the Precepts of an upasaka. This is a quite standard and ordinary procedure. There is no provision, as far as I know, for someone who wants to give up being an upasaka. In the Buddhist world, you can give up being an upasaka only in order to become a bhikkhu; so there's no provision, as far as I know, for giving up being an upasaka and just not being a Buddhist at all; that is not [60] covered by tradition, to the best of my knowledge. So this isn't really very helpful.

So let's go back to question 1: 'Do you think that it could ever be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member to resign from the Western Buddhist Order?' I must say I can't imagine a situation in which it could ever be spiritually advantageous. Perhaps I should say a little bit about that. I think it's obvious if you think what resignation means. Or perhaps one should go even further back and think what happened at the beginning when someone was ordained, someone Went for Refuge and presumably Went for Refuge with great faith, with great devotion, great determination, great sincerity and integrity. So if you resign, you as it were undo all that. You go back on a very serious and a very solemn commitment, an undertaking and promise, not just to other people but to yourself. And then there is the disruption of all your friendships within the Order, which may have gone on for many years, because your friendships within the Order are based on a common spiritual commitment, common membership of the Order; and if you resign, that is no longer there, so you destroy the real spiritual basis of whatever friendships you have built up over the years.

So resignation can hardly be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member. It cannot be other than quite catastrophic. One might say, for instance, supposing you resigned from the Western Buddhist Order and joined some other order; even supposing you find an order which would suit you, then what is the guarantee that you are not going to repeat the same pattern all over again, even if you do manage to find the strength to as it were recommit yourself in another way, in another context? So I would say briefly that I can't really imagine

circumstances in which it would be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member to resign.

Devamitra: May I just ask a question? What if you feel that your fellow Order Members have behaved very badly towards you and there's no way of reconciling that?

S: Well, you may feel that; you may be right, you may be wrong. Let's assume that you're right, and your fellow Order Members have behaved very badly towards you. Well, there are still two things to be said well, let's say one thing to be said: have they all behaved badly? Have all 400 of them behaved badly? Usually, if it does happen, it's only two, or three, or four, or maybe ten or twelve; but why should you resign from the Order because a small percentage of Order Members have admittedly behaved badly towards you?

Devamitra: But what if that small percentage of Order Members carry quite a bit of weight and influence within the Order, and you felt not in harmony with that influence, or whatever?

S: I think the question is too general, or too non-specific, for me to be able to say. I mean what does one mean by 'carry weight'? Is it a desirable weight, an [61] undesirable weight, skilful, unskilful? Because all right; if, for the sake of argument, it's undesirable, unskilful, then OK: if you are right and you're sincere, OK, you're in the wrong Order. You're right, everybody else is wrong. OK, either reform it or leave it, if that's how you feel. Do you see what I mean? But I think that situation is very unlikely to arise; but a situation may arise where someone does feel, perhaps rightly, that he or she has been badly treated by quite a few other Order Members, but if one still has faith in the Order as distinct from one particular Chapter of the Order or one particular group of Order Members, well, go elsewhere; join another Chapter, go to another part of the country, go to another community, another Centre, and commit yourself there; and sooner or later it will be seen, if you are right and are sincere, that you are getting on very well in that other community, that other Centre. There people appreciate you. So maybe the people who didn't treat you well in the first place will start having second thoughts. But I don't think one should resign from the Order because one has had unfortunate experiences with a relatively small number of Order Members. Perhaps when you were ordained you didn't even know those particular Order Members; or even if you did, well, so what? There are still so many Order Members with whom you could possibly get on very well and be appreciated by. Does that answer your question, or does it leave a doubt or reservation?

Devamitra: It's OK.

S: Anyway: to go on to this third question. 'In your experience, what kind of things, what issues, have led people to contemplate resignation from the Order?' I don't always know if they've merely contemplated, I don't really know what's been going on, usually, because they may not tell me what they are thinking. But I was just thinking back, I was trying to remember cases of people in the past who have resigned from the Order; I was trying to remember what they had resigned over. I cast my mind back, first of all, to the very early days. Oh yes, in the very early days there was an Order Member who resigned because he thought I was too hard on Christianity. He had very strong sympathies with Christianity, in fact he had a bit of a Quaker background, and after resigning as an Order Member he went back to his old Quaker contacts. So that was one reason for which someone resigned.

There was another person who resigned because she was in hospital for a few weeks and no

Order Member visited her. This again was in the very early days; I don't think any of you ever knew that particular Order Member. But she wasn't visited in hospital, it seems this is what she said after she had resigned and she felt this quite badly and she felt Order Members didn't care about her; so that was the reason she resigned. Somebody else resigned because he was very disappointed this was after two years that the FWBO didn't have its own large multistoreyed headquarters in London, and he felt that Bhante wasn't really going about it in the right sort of way, that we hadn't succeeded as we ought to have succeeded. He was also rather upset because he felt Bhante was introducing hippies into the FWBO not into the Order, but into the FWBO. These were his two reasons why he resigned. [62] Then another woman resigned because her husband, the man I've just been talking about, resigned, so she simply resigned because he resigned. No doubt a faithful wife. Then yes, another one from the very early days someone resigned because Bhante refused to make celibacy in the Order compulsory! Yes.

Dhammarati: I wonder if he's still celibate.

S: I don't know if he's still alive. He was certainly celibate for many, many years. He was deeply convinced that it was unskilful to bring human beings into this world. He was convinced it was unskilful, and even sinful, to propagate the species, and he became convinced that the only sure way of not propagating the species was celibacy; and he joined a Turkish sect, I believe in Istanbul, of people who believed in the non-propagation of the species. It may have been some semi-gnostic sect, I am not sure; I was never able to find out much about it. But that's why he resigned, and he wrote me several long letters on the subject arguing his case. He tried for several years to convince me that we should have a celibate Order. Sometimes I wonder if he was right. (Laughter.) Anyway, he didn't convince me, and I'm afraid he resigned on quite friendly terms; he didn't get upset or angry, he just disagreed with me and with others.

More recently (there haven't been, of course, many resignations), someone resigned when we changed from upasaka to Dharmacari. He put it like this; he wrote me a couple of letters, and he said: 'A Dharmacari is one who practises the Dharma, but according to Buddhism there's no self or 'I' to practise anything, so if you say that you're practising the Dharma, if you say that you are a Dharmacari, you are telling a lie, and this is against Buddhism.' I wasn't able to convince him to the contrary, so he resigned.

And then, of course, there were the much more recent cases, as you know, of Padmaraja and well, perhaps I should not say Satyadeva, because he didn't technically resign but Padmaraja certainly resigned because Bhante wouldn't agree that Manjunatha was the great trouble-maker down in Croydon and that if Manjunatha could only be removed everything in Croydon would be all right, because Manjunatha's criticisms of the situation in Croydon were completely baseless. That is why Padmaraja resigned. These are the only cases that I can recollect within my own experience of things or issues that have led people actually to resign. So I don't know to what extent one can generalize from that.

Any comment on that? [Silence.] It's a rather odd collection of reasons to resign.

Siddhiratna: Wasn't there an Order Member who resigned and became a Mitra?

S: Ah, that's right, yes. Yes, he felt he just couldn't keep up. So he just resigned and became a

Mitra. A bit like giving up being a bhikkhu and becoming an upasaka. Another case I remember, fairly recently in India: someone resigned, against the [63] advice of some of his Order friends, because he wanted to make money, he wanted to go into business; and he said in India you just can't make money in business without telling lies, and he didn't want to tell lies as an Order Member. And he thought he'd better resign and maybe in four or five years' time, when he's made some money, he'll be ordained again. So this was, you might say well, some people would regard it as excess of scrupulosity, but it did show he took the Precepts very seriously and didn't want to compromise as an Order Member. He thought it would be more honourable to resign and to pursue his business activities. I don't know whether he's going to be able to make money; it's not so easy to make money in India in business if you don't have the family connections, which he certainly doesn't have. But we shall wait and see. So people appreciated his honesty and integrity, though some Order Members didn't think it was so necessary for him to resign; but he certainly did.

Oh yes, there was another early Order Member who resigned. She resigned for also a curious reason this was in the very early days because she was very upset that everything happened in London and she was based in the Midlands; and she had developed a strong resentment, almost, that everything happened in London and nothing happened in the Midlands it was actually Birmingham nothing happened in Birmingham. And she didn't see why she should have to come down to London for all Order meetings and functions. She had a rather strong regional loyalty. I said, 'Well, just start an FWBO in Birmingham', but she didn't feel able to do that. So in the end she resigned and joined a local Buddhist group. So this, one might say, was a question more of regionalism. So again, a rather curious and odd assortment of reasons, if one can really call them reasons, for resigning.

Dhammarati: A couple of the cases, Bhante the person who had sympathies with Christianity and the person who thought we shouldn't propagate the species they were both quite principled reasons for resigning; there was nothing bad behind it ... spiritually advantageous reasons. Would you say that from their point of view how they saw the spiritual life made it necessary for them to

S: They might have thought; but the question is what I think is spiritually advantageous. I don't think it's spiritually advantageous to give up being a Buddhist and be a Quaker! I must say, maybe I'm not so sure about the celibacy, but in the case of that particular person though, yes, I believe in brahmacarya he did pursue it rather fanatically, and for him it became the whole of Buddhism. I couldn't really agree with that. It was principled, but I think his giving up being an Order Member was not to his spiritual advantage.

Dhammarati: Would you agree that if you have a view that something is crucial to the spiritual life, and that isn't held widely by the Order, in a way you are forced into a position where you have to resign, or should they have stayed in the Order even if ... ?

[64]
S: It's not a question just of resigning, but it's a question of not pursuing something which is in fact to your spiritual advantage. Supposing, for instance, you had come to the conclusion that Going for Refuge is not central in the spiritual life, it doesn't really matter whether you Go for Refuge or not. Well, it isn't then just a question of resigning and that the resignation would not be spiritually advantageous; it's the fact that you don't see Going for Refuge as central which constitutes the spiritual disadvantage, even if you don't technically resign. Or if,

for instance, you come to the conclusion that the positive nidanas aren't of any use, it's only the negative ones, so to speak, which are of any use in the spiritual life. Well, that, I think, would be to your spiritual disadvantage and would take you away from the spiritual life even if you didn't actually resign.

So it's not just the question of resignation in the more formal sense, but the fact that you've departed from certain things pertaining to the essence of the spiritual life, the essence of the Buddhist life.

So, 'assuming that to resign from the Order would not be spiritually advantageous for an Order Member, and assuming that to contemplate resignation would therefore be a personal and spiritual crisis, can you discern any positive or potentially positive elements in such a spiritual and personal crisis?' I think there are always potentially positive elements in spiritual and personal crises, because why does one have these crises? Very often it's because you come up against something in yourself; and it could be that you find some aspect of the Dharma, or some aspect of FWBO teaching, unacceptable; you come up against it, that precipitates a crisis; well, potentially this could be quite a positive thing. But I think for it to be a positive thing you would need to depend very, very much on your contact with your spiritual friends and keep in close contact with them and close contact with me, come to that. But I don't think it's to be regarded as unusual that one has personal and spiritual crises of this sort, whether major or minor. I think they are almost to be expected.

For instance, someone may feel that he or she is not getting on very well with their meditation; maybe they go on retreat, even solitary, they can't meditate; so they get really fed up with this, and they think, 'What's the point? I've been all these years an Order Member. I can't meditate, I can't even concentrate my mind.' So they may start thinking, 'What's the use of being an Order Member? Let me resign.' So their failure to achieve a satisfactory level of meditation may precipitate a crisis. But then they may talk it over with their spiritual friends, and the spiritual friends may say, 'No. Meditation is important, but it's not that crucial. You get a lot out of Puja, you get a lot out of Dharma study, you get a lot out of your spiritual friendships. Maybe just go slow on the meditation for a while. Don't let it precipitate a crisis, don't think in terms of resigning.' So there can be a crisis of that sort. Or you may clash very, very badly with a fellow Order Member, and you may be convinced he's absolutely in the wrong and that you just don't want to be in the same Order as that person. So you think of resigning, it precipitates a crisis. But then again your spiritual friends get together with you and say, 'Even supposing you're right, he's [65] not the whole of the Order, he or she's just one member. Don't resign from the Order because you've clashed badly with a fellow Order Member.' But then he might say, 'Well, I thought so highly of that particular Order Member; I really looked up to him and he's let me down.' And your spiritual friends might say, 'Well, perhaps you've put him on a pedestal. What about other Order Members? Aren't there other Order Members who are just as good, if not better? Why should you resign just because one person has let you down, or maybe one person hasn't lived up to his ideal or his commitment?'

So there can be all sorts of crises. Somebody else might feel he is bogged down with a wife and children. He'd love to go to Chapter meetings, and he'd love to go on retreats, but he can't because he's held back by his domestic commitments. So he might feel 'It's too much of a strain, it's too much of a struggle, I'll just give up struggling [to be] an Order Member.' But again spiritual friends might say, 'Well, never mind. Do what you can. Come when you can. Or maybe we'll visit you more often and give you more contact in that way.' So again there's

been a crisis, but it's been dealt with; resignation on account of the crisis has been averted. So I don't think one can altogether necessarily avoid these sort of crises; and they can be, I think, potentially positive, assuming that you are in good contact with spiritual friends and they can rally round and help you when you need that.

...E N D (no second tape found)

[66]

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Session Four - 10 June 1990

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Sangharakshita: Nowadays questions seem to come with preambles, and that is certainly true of our first question today. No doubt the preamble will help to get us into the mood. The question, or rather the preamble, is headed: 'Mitraship and the Four Criteria', and the preamble and the question are both by Devamitra. So listen carefully:

There has been considerable discontent during the past year amongst several Order Members and Mitras in Brighton concerning the application by the Mitra Convenors' meeting of the four criteria for Mitraship. The controversy arose because we would not agree to one particular Mitra proposal. The Chapter maintained that, although the proposed Mitra did not have a meditation practice, she fulfilled the other criteria more than adequately. She found meditation extremely difficult, even frightening, and so in place of meditation she did a daily and elaborate Puja. I [that is, Devamitra] and one or two other Convenors were not happy with this, and deferred the proposal to our following meeting.

In the meantime, we asked that she be given help by one of the local Order Members to see if the difficulty could be resolved. However, the woman concerned was deeply upset, withdrew her request, and telephoned me to let me know what she thought about myself and the Mitra Convenors' meeting. I have had several discussions, phone calls and exchanges of letters over this matter during the past 12 months. The concern about the Mitra Convenors' meeting was that we had applied the criterion about daily meditation practice far too rigidly, with the result that we failed to take the individual into account, and that this had had unfortunate consequences. It was suggested that a much broader interpretation and application of the criteria is necessary. Several members of the Chapter were not happy at all with the idea of criteria for Mitraship. (Members of the Birmingham Chapter have felt similarly.) It was suggested that it would be better to have guidelines rather than criteria, as it was thought that this would enable greater flexibility.

Personally, I am satisfied with our application of the four criteria. I consider there is sufficient flexibility in our approach. If anything, I think we err on the side of generosity, perhaps too much so, especially when you consider that several recently agreed Mitras in Brighton have drifted out of things, that one of the few men Mitras proposed and accepted by the LBC last year has already resigned, and another seems to have drifted away, and that recently a woman Mitra from Glasgow returned to the loving bosom of Catholicism within a year of her Mitra

ceremony. However, the issue has still not been entirely resolved, and so, after a [67] meeting earlier this week with some of the Brighton Dharmacaris, I agreed to put the following question to you

- this question is surrounded by red ink

You have said that we do not have criteria for ordination, since one cannot assess spiritual commitment by fixed standards. Why then do we have criteria for Mitraship? You once said to me that you considered the four criteria to be absolute. In what sense could they be said to be absolute?

So that is the question. I am going to tackle it bit by bit. I'm not quite sure which bits to tackle first!

I think we will look first of all not so much at the question itself but at something in the preamble. 'Several members of the Chapter were not happy at all with the idea of criteria for Mitraship. It was suggested that it would be better to have guidelines rather than criteria, as it was thought that this would enable greater flexibility.' I have thought about this, but I could not really see any great difference, if any, between having criteria and having guidelines; because if you had criteria you applied them, and if you had guidelines you followed them, so it would seem to me that it amounts to much the same thing in both cases. Anyone have any thoughts about this?

Sanghapala: 'Criterion' sounds to me more specific, Bhante. Guidelines

S: Guidelines? What's more specific than a line that you follow, straight.

Dhammarati: That's what it sounds like, guidelines sound less fixed.

Paramajyoti: They sound more optional.

S: A guideline is more optional? But a criterion can be applied more or less flexibly? When you say 'optional', a guideline means you can either follow it or disregard it. Is that what optional means that you don't have to follow it? Well, then, what's the point of having a guideline at all, if you don't have to follow it? What is the point of having criteria if you don't have to apply them?

Sangharatna: A guideline is something which can guide you but doesn't need to be followed strictly.

S: But criteria don't have to be applied rigidly?

Marichi: So why don't we have, er it says in the preamble we don't have criteria for ordination.

[68]
S: Ah, well, that's a separate question; I'll come to that. I am trying to get at why the term 'guidelines' is preferred to 'criteria.'

Kuladeva: Guidelines sound more flexible. In the case of criteria, for instance criteria for Mitraship

S: But to me 'guidelines' does not sound more flexible. A guideline is meant to guide you; a criterion is meant to give you some guidance in applying certain principles.

Parami: I think possibly people think maybe it sounds like guidelines are more easily applicable in individual cases, and criteria are more generalized.

S: But criteria apply to individuals; it is individual Mitras that one is considering.

Parami: I think that's right, but I think people read the term as meaning something that's less easily

S: But why do you think they do this?

Marichi: Well, you just said guidelines are for applying principles, and the criteria seem to be the principles in this case... descriptions of the principles ...

S: I think you could say that 'guideline' is more metaphorical. I don't think it really amounts to much more than that. Again, I say, I don't really see any significant difference between the two, whether it is a question of following guidelines or applying criteria rather; but I am a bit interested to find out why this term guidelines should be favoured.

Moksabandhu: Isn't the issue how the criteria or the guidelines are applied? That is the issue, not whether you call it ...

S: Yes. So presumably whatever they are called, whether one calls them guidelines or criteria, they can be applied in either case flexibly or not flexibly.

Voices: That's right.

S: Criteria do not necessarily, by definition, have to be applied rigidly. You can follow a guideline very strictly, on the other hand.

Cintamani: It is significant that the word 'rule' is not chosen; that 'guideline' and 'criterion' are much the same.

S: Yes, and 'rule' is much the same, as in a ruler; you use a rule to draw a straight line, a guideline. (Laughter.)

[69]
Man's voice: It's the connotation rather than the denotation.

S: So what is the difference of connotation?

Kulamitra: I think it's part of a more general thing. I don't know whether it is at the moment because my experience doesn't go back far enough to know. I tend to agree with you that they are really the same thing. But I think, particularly around issues that people consider to do

with authority, people are very touchy about language, ...

S: But how does authority come in here?

Ratnaketu: I think criteria are things that you have to meet with banks.

S: Pardon?

Ratnaketu: Criteria are things which you have to meet in order to get loans and things like that. If you don't apply exactly, that's your tough luck.

S: But even banks can be pretty flexible. (Comments and laughter.)

Vidyananda: Criteria sound as if they're things that have to be met: you know, these are the criteria that you have to meet.

S: The same with guidelines: a guideline is something you have to follow, if you choose to look at it like that.

Sanghapala: Perhaps the difference is because 'guideline' is metaphorical ...

S: But if you analyse 'criterion' you will find that that is metaphorical too.

Jinapriya: So you are asking us why the one word seems to have looser or less rigid connotations than the other?

S: No, I think I am asking why people think it has.

Parami: General usage, isn't it?

S: Mm; but do you think that is in fact the case, that in general usage 'guideline' is more as it were flexible than [criterion]? But then, why should people want something more flexible? - because Devamitra says: 'Personally, I am satisfied with our application of the four criteria. I consider there is sufficient flexibility in our approach.'

Moksabandhu: Presumably other people don't feel there is enough flexibility.

[70]
S: All right, so let's go back to this particular case, this particular lady. I am only going into it, not because the case itself is so specially significant, but just for illustrative purposes. So let's look at it little by little. 'The controversy arose because we would not agree to one particular Mitra proposal. The Chapter maintained that although the proposed Mitra did not have a meditation practice she fulfilled the other criteria more than adequately. She found meditation extremely difficult, even frightening, so in place of meditation she did a daily and elaborate Puja. I and one or two other Convenors were not happy with this.' So what were they, I wonder, not quite happy with? There's something I'd not be quite happy with, but I wonder what other people think.

Mallika: Three out of four isn't following all the guidelines.

S: Yes, right. But I was thinking of something a little different.

Cintamani: What's the dividing line between a Puja and

S: No, 'She found meditation extremely difficult, even frightening.' So, to my mind, that would ring a little alarm bell. One can understand someone, anybody, even an Order Member, finding meditation extremely difficult, but 'even frightening'? So one would have thought that, in the case of someone applying to be a Mitra, that did suggest that there was something to be looked into. So 'I and one or two other Convenors were not happy with this, and deferred the proposal to our following meeting.' Everybody no doubt appreciates the significance of that. Well, what do you take to be the significance?

Varabhadri: It wasn't an outright ...

S: Exactly; it wasn't a refusal. I have said, in the case of people requesting ordination, that no one is ever refused ordination; that they are asked to wait sometimes, in fact very often. It is the same with people who want to be Mitras. I don't think anyone is ever refused. They are asked to wait. So 'I and one or two other Convenors were not happy with this, and deferred the proposal to our following meeting.' Quite reasonable? (Agreement.) 'In the meantime, we asked that she be given help by one of the local Order Members to see if the difficulty could be resolved.' Reasonable or unreasonable?

Voices: Reasonable.

S: Reasonable? Yes. 'However, the woman concerned was deeply upset.' Hm?

Parami: Not very ...

Varabhadri: Unreceptive.

[71]
S: Receptive or not receptive, 'she was deeply upset'; though it would seem to me that the Mitra Convenors were behaving quite reasonably and were quite considerate. 'We asked that she be given help by one of the local Order Members to see if the difficulty could be resolved. However, the woman concerned was deeply upset, withdrew her request, and telephoned me to let me know what she thought about myself and the Mitra Convenors' meeting.' So what does that suggest to you?

Parami: She wasn't ready to be a Mitra!

S: She wasn't ready to be a Mitra. Quite apart from the question of whether a daily Puja could be accepted in lieu of a daily meditation, her reaction or response shows that she wasn't ready to be a Mitra. And I therefore wonder why it was necessary to have all these discussions, phone calls and exchanges of letters over this matter during the past 12 months. It seems to be quite absurd, frankly. And then 'The concern about the Mitra Convenors' meeting was that we had applied the criterion about daily meditation practice far too rigidly,' and that 'we failed to take the individual into account.' I just don't see how that happened. 'and this had had unfortunate consequences. It was suggested that a much broader interpretation and application of the criteria' I take it that it is 'criteria' and not 'criterion'

Devamitra(?): Ah, I think that the whole issue it's broadened out into the four criteria, not just that criterion.

S: 'Several members of the Chapter were not happy at all with the idea of criteria for Mitraship.' So I must say, without going into this individual instance any further, I think the Mitra Convenors acted quite properly, and I think it is quite obvious that that particular person was not ready to be a Mitra. I am surprised that the discussion has dragged on for so long.

But anyway, let's look at the actual question which Devamitra comes to. 'You have said that we do not have criteria for ordination since one cannot assess spiritual commitment by fixed standards.' I don't remember exactly what I said, but it was something like that; but I remember what I was as it were getting at. In fact, I might have even cited a passage from the Diamond Sutra in this connection; I believe it was on a Tuscany retreat. Can anyone think of which passage I might be thinking? It is the passage about marks, laksanas, marks of ?

Man's voice (after a pause): Buddhahood.

S: Buddhahood, yes, Buddhahood. And how many marks of Buddhahood are there, how many laksanas are there? Anyone remember?

Asvajit: Thirty-two major and sixty-four minor.

S: Yes. So is the Buddha the only one who has marks?

[72]
Asvajit: No.

S: So who else has marks?

Asvajit: The mahapurisa.

S: Er, yes, but the Buddha is one kind of mahapurisa; there is another kind. Who is that?

Asvajit: The wheel turner er, the cakravartin.

S: Yes, go to the top of the class Asvajit!(laughter), that's ... Years ago, it used to be Dhammadinna going to the top of the class. I don't know what's happened to Dhammadinna. (Laughter and comments.)

Dhammadinna: I'm not an intellectual any more.

S: Not an intellectual any more? No. So what's the question that arises there?

Kulamitra: How do you tell the difference?

S: How do you tell the difference? You can't tell a Buddha by his marks. So in the same way to come right down, as it were, in the scale or in the hierarchy you can't tell an Order Member by external signs. I am not just talking about kesas. You can't have criteria for ordination in

the sense that you have a list of things which you can sort of tick off, and if the person is this, and that, and so on, then he is ready to be ordained and he is, or she is, an Order Member. Not that those things will not necessarily be there, but they cannot be used as criteria; an Order Member cannot be recognized by his or her marks. You could have someone observing all Ten Precepts, but they still need not have Gone for Refuge. So you can tell whether someone is really Going for Refuge, or whether someone is ready to be ordained, only if you get to know them personally quite well and have a deep and genuine communication with them. So I think this is quite well known, isn't it? You certainly don't expect Order Members or prospective Order Members to break precepts, but the fact that they are not breaking precepts is not by itself a sign that they are actually Going for Refuge and are ready to be ordained. You see the difference?

But what about Mitras? We do have criteria. I think the case of Mitras is rather different, because they are relatively on the fringes of the Movement; they are much less involved, and in some cases they have not been around very long and you don't know them all that well. So you cannot speak so definitely with regard to the genuineness of their desire to be involved in the Movement. In any case, they are relatively new, relatively unsettled, relatively unintegrated perhaps; so one therefore needs relatively external criteria which can be applied in a more or less flexible [73] manner. Do you see the difference? Or is it not clear to anybody?

So you don't expect of a Mitra a profound change of inner attitude such as you expect of an Order Member, and such as can only be known through profound personal communication. But you do expect of a Mitra that they will at least behave in a certain way, and behaviour can be relatively easily identified. Therefore we say the Mitra should have a regular daily meditation practice. I think we are flexible here; I think I have said that 20 minutes a day would be acceptable, if it was reasonably regular. And then Mitras are expected to keep up regular contact with Order Members. It would be rather surprising if, wanting to be involved in the Movement, they weren't ready and willing to develop their personal communication with Order Members. And also, similarly, they are expected just to help out. Again, we are very flexible; we don't say they've got to arrange flowers on the shrine, or they've got to drive vehicles, or they've got to contribute finance. I think we are very flexible; we say just that they should be prepared to help out in practical ways. And as regards getting in contact or communication with Order Members, we don't say that they've got to see x number of Order Members for y number of hours per week; it is perfectly flexible. And that they should no longer be shopping around. We don't say that they shouldn't go and hear the odd lecture by the Dalai Lama, or by Thich Nhat Hanh, but we say they should have made up their minds more or less that the FWBO is the spiritual movement, the Buddhist movement, they want to be involved with.

So we do have these four criteria for Mitras, and I think on the whole they are applied very flexibly and possibly, as Devamitra suggests in view of some of the examples he cites, perhaps we have been applying them a bit too flexibly. Because it does seem rather odd that a woman Mitra from Glasgow 'returned to the loving bosom of Catholicism within a year of her Mitra ceremony'! So it does seem as though she was really stuck with her Catholicism all along.

So I don't consider that the four criteria are being applied inflexibly or without due regard for individuals. And I think we really don't need to change anything here. Anyway, 'why then do

we have criteria for Mitraship?' I think that should be clear. 'You once said to me that you considered the four criteria to be absolute.' I don't remember the context here.

Devamitra: I'm afraid I can't remember myself.

S: No. 'Absolute' is not a word that I generally use. So in what sense could they be said to be absolute? I think if I was asked now I would say they are absolute in the sense that none of them can be entirely put aside. There has to be at least some reasonable vestige of each one. If someone was wanting to get involved with the FWBO to the extent of becoming a Mitra, it would [74] be rather surprising if they didn't want to meditate or try to meditate for, say, 15 or 20 minutes each day; it would be rather surprising if they didn't want to make friends with Order Members; it would be rather surprising if they didn't want to help out practically whenever they could; it would be rather surprising if, wanting to be taken as a Mitra into the FWBO, they still wanted to be shopping around other groups. So it seems to me just a matter of as it were common sense.

Anyway, I don't want to linger too long over that, but if there is still anything that isn't clear, please ask, and maybe I will make a few final points.

Maitreyi: ... it is therefore correct to call guidelines guidelines?

S: I really don't mind. If people are happier calling them guidelines, OK, provided they apply them in the way that I have suggested. I mean, call it what you like, but just do as I say! (Laughter) I don't mind, you can call it guidelines, you can call it criteria, you can call it principles; I don't even mind if you call it rules. You can call it rule of thumb or rule of toe, I don't mind.

Ratnadharani: Did you give a description once about the relative merits of doing a Puja as opposed to doing meditation, and doing it on your own or doing it in a group?

S: I really can't remember. But buried among all these 18 million words on seminars I am told there are 18 million words there may possibly be some remarks of that kind. I am told that 11 million words have been transcribed.

Ratnadharani: I can't remember it exactly, but I had the impression it was something to do with collective practice being very important, and Puja being very important. (Agreement.)

S: Well, collective practice is very important; obviously, you can meditate together as well as do Puja together. And if you meditate or do Puja together, then of course a certain positive atmosphere builds up perhaps more strongly than you could manage just on your own. I think probably I don't want to be inflexible here! but a collective Puja is more what shall I say? more in accordance with the nature of that activity than collective meditation; because, in the course of a Puja, you can in certain circumstances or depending on the kind of Puja, invoke or call up certain spiritual archetypes, and I think this is more easily or readily done by a number of people working, co-operating, and doing the Puja together. This is not to rule out individual Puja by any means, but I think that very likely a collective Puja has a quality to it that not even a collective meditation usually possesses. I think I could say that. So I think collective Puja is perhaps to be even more encouraged than collective meditation.

Ratnadharani: And there is no way you see Puja as a practice taking the place of meditation? Because I think that was in this -

[75]
S: I think the criterion here, or the principle here, is the effect on one's mental state. Because we describe meditation as a direct means of individual development by working directly on the mind itself; but Puja, one can say, especially if Puja includes ritual, is a little more indirect. But there is no doubt that Puja does have an effect on the mind. Whether it has the same effect as meditation is perhaps a moot point, but in the case of this particular lady, of course, it wasn't possible even to get around to discussing that, apparently. But that is something that could be discussed.

But I think that if one was really able to get into a certain as it were meditative state with Puja, one wouldn't find Puja per se a frightening experience. You might find it difficult, but I doubt if you would find it frightening, if it was more or less the same sort of mental state that you got into as a result of doing the Puja.

Kulamitra: I notice, Bhante, that you picked up very early on this thing of Dawn(?) being afraid, and it occurred to me that the criticism or the doubt about having criteria, which we don't know very much about at first hand, seemed to be taking the line that the criteria were rigid and a bit implying that the criteria were of the nature of silavrata(?), I forget you know what I mean? that they were of that nature. But in this case it sounds to me as if the person criticizing the criteria is assuming that the meditation is not being applied for a reason, whereas the fact that the woman was a Friend says a lot about her mental states; and it's not just that you're asking someone to sit down for 20 minutes, you're actually asking them to work directly, or be willing to try and work directly, on even their more difficult mental states, and so on, aren't you?

S: Right. Because no one, to begin with, finds meditation easy. They might not find it frightening, but they certainly don't find it easy. Of course, there is the more practical question because there are all sorts of indirect methods of raising the level of consciousness. Supposing someone says, 'OK, So-and-so is allowed to do Puja instead of meditate; I prefer to do karate that changes my mental state or T'ai-Chi, or painting.' Do you see what I mean? Meditation is after all the direct method of raising the level of consciousness, and I think we should be able, or a Mitra should be able, to make some progress in that direction with the help of just a little regular meditation. It doesn't seem very much to ask or to expect. So if someone is unable to meet that particular criterion I think the Mitra Convenors are fully justified in querying that; not only justified, it is their plain duty.

I don't know this particular lady, but judging by what I have been told, her reaction does seem to have been rather over the top and brings into question her readiness for becoming a Mitra anyway.

Anyway, not to linger over that; I just want to make a couple of other points. Talking about these four criteria or guidelines, if you like in this sort of way might suggest to the uninformed observer that here are these people applying to be Mitras and then these unsympathetic Mitra Convenors oblige them or compel them [76] or force them to fulfil certain rigid criteria before they are admitted as Mitras. But actually it doesn't work out like that at all; because I think every week nowadays I receive letters from people who have made

contact with the FWBO, not only in this country but in other countries too, and people who have asked to become Mitras or who have just become Mitras, they write and tell me and they are always very happy and very grateful. They are usually so happy to be meditating, they are so happy to be able to be in contact with Order Members; they are so happy to do what they can for the Movement. And they certainly feel that they don't want to shop around any more! The whole idea is quite repugnant to them, they really feel, often they say this is a phrase many of them have used, and you may have used it yourselves at some stage they feel as though they have 'come home'. So I think most Mitras are delighted to find that there are these, so to speak, four criteria, and would be observing them anyway even if they weren't asked to or expected to. So it isn't a question of rigidly applying anything. Mitras usually, or new Mitras particularly, are only too willing and happy to meet these criteria. It is a sort of natural response on their part. So that when we, from our point of view, apply these criteria, it is more that we are looking, in the case of the would-be Mitra, for the reaction that one would normally expect from people who were delighted to have come into contact with the FWBO and who wanted to, in a sense, belong it or to, so to speak, join it. It is the natural sort of response; that you want to get more deeply into it, you want to change yourself, that means changing your mind, that means meditating. You want to know these wonderful people, these Order Members, better, and to strike up friendships with them, and you feel so grateful you just want to help in any way that you can. And you certainly are glad to see your shopping around days come to an end. So I think any talk of rigidity or inflexibility is really quite out of place here and quite inappropriate.

Not only that, I think, even though we have these four criteria, there are other things I think we could usefully look at, all sorts of things. Things I have been thinking about more recently, things like attitude to Right Livelihood. This doesn't mean that we expect the Mitra to be giving up his or her job in the world and joining a co-op; no, but does this prospective Mitra think in terms of Right Livelihood? Do they ask themselves whether the job that they are actually doing at present is ethical, or sufficiently ethical? I think we could expect a Mitra to be a little bit concerned with that, or at least interested in that. And then their ethical attitudes in general; perhaps even attitudes towards the environment. Perhaps we could look for some sort of awareness or sensitivity in that area.

So not only are the four criteria not rigid, they are not really completely exhaustive either. We need to have a much more rounded picture of our Mitra or prospective Mitra, and look at him or her from so many different points of view.

Any final point about that?

[77]

Cintamani: Yes. When we do discuss applications for Mitrahood at our Chapter meetings, I find it rather tiresome that time after time, having said 'Yes, they have fulfilled the four criteria,' when it seems to me the point is that it is not the thing to think in those terms but to think more 'How deeply are they into things?' rather than getting legalistic, which is basically what we are saying. I personally feel it needs to be underlined that I don't want to go back to an Order meeting to hear that phrase again, 'have they fulfilled the four criteria?' Obviously that is important, but it seems to me the wrong way of approaching it. We should think more in terms of how deeply they are into things.

S: When you say 'into things,' do you mean the four criteria themselves?

Cintamani: Well, you said that the four criteria should be natural expressions of an involvement in the Movement.

S: That means that someone who has asked to be a Mitra shouldn't be reluctantly complying with them just so that they can be made a Mitra. No. You should have difficulty stopping them observing those things! say, 'Wait a minute, don't try and do too much; not too much meditating come on, two hours a day is quite enough!' Or 'You don't have to empty your bank balance and give it to the FWBO, just think a bit first.' That should be more the attitude, not having reluctant would-be Mitras and trying to convince them to observe those four criteria. No, if they don't want to, leave them; [say] 'Don't bother about applying to be a Mitra just yet.' It should be glaringly obvious that they are observing these four criteria, that they shouldn't need any encouragement or persuasion. If you are having to persuade them, they are not ready. Forget about them, let them wait and be Friends with a capital 'F'.

Varabhadri(?): Just one last comment ... There was an article written by Vessantara in one of the old Newsletters, several years ago now; it was actually on Going for Refuge, but in the course of that article he came across the stage of Mitrahood and he presented the criteria as positive statements coming from the Mitra-to-be: in other words, for shopping around, the person is saying 'I am choosing the FWBO as a spiritual group, it is right for me'; and 'I have seen the value of meditation as a tool for raising the level of consciousness.' I thought that was a very useful thing to be aware of; it is like the initiative, as you say, coming from them very much recognized.

S: Yes, as I said, I find people writing in this way in their letters to me. It should be almost a question of your having to stop them doing too much rather than encourage them to do a little more than they are willing to do.

Righto, let's go on to there's not a preamble here but there is a whole series of connected questions, six of them, all from Asvajit. A bit more analysis will be needed here.

[78]

1) In what sense is there a hierarchy of roles within the Order?

2) Given that, at least in principle, one can make of oneself what one wills, is there anything unskilful in aiming to become a Preceptor? (Capital 'P')

3) I think you have said somewhere that a Master always substitutes a less onerous duty for a more onerous one. Could you elucidate what you actually did say in this connection (laughter) and what you would say in this connection now?

the implication being that Bhante sometimes changes his mind, not to say contradicts himself!

4) What are the most important factors in assessing whether someone is worthy to be appointed a Preceptor?

5) Given that brahmacarya is imperfectly observed by everyone, by what criteria would you

assess whether an anagarika is worthy of being appointed a Preceptor?

6) If, as one may suppose, the criteria

there's a lot about criteria this evening!

for assessing an anagarika as Preceptor are more stringent than those for a simple Dharmacari, or Dharmacarini, presumably) does it not make sense, if one aspires to Preceptorship, to abandon the more onerous course in favour of the less onerous one in striving for his aspiration?

So I think a little analysis is in order. So, first of all: 'In what sense is there a hierarchy of roles within the Order?' I must say I don't like the word roles at all. I always avoid it. Can anyone remember me using it in any connection, other than to criticize the idea? I don't like the word roles at all.

Asvajit: You did use it in connection with bhikkhus. This is

S: Well, that tells its own story, doesn't it? (Laughter.) Well, I took the trouble to look it up in the dictionary. I think we would all think more clearly than we sometimes do if we made more use of the dictionary. The dictionary gives three meanings of the word role: '1. a part or character in a play, film etc., to be played by an actor or actress.' I don't think this quite applies here. Then: '2. as a term in psychology, the part played by a person in a particular social setting, influenced by his expectation of what is appropriate.'

Side 2

That comes a little nearer, doesn't it? And then: '3. usual or customary function.' [79] I wouldn't mind using the word in that third sense, except for the fact that very often the second sense would be understood. So let's go back to the question. One understands, I'm sure, what is meant by hierarchy, but 'hierarchy of roles'? , I wouldn't mind saying that there was a hierarchy of functions, or even a hierarchy of responsibilities, but I wouldn't like to say that there is a hierarchy of roles. And I'm not sure that I wouldn't have reservations, even, in speaking about a hierarchy of functions or hierarchy of responsibilities, even. So let's think what sort of, say, functions or responsibilities would one have in mind, avoiding this word role? An Order Member could be what?

Cintamani: Chairman ...

S: Chairman. What else?

Parami: Preceptor or ...

Voices: Study leader.

S: Study leader, Mitra convenor. So is it possible to arrange these different functions in a hierarchy?

Voices: No.

S: I think it would be rather difficult. All right, let's take two simple examples, one that you would no doubt all be familiar with. Supposing you take Chairman; you take Mitra convenor. The Chairman has some very onerous responsibilities: agreed? He has responsibilities well, a responsibility that others don't quite share. What about the Mitra convenor? He has responsibilities, he has onerous responsibilities that others don't quite share. The Chairman has responsibility for overall vision, planning, organizing people, getting them to co-operate, getting them all moving in the same direction, sorting out difficulties. The Mitra convenor has the responsibility of seeing that the Mitras are all being looked after, that they all have Order Members in regular contact with them, that some of their confusions are cleared up, that they understand what it means to ask for ordination. So I think it would be very difficult to say that the Chairman's responsibility is greater than the Mitra convenor's or the Mitra convenor's than the Chairman's; they are different responsibilities. So I think that, even though there are different responsibilities, it isn't easy to arrange them in a hierarchy. I think that in any sort of Order situation, in any as it were Order mandala, in any FWBO Centre, you've got all these different Order Members fulfilling different functions. Some may be, perhaps, obviously more important or involve more responsibility. Well, if you're just the humble Order Member making the tea, presumably that is a less responsible function than, say, being Chairman, and perhaps the tea-maker does come at the bottom of the hierarchy, but I don't think you could really say very much more than that; so much so that you're not really at the bottom of the hierarchy if it's difficult to arrange in a hierarchy all the people [80] who supposedly are above you in respect of their function. I think, therefore, we should think in this sort of connection, in this sort of context, in terms of different Order Members fulfilling different functions all of which are important in their own ways, and those particular Order Members recognizing the importance and significance of the other Order Members' functions and all combining and co-operating to achieve a common end and a common objective. I don't think that, on the whole, it is possible to see or to recognize a hierarchy of roles, or even functions or responsibilities, within the Order. So 'In what sense is there a hierarchy of roles within the Order?' I think one can't say that actually there is one.

All right; 'Given that, at least in principle, one can make of oneself what one wills, is there anything unskilful in aiming to become a Preceptor?' Just to say a few words first of all about the Preceptor. One could say that that is the most important function, the most important responsibility; but, again, can a Preceptor function in a vacuum? Where does the Preceptor get the people he gives the Precepts to? Well, they are recruited I mean not directly by the Preceptor, they usually come via Centres and communities and co-ops which the Preceptor himself isn't actually running; they are fed to him via the whole as it were ordination or preordination process. So, yes, the Preceptor gives, so to speak, the finishing touches, which are very, very important, but he doesn't function in isolation; he couldn't function in isolation. Probably the Preceptor couldn't function without Chairmen, without Mitra convenors and all sorts of other people; without retreat organizers, and so on and so forth. So I don't think you can put even the Preceptor at the top of the hierarchy.

Anyway, that's just by the way. 'Given that, at least in principle, one can make of oneself what one wills, is there anything unskilful in aiming to become a Preceptor? Well, let's broaden the question: is there anything unskilful in aiming to be a Chairman, in aiming to be a Chapter convenor, aiming to be a Mitra convenor? What does one think? Do you think it would be unskilful to aim at that?

Voices: Depends on the motive.

S: Depends on the motive, yes; but I would prefer to say that it isn't a question of aiming. I think the emphasis should be on being an Order Member. I don't like to say 'good' Order Member that could be misunderstood but being an effective Order Member. If you are an effective Order Member, if you have the appropriate qualities and qualifications, someone sooner or later is going to say, 'I think you should be Mitra convenor' or 'I think you are the one who should be Chairman', etc. etc. Do you see what I mean? So I don't think one should as it were aim at becoming a Preceptor or aim at becoming a Mitra convenor, but rather concentrate on developing the qualities of an effective Dharmacari. People are always looking around for perhaps not Preceptors, but looking around for Chapter convenors and Chairmen, and if you have the necessary qualities I think sooner or later you are going to be taken hold of.

[81]
All right: 'I think you have said somewhere that a Master always substitutes a less onerous duty for a more onerous one.' I rather think, if I did say anything of this sort, it was exactly the opposite: I think I must have said that a Master always substitutes a more onerous duty for the less onerous one. Because otherwise the Master is one who always gives you an easy time. Can that be the case? the Master, with a capital M, is the one who regularly gives you an easier time? If you want to take on yourself an onerous duty, he says, 'No, no, take on a less onerous one' is that the case? I hope not! Or is it a typing error? No; so, no, I'd say I think I must have said exactly the opposite of that. So I don't think I need elucidate any more.

'What are the most important factors in assessing whether someone is worthy to be appointed a Preceptor?' I think in a sense I have answered that already, so let's go on to (5): 'Given that brahmacarya is imperfectly observed by everyone' I think that's pretty non-controversial? (laughter) 'by what criteria would you assess whether an anagarika is worthy of being appointed a Preceptor?' What strikes me here is well, there are Ten Precepts of a Dharmacari, and I don't think it is a question of brahmacarya being imperfectly observed by everyone, or kamesu micchacara being imperfectly observed by everyone; I think all Ten Precepts are imperfectly observed by everyone, in the sense that there is room for improvement all round in respect of all these Precepts. So I don't think, if there is any question of someone being worthy of being appointed a Preceptor, it's not just a question of looking at how perfectly or imperfectly they observe that particular Precept, but if it was a question of looking at their perfect or imperfect observance of Precepts, all the Precepts would have to be looked at in that particular way. Is that clear? So perhaps I need not say any more, because I have already commented that perhaps one should concentrate on developing the qualities of a Dharmacari rather than thinking in terms of particular responsibilities or specific responsibilities.

So, a sixth question, which is the knottiest: 'If, as one may suppose, the criteria for assessing an anagarika as Preceptor are more stringent than those for a simple Dharmacari' well, no, not more stringent, because one would be looking at all the Precepts in the case of the anagarika and the simple Dharmacari 'does it not make sense, if one aspires to Preceptorship, to abandon the more onerous course in favour of the less onerous one in striving for this aspiration?' As they say in Parliament, I have to refer you all to my answer to question no. 3. If it was a question of 'more or less onerous', presumably one would be encouraged to follow the more, not the less, onerous alternative. Anyway, any further point arising out of that?

Ratnadharani: Bhante, in Subhuti's recent talk I think he talks about criteria for people being kalyana mitras, and that if Order Members have been Order Members for ten or fifteen years

or something and might be considered ready to be kalyana mitras, then they could ask themselves 'why not?' and that that is a useful criterion. So that could be useful to aim for that kind of standard.

[82]
S: Yes; because when one speaks in those sort of terms, what one is meaning is that in the course of those ten or fifteen years one would have expected, if the person concerned had been making a genuine all-round effort, they would have reached a degree of maturity and depth of understanding which would obviously fit them for that particular responsibility.

Man's voice: There is one thing, Bhante: Subhuti said, I think on an Order weekend, something about if people did really see themselves as wanting to become Preceptors [they should] become involved in the Process and what they should do is ask the ... team at Padmaloka and become involved in that way. That's how I heard it, anyway.

S: Perhaps one could broaden that and say that all Order Members should consider themselves as directly or indirectly, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in the ordination process, whether it culminates at Padmaloka or whether it culminates at Taraloka or whether it culminates at Guhyaloka or anywhere else. All Order Members should wish to give a helping hand to any Mitra who has asked for ordination or who is thinking of asking.

Parami: I remember somewhere you were talking about co-operatives in terms of Right Livelihood, and you made the comment that co-operation means you put all your cards on the table, everybody sees what's available and then you decide the best person for the job. It seems to me quite sensible that that's what you're doing, and everybody is presumably hoping that Mitras Go for Refuge and that you put yourself into that, however you can and whenever you can...

S: Right.

Cintamani: These questions to my mind raise the whole question of the appropriateness of being career-minded or ambitious in the spiritual life or in the Sangha. It seems to me an inappropriate way of functioning. which ties in with what you were saying about at least strive to be an effective Dharmacari. It seems that to be career-minded because I have heard it said in the past that one should 'integrate one's ambition' and career-mindedness into one's spiritual life and to make positive use of it. It seems

S: That is true, but then the question arises how one does that. Clearly, there are as it were certain more mundane qualities or capacities or drives that one has, and one should, to the extent that they are skilful, try to bring them within the orbit of the spiritual life. Is there any ambiguity about this question of career? Because sometimes 'career' is used as a translation of the carya(?) the carya of the Bodhisattva. But clearly it is not career in the modern sort of business sense.

Cintamani: That's what I was thinking; it has a slightly ruthless tinge, of slightly ruthless ambition after a particular position.

[83]
S: Well, clearly one shouldn't wish for a particular position for the sake of the position or for

the sake of oneself in the position. If one wishes for it or aspires after it at all, it should be just as an opportunity of greater usefulness. I don't think there is a thin dividing line here; I think the difference is very great. Anyway, time is pressing, so let's just move on. I doubt if we're going to be able to get through all the questions I wanted to get through this evening, but we'll hold them over in that case till next week.

This in fact is a question left over from I think a couple of weeks ago. It is a question from Dhammarati:

You have said recently, I believe, that we need to be clearer on the relationship between meditation and Dharma practice on the one hand, and psychotherapies of various kinds on the other. Will you summarize the important points, please?

Well, I'm not going to summarize the important points because I've done it; I did it more than 20 years ago! Can anyone think where I did it, which lecture?

Voices answering.

S: Yes, 'Meditation versus Psychotherapy'. I did actually get hold of my original notes and then of a transcript of that talk, just to make sure I really did cover the ground properly, because I didn't remember all the points that I made more than 20 years ago. But, yes, it is quite comprehensive. So if anyone is concerned about this particular matter, I suggest they listen to that talk or get a copy of the transcript from Silabhadra. I hope it can be edited fairly soon and maybe brought out as a Dhammamegha or something of that kind.

But I'd like to make a few more general comments. The question being about our 'need to be clearer on the relationship between meditation and Dharma practice on the one hand and psychotherapies of various kinds on the other', I think that this will be less of a problem or less of a difficulty, whether theoretically or practically, if people are into their meditation and their Dharma practice. This will give them a proper perspective on whatever therapies are available of which they may perhaps from time to time need to make use. But if they've got a very shaky Dharma practice and their meditation isn't really up to much, then I think they may well be confused or even, if they have recourse to therapy, possibly even led astray. But I think so long as they are firmly grounded in their Dharma practice and in meditation well, there are many, many therapists; I don't want to over-generalise but if it does seem sometimes that a particular therapy is appropriate, well, they will be able to have recourse to that without any loss of clarity or without detriment to their commitment to the Three Jewels.

But in this connection I was noting I don't know if anyone else noticed it there is a contribution from Dhirananda in the current Shabda on the subject of psychiatry [84] and his own involvement in psychiatry. Have any of you read this? I will just read out the relative two paragraphs; they are quite short. He says:

'I have been working full time as a psychiatrist since September last year. The reason was partly to create a good financial situation for the Centre project. One of my weaknesses is to be rather liberal in spending money on myself and others. The idea of pursuing a well-paid profession is therefore tempting for me, providing it on the whole conforms with my spiritual ideals and is not detrimental to my mental states.

'I have now given it a good try. I have worked at one of the best and most progressive psychiatric clinics in Stockholm, as far as I can tell. I started it all in an optimistic and positive spirit, and I can't cope with it. Working with communal psychiatry is too detrimental to my mental states. I experience too much conflict with my spiritual ideals to be able to cope with it. So I realized, not without some relief, that this most likely is the end of my medical career. 'Becoming a psychiatrist' was the last weak attempt; at least one chain broken.'

I thought that rather interesting, from someone who has actually been involved in psychiatry. I take it that everyone understands what psychiatry means? What is the difference between psychiatry and psychotherapy?

Atula: One is medically based.

S: One psychiatry is medically based, and you need a medical degree to practise it, which you don't necessarily in the case of psychotherapy. Anyone have any reflections on that testimony of Dhirananda? I think the important point is that he says: 'Working with communal psychiatry is too detrimental to my mental states. I experience too much conflict with my spiritual ideals to be able to cope with it.'

Atula: ... use of drugs.

S: Mm. So I think that should give us cause for thought. But anyway, apart from that I would like to make a few more general comments. I think there is a danger in taking the medical model as a guide in psychotherapy. When I say the medical model I mean as it were the scientific medical model, the model according to which medicine is a science rather than perhaps an art; and if one takes this medical model and one makes use of that or takes that for granted in the practice of psychotherapy, you sort of have an attitude of tinkering with the human psyche in much the same way as a motor mechanic tinkers with the engine of a car. And I don't think that sort of approach is compatible with any sort of spiritual outlook or spiritual ideal. You become a sort of expert.

And I think there are other dangers, too, in being a psychotherapist. I think one of [85] the biggest dangers is that, in relation to the patient, you are in a position of power. You are in a position of authority. I think that the fact that you have a patient at all, or that someone is referred to as a patient, is suggestive. A patient, literally, is one who suffers; the patient is passive; and I don't think it is a very good situation for either the psychotherapist or the person undergoing therapy if one is as it were the doctor, the therapist, and the other is the patient, if the doctor, as it were, the therapist, has authority or power; and as you all know it is very easy to assume that in that sort of situation. It is very easy for both parties to assume that. I think a very great danger lies there.

I think also there is a very great danger in this whole question of professionalism. If you are a therapist you are a sort of quasi-doctor, and as a quasi-doctor you are someone belonging to a profession; you have a certain status, a certain authority, even a certain social position. Do you see what I mean? All these things seem to be interconnected. I think, therefore, that anyone especially any Order Member, any Dharmacari or Dharmacarini thinking of taking up any form of therapy as a means of livelihood or as a means of helping people, should give very careful consideration to all these points; ask themselves whether they are not unconsciously putting themselves into a position vis-a-vis other people where they are the

more powerful, and whether that is really a determining factor in their taking up the practice of that particular therapy. Or even whether they are attracted by the fact that it is something respectable, it's a profession, with all that that implies.

I was going to say rather more, but I think we don't really have time. But it is certainly something that should be looked at. People in the sort of therapeutic situation or in, let's say, the position of patient very easily hand over power and responsibility. A few years ago there seemed to be a wave around the LBC of people going to astrologers and mediums, and I was quite concerned about that, because it represented the same sort of thing, with a bit of additional perhaps mumbo-jumbo and all that. You sort of almost hand over at least a degree of responsibility, or perhaps sometimes you go to the medium or the astrologer or whoever it was because you want them to tell you what you want to be told, because you can't get that sort of answer out of your spiritual friend, and perhaps in some cases you certainly can't get it out of Bhante! But you might get it out of the medium, you might get it out of the astrologer, and then you can follow that advice because you are only following advice you see; you are being very receptive, etc. etc. So I think we have to be very much on our guard against this sort of thing.

There was a question from someone?

Atula: I was just going to make the point that the same dangers, I think, apply to becoming an Order Member and being an Order Member, and one is dealing with that all the time: that people are putting authority and power on to you.

S: I think it's very difficult to guard against it in this case. Of course, you mustn't [86] allow people to do it, but very often they will insist on doing it; and you cannot be blamed for that. You simply mustn't go along with it.

Atula: Yes. I think the same in that situation, where you have therapists they must make it conscious in some kind of way ... Because it will happen.

S: Mm. And if I may just add a little word here: I think male Order Members in particular have to be very careful with regard to this in the case of women, including women Mitras, coming along to classes at Centres. I'm not going to elaborate; you all know what I mean. But they need to be particularly careful.

Kulamitra: Can I just make one more mention of an area? I think we need to be careful in communication exercises. It's an observation I made from leading a lot at Wednesday classes a number of years ago: I think quite unconsciously some of the Mitras, and even Order Members doing them. It was very clear from their initial physical response to the other person that they were going to guide the other person and therefore assume some responsibility: for instance, pushing both legs outside the other person's legs. It was just very obvious

S: Right, yes. Ah! I'm very surprised to hear this, because I have described how the communication exercises were to be done correctly years and years, even decades ago; it certainly didn't include anything like that.

Kulamitra: I think they were quite subtle, unconscious movements, but nevertheless sometimes looking week after week round the room I felt that it was of that nature.

S: I think it was about seven or eight years ago in Tuscany, I took the precaution of it might have been more than one year of actually taking communication exercises myself, because I suspected that maybe there had been some departure from the way I originally taught them. But certainly, even if you are an Order Member and the person sitting opposite you isn't an Order Member, don't adopt the attitude that you are there to guide the other person: you are not, you are there to communicate, just communicate. If there is any question of guidance it will emerge quite naturally, and it isn't necessarily one person rather than the other that's going to do the guiding. But no one should think in terms of guidance, and certainly not do things like putting your knees outside the knees of the other person. I think this is, in a way, in its implications, quite a serious departure from the way in which the communication exercises should be done. Maybe we need to overhaul the way communication exercises are conducted; it may be something that we need to look into.

Anyway, just one more final point. There was a very good question about the Tara practice that I wanted to go into, but I think I'll save it for next week so that I can go into it more thoroughly. But I just wanted to tie up a few loose ends from last week, and Dhammarati's question about the milk rice with which the Buddha was [87] supplied just before his Enlightenment. We did have rather a long discussion, and I think the discussion became rather diffuse; and reflecting on it afterwards I thought that probably the point that I was trying to make hadn't emerged with sufficient clarity. Well, perhaps I'm mistaken! Perhaps you're much brighter than I thought. But anyway: what was the point that I was trying to make, would you say? Let me just check that it did get across; I think it probably didn't!

Jayamati: It was the difference between the division you created was [between] one's self-indulgence and so-called alienated idealism. You were looking at how it can get misconstrued and some criticized the other ...

S: Yes, I certainly was making that point, yes; but I was really dealing, of course, with Dhammarati's question, and perhaps we did stray rather away from that. 'Will you say something about what this incident in the Buddha's biography symbolizes?' I did say jokingly, 'Well, it doesn't have to symbolize anything'; but it does symbolize something, and I think what it symbolizes can be misunderstood. I don't think it symbolizes that you've got to have lots of material accessories before you can get on with Enlightenment. I don't think it symbolizes a sort of apologia for hedonism. What I think it means is that you need spiritual nourishment; I think the material nourishment here doesn't just stand for the material basis that you need if you are to gain Enlightenment the minimum of food, clothing and so on; it represents all the spiritual nourishment, it represents the inspiration that you need if you are to gain Enlightenment or to make spiritual progress. It represents, perhaps one can say, emotional nourishment; you don't just need material nourishment, you need inspiration. I think this is what it stands for, this is what it symbolizes. So I don't think we should take this incident as representing the fact that we need a good house and nice clothes and need to pay ourselves enough money it's not just that; it's also the emotional nourishment; it's well, the spiritual inspiration that it represents. That was the point I was concerned to get across. So I think this is what the incident does symbolize, if it does in fact symbolize anything at all. The fact that the Buddha was materially nourished well, that's a fact; it's not in itself symbolical. But that material nourishment can be regarded as symbolical of the higher spiritual nourishment that one also needs.

All right, perhaps we'll leave it there and deal with the question about the Tara practice next

week.

Oh yes, just one very final word: I wondered whether you'd seen this?

Woman's voice: Yes.

S: You have? This is not a book launch! (laughter).

[88]

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Session Five - 17 June 1990

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Sangharakshita: This week I've received a few more questions than usual, and it may not be possible to get through them all. In any case, there are one or two questions left over from last week, and I think it is with one of those questions left over from last week that we shall begin. It is a question about practice; it is a question about meditation practice; it is a question about a sadhana, but it goes, I think, a little beyond that. It also is relatively short. It is from Karunamaya, and it's a question about the Green Tara practice. It goes like this:

Firstly, What is the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice?

Secondly, Why did you make it explicit a few years ago that 'all the Bodhisattvas' meant these particular eight?

Thirdly, The Vajraloka team seem to encourage a creative approach to meditation or visualization. What is the significance of us maintaining the tradition of the Eight rather than visualizing others?

Finally, Do the Eight Bodhisattvas relate to the Five Dhyani Buddhas?

So actually there are four, if not five, interrelated questions there. First of all, it's a question about the Green Tara practice. I'm not sure whether everybody is familiar with that practice; perhaps quite a few of you are. Hands up those who are familiar with it. Yes: nearly half of you, I think. I'll just mention some salient points here which have significance so far as the questions are concerned, because the first question runs: 'Firstly, what is the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice?'

I will very briefly recapitulate the practice. You visualize yourself as Aryatara; you visualize the green Tam in your heart, and rainbows go out from that through the crown of your head and at the end of the rainbows there are Offering Goddesses; they make offerings to the Eight or the All Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattvas send down their blessings. The blessings strengthen the Tam in the heart, and from the Tam in the heart they radiate rainbow rays on to all sentient beings in the Six Worlds, who then recite the Tara mantra.

So one has got a number of things here, and I think one has to see this clearly before one can answer the question 'Firstly, what is the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice?' The practice has been described from a certain point of view as a complete practice, because first of all you've got the rainbows [89] gathering in the heart and going up through the crown of the head; at the end of each rainbow there's an offering goddess, and the offering goddesses make their offerings to all the Bodhisattvas or the Eight Bodhisattvas. So what does this represent, in terms of positive emotion?

Voices: Devotion.

S: This represents devotion; what else could one call it?

Parami: Receptivity.

S: Receptivity; no, not quite yet, but in a much simpler

Woman's voice: Giving.

S: Giving, generosity, yes; but what sort of generosity?

Cintamani: Worship.

S: Worship, it's worship; and it's also faith, surely. It represents that upward movement of faith, devotion, aspiration, worship and so on. But then you've also got a downward movement in the practice: the Bodhisattvas, pleased, so to speak, by the worship, send down their blessings on the Tam in the heart. So you've got the opposite movement. So what would one call the movement which is the opposite of worship, not from below upwards but from upwards down; what could one call that?

Cintamani: Compassion.

S: Compassion, yes; what else could one call it?

Voices: Blessing.

S: Blessing, yes ?

Cintamani: Inspiration.

S: Inspiration, yes.

Cintamani: Initiation.

S: Initiation, yes.

Cintamani: Grace.

[90]
S: Grace, yes, one could call it all those things. So you've got this upward movement in the

practice and the downward movement. And then what other movement have you got, do you remember?

Woman's voice: Outward.

S: You've got the outward movement. So probably it would be more appropriate to call the outward movement compassion, though clearly compassion is involved in the downward movement too. So you've got an upward movement of positive emotion, a downward movement, and an outward and spreading movement; so in that sense, in terms of positive emotion, the Green Tara sadhana is a complete practice.

The question asks: 'What is the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice?' So, in the light of that explanation, what would you say was the significance? It becomes fairly obvious, doesn't it?

Marichi: They are the objects of worship.

S: They are the objects of worship, yes. There's yourself, as it were, in the middle; you are worshipping. They are the object of worship, you are the object of the blessing, and all sentient beings are the object of your metta and karuna. So the significance of the Mahabodhisattvas in the practice is that they represent the object of worship; they represent the Transcendental; they represent the ultimate point, the ultimate object of your aspiration and your devotion.

So, secondly: 'Why did you make it explicit a few years ago that 'all the Bodhisattvas' meant these particular eight?' In the actual text, it says: 'The offerings are made to all the Bodhisattvas', so does that mean that you are meant to visualize all the Bodhisattvas? How many Bodhisattvas are there? Does anybody know? (Some laughter.) I mean, there are several thousand actually named in Mahayana sutras. The text says 'all the Bodhisattvas', so how can you observe that? If you want to be faithful to the text, what do you do? Do you try to visualize literally all of them, or what do you do?

Woman's voice: You select.

S: You select. You take certain as it were more familiar Bodhisattvas as representing all of the Bodhisattvas. So in most Mahayana sutras there is a standard list of eight, and those eight are taken as representing all the Bodhisattvas. I have dealt with this subject in The Three Jewels in, I think, the chapter on 'The Glorious Company of the Bodhisattvas'. I say there is a standard list of eight, but it would be more correct to say that there are several standard lists, because the lists don't always completely coincide. You always get Avalokitesvara, you always get Manjusri, you always get Maitreya; but certain other Bodhisattvas sometimes are included in [91] the list of eight and sometimes are not. But there is a standard list, as is the case with the various representations of the Refuge Tree: standing on the lotus to the left to our left there are the Eight Bodhisattvas representing the Bodhisattva Sangha, or representing all the Bodhisattvas. So it's not that 'all the Bodhisattvas' means these particular eight in the sense that one ignores all the Bodhisattvas and there are just these particular eight; but these particular eight, whichever eight it happens to be, represent or stand for all the Bodhisattvas. You don't have to visualize just eight; eight is quite a large number, isn't it? You could if you wanted just visualize three: you could visualize the Three Family Protectors, Avalokitesvara,

Manjughosa and Vajrapani. Or if you were particularly good at visualization you could visualize ten or twelve or twenty.

Thirdly, 'The Vajraloka team seem to encourage a creative approach to meditation and visualization.' I'm not quite sure what is meant by this 'creative approach to meditation'. I notice that the creative approach is being extended to study, and we're going to have creative study. I'm rather in the dark about these matters, being a bit behind all these developments, so what exactly is meant by 'a creative approach to meditation and visualization'? Could anybody tell me? (Some laughter.)

Karunamaya: It's down to me! Well, not necessarily sticking with the set format of the practice, but maybe using other aids to work in practice.

S: Aids such as ?

Karunamaya: When I was there in November they were talking about working with what they called three keys

S: K.E.Y.S?

Karunamaya: Yes. In terms of

S: I'm afraid I have been left out here. Would someone enlarge upon this?

Karunamaya: I'm not sure. Could you help me out, Dhammadinna? You don't know. I think it was in terms of talking about vitality or well, it's the same sort of things as being aware of what feeling quality is there, what thoughts are there, become aware of all those things in meditation, and maybe if you feel a bit sluggish using different things to make help stimulate the energy ...

S: OK, that's clear enough. I did say myself several years ago, and I have said it, I think, several times, that there are certain details of the visualization practice that are left to the choice of the individual meditator. For instance, if you are visualizing a particular figure, say, seated in a landscape or in Sukhavati, all right, the details of the trees and the flowers and all that sort of thing can be left to your individual [92] imagination. But the main features of the practice should be adhered to.

Karunamaya: Can I just ask in the past it has sounded as if people were putting White Tara and Vajrasattva and the wrathful Vajrapani up there among the Bodhisattvas, and what the question is referring to is that a few years ago it sounded as if you had said that 'all the Bodhisattvas' meant the particular eight.

S: Well, for practical purposes, in the sense that you can't visualize all the Bodhisattvas, which is no doubt obvious. But I certainly don't think I said that you should only visualize those eight and no others because, as I said in The Three Jewels, I mentioned that there is not one standard list of eight, and if there are Bodhisattvas that one feels particularly drawn to one can certainly include those, substituting them for Bodhisattvas included in the eight with whom one isn't particularly familiar or to whom one doesn't feel drawn.

But why I am a little cautious about the use of this word 'creative' is that I find that the word 'creative', like the word 'charity' nowadays, can cover a multitude of sins, if you see what I mean. There is such a thing as a spontaneous meditation experience which does not go along necessarily with the form of the meditation as handed down, and certainly one need not restrain that; because all the different visualizations were once upon a time somebody's spontaneous experience. But what one shouldn't do is to tinker and tamper just out of mental restlessness do you see what I mean? without any really deep creative sort of inspiration; certainly not as regards the major features of the sadhana. For instance, not saying: 'I usually visualize or try to visualize such-and-such Bodhisattva as white; I think I'll have a go at yellow today.' Well, not like that. But if, while you are deeply meditating, quite spontaneously the white or the green figure turns into a yellow or golden figure, one need not resist that; that no doubt is something genuinely creative coming from within. But one needs really to distinguish, I think, between what comes from a deeper source and is creative, and what is just coming from the restlessness of your mind or your mind getting a bit bored with the practice and wanting to change things around a bit so as to relieve the boredom.

Lama Govinda, of course, uses the expression 'creative meditation', doesn't he? Some writers on Tibetan Buddhism use the term 'creative meditation' to cover the utpanna krama(?), that is, the arising stage of meditation where you visualize Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because, yes, ideally it is not just a mental image, it is something created from deep within yourself. But nonetheless I think we shouldn't use this term 'creative' too as it were easily or too cheaply.

Vimalamitra: Bhante, I think they might mean by 'creative', as I've understood it correctly at Vajraloka something like if you couldn't visualize white very well but you could visualize red, maybe you could visualize one of the Bodhisattvas in red robes to actually begin to visualize; and then, say, change the red robe to a white robe so that you are practising to try and get to the final object. I think that's [93] what's meant by creative, and then

S: I'd like to check up on these things a bit. Because, yes, it could be that someone does find one colour easier to visualize than another. Usually, I think, people find red comparatively easy to visualize. That is the first colour that one recognizes or sees, so to speak, as a baby anyway. But I think also there is the point that if one has difficulty visualizing colours there are always the kasina exercises to do preparatory, that is to say just visualizing discs of colour. You're probably familiar with this exercise? It's found in the Theravada tradition. It might be preferable to do that. But I wouldn't say that I was completely against changing the colour of a robe; that's a relatively minor detail. But I think I'd like to go a bit more into this question of whether people do have difficulty visualizing particular colours. I don't know if anyone has any comment to offer here, if anyone has ever found it more difficult to visualize one particular colour than another?

Jinapriya: Yes. I find it particularly difficult to visualize blue very difficult indeed.

S: Dark or ?

Jinapriya: Sky blue. I never get started.

S: Is that due to the English climate? (Laughter.) Perhaps you should go off to Spain. Any other comment?

Karunamaya: I've just been on the Tara retreat it's a surprising thing and it did seem there that a lot of people found it quite difficult to visualize full-stop.

S: Oh, yes, well, that's another difficulty; yes, full-stop, yes. But any further difficulties with regard to particular colours?

Man's voice: Brown Samantabhadra.

S: If one has difficulty with particular colours, I think one has to familiarize oneself with that colour, because in the Tibetan tradition they do recommend looking at the blue sky, when you happen to be able to perceive a blue sky. I think that is one of the features of the Tibetan landscape which Lama Govinda has commented on: the extraordinary vividness of colour. I'm sure that has had something to do with the ability of Tibetans to visualize. It's difficult to visualize something that you've never seen. It's good perhaps to contemplate expanses of green grass: just go for a walk in Victoria Park, just look at the green grass, and you'll probably find it easier to visualize green. Brown? Well, brown tree trunks, I suppose. Red? Red of sunsets. Pure white? Well, snow, when we get it. So I think if one has difficulty visualizing colours or particular colours, I think one needs as it were to refresh one's memory or improve one's visualizing capacity by actually contemplating those colours in nature; or, if that even is difficult, by doing these kasina exercises. There are quite detailed [94] discussions about how to do them in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, especially. I have touched on them, I think, in my own writings and seminars here and there.

Cintamani: Bhante, just a couple of related things on that. For each Bodhisattva there are obviously a number of different forms. One can visualize Avalokitesvara as white with four arms, or one can visualize him in the royal ease pose ... There's also, I believe he was originally red; he was red because he's from Amitabha's family. So with each of the Bodhisattvas you have a number of different forms to choose from. I suppose there is no objection to choosing a form that resonates particularly

S: Simply the form with which you are most familiar; because you may have thangkas of particular Bodhisattvas hanging in your room or in your shrine, and you may be more familiar with those forms. So I'd say just stick with those.

Cintamani: The other point was: I think in one of your writings, I think it's from The Journey to Il Convento period, where you talk about not seeing symbolic figures or archetypal figures as being particularly fixed. I'm afraid I can't remember it might have been a story you wrote. I can't remember the exact context, but it occurred to me while practising that it sounds a bit ridiculous, but I thought, well, Manjusri has been out there with his arm in the air for so long he must be getting tired. I know it sounds ridiculous, but I thought because there's a Japanese form of Manjusri with his hand down here; I thought why don't I let him put his arm down? ... (words lost in laughter) and he can put it up tomorrow.

S: Perhaps you suspected he was being wilful! (Laughter.)

Cintamani: The point I'm trying to make is that there are lots of forms for one particular Bodhisattva and therefore it would seem that within a particular Bodhisattva there's a fluidity; the arms can go up and down, but the basic thing is you get a feel of the personality if you like. Is that acceptable, that sort of approach?

S: There is as it were a Manjusri quality which you should try to experience, not just have an eidetic image of a visualized form. I think I have said often enough that to get a feeling for the Bodhisattva is even more important than being able to visualize correctly; and if you can't visualize, and people do have difficulty visualizing, just have the feeling that the Bodhisattva is there and you sort of feel his presence and his quality, even though you can't perceive him. It's as though he's sort of behind a curtain, behind a veil.

Karunamaya: Can I ask two more things? Just small things. It's important that they are peaceful forms rather than wrathful forms, I've heard someone [say].

S: Yes, because wrathful forms are generally considered to pertain to the Anuttara Yoga Tantra, not to the three exoteric Tantras, as they are called; and the Green Tara practice definitely falls within the external Tantra. So one would visualize [95] peaceful and not [wrathful] forms.

Karunamaya: And it should be male rather than female?

S: Well, Bodhisattvas aren't necessarily masculine in gender. I suppose one could include Tara, though she is the main object of the sadhana. It would include the White

Karunamaya: Or Prajnaparamita.

S: The Prajnaparamita is not a Bodhisattva. But one could certainly include the White Tara, or one could include Kurukule, or one could include Ekajati, or Padmasavari(?). There are quite a few female Bodhisattvas.

Anyway: 'And finally, do the eight Bodhisattvas relate to the five Dhyani Buddhas?' Well, each individual Bodhisattva among the eight does belong to one or other of the five Buddha families. You can get this information from quite a number of texts, including Govinda's Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism.

Anyway, I think that's enough about the Green Tara practice and the Bodhisattvas, unless there's any supplementary question?

Vimalamitra: Just to clarify. Is there any real difference between the Dhyani Buddhas and the Mahabodhisattvas as far as level [is concerned]? Do they just represent the Transcendental plane?

S: I've used the expression Dhyani Buddhas because it does occur in the question and it is a term that is commonly in use, but it's not really a term that is used in Tibet by Tibetan Buddhists. What we often call the Dhyani Buddhas are called simply the Five Jinas, the Five Victors or the Five Conquerors. But one can say that the Transcendental Bodhisattvas are really different as it were individualized aspects of the Sambhogakaya. It isn't that one has got literally separate personalities: Amitabha the Buddha, Avalokitesvara the Bodhisattva, Tara the Bodhisattva and so on. One must think rather in terms of having, so to speak, an impersonal Dharmakaya (I'm using very provisional language here), an impersonal Dharmakaya so to speak manifesting as a personalised multiform Sambhogakaya. Do you see what I mean? It's as though the Dharmakaya manifests as an infinity of personalised Buddha forms and an infinity of personalised Bodhisattva forms; or if you like manifests as Buddha

forms which in turn manifest as Bodhisattva forms. And this totality of Buddha forms and Bodhisattva forms is a sort of bringing out, a sort of revelation of the inner content of the as it were impersonal Dharmakaya. So through any of the Bodhisattvas, any of the Buddhas, one has access as though through a particular door to the Dharmakaya. Of course, one mustn't divide the Dharmakaya and the Sambhogakaya too sharply from each other. It's not that there is literally an impersonal Dharmakaya that truly manifests as, as it were, a personalised [96] Sambhogakaya. The two are really not different. One is trying to speak of something which is beyond duality in terms of duality, the duality of impersonal and personalised, simply for the purposes of some kind of communication about it. Does this make it clearer?

Vimalamitra: Clearer, yes.

S: Yes, if you think it's clear you haven't understood, yes. (Laughter.) I think there was another question from over there.

Woman's voice: Does this go back to the Bodhisattvas as objects of worship being in masculine form? Because I thought you had said that that was an aspect of the practice, that they were in masculine form and worshippers were feminine, and that that

S: Yes, one could look at it like that, bearing in mind that they are masculine and the worshipper is feminine, even when the worshipper is a man.

Same woman: Yes, but there is no polarity between them

S: Right, yes, one can certainly look at it like that. Because in some sadhanas one does visualize oneself not only as Tara but as Pandaravasini or whatever other female form waiting upon the appropriate Buddha. So it does represent the relationship between the as it were purified mundane and the Transcendental.

Cintamani: Bhante, why does the practice make offerings to Bodhisattvas and not to Buddhas?

S: I suppose it's just because Bodhisattvas are more accessible. I assume it's simply that. No reason why one shouldn't make offerings to Buddhas. I haven't actually come across any traditional explanation but I assume it is that, that the Bodhisattvas are more accessible. Of course, you've got the offering goddesses as the sort of medium, the messengers between you, even you as Tara, and the Bodhisattvas.

Danavira: Since we are talking about Tara, I was wondering if there was a special reason why, when we visualize ourselves as Avalokitesvara we embody or become Avalokitesvara or visualize ourselves as Tara but we ... visualize

S: I have talked about this at different times. There are different types of practice in the different Tantras. There are practices in which one visualizes the Buddha or Bodhisattva 'out there'; that is called visualization in front. And then there is what they call self-visualization, in which you visualize yourself as the Buddha or Bodhisattva concerned. I haven't come across an adequate explanation of this in [97] tradition, but my own understanding of it is that it represents the as it were divinization, for want of a better term, of the two complementary

poles, the subject and the object. Because our experience is entirely within the framework of the subject-object duality; we have to transcend that. So we have to see initially the object as it were as the Bodhisattva or the Buddha; we also have to see the subject as the Bodhisattva or the Buddha. And in this way we have to approximate to a state where we don't experience that duality, so we divinize the object in one kind of practice, we divinize the subject in another kind of practice, and the two are complementary. It's not as neat as this in tradition, it's much, much more complex in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, but I think it's become in some ways so complex that the basic structure, as I perceive it, has been rather obscured, one doesn't see the wood for the trees. But so far as I can make out, this is actually what is happening when one has this in-front practice and this self practice.

All right, we're going to go on to something a bit different, though perhaps not so very different; and it arises via first of all a comment and then a question or questions from Jayamati. The little introduction or preamble goes like this:

Further to your comments arising from the study of the goatherd girl giving rice to the Buddha-to-be, there has been some concern that we still need to be wary of stating our ideals too clearly, or even holding our ideals too enthusiastically because of the danger of becoming over-idealistic and therefore alienated from our more considerate natures. You were saying two weeks ago that we need not be overly concerned with being too idealistic or with becoming alienated as a result of our idealism, and that we could prosper by encouraging each other more in identifying with our ideals, i.e. the Three Jewels, by being careful not to criticize or discourage those who are trying to clarify those ideals and to put them into effective action. Last week you suggested that the real significance of the goatherd girl giving rice was that it was nourishing Siddhartha's pursuit of his spiritual ideals.

Question: Could you therefore return to this point and clarify to what extent we need to be wary of our idealism? Do you think, as has been suggested by some people, that the cause of ex-Padmaraja's downfall was his idealism; that because of people's propensity to conform and to follow unthinkingly we should therefore soft-pedal when referring to the ideals of the Dharma and the Movement in particular, for fear that we might lead people too quickly into areas that they are not ready to go? Do you 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? Or, again, do you think we should be wary of doing this? 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?

There are quite a few questions there. They seem to revolve about this question or topic of idealism, so perhaps we need to go into that a bit first. But I think first of all [98] there needs to be an understanding of what we mean by idealism, because if different people mean different things by this word idealism then clearly they are going to be at cross-purposes in discussion. So I wonder if anybody's got any clear idea about what is idealism, or what is meant by the word ideal? If there has been discussion about this, I hope people have gone to their dictionaries first. So can anybody enlighten me on this score?

Dhammarati: I haven't gone to the dictionary, but I think it's been used in at least two senses in discussions that I've been involved in. One is the sense of a clear expression of the spiritual experience that we're moving towards and in the terms that you talked about it a couple of weeks ago, ... to inspire, to energize and to draw you. I think that's a positive use of the word.

I think in discussions that I've been involved in, when it takes on a more negative connotation perhaps it's not really a meaning of the word idealism but it's what's being meant, I think is a certain kind of it's the way your principles become dogmatic and become applied with insufficient experience of forming them and without sufficient awareness of the people to whom the ideals are being communicated. So I think in the positive sense what's being spoken about is a response to a new vision, and in the more negative sense what's being spoken about is a certain kind of intolerance and dogmatism.

S: So in other words, if what you say is correct, the word is being used in two quite different, in fact even quite contradictory, senses? In that case, wouldn't it be better to have two different words for two different things? Wouldn't that conduce to clarity?

Dhammadinna: But isn't it a matter of opinion? Some people might think that they're being idealistic and others might think they're being dogmatic.

S: Well, all the more reason for having the two separate words; because I looked up the dictionary, as I usually do, and I find that 'idealism' means primarily this is the primary meaning: 'belief in and pursuit of ideals'. So this would seem to correspond to what Dhammarati said initially. And the word 'ideal' itself has many definitions, some of them just technical philosophical ones which I shall ignore; but the more general ones which concern us are these (This is 'Ideal'): '1. a conception of something that is perfect, esp. that which one seeks to attain. 2. a person or thing considered to represent perfection.' Then: '4. a pattern or model, esp. of ethical behaviour. 5. conforming to an ideal.'

So I think we've got to make up our minds in this sort of discussion whether we are going to use the term 'idealism' in a positive sense, or whether we're going to use it in a negative sense. Because if at one time we use it in a positive sense and at another time in a negative sense, or some participants in the discussion use it in a positive sense and others in a negative sense, I think there's going to be a lot of confusion. Or if they're not even agreed as to whether what they are doing is idealism in the positive sense or idealism in the negative sense, there's going to be [99] further confusion. Do you see what I mean?

Marichi: Some people usually say 'over-idealistic' for the negative sense.

S: I don't think that's very satisfactory, because it's like saying 'He's got too much metta.' Because if you take idealism as a positive thing and then you say 'You've got too much of it', it becomes rather difficult to understand how you could have too much of a genuinely good thing.

Marichi: It still suggests an imbalance.

S: Imbalance with what?

Khemananda: I think in the Survey, towards the end, where you say that with ideals two things can go wrong. One is to deny them and the other is to absolutize them. That's more subtle. Where you use the one word and say that you can only deny the Ideal that's obviously wrong. A more subtle mistake is that of making it absolutized.(?)

S: How do you understand 'absolutizing' an ideal?

Khemananda: Well, you use it like the raft, [which is] a means to an end, as an end in itself. It becomes fixed. You need the raft, but at the same time you have to bear in mind that it's only a vehicle for something else.

S: But you're not speaking here about the raft. Presumably you're speaking about the other shore?

Khemananda: The ideal.

Kuladeva: I think it can suggest an imbalance between faith and reason.

S: Uh huh, yes: in what way?

Kuladeva: Well, there can be an excess of faith, needing balance.

S: Right, yes. Can you say a little more about that? How does it work out with respect to the ideal? You have faith in the ideal, but not enough reason? Or is it that you have too much reason and not enough faith?

Kuladeva: Well, perhaps the faith suggests that there isn't a sufficient depth of experience of the ideal in the first place.

Cintamani: The problem seems to be that there's been ... ideals people, say, Order Members use their idealism in such a way well, they communicate it to, say, [100] Mitras in such a way that it hurts them rather than inspires them; and as far as I can see your idealism only hurts people if you blame people for doing what you're not doing yourself. You could use an architectural analogy: you've got two people, they're both agreed that there should be beautiful buildings in the world, but the first is prepared to go out and build them and the second just complains that there are no beautiful buildings in the world.

S: So which is the idealism? I'm not quite clear.

Cintamani: Well, what I'm saying is

S: Who is the idealist?

Cintamani: Well, in a sense they're both idealists but one has an awareness of what it takes to realize an ideal, primarily within himself; and the other just has an ideal of what could be. Perhaps somewhere he has a conception of what it means to implement that, but he's not doing it for some reason, and the gap between himself and society and the Ideal strikes him as uncomfortable and painful but he can't actually bridge the gap between actions and

Side 2... I don't know if I've made myself clear.

S: Not yet, no. Are you saying that one is a genuine idealist and the other is an armchair idealist?

Cintamani: Yes, I'm saying that to be a real idealist you've got to have well, genius is one per cent. inspiration and 99 per cent. perspiration: you've got to be able to being a real idealist is

knowing how to implement your ideals, how to attain your ideals.

S: So, in other words, what you are calling the real idealist is what the dictionary simply would call an idealist. Would you say, then, that the distinction which needs to be made is between genuine idealism and false idealism, or pseudo-idealism?

Cintamani: Or half-baked idealism.

Siddhiratna: But is there a distinction between the idealist who wants to achieve ends and is so convinced of the benefit at the end that he or she will seek any means to achieve it, and takes on an aspect of fanaticism about imposing that ideal on people because it's for their benefit?

S: So what would you call that sort of person?

Siddhiratna: I'd call him a fanatic.

[101]
S: So you'd speak of idealism as opposed to fanaticism?

Siddhiratna: Yes, I think I would. And somehow I think I can't remember the original question but it involves an element of sensitivity where people can take on board the idealist's ideas and ideals

S: But this is part of the question.

Siddhiratna: and where it's applied to you (?) ...

S: So it does seem to be advisable to have two different terms, whatever they are, for these two quite different things.

Dhammarati: I think that's true but I still think sometimes the two different things can be quite psychologically related. I suppose I'm thinking of the things like Sona Kolivisa was doing; where somebody is quite highly motivated and is quite sincerely trying to practise, but momentum takes them beyond a point that is quite sensitive, in a way they start to do that.

S: Well, this comes back to what Kuladeva was saying about balance, because the Buddha's comment on that occasion was that Sona Kolivisa should make a balanced effort. He didn't say that he should slacken off and not make an effort; he said he should make a balanced effort. His effort had become unbalanced effort. But I don't think it's quite that, is it? because it's not a question of holding a balance between idealism and fanaticism, is it? I think it would be agreed that fanaticism was wholly unskilful. So can one look at it in that way?

Dhammadinna: Isn't it a balance between where you want to go and where you are? You have a long-term vision and a short-term vision, ... take the steps in between.

S: Right, yes. Also I think, in the light of what Siddhiratna said about fanaticism, it's a question of not separating the end from the means. There's a saying of Mahatma Gandhi's which I used to quote not that Mahatma Gandhi is really a hero of mine, but sometimes he did

hit the nail on the head: he said the end is the extreme of means. You can't divorce the end from the means. It's not that there is the end, there is the aim, there is the goal, and any means to get there are justified. But it's not the situation, because there are certain means which cannot reach certain ends; because the end is the extreme of means. So if your goal is, say, love and compassion, and you want to propagate love and compassion, you cannot do that by any means except love and compassion. Not that I'm leaving out Wisdom or anything of that sort, if you see what I mean, but you cannot propagate or achieve an aim or a goal by means that do not partake of the character of that aim or that goal. So is it that people are saying that what we could call, say, pseudo-idealism is committing that particular mistake?

[102]
Voices: Yes.

Kulananda: ...persons, because you don't take them into account. You have an idea about what

S: Well, not just persons, but perhaps situations, conditions. So what terms then should one use for which thing? Should one keep the word 'idealism' for the genuine article? Because I've got the impression in recent months that in some quarters idealism has become almost a dirty word that one uses at one's peril. If it has become a dirty word, we'll just have to drop it, but what will we put in its place? Do you see what I mean?

Kulamitra: You'd have to change the dictionary definition, or we'd lose touch with the English language. What you read out seemed very pertinent to Buddhism.

S: Yes, right. So in that case we'd have to stop using the word 'idealism' as a dirty word, and what we formerly meant by idealism, using it as a dirty word, we should at least call pseudo-idealism. Do you see what I mean? Otherwise, we are going to become very, very confused; and I don't think we should get too far from standard English usage if in fact it is still standard English usage. The definitions I've given are from Collins', what do they call it, Modern English Dictionary? It's the quite recent edition which was edited among others by our friend Dharmapriya.

So does this shed light on the whole question? Or do you think people are still going to go on using 'idealism' as a dirty word and using the term 'idealist' as a term of abuse?

Dhammarati: I think it's a very important point, separating out the two senses of the word being used. I think that's quite crucial.

Cintamani: From my own recent experience, I think quite often people say that if your pursuit of an ideal causes you discomfort in any way, then it's impractical and you are a pseudo-idealist.

S: Well, of course the pursuit of the Ideal is going to be uncomfortable. It cannot but be uncomfortable to some extent. I assume that is generally understood; though I sometimes think that maybe if people do recognize this and are prepared to bear a little discomfort in the course of their spiritual life, some of their good friends will advise them not to be wilful! I think again we have to be careful about that.

But to get back to the question, the first part is: 'Could you therefore return to this point and clarify to what extent we need to be wary of our idealism?' Well, if you use the word 'idealism' in the dictionary sense, you mustn't be wary of it at all. You should be as idealistic as you possibly can, and encourage others. And if you are using the word 'idealism' in the sense of 'pseudo-idealism', there's no question of [103] being wary of it; you should try to get rid of it altogether. Do you see what I mean? Or do you think that, at least around here, so to speak, the word 'idealism' is beyond rehabilitation, or beyond restoration to its dictionary status? Has FWBO-speak gone as far as that? Jayamati says there has been quite a bit of discussion about this since the other week.

Dharmapala: It would seem that what needs to be clarified a bit is the sort of idealism that causes harm rather than discomfort.

S: Mm, mm (agreeing).

Parami: Actually I thought two weeks ago you were quite clear about it when you said that idealism is something that moves us rather than something we use to restrict. That's quite clear.

S: Yes. Well, I spoke, for instance, in another connection, of Mitras being inspired and wanting more contact with Order Members, being glad that they didn't have to shop around any more, etc.

Parami: I thought that particular phrase was quite helpful, because I think Dhammadinna's right, I think where the polarity happens the argument is probably because people think they are using the term in the same way, so that somebody says 'I'm being idealistic' and another person thinks 'No, you're not, you're being pseudo-idealistic.' So it's interesting to have something like that as a touchstone ...

S: Because sometimes there can be a genuine confusion, and someone may be really convinced that they, or somebody, are being idealistic; somebody else may think that they're being pseudo-idealistic. That is a possibility.

Parami: So to have something like what you said a couple of weeks ago where you can say, 'Is it restricting and threatening, or is it actually conducive to growth?' seems to me quite

S: Well something can sometimes threaten you and be conducive to growth. The idea of death (Voices murmuring.)

Parami: Maybe restrict was a better term - you used both, actually, restrict and threaten.

Siddhiratna: Bhante, I've assumed from my bits of reading that idealism is a sort of negative thing largely when it's applied to society as a whole, and I still believe that idealism is a positive thing when it's applied to a individual goal, Enlightenment. But idealism seems to be a dangerous sort of aspiration when you think of it in terms of fanatics that try to impose regimes or doctrines, political doctrines, on situations from a set of ideals. I can't really think of historically anyone that's succeeded, [104] though in a sense I believe that some of those people genuinely thought of themselves as idealists. But what they ended up with seems inevitably to be a negative situation.

S: They've sometimes succeeded for short periods of time, and even sometimes for centuries.

Siddhiratna: What would you think of, for centuries?

S: Well, you could think of the Catholic Church, for instance, or the Inquisition; but they were successful, you know.

Siddhiratna: For a period.

S: For a period.

Siddhiratna: But maybe that's the limitation 'for a period' which rests on particular historical circumstances.

S: Yes, but even sometimes like the Dharma, even something as positive as the Dharma will also die out after a time, so the Buddha says.

Kulamitra: Coming back to what Kuladeva said about faith and reason: in Buddhism, if we really understood our ideals, for instance individuality is one of our ideals; so in our case, disregarding anything outside our own Buddhist context, if you really understand the Ideal, not just stand up for it without understanding it, then, since compassion and individuality and things like that are part of that Ideal, you would not be able to be pseudo-idealistic, so reason is a factor.

S: Yes, you don't sort of just represent it, you embody it to some extent.

Cintamani: I think this is quite a woolly area a lot of the time. I think a lot more discussion is going to have to go on, because there is a scenario which takes place which I think quite a lot of people are familiar with. It goes something like this: somebody is living in a certain way, living their spiritual life, doing their practice; and at that particular time they seem to have a rather drawn face and sunken eyes, and they don't seem terribly 'happy' - single inverted commas. So somebody comes along and says: 'Come on, you're giving yourself such a hard time. The trouble with you is you're too idealistic.' (Bhante chuckles.) And then you wheel out the quote, which is something like 'If you're not enjoying your spiritual life, there's something wrong with it.' OK?

S: (laughing) Whose quote is that, may I ask? It is rather wrenched out of context?!

Cintamani: I seem to remember in the Great Chapter in the Sutta Nipata, Mara coming along and saying much the same thing, basically: 'You're giving yourself [105] such a hard time, why bother?' You know, ...

S: Yes. I remember another example that occurs to me, that of the Bunuel film Simon of the Desert, when there's poor old Simon up there on his column, and Jesus appears; and Jesus is so sorry for poor Simon, and says: 'Oh, Simon, you're giving yourself such a hard time. Just take it a bit easier.' And of course poor Simon is quite touched. But then he gets a bit suspicious, and he has a good look at Jesus, and of course it's the devil in disguise, with all these fake curls and this sweet smile (laughter). This film has been on very recently. I recommend it. I saw it years and years ago, and I think it's a very good film. (But that's by the

way!) But, yes, that is exactly what you are talking about, even though within a different religious framework.

Dhammarati: I was just thinking, Bhante, in a way it's easy to carry ... both the drawing-room idealist, the caricature of the self-indulgent ... But it seems to me a lot of this language comes from the Vajraloka meditation teaching again

S: From ?

Dhammarati: From Vajraloka

S: Oh! Which language are you speaking of?

Dhammarati: Especially the language of wilfulness and ...

S: Well, there is such a thing as wilfulness, obviously, but we have to be clear about what it is we are talking about when we are talking about wilfulness. Because if we read the biographies of all the great Buddhist masters, saints, male or female, many of them really put themselves through it, and perhaps they nowadays would be labelled by us as wilful. Perhaps the Buddha would be regarded as wilful, sitting down on that heap of kusa grass and saying 'I will not stir from this spot till I have gained Enlightenment.' Very wilful! (Laughter.) Do you see what I mean? I think you have to be very careful of this pseudo, not just psychological approach but pseudo-liberal approach almost. Because the spiritual life isn't easy, even under the most favourable conditions; it's very difficult, and we do sometimes actually suffer. We all know that. But the fact that you are suffering and giving yourself a hard time does not necessarily mean that you are being wilful in that rather negative sense.

Dhammarati: But I think still there's a point that, practically speaking, you have to be aware of in practice. I've just come from Vajraloka and they were having us doing eight hours of meditation a day, it was a fairly demanding programme , not soft-pedalling. But I think they are quite careful to point out that a particular kind of awareness, although it's a lot of stress and strain and in a sense isn't sufficiently receptive and isn't sufficiently aware of sometimes quite subtle movements that are the beginnings of a deeper meditation experience, and it seems to me that the point [106] they are trying to make is that effort has to be sometimes quite strong effort, but that that has to be offset by a certain kind of sensitivity not sensitivity instead of effort but sensitivity hand in hand with the effort.

S: I think one has to be a little careful one doesn't throw the baby, that is to say the effort, out with the bath-water, that is to say the wilfulness. I think that sometimes people are actually not being wilful (I'm not talking about people who go to Vajraloka now); sometimes people are not being wilful, even though their effort may be identified as wilful, but are actually just making a genuine effort. I think we have to be very careful not to label someone's genuine effort as wilfulness and in that way discourage them.

Dhammarati: Do you think there are revival of criteria of telling which are the ... ?

S: I think you can't tell them apart as it were in the abstract. You have to know that particular person quite well individually, as a spiritual friend. Because what might be wilfulness in the case of one person, or appear so externally, may not be wilfulness in the case of another

person. I think you need to know somebody personally quite well before you start advising them in that way, whether positively or negatively, to do or not to do. I think one shouldn't rush in with one's advice and one's opinions, as sometimes I think happens.

Anyway, I'm afraid we've rather lingered over this question, which is perhaps not a bad thing; which means it's only our second question this evening. But never mind, perhaps it's better to do a few questions thoroughly than a lot more superficially. But let's just go on, very briefly, to further questions raised by Jayamati, but it will have to be briefly: 'Do you think, as has been suggested by some people, that the cause of ex-Padmaraja's downfall was his idealism?'

So how would one answer that in the light of our discussion so far?

Man's voice: It wasn't idealism.

S: It wasn't idealism.

Khemananda: It wasn't idealistic enough.

S: In a way, they weren't idealistic enough. In some ways that's true. I won't say very much about this, partly because, well, the ex-Padmaraja isn't present and perhaps it isn't proper to talk too much about someone in their absence. But I will just say one thing, because after getting the question I asked myself, 'What was the cause of Padmaraja's downfall?' And to my mind it really seemed very simple: he did commit mistakes; other people commit mistakes; but I think the real cause of his downfall was he would not listen to criticism. I think it was as simple as that. If he had been able to listen to criticism, the criticism of his peers, especially fellow [107] Chairmen, criticism of senior Order Members and criticism specifically of Manjunatha and Devamitra's criticism and my criticism well, things could have been put right by him in Croydon, instead of having to be put right after his departure. But he couldn't listen, he couldn't accept criticism. That, I think, was the main cause of his downfall. Because, yes, all right, one can be perhaps pseudo-idealistic; it's not a sin to be pseudo-idealistic. But what is a sin, if one can use that expression, is when your pseudo-idealism is pointed out to you or is criticized, that you are not receptive to the criticism, and you don't take a look at yourself and ask yourself, 'Am I not being pseudo-idealistic?' and attempt to put it right.

Dhammadinna: I can remember Padmaraja saying once there were two standards, perfection and failure. So that would be an ideal thing, and if that is human ... then that would imply that he couldn't take criticism because ...

S: Yes. You had to be either perfect or you had to be a failure, and of course one doesn't want to be a failure; so the only alternative is yes, he wouldn't admit any chink in his armour. I know this, because it ended up with him writing to me and telling me that I was mistaken, that I did not see the situation as it was, and in fact he told me I was blind; that I did not perceive what was happening in Croydon; he perceived it correctly. So that, I think, is the great failure and was his downfall not to dwell upon him personally. So I think almost anything can be forgiven, any mistake can be forgiven if only we are willing to look at it when it's pointed out to us and recognize the possibility of our having been mistaken, and that applies to pseudo-idealism as well as to any other thing. So, yes, it wasn't idealism in the dictionary sense that was Padmaraja's downfall, it was something very different: his failure to listen to people who were trying to be his spiritual friends.

So I think whenever we are confronted by criticism we must listen to the criticism, and only too often our reaction is defensive. Sometimes the criticism may be unjust quite objectively; I'd say 'all the better'. An unfair criticism can be very salutary; not just that you think it's unfair, but it may be unfair; but listen to it all the same. If you can take unfair criticism to heart, you'll probably make more progress than if you take fair criticism. (laughter) In a sense, criticism is never unfair, because I am quite sure that lurking somewhere within you is something to which that criticism actually applies! (laughter) So just try to see it, however convinced you may be that the criticism is totally unjust, unfair, unwarranted, etc.

Anyway, we are nearing the end: ' - that because of people's propensity to conform and to follow unthinkingly, we should therefore soft-pedal when referring to the ideals of the Dharma and the Movement in particular, for fear we might lead people too quickly into areas that they are not ready to go to.' Well, presumably one is talking about relatively new people, beginners; do people think that that is a genuine danger? Does it happen, could it happen? Give specific examples with regard to what?

[108]
Khemananda: The dividing line whether to say enough about your principles to make them clear to begin with, or whether to actually be sensitive to the other person where they're coming from and what they need, and how skilful it looks to be how you communicate with that particular person.

S: I think you can be very open about communicating your own enthusiasm for the Ideal, the fact that you are inspired by the Ideal; but be very, very cautious about suggesting to any new person any particular line of action that they should follow with regards to the Ideal. Let them just feel, as it were, your general inspiration and leave it to them to decide how they are going to respond to that. But don't soft-pedal your enthusiasm and idealism. Do you see what I mean? Let it be clear that you are inspired by the Dharma, you're inspired by the Ideal of Enlightenment, you would like to be a Stream Entrant in this life; but don't start saying 'and therefore I think it would be good for you to become a vegetarian'! (Laughter.) Let them just receive the impact of your inspiration and, well, maybe they will decide the next day that they'd like to be a vegetarian or whatever. Do you see the difference? If they ask you what you think they should do, even then be quite cautious about suggesting concrete lines of action, unless you again know them very well or have come to know them very well.

Vidyananada(?): Is this part of the danger of pseudo-idealism again thinking about Padmaraja, he had this thing of like you had to be perfect or you're a failure; so that in a way you can set a standard which if people don't live up to that then they're just not good enough? You're not actually offering them any help to develop, you're just cutting them off. Is that one of the dangers of pseudo-idealism?

S: One could look at it like that, but, as I said, if you present the Ideal and present and communicate the fact that you are inspired by the Ideal you are not then as it were putting any sort of pressure on other people. It's up to them to respond in the way that they think fit. And as you get to know them, perhaps you will be able to suggest ways in which they can do that, but you need to be quite cautious even then. But not cautious about your own idealism.

Danavira: Bhante, when you were talking about idealism two weeks ago I tried to understand why there was this sort of tension that Jayamati is asking the question about. I was wondering

if perhaps pseudo-idealism is, for some people at least, a psychological strategy that they use, it's one of a number that are open to people. For example, some types of people might choose to go in for some kind of projection, or projecting out their inner material quite openly on to people. I was wondering if other types of people prefer not to see what's happening within themselves but to put a veneer of supposed idealism over the top of it, and in a sense project the veneer out into the world. Do I make myself clear?

S: Not completely. I think it seems to come down to what Dhammadinna was saying earlier on: the need of connecting means and ends.

[109]
Danavira: For me, I was just wondering if some people tend to use one kind of strategy to master self-delusion, other people choose different strategies, and sometimes they collide; and so you end up with a confusion, a conflict, where one person claims that they are an idealist but the other person doesn't believe them but feels they are up against a psychological strategy to cover up personal difficulties.

S: I think if the other person is claiming to be an idealist, you should give them the benefit of any doubt; assuming, of course, that they actually embody idealism at least to some extent in their actual life. As I think I said a couple of weeks ago, you shouldn't discourage people's genuine idealism by questioning it and trying to make out that in fact it's pseudo-idealism. This can be very discouraging and very hurtful, if someone's idealism is really genuine, and doubts are cast on it in that sort of way which may be the strategy, as you have called it, of some people who are perhaps made uncomfortable by genuine idealism, as sometimes is the case.

Anyway, the last part of the question: 'Do you feel we could be effective if we were to use the language of our ideals as opposed to the language of growth and development, or again do you think we should be wary of doing this?' I think actually we need both languages. The language of growth and development is found in the Buddhist scriptures; the Buddha uses this language when he speaks of his response to Brahma Sahampati's request, when he sees the whole of humanity as like a bed of lotuses. But I think the language of growth and development, as used in some contemporary therapies and psychologies, is rather limited; because the growth only goes so far. So I think we also need to use the language of our ideals, the language of Enlightenment, the language of Buddhahood, the language of Bodhisattvas and the language of the Trikaya, the language of Nirvana. We need to use that language also, the language of our ideals; not just the language of growth and development in the more contemporary sense.

And finally: '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?' I think that really sums it up quite neatly. Our idealism is embryonic; we have to admit that. It needs nourishment, and where are we going to get the nourishment from? Well, yes, it is coming from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but we are not really tuned in to that, so it can only come from our spiritual friends in the widest sense. So we really need to nourish one another's genuine idealism, which of course implies discouraging, even criticizing, one another's pseudo-idealism if we do happen to encounter it. So I think we should be very careful not to sit on anyone's genuine idealism, not adopt a sort of cynical attitude towards it. Cynicism is very common in the modern world; it is considered smart. But it's really quite a disgusting vice, and I think we

should be on our guard against it. Someone said 'Take rhetoric and wring its neck,' but we should say 'Take cynicism and wring its neck.' There's nothing really smart about it, and it completely undermines the spiritual life. So I think if we do see some little embryonic idealism in someone, some fellow Order Member or Mitra, for heaven's sake don't stamp on it in the name of streetwiseness or whatever [110] it is; but just encourage it. If spiritual friends don't encourage one another in this way, who is going to give encouragement? I think if one encourages genuine idealism, there is not going to be much room left for the pseudo article. Any further point or supplementary to that? We've got three minutes left. Has the discussion contributed to some clarification? (Voices: Mm.) It can't completely clear things up, of course. Or are there unresolved difficulties lurking beneath the surface of consensus?

Danavira: Can we assume, Bhante, that implicit in our idealism is awareness, is compassion, is Wisdom?

S: Oh yes.

Danavira: I mean can we assume that ?

S: Perhaps we shouldn't assume it, but perhaps we need to spell it out more, or to manifest it more that idealism does involve Compassion; that Compassion is one of our ideals, or part of our ultimate Ideal. And inasmuch as Compassion is part of our ideal and our goal, it must be part of our means, that our means is not a means without that.

Sanghapala: I suppose I'm sitting here with unresolved thoughts: what comes to mind is that with other examples we certainly have got away with defining all interpretations of, say, 'neurotic' and of, say, 'reactive', there are quite FWBO understandings of those terms. I think we get away with that because we don't use them in everyday language, whereas 'idealism' or 'ideal' are more everyday terms.

S: Well, it's not just the FWBO; in the Buddhist movement in the West, especially the Tibetan branch of it, some terms have been used in quite un-standard senses. For instance, in Trungpa's literature, 'neurotic' is used in a quite un-standard way. We might have been a little affected by that. But I think, again, we shouldn't depart too much from mainstream usage. But I think that if a more specialized terminology is required we would need to take it from traditional Buddhist sources rather than take a word which has a definite dictionary meaning and change it too much in such a way as to create confusion among ourselves and among the general public when we use it. I see what you mean; we need to be careful about general expressions, just from the standpoint of literary decency. I don't like expressions such as 'I think I'll go and sit.' (Murmurs of agreement.) To me this is rather an uncouth expression.

Woman's voice: Jargon.

S: Jargon, yes. What are others of this sort? There are several others I was thinking of. I've even heard people saying, 'I think I'll go and have a Pooj'! (Laughter.) Such expressions are a bit inelegant. Oh yes, and another one is: 'I'm going to have a solitary.' Well, a solitary what? A solitary fag?! (Laughter.) It's a [111] solitary retreat if that's what we are talking about. It's just careless usage which doesn't conduce to clarity of thought or ease of communication. Quite inelegant. Maybe it's well, I can't say it's my middle-class background, because I don't have a middle-class background! It might be somebody else's middle-class background, but

not mine.

But I think we should have some respect for the language which we use, which is the instrument of communication. If we are not sensitive to the language which we use, and use it to the best of our ability, we are certainly restricting our communication; and not only restricting our communication but sowing seeds of misunderstanding, possibly. If you say, in a general sort of way, 'I think I'll go and sit,' they might think you're going to sit on the toilet seat rather than sit in meditation. So let's try to be more accurate in our language.

Anyway, let's perhaps leave that there, even though there are unanswered questions, but I'll try to get around to some of them at least next week.

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Session Six - 24 June 1990

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Sangharakshita: Today, for some reason or other, I didn't get any new questions at all, not a single one. But there are a few left over from previous weeks, and I think I'll deal just with a couple of those, and then perhaps embark on a few more general matters; perhaps ask a question or two myself. Let's start off with one of the left-over questions.

The differences between men and women following the spiritual path often seem to be reduced to the fact that, quote,'women are at a disadvantage spiritually on account of their biological and physiological make-up', end of quote, to quote from this month's Shabda. It seems to me

the question, by the way, is from Karunamaya

that expressing the issue in this way serves to perpetuate whatever difficulties a woman may have in following the spiritual life. It brings to my mind hearing of experiments with children, where the teachers of a certain group of children were given certain untrue assessments of these children, and over a period of time the children seemed to modify their academic achievement in line with these expectations. So does our expectation and expression that the spiritual life will be difficult for a woman add to any difficulties she might have? As a part of this question, I also wonder if such an approach could perhaps engender a sense of imagined superiority in men, and how helpful this might be to their development.

I think I'll approach the question as it were indirectly, or rather come from the more general to the more particular. I must say what interested me most in the question was this statement: 'the children seemed to modify their academic achievement in line with these expectations.' This led me to wonder to what extent not just children but people generally modify their achievement, or lack of achievement, in accordance with other people's expectations, and therefore what effect on people our expectations of them, or from them, do have. Clearly, this is a question which concerns all of us, because one could say, talking of expectations of Order Members, Mitras have expectations of Order Members; Friends have expectations of Order

Members; your own spiritual friends, perhaps, have expectations of you; you have expectations of them. So what part does this whole question of expectations play in our lives, especially our spiritual lives? Is sometimes too much expected of us? Is sometimes too little expected of us? How are we to know? or how are we to know in the case of other people whether we are in fact expecting too much of them or expecting too little of them? Any comment on this, this more general point, first?

[113]
Man's voice: Would you say it was better to expect too much than to expect too little?

S: I suppose it would depend on the person; too much in relation to, or with reference to, whom?

Devapriya: Maybe hope for a lot and expect nothing. (Delayed laughter.)

Cintamani: It's quite a complex issue, really, because on the one hand you could say that if within the Sangha, within the Order, there are people who have Gone for Refuge, you could quite legitimately expect that at the very least your fellow Order Members should in some way embody their Going for Refuge in their behaviour; but on the other hand, there are many, many people who have totally unreasonable expectations of other people, based on their own laziness or based on the desire vicariously to have somebody act out something for them that they are unable to do themselves; and it's quite a complex issue.

Vidyananda: I think those experiments weren't so much concerned with expectations as views of what the children were like. For instance, there were experiments where teachers who were told, say, a group of children were problem children and could expect difficulties, or such-and-such a group was low ability and such-and-such group was high ability, and in fact they were all pretty uniform; and then the teachers' expectations did have a real effect on their actual performance. It was more that sort of aspect, rather than governing certain expectations.

S: But this, if one can generalize from that, seems to make the point that if you expect from people less than they are able to do, they will give you less than they are able to do. (Murmurs of agreement.)

Vidyananda: And the converse: if you expected quite a bit from them you thought they were bright and in fact they were average they would actually perform better than if you were told they were average.

S: So perhaps it's better to have higher expectations of people, or to err on that side. Because even if they can't quite live up to those expectations, at least it will stretch them a bit, and they'll do better, perhaps, than they would otherwise have done. Though, of course, obviously the expectations, whether from children or others, shouldn't be completely unrealistic. In the case of Order Members, you shouldn't expect them to become Stream Entrants within two years of ordination. (That isn't impossible, of course.) Or perhaps you should expect it!

Marichi: But it's to do with how the expectations are expressed, whether it's encouraging or critical.

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S: Yes, indeed. No doubt it ties up quite closely with encouragement; communicating to someone that you're convinced that they can do it, rather than communicating to them that you think they ought to do it, if you see the point of the distinction. I think we find this a lot in sports, don't we? where the trainer encourages the sportsman or sportswoman to do just a little bit more. Though that can sometimes have unfortunate results. There was a quite famous case, I think a year or two years ago, of a girl swimmer who was trying to break the Channel swimming record, who was encouraged by her trainer, who believed she could do better to carry on, and the girl died. I think the trainer was prosecuted for manslaughter; I don't remember ... So sometimes you can have quite unreasonable expectations of people. But no doubt to expect a bit more of them than perhaps they expect from themselves is not a bad thing. A lot of people do respond to that very positively.

Do people have any personal feelings about whether too much is expected of them, or too little, by their friends?

Kulamitra: I'm interested in this slight difference between perhaps encouragement and expectation, because I think sometimes if you just expect something of somebody without actually letting them know that you think they could do this thing, it can be quite confusing, quite painful. You feel an expectation but you don't know how to get from A to B. So I think if it's in a context where there is continual contact and encouragement, it's rather different from a sort of cold and distant expectation in the effect it has. I was also thinking that one of the complicating factors is people do rebel; which perhaps small children wouldn't in that situation. So if you have very much experience of what you consider unrealistic expectations and no encouragement, I think people tend to rebel and go through a phase of refusing

S: Sometimes they just go stupid. I remember cases of this sort from my experience in Kalimpong, with quite a number of my Nepalese students who were going to night school and college. In quite a few cases they came from quite poor families, and their parents weren't educated, as they say in India; and if a boy didn't pass his examination, the father was always convinced it was due to sheer laziness and lack of application. So if the boy didn't pass the examination the father would say, 'Right! You don't go out this year. You're not to go out of the house, you're not to go to the bazaar, you're just to study, and you're to study till 12 o'clock every night.' No sympathy; just this sort of command, you see. And if the boy by half-past 11 just got up and went outside, the father said: 'Where are you going? Why aren't you studying? You'll not pass at this rate, you know! We don't want you failing again!' So there was this expectation that the boy should pass, but a total lack of sympathy and no real encouragement at all. And very often the boys used to go very sullen, and sometimes some of them would come and tell me: 'I want to murder my father!' It happens even in the East.

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Cintamani: Bhante, isn't the difference in tone between expectation for the person's benefit and expectation for your benefit?

S: Yes. Because, in the case going back to that example of these fathers, they were having to support their sons, so if he failed his examination it meant another year of fees, another year of support etc. But unfortunately many of the fathers went about it in a very clumsy way.

Well, they didn't know how to encourage their son. They couldn't give him any actual help in his studies. So, yes, it's not enough just to expect, we need to encourage; and also, whenever we can ourselves, give personal help to the person, whether child or adult, in achieving that particular goal.

Paramajyoti: One approach is threatening the person, rather than encouraging.

S: Yes. Anyway, come back then to the more specific: 'The differences between men and women following the spiritual path often seem to be reduced to the fact that 'women are at a disadvantage spiritually on account of their biological and physiological make-up', to quote this month's Shabda.' I tried to find that in this month's Shabda, but couldn't find it.

Karunamaya: Ratnaguna's reporting-in.

S: It was this month's?

Karunamaya: Yes.

S: Right. 'It seems to me that expressing the issue in this way serves to perpetuate whatever difficulties a woman may have in following the spiritual life.' Do people agree with that?

Varasri: It will only perpetuate the difficulties if people let it be so.

S: 'It seems to me that expressing the issue in this way serves to perpetuate whatever difficulties a woman may have in following the spiritual life.'

Vajramala: Bhante, did you mean did we agree with the first bit or the second bit? I mean did we agree that women were at a disadvantage or

S: No, that if they were at a disadvantage supposing they were whether 'expressing the issue in this way would serve to perpetuate whatever difficulty a woman may have in following the spiritual life.'

Atula: In my experience it has. I think a lot of the ... in the Movement does have that effect on women.

S: Would you say the same thing applied to men?

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Atula: I think if you're expressing the difficulties and putting the emphasis on difficulties and picking up the differences etc. all the time, I think it does tend to have a detrimental effect.

S: So, in a way, this goes back to what we were talking about last week, about idealism and pseudo-idealism. Do you see the connection? It's as though we need to follow a middle way between being realistic about actual difficulties and upholding the ideal and encouraging people to work towards the ideal at the same time.

Vajramala: I did meet some people yesterday who actually felt quite - they wondered if it was possible for women to evolve at all. This was on a day retreat in Birmingham these were

women from Nottingham. They had never met a woman Order Member at all, and they picked up that sort of view, and they were asking what I thought about it. And it obviously had had quite a bad effect on them.

S: Of not seeing a woman Order Member?

Vajramala: Well, because they hadn't had any contact with women Order Members, and they had heard that it was difficult for women, and possibly, one said that women couldn't become enlightened and all the rest of it. One reason they said they'd come was to see a woman Order Member, just to prove to themselves that women could actually

S: So what's the moral of that?

Vajramala: We need a few more women Order Members in outlying areas!

S: Well, not just need them in outlying areas. The existing ones ought to visit outlying areas. Yes.

Vajramala: I hadn't heard that for quite a long time, so I was quite surprised to hear it again.

Marichi: The quotation does suggest that Ratnaguna is under the impression that women are disadvantaged or feel disadvantaged.

S: Well, the quote says: 'Women are at a disadvantage spiritually on account of their biological and physiological make-up', to quote from this month's Shabda.' And then Karunamaya's comment is: 'It seems to me that expressing the issue in this way serves to perpetuate whatever difficulties a woman may have in following the spiritual life.

Marichi: It does suggest that women are at a disadvantage, full-stop, and then he puts this reason for it.

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Kulamitra: I'm not sure what the context was, I can't now remember

S: That's what I wanted to find out.

Kulamitra: It is a quote from Shabda. I think there's more than one reason for communicating. Sometimes it's just an opinion that you have, which especially in the context of Shabda, assuming it's a not unskilful particular, you should be free to express. But that doesn't mean, even if you have that opinion, even if you really believe that, that you should sort of rub it in with the person; you know, every time you meet a woman, start talking about that. That would be really insensitive.

S: Right, yes.

Kulamitra: Even if you did have that opinion, you could still, when you were with a woman, encourage them because it's not a fixed thing. You may believe there's a disadvantage, but you don't mean they can't develop spiritually; presumably in Ratnaguna's case that's what he's saying.

S: Presumably Ratnaguna does believe that women can develop spiritually.

Karunamaya: Shall I just say what I remember of this. It was that he was at an Inter-Faith Conference, and he was reporting back about that, and the issue of women in the spiritual life came up and he said something to the effect that he would not hesitate at all and just state the case quite firmly how it was in Buddhism. That's where that quote came from.

S: So he was representing the Buddhist view to a group of non-Buddhists?

Cintamani: But it's a very strange way of putting it, because it suggests a yardstick - that there's a norm and then there are this other group of people who somehow don't ... I mean I would have thought everybody had got their own difficulties, you've got the difficulties you've got, that's what you work with, full-stop, whoever you are, and it may be that for statistical convenience you group one group of people together and say they have a similar difficulty, and another group of people say that they have a similar difficulty. But from inside yourself it's not like that, you've just got one ...

S: So the general point seems to be that one can recognize difficulties that a particular individual or group of individuals may have, but though one recognizes the difficulties the difficulties aren't as it were to be harped upon or, as Kulamitra says, not rubbed in. And the overriding sentiment or motive should be one of encouragement and inspiration.

Marichi: But it still seems to be a fixed view that women have difficulty because they have a body and can have babies, want to have them and so on. That seems to be [118] rather a fixed view, that that's a disadvantage... (coughs drown) From my position it doesn't fell like a disadvantage.

S: But do you think that women have any disadvantages, as women, that men don't have, or vice versa?

Marichi: They seem to have a cultural disadvantage of lack of confidence.

S: You think it is cultural?

Marichi: Yes.

Varasri: For me, it came more in a question of practical difficulties I have; perhaps not to do with my body or anything like that, but the practical difficulty I have with life in general. My life was more difficult, perhaps, because I was a woman with a child. But on a practical basis I couldn't see anything else.

Vidyananda: I think the question does frame one thing that is different from men to women, and that is that it's very common for women to view their problems as if it's something that's imposed on them, something you hear all the time: that society sort of makes you in a certain shape. There's this idea of being passive and being shaped by society, being shaped by other people's attitudes. And if you view women as being like that, as being shaped, you're defining women as being more impressionable. Do you think that's being ?

Marichi: That's not what I'm saying when I say that women are culturally less self-confident

overall than men

Vidyananda: Well, I mean women are half the population, so why is it that women are conditioned in a certain way rather than being conditioning? Why do women see themselves as being conditioned rather

Vajramala: Not all women do.

Marichi: I think everybody is conditioned to some extent.

Vidyananda: Yes, but why do you think that women are conditioned in a way that sort of puts them at a disadvantage? They are over half the population: why do you see yourself like that?

Marichi: I think it's rather a long discussion!

Vidyananda: Yeah, maybe it is but I think that is a tendency of women to regard themselves as being made by society and by other people ...

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Marichi: I don't regard myself as more 'made' than men are. I just think there are received impressions all the time for men and women.

Vidyananda: Yeah, I mean we all sort of create impressions, but the view seems to be presented of women as being more impressionable, and that seems to be presented by women.

Parami: I think that's a very simplistic and unsubtle response to a quite complex issue I think, personally. It seems to me that all people have their subjectivity to some extent reflected back to them by externals. I think that's the case, although I think also obviously as a Buddhist I believe that we bring into that subjectivity elements for which we are responsible. But it seems to me that, even given that, that subjectivity is still reflected back in all sorts of ways all the time; and it does seem that culturally certain norms are reflected back to men and certain norms are reflected back to women, Within a quite wide spectrum obviously there's differences.

Vidyananda: Where do they come from, these things that are reflected back? What I'm saying is, why are you saying that women are shaped in a certain way and not men?

Parami: I just think people I mean I know very few people who would say that women are shaped and men aren't. I think that's very unsubtle.

Vidyananda: Well, something you hear from women an awful lot [is] that they are created...

[Two people speaking together]

Jayamati: ...Valuable as this is, I think it might be more profitable to use the time to get Bhante's comments on ...

S: This evening I'm just, er (laughter)...(inaudible). I'm going to ask some questions I think in a minute. I think the general point that emerges here is quite clear. Leave aside whether

women are actually disadvantaged in a particular way or not, but if anyone is disadvantaged in any way, clearly one just recognizes whatever disadvantage it happens to be, or whatever difficulty, but at the same time one doesn't harp on that, and one reminds them, and oneself, as best one can about the Ideal which transcends all those difficulties and disadvantages in the long run. But one does for the time being at least recognize those disadvantages as disadvantages, whatever they happen to be, if in fact they do exist.

Paramajyoti: The question is whether any sort of statement like that is made with sympathy rather than You know, it's a question of the attitude behind the

S: Yes, right.

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Paramajyoti: Because I was thinking there that in Milarepa's Songs he keeps saying that the spiritual life is difficult to lead - even when you've got the right conditions it's still very hard to follow the spiritual life. So I don't think that perpetuates the difficulty to lead the spiritual life, it just makes it clear what it is.

Ratnaketu: I think it's unclarity, what's actually being said, that matters. Because I don't think it really is a complex question, I think it's very simple because it's really crude. You've got all human beings, and you just take a big knife and you divide them, largely arbitrarily: all men on one side, all women on the other. Because we all know that everybody is degrees of one or the other, so you could say then, well, OK, we'll look at the worst examples of men and the worst examples of women, and they've all obviously got these very extreme problems which they have to deal with in order to gain Enlightenment, and so even if you are going to argue about of the extreme men and the extreme women is most disadvantaged, the thing is that what we're talking about really is communicating with people who are trying to get them to move up the progression so that they are less extreme; in which case any discussion based on sex becomes more and more irrelevant. But you could say that men who would be extreme negative men are more likely to go to hell (laughter) and therefore there are more Buddha-seeds ( ) better off. (Laughter.)

Woman's voice: (inaudible comment. Loud laughter.)

S: I don't think more women have to aim to go to hell!

Cintamani: The quote is spiritually disadvantaged here. It seems to me that this gets mixed up with current notions of just being advantaged or disadvantaged in society at large as it is. You could argue that because society favours the sort of tough, go-getting businessman etc. therefore it places him at an advantage; but spiritually he, in that position, is equally if not more disadvantaged than, I would say, quite a lot of women. So in terms of spiritual disadvantage I don't think society hands out a better world or image to men than to women, ... both in the same boat.

S: Anyway, I'm afraid we've got another question which involves sex to some extent. I'm afraid, despite what Ratnaketu has said, the topic of sex seems to come up again and again, for some reason or other. But anyway, I'll deal with this briefly, then I'm going to come on to some general points that I want to make myself.

This question is from Paramajyoti:

I am led to believe that on one occasion you said something to the effect that (laughter) if a man was in a sexual relationship with a woman, you seriously doubted if it were possible for him to develop true friendship with other men. Have you actually said something to this effect?

I'm glad someone asks me if I've actually said something!

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If so, why do you have such doubts about this possibility?

Well, I think again it's quite simple; because on the one hand there are sexual relationships between man and woman, or even between people of the same sex, and on the other hand there are friendships; and I think these are two quite different things, and I think that very, very rarely do they mix or combine. And our natural tendency, or the natural tendency of 99.9% of the population, is to become involved in sexual relationships and their emotional life, at least, to be largely organized around the sexual relationship. Friendship, on the other hand, is something that we achieve with some difficulty. Usually, people's sentiments of friendship are weak, and if you are involved in a sexual relationship the natural tendency, I think, is for that relationship to occupy more and more the centre of your mandala. And from the Buddhist point of view, from a spiritual point of view, what we are trying to do is to put friendship more in the centre of the mandala. So the question whether someone in a sexual relationship is able to develop a friendship or not depends very much on whether the sexual relationship is at the centre of the mandala. You can have a sexual relationship as it were not at the centre of the mandala, more near the periphery, yes, and develop very strong and true friendships; but I think if your sexual relationship is at the centre of the mandala, your friendships will inevitably suffer, because in the first place you will have less time for your friendships, and also your emotional energies will be largely engaged elsewhere. So I think in a way it is quite simple and straightforward.

I don't remember the original context or whether I actually said something like this, but it is as I said not so much a question of just sexual relationship but the importance one attaches to it and whether it does occupy a central place in your life. I wouldn't like to say that you can't develop true friendships without giving up sex; no, I don't think that is so, that would be going to extremes. I think it is very, very difficult to develop true friendships, true spiritual friendships, if your sexual relationship is very very important to you and if your emotional life is also like that.

Marichi: Would you consider having one of those friendships more dominant than the others, say, or would you have several friendships of equal weight that you put at the centre of your life?

S: Aristotle raises this question in his Ethics. In his view, you can't have more than four or five really close friends. I think most people would agree with that. I think even two or three really good friends with whom you spent a lot of time would occupy quite a big place in your life, and it would be very difficult, I think, to have more than that effectively, much as one would like. So I think, yes, you can't have ten or fifteen or twenty really close friends; it just isn't possible. You shouldn't try. Otherwise you'd just be dashing from one to another all the

time. But just maybe two, three, four. If you have two or three or four really good friends you're very lucky, and if your spiritual and emotional life can revolve around them you are very, very lucky.

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Any further point arising out of that before I pass on to other things?

Danavira: I think it's fairly easy for us to think if we want to develop friendships obviously we don't have a heavy sexual relationship in the middle of our life. I can see the sense of that. But I think we also have to remember that, just by saying no to having a strong sexual relationship doesn't mean that therefore you will develop friendship. I suppose we also have to remember that to develop friendship you've got to engage emotionally somewhere on an equal level with other people.

S: Oh yes.

Danavira: And it makes me wonder whether I think you quoted something in one of your lectures years ago saying people are not nearly emotional enough I don't know who it was said it, but you said it somewhere...

S: I might have said it.

Danavira: I wonder if also that's got something to do with it: that there is in our cultural conditions a general lack of emotionality that, like electricity or water our emotions find the easiest path an intensive experience which involves sexuality, much more so, say, than

S: Yes, right. I think very often people want a sort of quick fix and they get it through sex, whereas the development of friendship is much more like a slow, patient slog, with nothing very dramatic or exciting or stimulating happening, in a way; or certainly nothing that for stimulation or excitement can be compared with even a small amount of sex.

Vimalamitra: Does that mean that two people who have sex, after they'd got through the first quick flash of excitement and enjoyment, over the years, couldn't develop through the boring process of being together and being next to each other and such things, develop a friendship?

S: I think elements of friendship can develop, but after many years. I would say maybe after 20, 30 years; as you see, in the case of some people who have been married for 20, 30, 40 years. But I think it's a very slow process, as all friendship is. And also it does mean disentangling from the sexual element not just the honeymoon wearing off but giving up feelings of possessiveness and exclusiveness, which can be very, very strong in the monogamous relationship, even though elements of friendship may eventually develop. Because friendship is incompatible with possessiveness and exclusiveness, and they are almost invariable accompaniments of the sexual relationship, especially the monogamous one. So yes, I don't deny that after many, many years, some elements of friendship may be there, but I think not if the sexual relationship, even in the post-honeymoon phase, does remain, as sexual relationships usually are, quite exclusive and possessive.

[123]
Harshaprabha: So do you think polygamous relationships would be better in that way?

(laughter)

S: Well, if they did exclude possessiveness and exclusiveness, I suppose to that extent they would be better. I must, of course, add: not only polygamous but polyandrous. Anyway, I'd rather not ... [Sound deteriorating]

Danavira: One last thing: I was wondering about deep friendship. If we take deep friendship as an ideal, surely there is a question of what constitutes a deep friendship for us, for Order Members which maybe different say from a group of artists or whatever people, for example, who come together through a personality attraction: is that something that we would think would be a deep friendship, people who ?

S: I think very often you do come together through a personality attraction in the case of friendship. I think we needn't be scared of that: if you just like someone, for some inexplicable reason, by all means follow it up. But sometimes you become friends with people for whom you've no immediate attraction just because you're thrown together through force of circumstances. I can remember in the Army seeing the most unlikely pairs of friends; it was quite extraordinary, sometimes even quite laughable. The most unlikely sort of people would become quite good friends, simply because they occupied the same barrack room or they were on duty together or something of that sort. So it can work both ways. But I don't think, as I said, we should be afraid of following a natural liking. It can provide a very good basis for quite a deep and spiritual friendship. You don't have to deliberately choose as a friend the person in the community whom you find most difficult to get on with. It would be very noble if you did, even saintly. But by all means follow the line of least resistance here, because developing friendship is difficult enough anyway.

Marichi: Surely some of those friendships can be just as exclusive as some sexual relationships?

S: Yes, sometimes friendships can be. But I would say that no friendship is as exclusive as, as it were, an established sexual relationship, where you do get an extreme possessiveness and exclusivity which is hardly ever encountered in the case of simply one of friendship; hardly ever encountered. Unless the friendship is sort of crypto-erotic, as sometimes happens.

Paramabodhi: I think it's quite interesting, because you do see those same feelings coming in in friendships, and one can recognize them and one has to sort of go through those in the context of a friendship as well, because they do arise as soon as there's any kind of emotional context. Those things tend to come into it as well.

[124]
S: I think that the real intensity's far far less. If you saw your best friend talking with another chap, you wouldn't mind particularly. But if you saw your girlfriend talking intimately with some other man you might experience jealousy and hatred. So there is quite a difference, I suspect.

Anyway, we're going to pass on from that subject, just to a few general points. That is about the questions themselves. I did a bit of a count this afternoon, and I find that altogether, over the last six weeks, I have received about three dozen questions, and I received them from altogether 12 people: 11 Dharmacaris and one Dharmacarini. So in a way that's a bit

disappointing, that there weren't more questions, more questions from more people. Most of the people who did ask questions asked several; some people seem to be more willing or more ready to ask questions, or perhaps just to have more questions to ask. So this set me wondering why there had been fewer questions than I must admit I had expected... rightly or wrongly. I had suggested originally that the questions should be at least predominantly dharmic, and they have been predominantly dharmic but in some cases tending to be towards other than quite dharmic things. But I started thinking about this, and I started asking myself: how do people develop dharmic questions, or how do dharmic questions arise? How do dharmic questions occur to you? And then I thought: dharmic questions occur when you are engaged in cintamaya prajna. You must all be familiar with these three levels: there is the suttamaya prajna, where you just take in, you read or you hear, you listen; but then there is cintamaya prajna, where you turn over in your mind, you reflect, you try to understand, try to go deeper; you try to establish connections with other things you've heard, other things you've read, other things you've understood and so on; and it's then, of course, that the questions start arising, sometimes thick and fast. And it occurred to me that perhaps the reason why we haven't had as many questions as I had expected was that there isn't perhaps quite enough cintamaya prajna going on. So I wondered to what extent this was so, and whether people did actually reflect on the Dharma that they had learned or the material that they were reading or had read. Has anybody got any comments on this?

Vimalamitra: Maybe it's because people aren't reading any Dharma or have given up studying Dharma to even get to the point of the second.

S: Well, I wondered about this, and I thought I might have just a quick whip round and ask people which was the last Dharma book they read, and when they read it. (Embarrassed laughter.) So could we go round very quickly, just to give me an idea? The last Dharma book you read, and when did you read it?

Varasri: Not from cover to cover the White Lotus Sutra. This is because I am teaching it! And that was two months, three months ago.

S: Good.

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Ratnaghosa: The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, recently, but again because I am leading study.

S: Ah. Yes, perhaps people should mention that, if that is the case; if they read something because they are teaching it.

Vajramala: Part of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa that we've been doing in the Friday class.
Karunamaya: I'm reading at the moment The Historical Buddha, a biography of the Buddha by I can't remember what his name is. I was reading it this morning.(Laughter)

S: A German scholar. Yes, I can't remember his name.

Woman's voice: Yeshe Tsogyal's Mother of Knowledge, two or three weeks ago.

Parami: I've hardly read anything dharmic for months! I've been cramming for my finals and I haven't read much other than the stuff for that except I read Mitratas as they come out. But I

suppose the last thing I read is the last Mitrata, which wasn't that wonderful.

S: Well, that contains quite good material!

Parami: Yes. I haven't done any systematic dharmic reading, even for maybe ... years or so but I look forward to doing them again.

Devamitra: I've just finished reading the Gandavyuha Sutra.

S: Ah, in three volumes?

Devamitra: No, just the third volume.

Man's voice: The last volume of the Avatamsaka. And also the Life of Atisa, which I finished this morning.

Ratnaketu: I've just been reading Longchenpa's Jewelled Ship which we've been studying.

Mallika: I'm reading the Survey each morning.

Side 2

Woman's voice: I've just finished taking study of Mind Reactive and Creative, so I've read that, and I'm reading at the moment the Survey just two pages a day, and then reflecting on it.

[126]
S: Good.

Same woman: Otherwise, if I read too much it just goes in and out.

Maitreyi: I've just started reading Mother of Knowledge.

Ratnamegha: I'm leading a study group doing the first year course on the Evolutions, so I'm ... and reading bits of devotional things mainly about Padmasambhava.

Atula: I'm not doing it at the moment but I've been doing study of the Mahavastu...

Cintamani: I tend to dip. Three days ago I read Padmasambhava's 'Advice to Three Fortunate Women' and I've been reading the Tantric Mitrata series as they come out. That's in the early part of this year.

Woman's voice: I've been reading the Abhidharma lecture series because of Varasri's study group, and I've just read those three...

Danavira: I've got one of the best Buddhist libraries in the place but I'm afraid I never read Buddhist books. So I can't remember I'm afraid I'm one of those Order Members who never finished the Survey, Bhante.

S: I somehow get the impression it's considered a difficult book.

Same man: I find it very difficult reading Buddhist Books.

S: Maybe we should talk about that some time.

Aryaguna: The Ten Pillars, because I'm supporting Ratnaghosa's study group...

Jayamati: Authority and the Individual in the New Society, this afternoon, after a study group on a weekend retreat.

Paramabodhi: I think the last thing I read was Nanamoli's Life of the Buddha. That was for teaching purposes. And the last thing I actually studied for my own personal interest was on a retreat two years ago, I studied the Sutta Nipata, but it's two years since I ... just for teaching.

Varabhadri: Currently, the Tantric Path series because I'm leading study on it. In connection with that, the Psychocosmic Significance of the Stupa. And I started on Rebirth and the Western Buddhist, on which I wanted to ask you a question but there wasn't time.

[127]
Devapriya: Mainly Sangharakshita's work. Well, I'm still reading or I'm reading the Survey again; just started doing The Eternal Legacy again. Peace Is a Fire I'm dipping into. Thich Nhat Hanh's book recently. Autobiography of Empty Cloud I've been dipping into. But I do have a lot of time on my hands.

S: I shall have to write a few more things!

Devapriya: The Ode to Friendship I recently re-read.

S: The seminar on it has been transcribed. In fact, it's been edited, provisionally at least, though not published yet. It's been edited by Subhadra.

Jinapriya: I've been dipping into the Tantric Path series of Mitrata. I've been reading, a bit at a time, the Taste of Freedom lecture. I've finished An Introduction to Buddhism. I'm about to start the chapters on the Noble Eightfold Path in the Survey. And I can't remember the title of the other one oh, Thich Nhat Hanh I'm dipping into... And those books on computing.

Dharmapala: I've been looking into the Ten Pillars, because I'm on study with that. I've been listening to the Positive Mental Events tapes from the ... In terms of reflection, I've had more reflection on recent talks that have been transcribed than I have ... The Ten Pillars is something I'm working on.

Paramajyoti: I haven't read a Buddhist book right through for a long, long time. I think the last one I read would be the Life of Milarepa, two different versions. I read the Ten Pillars, we studied it in Tuscany and I've dipped into things. These days I try to read the whole of Shabda and don't seem to get much further than that.

S: It's quite a lot of reading.

Yashomitra: I'm reading (you missed me out!) (laughter) I'm reading something called Tantric Practice in Nyingma. But I'm sort of reading things at the moment, but I've tended to be a bit

like Danavira, and read very, very little on Buddhist things at all.

Khemavira: I tend to read Sangharakshita. I'm embarrassed to say I can't remember the name of the last one. Prior to that I read The Way to Wisdom. I've got My Relationship to the Order on my table.

Khemananda: Luckily I was on solitary. I read the Survey, 40 pages a day, from cover to cover. I think there were three or four pages which were quite difficult but I'm glad I read it, and the Ten Pillars as well. At the moment I'm reading a book on the Battle of Britain ... Very different, I'm afraid, at the moment.

Kuladeva: I've just finished reading three publications: the Life of Dr..., [128] Liberation through seeing, and the volume A Taste of Freedom. I've just picked up again kindly bent tweezers (Kindly bent to ease us?)

Siddhiratna: The last I read was round about the turn of the year, ... Ten Pillars, and occasionally I dip into The Awakening of Faith. But not very much.

Dhammarati: I've just read New Currents... Ten Pillars... There's a few bits... especially ... The last serious reading that I did was the Digha Nikaya at the start of the year and also ...and before that, last autumn, commentaries on The Heart Sutra and before that the Platform Sutra and Diamond Sutra and some of the commentary ...seminar tapes.

Moksabandhu: Last week I was reading My Relation to the Order, but I haven't read any Dharma for ages.

Punyamegha: At the moment any Mitratas that have anything to do with meditation ... Also the Tantric series for a study group. And The Last whole book, which was last session was the Vimalakirti Nirdesa. And at the book launch recently, I read that one as soon as I got home... So a lot of dipping.

Kulamitra: The Tantric series Mitrata more or less as they are coming out. Probably whatever series... Other than that, I think it's probably already two or three months ago I got quite involved reading Central Asian Buddhism by ... But even though I was really into it, I never got even halfway through, and I do consider my study to be very inadequate in the sense that occasionally I have little bursts where I do get really interested, but I don't really follow through, so even if I finish a book I don't really feel I've finished the subject and reflect on it. I certainly don't consider what I'm doing at the moment anything like my capacity.

Woman's voice: The Tantric series Mitrata, and I've been dipping in and out of the Survey again. I read the Survey some time ago. And I've been listening and re-listening to the Diamond Sutra. And a rather nice little book called The Fine Art of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation, which I've really enjoying at the moment, from the Wisdom series.

Vidyananda: I've read New Currents too. Since then I've read The Faith to Doubt by Stephen Batchelor. I didn't think too much to it.

S: What was the title?

Vidyananda: The Faith to Doubt. I've just finished reading the first few chapters of The Realm of the Inconceivable ... That's got some translations of Chinese texts, which I found a bit too tedious, but the introduction is very good. I've just started a book on Robert Bligh's biography and just this and that: Lama Govinda; and re-reading my Mitra notes.

[129]
Sasanajyoti: I'm slowly working my way through the Tantric series; A Taste of Freedom last month; we're studying Skilful Means by Tarthang Tulku in our Going for Refuge group. I think we are reflecting on that particularly, a chapter at a time.

Ratnadharani: I've not read anything properly since last summer, when I was on a solitary retreat with a whole rucksack full of books, and ... I find it very difficult to have much time to read in London. I find it quite an effort to get through Shabda each month; I don't know how people do it. I try to get through from cover to cover, and I don't quite manage it each month. It seems to take up every available moment.

Sangharatna: I haven't read a single book of any kind in the last five years, but recently somebody gave me a book of your poems, which I've read a few of in the last fortnight.

S: Six people now like my poems! (Laughter.)

Parami: He didn't say he liked them, Bhante! (Loud laughter.)

S: ...upset another expectation!

Harshaprabha: Shabda and the first essay in New Currents. But I realize that generally I don't read enough, although the intention is there; I've got a load of books I want to read but time seems to take its toll.

S: So it seems a reasonable amount of reading is going on. Oh, you haven't [replied].

Vimalamitra: I haven't it's such a long time since I've read a book from cover to cover, I can't remember. I'm sure the last one I did read cover to cover was a secular book. But I'm doing a little bit of the Ten Pillars ... was saying, and I dip into the Mitratas. But I have got my meditation leader's notes from Vajraloka, which I'm hoping to go through in the next few weeks.

S: A fair amount of reading seems to be study-related. But reflection? Would you say there was much reflection, in the sense of cintamaya prajna?

Woman's voice: A bit.

S: A bit. Presumably, if there had been more reflection, there would have been more questions.

[130]
Vajramala: Personally I think it comes from... At the moment I'm so much thinking about the Cherry Orchard, that's why I've lost six weeks or so of my thinking time. If I'm giving a talk on something then I'll be turning that over in my mind. It's probably the same for everyone, I

think.

S: But would you say perhaps dharmic questions arise within the context of thinking about the Cherry Orchard? I don't mean in the sense of abstract metaphysical questions, but more as it were existential questions.

Marichi: They arise in existential crises, I think. When my life's ticking over it's all right but then I suddenly think it's not going right and dharmic questions arise in the course of the

Parami: I find a problem in there's a leap that I just need to make to get to the point where I have a question that's worth asking. Because I think I find I can usually answer my questions, which I think is a reflection of a lack of depth rather than anything else. Or I can find somebody, I can talk something over with Dhammadinna or somebody, and feel that I've satisfactorily answered my question or Dhammarati or somebody. But I find I need time and space to take the next leap to come to a question that's worth asking you, if you see what I mean. I think that's the problem; it's like my thought processes I think I do reflect quite a bit, but I seem to get to the point where I need to make some kind of quantum leap beyond it, and

S: Some of the questions that have come up and which I've dealt with I think could have been thrashed out within, say, a Chapter.

Varasri: I've found exactly the same as Parami; I start thinking, 'Oh, if I get stuck I'm lost.' Someone can find the answer usually. You have said many things well, yes; one can find one's way from that area. So I need to take the next leap, whether the questions are more difficult.

Atula: I was going to say, there are questions on my mind but I can't necessarily formulate them, but they are much more to do with the Movement and where it is now and things that have been happening recently.(too quiet to hear)....

S: Anyway, we've not done too badly, have we, on the whole? Anyway, would you like to know what I've been reading recently? I've been reading, of course, quite a lot of non-dharmic things, but I've been reading a few dharmic things. I think the most recent, believe it or not, was Feminine Ground anyone seen that? I got it from the Bookshop here. Why I got it was I saw there was an essay in it on the Dakini, which I thought might be interesting; actually, it was quite interesting, though it didn't contain any new information, but some interesting and relevant citations from mainly Tibetan texts, so I read that recently. Also I am in the middle of I've put it down for the time being Progressive Stages of the Meditation on Emptiness, [131] which Subhuti had strongly recommended, you may remember. It is translated by someone who used to come along to talks and classes of mine years and years ago, even before the FWBO started, someone I used to know in Oxford.

And then, at the same time that I got Feminine Ground, I got Buddha Wisdom, which is an anthology of extracts from the writings of Longchenpa; I've been dipping into that. But apart from that, my more as it were spiritual reading has been Platonic and Neoplatonic; I'll been pursuing that when I go to Spain. Anyway, I trust people will carry on with their studies, and maybe reflection too.

There's one thing I was going to mention. I was going to mention it to Dhammarati when we

talked the other day, but somehow it slipped my memory; but afterwards I thought why mention it just to Dhammarati because it really concerns everybody. He's only the Chairman, if you see what I mean! It was this: it seems to me that well, to go back a little bit, when we first looked at the Old Fire Station and thought of acquiring it as our new Centre, lots of people said, 'Who's going to go to Bethnal Green? It's so far out.' But obviously that's been disproved years and years ago; actually Bethnal Green is very central, if you look at London as a whole, and I do believe people come from all over the place in many cases. Also I think, over the last 10 years, we have seen changes taking place in Bethnal Green itself. And it seems to me that we are very favourably situated in many ways; and it looks as though more and more people are going to move into this sort of area, which one would say even includes the Docklands area. So I think we are very, very favourably placed; and I think we should be more aware of that, and perhaps try to have more of an outreach to people in this particular part of London, and perhaps advertise more widely. For instance, I saw in the tube an advertisement for new apartments in Bethnal Green I don't know exactly where, but it's in Bethnal Green, and it said Bethnal Green is going to become the, what was it? the equivalent of East Side New York. So we are in a way very strategically situated, and I think Order Members living and working in the area should be very aware of that. There are all sorts of opportunities, I think, that we're going to have. That means, of course, we've got to be able really to put across the Dharma effectively, which means we've got to know the Dharma. I don't think it's enough I think everybody knows this just to offer meditation classes in a remedial sort of way, just to help people survive in the city, but eventually to really offer the Dharma and communicate the Dharma, try to put the Dharma across in whatever way we can; in depth, if that is at all possible. And if we can succeed in attracting more people we may well find that some very intelligent people are coming along, and we need to be well equipped to be able to meet that challenge and put the Dharma across to those sort of people. Possibly we are getting them already; I suspect a few of them are coming along already.

But what I am getting at is that we really need to know our Dharma quite well; not necessarily have a scholarly knowledge of it, but really be well acquainted with the essentials, have them at our fingertips and live them to as great an extent as we can, and be able really to communicate them in a convincing and effective way. So I'd [132] like everybody to reflect on this and just be aware of what the opportunities and possibilities are. As I said, I think we happen now to be very strategically situated. I'm not saying, of course, that the LBC could cater for whatever interest in the Dharma there might be in London as a whole; we probably need three or four LBCs scattered around other parts of London. But at least in this area we can do quite a lot, and have a very thriving and flourishing Centre, even more thriving and flourishing than it is at the moment though obviously it's not doing too badly at the moment. So I'd like everybody just to reflect on that and try to deepen your Dharma knowledge and obviously practise the Dharma as well, so that the Mandala does attract and draw into itself more and more worthwhile people who can benefit greatly from what we have to offer. So I think that's all I wanted to say ... so we'll conclude there for this evening, and for this particular series.

Cintamani: Bhante: I won't say much. This is from everybody here, in gratitude. This card...

S: Oh, thank you very much.

Cintamani: And this is a commemorative mala in lapis lazuli.

S: Oh gosh.

Same man: There is one bead for every Order Member in the Region, and a big one holding it all together. It speaks for itself, I think. (Applause.)

S: That's very nice indeed. Thank you very much.

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