

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrās](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE OPENING OF DHANAKOSA RETREAT CENTRE

Held on 20th March 1993

Jinavamsa: Bhante has a list of questions and he's going to answer them in his own time.

Sangharakshita: And in his own way [Laughter] I don't think I'm going to be able to deal with all. Some of them are a wee bit, as it were, technical and in any case I don't think I can do justice to them all in the time that we have. But I'll do my best. I think it's important to go perhaps a little more thoroughly into a few questions than to deal superficially with a lot.

I'm not quite sure where to start, they're a rather mixed bunch. I suppose that means you're a rather mixed bunch. [Laughter] Let me start off with something rather general. Yes, here we are. We can hardly have something more general than this question.

"You will recall the story of the Indian monk who when asked by the Emperor of China, 'What is the fundamental principle of Buddhism?' " is said to have replied, 'Ceasing to do evil, learning to do good, purifying the heart. This is the fundamental principle of Buddhism'. What would your own answer be if a Western leader was to ask you the same question today and do you think that a modern leader would find your response so simple that even a child of three could understand it and that you would feel that even an old man of eighty could not put it into practice?"

Because this is what you may remember, Bodhidharma - I think it was Bodhidharma or the Indian monk whoever it was - replied to the Emperor when the Emperor said, 'Well, even a child of three can understand this', and the Indian monk said, 'Well, even an old man of eighty, like you can't fully put it into practice'. So "What would your own answer be if a Western leader were to ask you the same question today?" I think it's highly unlikely that a Western leader [Laughter] would ask me. But if he were to ask me I don't think I'd have much difficulty in giving him that kind of reply. It's not really so difficult. I think that if I was asked what the fundamental principle of Buddhism was, and bearing in mind of course conditions in the world today, I think I could give it to him in one word. I think I'd just say "Non-violence". I think so. There is a Buddhist text, the Mahavastu, in which the Buddha is represented as saying "ahimsa paramo dharma". "Ahimsa", 'non-violence' "is the highest dharma" which can mean principle, religious principle, truth, practice or whatever. I think the application of this is obvious.

If any Western leader or even Eastern leader for that matter was to take this really to heart, this principle of non-violence, it would make a very great deal of difference to the world. But the implications are really quite profound and far-reaching. I don't mean just the practical implications but even the theoretical implications because why do we practice violence? Why are we violent? Why are we violent towards others because it's usually towards others, towards other people, that we are violent. We can of course be violent to the environment but that's, one might say, almost in a manner of speaking. Usually we are violent to other people. We injure other people. We harm other people. We destroy other people. We undermine other people. This is what very often we do. This is what violence is. This is what 'himsa' is. We afflict others. We inflict things on them. But do we like this to be done to us? Do we like to be at the receiving end of the violence? Well, we don't do we? We don't like it at all. We object very strongly. So if ourselves objecting to violence when

directed towards ourselves are violent towards others, well, what does that mean, what does that imply? What sort of lack in us? Well, it means we can't empathise with others. It means we lack imagination.

So in order to practice non-violence you've got to have imagination. You've got to have enough imagination to put yourself in the place of the other person. So the world leader or Western leader, whoever he was, if he did accept that this was the fundamental principle of Buddhism, and if he was impressed by that or inspired by that, he'd have to develop his imagination. He'd have to encourage his people, his country to develop their imaginations and place themselves in the position of others because you can't really practice non-violence without that, you can't practice it, as it were, cold. You have to practice it as the outcome, as the expression of your feeling of empathy with other people. You feel for them, you feel with them so therefore you cannot do to them what you would not like done to you in that way.

But this implies something else. It also implies, one might say, sensitivity because you've got to be sensitive yourself. You've got to be sensitive to suffering yourself. You've got to be aware of your own suffering. Not just crude physical suffering but more subtle, perhaps mental, perhaps emotional, perhaps psychological suffering. If you're not, so to speak, in touch with your own suffering, sensitive to your own suffering, you won't be able to sufficiently empathise with the other person, to be able to practice non-violence towards them.

So this one word "ahimsa", "non-violence" has all sorts of applications. All sorts of implications. So if I was asked by some Western leader this particular question and if I said, "Well, the fundamental principle of Buddhism is non-violence" I'd also be saying the fundamental principle of Buddhism is imagination. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is empathy. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is emotional sensitivity. If you had all these things, well, you've a very great deal and this I would say really amounts to the fundamental principle of Buddhism at least, so far as that is applicable to large numbers of people in our world today. I wouldn't say anything about karma. I wouldn't say anything about anatta. Certainly wouldn't say anything about sunyata. I'd certainly speak of non-violence. So perhaps that serves to get us a bit started. (Pause)

Something else rather practical. This question comes at the end of a letter. I won't read to you all the letter. Well, I might have to. [Laughter] Perhaps I will. The letter is interesting and the question does come right at the end of the letter. "Dear Bhante. I'm on the verge of giving up my job. I have been in this particular job for the last eighteen years and it is fairly well paid but now I feel the need to stop". Maybe I'll skip the more autobiographical bit. "I may add I did have a tantalising taste of Team Based Right Livelihood ... Continuing to explore possibilities in this area. But in the meantime I don't think that working in the world, so to speak, is the best way for my Going for Refuge, to develop, grow and flourish". So here comes the question. "What I would like to hear, Bhante, is your views on this subject, 'working in the world' or positively creating lots of time to study, meditate, develop friendships and the time to pursue other activities beneficial for going forth?" So, "working in the world", yes.

Quite a long time ago, I think in the very early days of the movement, I used to encourage people to give up their full time jobs. This is twenty-five years ago and, well, recently, sometimes people have wondered, well whether that the only alternative? Well, one has to remember that in those very early days of the FWBO, options were very limited. There was, in those days, no such thing as Team Based Right Livelihood. I don't think we had a Team Based Right Livelihood business or co-op as we used to call it until the movement had been functioning, had been active, for about seven or eight

years and it took us a long time to find out, well, just how Team Based Right Livelihood businesses should be run, and we're still finding out. So in those days, in the very early days of the movement there were really only two possibilities for people. One was just to stay with their full-time job which wasn't always of a very ethical nature, just getting along to what classes they could and going on the occasional retreat or just to go on the dole. And I did encourage some of the younger people who didn't have responsibilities just to go on the dole and devote themselves to Dharmic work. But the situation is rather different now. Now, if someone became disillusioned with working in the world and if it was a practical possibility, I'd advise them to take up, I'd advise them to start or join a Team Based Right Livelihood project.

I have sometimes said in the past that to start a public centre, an FWBO centre, is not difficult. Not very difficult. To start a community, especially a single sex community, is rather more difficult. But it's most difficult to start a Team Based Right Livelihood business. That's the most difficult and the most demanding of all. But it's also perhaps the most worthwhile of all because you, well, in some cases you not only work with other people but you live with those same people and living with them and working with them, you can develop a very close spiritual friendship. If you're living with them in a spiritual community, working with them in a Team Based Right Livelihood project, you can come very, very close to them.

This just reminds me of a point that arose recently. Sometimes the question is asked whether we should think in terms of the needs of the business or the needs of the Team? Should we work on making the business better, more successful, or should we work on better relationships within the Team. I would say you can't really separate the two because what is it that makes the Team? What makes the Team is the business objective. That is what has brought you together. So it is not that you put aside the business objective, the success or whatever of the business, in whatsoever terms, in order to work on your relationships within the Team because you work best on your relationships within the Team by all of you, more and more devotedly co-operating for the fulfilment of the aims and objects of the business. The two are not really separate. You can't really distinguish. If you are separating them, to that extent you can say, it's not fully a Team Based Right Livelihood business. So that as it were, is by the way.

So the Team Based Right Livelihood business occupies a very, very important place in the economy of the total movement. But, now we come to another point, what about working out in the world? Obviously that cannot be ruled out altogether. In fact I would say, I would not like it to be ruled out altogether. I don't think I would really like to see everybody in the FWBO working in an FWBO Team Based Right Livelihood business. I think I would like to see some people out there in the world. Those that can stand the world [Laughter] because well, we need, as it were, outposts. We need points of contact. But there are certain things to bear in mind. If the work that you are doing, if the business that you are involved in is unethical, in any serious respect, well, as a Buddhist you have to withdraw from that. But if the business is reasonably ethical, and if it is not too demanding in the sense it does not involve you in too much psychological wear-and-tear, so much so that you can't meditate, and if it doesn't throw you too much into the company of people whom you really detest and for whom you gradually build up a real dislike, perhaps even hatred, if it doesn't do anything of those things, well, stay in the world if you have to. Work in the world but keep up your contacts with your spiritual friends within the movement. Keep up your meditation practice. Keep up your Dharma study as best you can.

So in a way I see people as that is to say, people within the FWBO, as falling very roughly into three categories. There are those who are fully occupied and supported within the FWBO, within the

Movement, doing predominantly Dharmic work. Teaching around centres, running retreats and so on and then I see those people who are working as members of Team Based Right Livelihood FWBO businesses and then I see those heroic souls who are working out there in the world but applying their ethical principles to their business and working life out there in the world and keeping up their spiritual contacts within the FWBO. Perhaps that's even more difficult than working in a Team Based Right Livelihood business. That's why I describe them as heroic souls. And sometimes I've read reports in *Shabda* of people who are working in the outside world, and I've felt so, so sorry for them. Not so much the professionals, not the doctors and the teachers and the lawyers, not so much those people. They have it comparatively easy. I remember the case of one young male Order Member who was working on a building site in London with others who were, who were of course not Buddhists. Very far from it [Laughter]. I got the impression from his reporting-in that they were barely human. [Laughter] But I really felt so sorry for him and he was struggling so hard. Well, you can imagine, so of you the sort of things he had to put up with and struggle against and I felt really so sorry for that young Order Member. He stuck it for several years. Now he's doing something which is more conducive to the sort of life he really wants to lead. But he wasn't really qualified for much else unfortunately. He didn't have professional qualifications.

So as I said I see FWBO people falling very broadly into these three categories. I haven't of course mentioned the housewife but I regard the housewife as, in a way, working, you might say, in a Team Based Right Livelihood project, perhaps on a rather small scale, depending on the number of children. But we can't forget that also. So, yes just those few words about working in the world. It isn't easy and one does have to exercise discrimination about the sort of working you're doing. The sort of people that you are working with and the sort of effect it has on you psychologically and spiritually. But if you bear those in mind and take those sort of guidelines, it can be done and sometimes it has to be done and as I say, I'd really prefer that there were at least some people out there in the world so that the FWBO did not exist in a sort of little spiritual ghetto almost of its own. We need these wider and broader contexts. Sometimes they can be very useful. Sometimes we can be very useful to them. Sometimes people whom you get to know in the workplace can become interested in yoga, can become interested in Buddhism, in meditation and some of them, at least, may find that their way through you to the centre and into a better and happier life.

I don't think we should be precious. I don't think we should, in a sense, I don't think we should take refuge in the retreat centre, or take refuge in, even in a Team Based Right Livelihood business just because we can't make it out in the world. I think that is very important. I think it's quite important that we should be the sort of person who can make it out in the world if he or she really wants to but who chooses not to. Not simply the person who is unable to make a success of it out there. Those are the sort of people who will make a real success of their own spiritual lives and operate whatever it is that the FWBO is doing.

Yes, something a bit controversial. I was expecting some of you were hoping for that. [Laughter] This question has been sent by somebody who wasn't able actually to be present with us.

"Pseudo-egalitarianism is a term that worries me. Please could you expand on the sense in which Buddhism sees us all as equal and as not all equal. Thank you?" [Laughter]

I'm afraid I have some ideas of my own on this subject of equality and egalitarianism. And it's my particular views which I think may be controversial. I've arrived at these views of course on the basis of reflecting about the Dharma. I think that the concept of equality as applied to human beings is totally beside the point. I don't think human beings are equal. I don't think human beings are

unequal either. I just think that the concept of equality is inapplicable to human beings. Now what is this concept of equality? I would say equality is a quantitative concept. If you, well, you can say that, let's give an example, a sort of arithmetical example. Two plus three equals five and four plus one equals five. So there's equality. There's equality between the two plus three and the four plus one. But you can't apply that sort of logic, that sort of concept to human beings. Do you see what I'm getting at? Because human beings are not quantities. So human beings are, one might say, incommensurable. You can't really compare one human being with another in the way that you can compare one amount with another and say that, well, this amount is greater than that, or this amount is smaller than that or this amount is equal to that.

So I would say that the concept of equality does not apply to human beings. Now what about this concept of equality of opportunity. I think that even this is not really applicable. One doesn't have to talk in terms of equality of opportunity with all the discussions that that gives rise to. So what should one talk in terms of from a Buddhist point of view. Well, every individual human being should have the fullest possible opportunity to grow and to develop in accordance with his or her own innate qualities, characteristics, needs and so on. You don't need to bring in this concept of equality. Do you see what I'm getting at? I think we sort of confuse the whole issue by talking in terms of equality or of even equal opportunity. Everybody should have what they need for their life and for their development, full stop. So I don't use the term 'equality' and for this reason I speak sometimes in terms of pseudo-egalitarianism by which I mean this sort of quite illegitimate, in my view, application of this concept of equality to human beings. One can speak of human beings in qualitative terms presumably by surely not in quantitative terms. So you can't say that one human being is equal to another as though one human being was say a pound of flour and the other was a pound of sugar or they're both equally pounds as it were. It isn't really like that. [Laughter]

But then what about this seeing us as all equal or not as all equal in Buddhism? Well, in Buddhism, in Mahayana Buddhism, there are the jnanas, the five jnanas which are symbolised by the Five Buddhas. So we've got the samata jnana and we've got the pratyaveksana jnana - I assume that's what the questioner is referring to. Samata means, well, you could translate it as 'equality' but it's more literally 'sameness'. So in what sense are, not just all people but all things, samata. This is not samatha, by the way, this is samata, which is a different word. Well, they're all 'equal', single inverted commas, inasmuch as they're all sunyata. They're all characterised by sunyata. That is the sense in which they are 'equal', again single inverted commas, or 'same', and that's just one aspect of the truth. But the other, or another, is this pratyaveksana jnana. Pratyaveksana jnana is that jnana which recognises the indefinable uniqueness of things. No one thing is absolutely like any other. Everything is absolutely unique. There is a principle in Western philosophy, I think it's contributed by Leibnitz, called the 'identity of indiscernibles'. If two things can't be distinguished in any way, well, they're the same thing, you haven't got two things. But the things that we're acquainted with, well, are discernible in all sorts of ways so they're not the same. So the pratyaveksana jnana recognises the absolutely unique individuality of every single thing. If you think about it, it is really amazing how different things are. Take for instance the human face. There are how many billion human faces? But they're all made up of the same simple elements. You've got one nose, two eyes, a mouth, a couple of eyebrows but they're all absolutely different! Absolutely different. Look at your hand. Look at the lines on your hands. Look at your fingerprints. There's, well, there's ten billion of hands and well, fifty billions of fingerprints, they're all absolutely different. And if you look inside each little cell, I don't know how many of billions and billions of cells there are, they're all different. So everything has its own absolutely unique individuality which cannot be reduced to the individuality of any other thing.

So that sort of realisation is the Pratyaveksana jnana. If you look around the world, if you go about you just see how absolutely, well, unique everything is. It's absolutely amazing. You can't boil it down just to one sort of soggy mass. But there's also this samata jnana. All these, absolutely unique things are sunyata. So these are just two of jnanas. On the one hand you've realised the absolute ineffable sunyata of everything. Everything is, well, let's use the word equally, by this time, equally sunyata, but at the same time each individual thing is absolutely unique and irreducible to any other thing. So the fact that these are two of the five jnanas means you, if you are enlightened you hold these and the other jnanas together, so to speak, in your mind, in your enlightened experience at the same time. At one and the same time you realise the absolutely void nature of absolutely everything but on the other hand you realise and you experience the absolute unique individuality, particularity of everything. So that's the sort of Buddhist vision, especially the Mahayana Buddhist vision about, well, equality and difference.

So that comes a long way from the way in which we usually, and in my view quite wrongly, think about equality. We just have to try and hold in our minds at one and the same time the, well the void nature of everything and at the same time the absolutely unique individuality. And paradoxically I think that the more we can do the one, the more we can do the other. (Pause)

Some of these questions are a little complicated. Yes, let's go back to something quite simple and practical. Something to do with meditation. A question about the fourth stage of the Mindfulness of Breathing.

"Why focus attention on the nose/mouth area?"

That's one. Two -

"Isn't ending the practice with the experience of single-pointedness like this a bit abrupt?"

Three.

"Some meditation guides to end with lead the meditator into a more expansive sense of the environment all around the meditator. Is that advisable?"

So clearly the question is about the fourth stage of the Mindfulness of Breathing where one focuses the attention just on the point where the in-and-out breath strikes. It's a very fine point, just that sensation, you make that your object of concentration, not the in-and-out breath itself. So the concentration that you achieve at that point, at that stage, is quite refined. In some traditions one concentrates on the rise and fall of the abdomen but that is a somewhat gross object, it's a big object. The sensation at the tip of the nose made by the breath coming and going is a much more fine point so you achieve a better concentration, concentrating on that. Anyway this I expect you are familiar with. We've focused, the question is "Why focus attention on the nose/mouth area?" It's not so much the nose/mouth area, it is just that sensation at the tip of the nostrils made by the breath coming in and going out.

Then the second part of the question is, "Isn't ending the practice with the experience of single-pointedness like this a bit abrupt?" Maybe, we'll deal with that together with the next question. "Some meditation guides to end with lead the meditator into a more expansive sense of the environment all around the meditator. Is that advisable?" Well, if you practice the mindfulness of breathing and if as a result of concentrating on the sensation at the tip of the nostrils you do become

really concentrated, it can even seem that the breath has stopped and that there's no sensation and you're just absorbed. You may have a dhyanic experience. Obviously you must not make too abrupt a transition back into the world as it were. But I think in the case of most people they, well, they take care of that, as it were, automatically because what you find is usually after you've been in that very concentrated state for a little while, it may be only a minute or two, you notice that your breath is becoming, well, it's coming back perhaps, it's becoming a little harsher and well, your concentration then becomes less refined because the object of concentration is less refined. So you sort of gradually come down. Usually that happens quite naturally but it isn't advisable to, as it were, jump from a highly concentrated mental state just into doing something else.

And if it is the case that some meditation guides do suggest that one just becomes aware of the environment, well, there's nothing wrong with that I should say. Usually what happens is that people are meditating with their eyes closed, so when the meditation has, as it were, come to an end they just open their eyes. They may not actually look around. But if you open your eyes after a period of meditation, maybe concentrated meditation, if you open your eyes, well you do become aware of your environment anyway, automatically and you may sometimes find you see it in a very clear way because you see it without any thoughts - maybe your mind hasn't started working again yet. You just see it without any thoughts and then of course gradually the thoughts start coming back and you start thinking about the next thing to do.

So I don't think usually any sort of special sense of the environment is needed to be cultivated but the general point is, of course, as seems to be implied here, that, well, don't rush from an absorbed concentrated state straight into doing something else. Give yourself time. Have a little break, as it were. Just sit on just for a few minutes before you get up from your seat and carry on with whatever else it is that you have to carry on with. Is this clear? I mean this is a practical point. (Pause)

Yes.

"Many of your taped lectures are twenty or so years old". Some are more than that! "In terms of your own development, how far have you found that you have modified or extended the ideas and interpretations expressed there? I'm thinking, for example, of your attitude to paid work". I have dealt with that, haven't I, already. "Are there any major changes that it would be helpful for us to consider in our own Dharma study?"

I gave some thought to this. I don't think there have been any major changes but I've certainly developed my thinking I may say over the years and I think one example which you may care to give attention to, is the way which I've developed the conception, the traditional conception of Going For Refuge. And certainly one of the developments in the course of the last twenty years has been to see the arising of the Bodhicitta as representing the positive, the altruistic dimension of the Going for Refuge itself. Perhaps I should say a bit about how I came to think in this sort of way. If you read the Mahayana sutras you encounter beings called Bodhisattvas. I'm sure you're familiar with those. And Bodhisattvas take vows. And, for instance, a Bodhisattva may vow that he wishes to deliver all sentient beings and he says something like , in some cases, in some sutras, he says something like "I'm quite ready to go to hell and suffer for a million ages if that can save, even a single sentient being, from one minute's suffering". So I said to myself, well is this realistic? [Laughter] Is it really possible for any of us to take that sort of vow? Is it? Well, this is what the Mahayana sutras say the Bodhisattva does.

So is it possible for any individual to take that vow? Can you imagine even a highly developed

spiritual being to really taking that vow? Can you imagine it? Well, I can't. Your imagination may be better than mine but I can't. So what does it mean? What does it represent? This was the question I asked myself. So I came to the conclusion that the Bodhisattva was not an individual in the ordinary sense. That the figure of the Bodhisattva represented something vast, something cosmic, as it were. Some sort of cosmic tendency. Some tendency, some supra-individual tendency at work in the whole universe but which might be reflected in the aspirations, dimly and distantly reflected in the aspirations of individual human beings in that altruistic aspirations, and I saw that this other-regarding altruistic aspiration was a dimension of our own Going for Refuge. That Going for Refuge can't be an individualistic affair. You can't just Go for Refuge for the sake of your own enlightenment. Well, partly because there is no "own" because there is no "self" in the absolute sort of separative sense. You can't really separate yourself from others.

So if you Go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, for the sake of gaining Enlightenment, that has implications for others. That has a bearing on others because you have a bearing on others, you are in relation to others. So your Going for Refuge has an altruistic dimension and the arising of the bodhicitta represents that altruistic dimension. So the bodhisattva represents, well, something, as I've said, cosmic - I've really no other word for it - something universal, something present in the universe, working for the good of all. You in your small way just try to reflect that, try to embody that. Try, if you like, to incarnate that, and that is the altruistic dimension of your act of Going for Refuge.

So this represents, I'll give you this as an example, an illustration, this represents something, a way of thinking that I've developed over the last twenty years, this is one example. It all makes sense of those statements in the Mahayana sutras. So the aspirations of the Bodhisattva are not just to be taken on by us, they are not to be taken on by any individual. They're something that transcend the individual. But the individual can certainly mirror them in his or her own life to the extent that he or she can, as he or she Goes for Refuge. (Pause)

So there's another question from the same person.

"You have suggested that hate has an affinity for wisdom and that people with hot or bad tempers often have a highly developed intellectual faculty".

This is not just my suggestion, this is actually a Buddhist tradition. You find it in Buddhagosa's Visuddhimagga and Dr. Conze has written on this, some interesting essays. There's an essay by him called "Hate, Love and Perfect Wisdom". Anyway,

"A few years ago you also said that people connected with the FWBO were 'too nice' to be great scholars. Is this still the case?" [Laughter]

I don't remember saying this but I'm told by people who are doing transcription work that there is some eighteen million words of mine [Laughter] in seminar, most of which I believe have now been transcribed, so I don't remember all the things I've said but I'm quite willing to accept, yes, I did say this or that. [Laughter] I really don't like this word "nice" and I would even go so far as to say that if you're too nice, not only can you not be a great scholar, you can't even be a good Buddhist. I suppose you understand what I mean by "too nice". Good, but in a rather weak, pusillanimous sort of way. A good Buddhist is really a heroic sort of person who isn't afraid of danger, isn't afraid of taking risks. And I won't say is someone who is bad-tempered who is certainly not afraid to speak his or her own mind, not afraid of standing up to challenges, not afraid to stick up for the Dharma. I

think, not only in the FWBO, but perhaps in the Western Buddhist world, not enough people are prepared to stick up for the Dharma and perhaps this brings me to a more general point.

I think we're living in very dangerous times. I think a lot of us thought once the Cold War was over we'd have really a nice peaceful world, a relatively peaceful world. Actually things seem to have got quite a bit worse. And I think we don't always realise it living in this little corner of Europe, living in Britain and being relatively undisturbed and relatively happy. I think we don't always realise how bad things are in some other parts of the world and how that could affect us sooner or later. I really wouldn't like to predict what might happen, even in this country in the course of the next twenty years, perhaps even the next fifteen, perhaps even the next ten years. I don't know. But I certainly think that the Dharma is going to be under threat, at least indirectly. I'm not suggesting that anyone is going to start deliberately persecuting the Dharma as the Dharma, but it could be that in a few years time, or few decades time, our living conditions in this country do become so difficult for one reason or another, perhaps even due to war, that it isn't easy for us to practice the Dharma and it will require real heroism for us to do so. I think that we should that as a serious possibility and be mentally, emotionally, psychology prepared for that.

There are many forces in the world today which are really quite inimical to the Dharma. Some of them openly so, some of them not so openly. Not that they think in terms necessarily of attacking Buddhism as such but that they certainly don't think in terms that we think. I think even in terms which could result in a serious upset in the world in all sorts of ways. So we've had it in this country so far really - I mean Buddhists - really quite easy. We haven't had any sort of persecution, any real difficulties but it may not always be like that.

[End of side one side two]

So Buddhists need to be heroic and all the more so because we can't respond to violence with violence. We have to respond to violence with non-violence and that isn't easy. So these are some of the thoughts that I've been having recently. We can't afford to be too nice in that weak and negative sense. I've sometimes even said that, well, it would be a good thing if people thought twice about crossing the path of Buddhists. I think at present they don't think twice about it at all. They wouldn't hesitate because they've nothing to fear. Not that people should be afraid of Buddhists, but certainly they should have a healthy respect for them.

So don't be afraid to sort of stand up and be counted. Say, well, we've been talking about people working out in the world, don't be afraid to say, "well, yes, I'm a Buddhist." Sometimes people hesitate. They don't like to risk being ridiculed and made fun of. But don't hesitate, sort of nail your colours to the mast as it were. Well, I was in the army. I mean I made it quite clear when I was in the army that I was a Buddhist and I even demanded that they ought to go and celebrate Wesak. [Laughter] I went and asked my commanding officer for the day off. He was rather surprised but he gave it to me. And I became a vegetarian in the army, yes. And some of my friends made fun of me but I didn't care at all, didn't care tuppence. I just insisted on being a vegetarian and sometimes I had to live on tinned cheese and biscuits because that was all there was. Well, I didn't mind at all. I was quite happy to nail my colours to the mast and let them know I was a Buddhist. When you're young you're like that. [Laughter]

But you needn't change even when you're older. So, yes, I think that what I'm really saying is not that just that people within the FWBO were too nice to be (), I think that they're not always heroic enough. Some people in the FWBO are heroic, especially those who go and start up, Order

Members who start up FWBO centres all on their own, just one single person. That's quite heroic. But I think that's about as far as heroism goes in the FWBO. Well, no one's been burned at the stake. Though one, yes, though one Order Member in India did die by self-immolation. I don't know whether you all know about that. He felt he was very old and he didn't want to be a burden to his fellow Order Members so he went on retreat and in the course of the retreat there was a full moon day. So without telling anybody he just stole out at night, he built a little pyre by the light of the full moon and doused it with petrol and he set fire to himself, quite peacefully and, well, I won't go into any details but he immolated himself in that way. So that was something heroic. It's not something I'd encourage, certainly not. But if someone has done it, I certainly can't help admiring them for their courage and their heroism. Yes, heroism of that sort is very rare in the world. So I certainly don't suggest that anyone should ever do this but that kind of spirit applied in a different way, that sort of spirit, I think we should certainly have. The spirit which would be prepared just to sacrifice our life if necessary for the sake of the Dharma. Let's hope it won't be necessary. But we need to be prepared for that.

So don't be afraid to speak out and don't be afraid to stick up for the Dharma. If you find that people are misrepresenting the Dharma or ridiculing the Dharma, well, don't let them get away with it. Don't just keep quiet in the name of a sort of pseudo-tolerance or pseudo-universalism. You spell it out to them. Just let them know that they've got it wrong. That you're not going to just sit there and hear them misrepresenting the Dharma. Do it nicely, do it firmly, do it clearly. Do it vigorously and quite unmistakeably.

So, yes, "A few years ago you also said that people connected with the FWBO are too nice to be great scholars". So don't be so nice that, well, you can't really be a Buddhist. But of course don't be so nasty that you can't be a Bodhisattva. Steer a middle way. (Pause)

"Do you feel that the effort required to found, develop and lead the FWBO has helped or hindered your spiritual development?" [Laughter]

I thought about this but I can't really say. I don't know. [Laughter] But I felt I'd just say a few things around this sort of topic. I think one of the things I can say is that I would, I would have preferred, I think, that I did not have to found the FWBO. Not that I regret having founded it, don't think that. But I would have preferred it, in an ideal world, that the FWBO should have been already there and I could just have belonged to it and taken part in it. I think I can certainly say that because it isn't easy to start up a new Buddhist movement. It's a very difficult thing to do and it takes, I mean, a lot of energy that well, might have been perhaps been spent in some other way. If say there'd been an FWBO or something like it, already set up, I wouldn't have had to bother about anything organisational. I could have just written books and given talks and everything else would have been looked after. Perhaps I could have written more books. Perhaps I could have given more talks and perhaps instead of eighteen million words of seminar, you might have had a hundred and eighteen million words. [Laughter] So I think I can say that, well, in some ways it's a pity that, well, the FWBO wasn't just there for me to be just a part of. I think I would have preferred that.

But on the other hand, one could say, one could argue, well, you know, that having to set up the FWBO was part of my spiritual development. That I couldn't have it already laid on for me. Perhaps if it had already been laid on for me, that wouldn't have been very good for me spiritually. So perhaps it has been better for me spiritually. I don't know but perhaps it has been better for me spiritually that I had to set to and set it up. I just don't know. Well, it's not the sort of question that one can give a very categorical reply to because one shouldn't also be precious about one's own

spiritual development. Sometimes you hear people say, "Oh, I can't do this, I can't do that because it'll get in the way of my spiritual development". [Laughter] But I think you have to be rather more robust than that [Laughter] and well, you can do this and do that and get on with your spiritual development at the same time and perhaps even that thing which you don't particularly want to do will help you in your spiritual development. So maybe it's something like that in my case.

And also - sometimes the thought has occurred to me - that perhaps one of the reasons why I was able to set up the FWBO was that I didn't really want to start a new Buddhist movement. That I would have preferred this new Buddhist movement to have been there, already set up and with myself just able to join it. Anyway these are just a few reflections on that particular topic. So I don't really know whether my spiritual development suffered or not. I suppose in the long run it doesn't really matter very much. The FWBO has been set up and it is here now and yes, I can just be part of it and can withdraw more and more from the organisational side of things and get on with writing my books and doing a few more things of that sort.

Anyway a question of a quite different kind.

"Given that your interest in western art, literature and philosophy is concentrated on the last century and before, are there aspects of culture over the past forty years that you find of interest and worthy of respect?" [Laughter]

Past forty years. Well, the past thirty years I've been in Britain, yes. I can't say that there's much that I found of interest and certainly not worthy of respect. [Laughter] Of course, I must admit I have my limitations. I'm not aware of all the developments that have taken place, culturally in the course of the last forty years. I'm most acquainted, of course, with the field of literature. And I was trying to think, well, are there any authors who've published, any books published during the last forty years that I have found not only interesting but worthy of respect because I think that's also quite important. Not just interesting. There's lots of things I've found interesting but the question says, "of interest and worthy of respect". So I was just trying to think, I came up, this maybe of interest to you, with the names of two authors. One's American and one is English. The American one is Nelson Algren and the English one is Malcolm Lowry. Ring any bells? So, yes, I have found these two authors interesting. They've not written very much, well, I found them interesting and worthy of respect.

Of course this also raises the question of, well, what is it in a work of literature that makes it worthy of respect? I don't think this is a very easy question to answer. But I personally feel respect for a book - of literature that is, not say a scholarly work - when I feel that the author has really put himself into it. That he's tried to be as honest as possible He's asking himself, well, what do I really want to say? What is my experience? How can I express that in the best way, the most faithful way possible? I think if the author is clearly trying to do that and has succeeded, at least to some extent in doing it, then he is worthy of respect. So I feel this about the writings of Nelson Algren and Malcolm Lowry. Malcolm Lowry, of course, wrote "*Under the Volcano*". It's mainly that work that I'm thinking of. It's a man's struggle with alcoholism and Nelson Algren has written "*The Man with the Golden Arm*" and "*A Walk on the Wild Side*" and well, if you're interested in modern literature at all, well, I suggest you do read these. It'll give you, perhaps, some idea, if you're interested, what I have found of interest and worthy of respect among, well, these are all novels produced in the last forty years.

There might be work produced in the fine arts, painting and sculpture over the last forty years that I

might find of interest and worthy of respect but frankly I've not investigated that field very much. As the question says my interest in western art, history and philosophy and all that, is concentrated on the last century and before, as much before as possible, one might say. [Laughter]

_____: You said good things about Alan Ginsberg in the past.

S: Interest and worthy of respect. Yes, I have said good things. I've said good things about quite a lot of authors but I wouldn't quite put Ginsberg in the same category. I think I just find him interesting. I don't think he's a very good poet frankly. I don't like it. I mean his poetry is interesting but I don't really find much of what I would regard as poetry in it. But some people would say, well, that's just because I've got an old-fashioned view about poetry. I did once have a discussion with Alan Ginsberg about this and we talked - it might have been on our last meeting - we talked about academic poetry. I said jokingly that I thought my own poetry was academic and he said very seriously that he thought academic poetry was definitely still poetry. So his own taste does seem to be quite catholic. But I can't really feel that everything that he has produced really (?) poetry. In fact I don't think I think very much of it. Maybe the little bits here and there but I can't honestly feel anything more than that. (Pause)

Well, I've got a lot of questions about karma and rebirth. I think I'm just going to pick up one or two of them because that might take us too far afield and I think we have to finish.

"Do you think or feel that one or more of the people that you are close to in this life you have been close to in a previous life? If so how do you come to that conclusion?"

Well, I must say I do believe in karma and rebirth and I think I can say that there are people to whom I'm close, am close in this life but I must also say I've never had a sort of feeling as some people seem to have, "Oh, we must have been together in a previous existence". I've never had this feeling. I don't know whether it's any sort of lack or deficiency in me but I've never felt this. I've certainly felt very close to certain people and feel very close to certain people but I have never felt, "Oh, yes, we must have been friends or whatever, father and child or husband and wife, or just friends, in a previous life". I've never had that actual feeling but I can recognise it as an abstract possibility. Do you see what I mean? And I think sometimes when people say "Well, we must have been together in a previous life, they're just trying to express in terms that are familiar to them, their sense of closeness. I don't know how seriously we can take that feeling, that, yes, "We've been together in a previous existence". Well, I haven't had that feeling.

"Do you think spirit guides or daemons exist? Have you had any experience of them yourself or know someone who has? Is there room for them within the six realms and if one became conscious of such an entity how should one relate to it?"

I think that the answer to this question is really to be found in the whole concept of levels of existence. I think we have to recognise we don't just live or exist on the level with which we are familiar. Not just on the level of the five senses. Not just on the level of the rational mind. Not even just on the level of the higher consciousness. We exist on all sorts of levels, right up to the top, but we are not conscious of ourselves as existing at those levels. We don't actually experience ourselves as existing on those levels. We experience ourselves only as existing on these lower levels. But sometimes we just have a glimpse. We just have an intimation and it's that sort of glimpse, that sort of intimation I think which the person asking this question refers to as spirit guides or daemons. Of course sometimes people have spirit guides in a sort of imaginary way. A clear projection of their

own, well, subconscious one could say. But apart from that, inasmuch as we do, so to speak, exist also on these higher levels of consciousness and can sometimes have intimations of them, we can have a sort of guidance from these higher levels. Guidance not from something or someone outside ourselves but from this supraliminal part of ourselves. It maybe very much higher, it may be just a little bit higher. But this can happen and I think it does go to explain some of the experiences that some people do have.

Anyway let's come to the last question of all. I think I've dealt with most of them anyway.

"In the 'Ten Pillars of Buddhism' while talking about the seventh precept, 'abstention from gossip and backbiting' and the practice of harmonious speech, you imply that there are very few instances indeed where it is good to talk about a third party behind his back. Is this not unrealistic? Surely we all talk about people all the time. Is it not essential to be talking about other people to see how they are getting on, to understand them, to bounce your feelings about them both positive and negative, off someone else to have them clarified etc? Similarly is there not a danger if you don't talk critically about someone behind his back, of an 'Emperor's New Clothes' scenario, neither person is able to openly to express what is obvious to both of them, e.g. that the person is nasty, talks too much, doesn't wear any clothes etc.?"
[Laughter]

I think we have to look at this phrase "behind his back". I think you're talking about someone behind his back if you're saying about them to a third party something that you don't really want to say to the person directly. Yes, sometimes it is necessary to talk about people but not to talk about them behind their back. Now I think if you do talk someone in their absence, I think that you should make a mental note to tell that person about whom you've been talking what you have been saying about them otherwise misunderstandings are sure to arise. That person will get to hear sooner or later what you have said and more likely than not, he or she will hear it in a very garbled and distorted form. I'm afraid I'm coming up against this sort of thing all the time. Someone says, "Oh, so-and-so said this about me". "Well, how do you know?" "Well, so-and-so told me". "Oh, how did that person find out?" "Well, so-and-so told them" and it goes round like that.

So I think if you do have quite objective occasion to discuss someone in their absence at the very first opportunity, tell them, "Well, we've been talking about you and this is what I said". If you don't do that, well then, I think you are talking about them behind their back. I think the only time when it's admissible is when they may be, as it were, mentally disturbed or even a bit mad and you may have to discuss them, without their knowing it because if you were to tell them what you were talking about, well, it might make their condition worse. But even then you should be very careful and not assume that someone is in that sort of state. But I think we have to be very careful about talking about other people because even when it may be objectively necessary for one reason or another or desirable, it can so easily degenerate into gossip. I think that is the great danger. Yes, as the questioner says, we do talk a lot about other people but we have to ask ourselves, is it really necessary? Is it really skilful?

Well, sometimes Order Members have to talk about someone when someone asks to be a mitra. But then whatever is said really should be communicated to that prospective mitra as soon as possible and if you think there's any possibility of verbal communication being misunderstood put it down in writing so that there's no doubt and no mistake, no possibility of misunderstanding. Because sometimes I say that, well, you've only got one precept to cover violence. You've only got one precept to cover sex etc., etc. You've got four precepts to cover speech because the tongue is such a

unruly little member. [Laughter] It really has a life of its own. It really runs away with us sometimes. Talk about the tail wagging the dog. [Laughter] Sometimes, I mean, we follow our tongue, not our tongue follow us. So we really have to be so careful about this. It really does have a life of its own.

So be very, very careful about talking about other people. Yes, we do have to talk about them sometimes but let it be done very mindfully. Let it be done for the best reasons and don't let it degenerate into gossip and communicate to that person as soon as you possibly can what it is that you've said about them otherwise all sorts of misunderstandings can arise which ought not to arise within a spiritual community.

Anyway perhaps I've spoken more than enough anyway. So perhaps we should just conclude. Let me just check through in case I've missed out any question that I really wanted to say something about.

No. OK that's all. So thank you for your questions, those who did submit them and hope you've heard something that you might find useful and are able to employ in your own lives until next time.

(end of tape)