

The Venerable Sangharakshita
Question and Answer Evening in Auckland, New Zealand
20th March 1979

Please note that this transcript is the result of copy typing from a handwritten transcript taken from tapes which are now missing.

Rather than leaving this material unavailable it is published in this form without its having been checked against the original recording. Silabhadra

Sangharakshita: First of all let me say how glad I am to be here at last; because it has not been very easy getting here, and in any case I haven't been for about four years now, and even after I had decided that I just couldn't delay any longer, and really had to come, it wasn't easy to even leave England. There were all sorts of obstacles and difficulties to overcome, that I need not go into now, but at last I did get away: I did manage to leave England and even then, of course, it took me a whole month to get here. I had to pass through India, where we had quite a good programme, where I met many of my old friends whom I hadn't seen for thirteen fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years. Then we came through Malaysia, where I met a Chinese Buddhist with whom we had been in correspondence, and who had been listening to tapes and lectures; and then on to Australia and Sydney, where we met another group of friends who had also been listening to tapes and lectures. So it was only after all that, that I was able to reach Auckland and reach this Centre. So, as I said, I am very happy to be here at last in the midst of you all, and see what changes have taken place since I was here last time. I was remarking to someone only a few moments ago, that just receiving written reports, one could see that some changes had taken place, but one couldn't really feel what those changes were. But actually coming here, and actually being here, and actually meeting people and talking to people, I could feel those changes and that progress, and that, very tangibly indeed. So here we are again, and this evening we are going to have, I hope, some questions - perhaps some answers. We have had, incidentally, this sort of programme all the way from England. I remember in India we went away on retreat - went away to an ancient hilltop fort about twenty miles out of Pune. There were thirty-three of us - it was an Ordination retreat land we had a question and answer meeting and all sorts of questions came up. And in the same way, when we were in Malaysia we had a question and answer meeting in _____. This meeting was attended mainly by Chinese Buddhists, and here also all sorts of questions came up, And again in Sydney we had a question and answer meeting at the local Buddhist Society, and here again we had some most interesting questions, And there seemed to be a certain pattern, a certain thread, running through them all.

So here we are in Auckland, having a question and answer meeting for Mitras and others. So let's see what comes up here and whether there's any sort of thread running through the questions in this case also. So I don't know whether people have been sort of accumulating questions over the last four years whether there are any questions burning in your minds and just waiting to burst forth or whether there might be perhaps questions which emerge just in the course of the discussion itself. I don't know whether anyone is bothered by any particular question of Buddhist metaphysics, or whether you are turning over in your mind questions about meditation or some other such practical matter, or whether you want to ask what's happening in England or anywhere else in the world where we have established ourselves. So let's see what sorts of questions come up, and what sorts of answers, maybe, also emerge. So who's going to be first? Don't be shy. (Pause) No need to manufacture questions of course. If there is no question, that's fine; but if there is something that does come into your head mind, ask it by all means.

Ann D: Can I ask you to tell us something about the Order in India?

S: In India?

Ann D: Yes

S: Mmm. Right, There's not much to tell about the Order in India, but what little there is is very good news because in the course of that ordination retreat which I mentioned a few moments ago which we held in Pune, and which Priyananda also attended, there were two ordinations of Indian friends, Indian Mitras, both of whom had been associated with me personally for the last twenty years; but of course I had not been in personal touch with them, apart from letters, for about twelve years, though they had been getting the Newsletter in between, and though Lokamitra, Anagarika Lokamitra, who is out there running the FWBO Pune, had been in quite intensive contact with them for about the last nine months. So one of these friends was from Arminabad. He is a Gujerati Buddhist whom I have known, as I've said, for twenty years; and the other was a Maharashtra Buddhist whom I have also known for twenty years if not longer. He used to be my main interpreter in the Pune/Maharashtra area. So the friend from Arminabad received the name of Bakula. In fact I had given him that name years and years ago, but we decided to continue it and sort of reaffirm it. And the other friend receives the name of Dharmarakshita, which he also had been given years and years ago, but which he hadn't actually used, But anyway from now onwards he is going to use it. So he is going to be known as Dharmarakshita and the other is Bakula.

There are quite a few Mitras when we left, I think there must have been about a couple of dozen. And some of these Mitras are being prepared by Lokamitra, quite intensively, for possible ordination when I go back. And some of them again, some of these Mitras, also, I have known for many years. I have had quite close contact with them, in Pune especially when I was giving lectures in Pune many many years ago, when I held even a Dharma course which some of these same people attended. So I am hoping that by the time I get back to Pune and Arminabad, there will be a good crop of ordinations waiting for me, so that by the time I leave India there should be a dozen or so Order Members in India. That includes, of course Padmavajra, who has been helping Lokamitra since August and also two or three other English Order Members who are there for the time being, and who may still be there then. They are on a sort of extended visit to India. But the extraordinary and interesting thing is, not only in connection with the Order, but also in connection with the FWBO generally in India, is that the methods and the sort of approach that we worked out, not to say hammered out, in England, have proved to be exactly suited to the Indian scene in a really remarkable sort of way. If anything, even more suited to India than England. Almost as though I'd sort of had India and the needs of the Indian situation at the back of my mind, which I hadn't had consciously, all the time that I was working in England, So that our whole approach to Buddhism, our whole way of organising things: our whole sort of spiritual structure seems to fit the Indian Buddhist movement like a glove. And as you probably know, there were hundreds of thousands, in fact millions of these people, ex-untouchable Hindus converted to Buddhism many, many years ago, and I had quite a bit of contact with them in the few years after that conversion. But then of course, I went back to England, and started up the FWBO there. In the meantime not much seems to have happened in India, in Maharashtra. It's almost as though they were waiting for us, So we got a tremendous reception when we arrived, and Lokamitra had already been doing a lot of real spade work in the way of retreats, courses, classes, and public meetings, and all the rest of it, so that we got a really overwhelming sort of reception when we did at last turn up, So it seems that the prospects for the Order and the FWBO in India are very favourable indeed. What we're currently trying to do, our priority is to establish a permanent Vihara in Pune. At present Lokamitra is functioning in a very small place, which has been just lent to us for a few months, and we are trying to raise funds in England and other places so that we can purchase a fairly good building in Pune, for use as a Vihara, and from which we conduct our activities in the Pune area and beyond, In Pune city itself it is

estimated that there are 300,000 people of ex untouchable origin, who profess to be Buddhists, and they form a third of the population, and they are distributed around about eighty or so localities because the Untouchables formerly had to live separately from the caste Hindus, as they weren't allowed to mix with them. So we've got this vast amount of sort of human raw material, and they are just waiting - they just want some sort of help, some sort of instruction and so they are just flocking along and we have really got our hands full just coping with that situation. I was really surprised that after so many years they still remembered my lectures, and still wanted to be involved. In fact more so than ever. So we've got a huge field of work there. There's no question of going out and getting people interested and persuading them to come. They are all there waiting on your doorstep practically in their thousands. All we need is a few Order Members, It is as simple as that But one person there, especially one person like Lokamitra, can do a lot of work, and he's totally dedicated to the work, but we still hope we can get a few more Upasakas out there, and Upasikas too, perhaps, to help him.

So just to come back to your original question - the prospects of the Order in India, especially in the Maharashtra area, that is Western and Central India, seem very very favourable indeed and we hope that the Order in India, both the English and Western members and the Indian members themselves of the Order, can do a lot of work for the Dharma, and for all those people who have in their own way take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Megha: What is the connection with conversion?

S: Well, originally, you know when Dr. Ambedkar, who was their leader, organised what he called the Buddhist initiation, they understood by conversion, an explicit repudiation of Hinduism in the first place and especially a repudiation of all discrimination between man and man, and particularly a rejection, a repudiation of the system of hereditary caste under which they have suffered for hundreds of years in a very grievous sort of way indeed. That was the negative side of it, and then positively, there was what they thought of becoming Buddhists; so they took the refuges and precepts - the five precepts - but it must be admitted that for many of them - and most of them, don't forget, are illiterate, - it wasn't much more than a ceremony which gave them a lot of hope, but thereafter they considered themselves not Hindus but Buddhists, And I found that if one got around to them - and I did this quite a lot in the late fifties and early sixties - if one got around to them and explained what it was really all about, they were very, very receptive: they really wanted to go for refuge, truly and sincerely, but they didn't know what to do, they didn't know how to go about it, and there was no one to instruct them because Dr. Ambedkar himself died quite suddenly only six weeks after that original conversion ceremony in Nagpur, But it was still sort of rolling on and people were proclaiming themselves as Buddhists, but without, frankly, knowing very much about Buddhism. So I was getting around as much as I could in those days, simply explaining the meaning of what they had done, and explaining what was expected of them - what it meant to go for refuge, what the precepts meant how they had to change their lives, how they had to give up certain evil habits. There was a lot of indebtedness in this community; there was a lot of drunkenness; so we were encouraging them to give up those things, But then of course after a few years, I went off to England, so I wasn't able to do any more work in India, and in any case there were certain difficulties which I need not go into now. But now it seems easier than ever because lots of my old pupils are grown up. Those who were boys in those days, and those who were college students are now in responsible positions, many of them in local government service, and their economic position has improved slightly, and they are still quite hungry and thirsty for the Dharma. No Dharma work has been done, practically, in Maharashtra for the last twelve years, and as I said, our system seems really to appeal to them and really suit them. So it's been taken up in Pune, thanks to Lokamitra and Padmavajra and we hope it may be extended elsewhere throughout that vast region. But conversion originally for them meant

giving up this iniquitous social system, the caste system with that orthodox Hindu sanction, and just getting free of that, making a new start as Buddhists.

But it is only comparatively recently that they have been really able to understand what it means to be a Buddhist and to be able to put it into practice. This is where of course, our three Refuges and ten precepts come in very beautifully, because they have already chanted and recited the three Refuges and five precepts, They have, as it were, taken the provisional refuge, as I call it, or cultural refuge; but we have to draw a line between that and real, conscious, aware, intelligent, spiritual commitment - going for refuge. So those who are capable of that we ordain as members of the - we don't call it Western Buddhist Order there; we call it *Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha*. You'll have to learn that one, I'm afraid. And they are 'sila' Upasakas, ten-sila Upasakas and in that way distinguished from the five sila, more or less nominal Upasakas, if you see what I mean, So this is just one of the ways in which our system fits in there very well, If in England we had only taken five precepts, we would have been in difficulties in India, because it would have been difficult to distinguish the old type of more or less conventional upasaka just repeating precepts, from the real upasaka who really understood what it meant to go for refuge. So within the larger community that is converted we are building up the smaller spiritual community of Upasakas and Upasikas, who are committed, and who truly 'Go for Refuge'; and they will leaven the whole lump, if I may call it so.

Judith. Bhante, are there no other Buddhists, I mean apart from.....

S: Well, it's really extraordinary, there's hardly anybody, I mean, if these people had been converted to Christianity, millions of pounds, millions of dollars would have poured in and you would have had thousands of priests and nuns working. But they had become Buddhists and nothing happened. Buddhist Asia apparently is quite apathetic. You get the odd monk straying in from Ceylon or you get the odd Thai bhikkhu student at Pune university, occasionally he ventures along to a meeting and gives the Precepts, but that is about all. People seem to find it difficult to work among these Maharashtra Buddhists; and it is true; it is difficult. They are very sincere people, they are very loyal people, but they are rather rough people, they are not very cultured people, they are a bit crude, Their heart is in the right place, but their manners, it must be confessed, are rather unrefined. Some of our Friends just don't like this, they can't operate in that sort of situation. And they aren't very much hampered by Buddhist tradition, and very often the Bhikkhus who come from Southeast Asia are rather strong on tradition and they expect to be treated just because they are wearing yellow robes, exactly the way they are treated In their own countries, which is with tremendous respect. But these new Indian Buddhists aren't like that - they take you as they find you; they are not all that impressed simply by yellow robes. They have had all that in Hinduism and they are a bit fed up with it. So they don't respect the Bhikkhus just because they are Bhikkhus, but only if they find they really know the Dharma and can teach and help. So this some of the people from Southeast Asia don't like. And there are various other reasons also. Some of the people from Southeast Asia have their own prejudices. For instance I have known myself, in the old days, Bhikkhus from Ceylon not being too happy that all these proletarian type people even poor people, had become Buddhists, as though the Buddhist community was being a bit lowered by that. They wanted very respectable middleclass well-educated people to become Buddhists, not poor people like this, so they tended to stay aloof from them, and often the Buddhists from Southeast Asia, some of whom are functioning in India, are much too hide-bound and rigid and not adaptable enough and not really understanding the Dharma deeply enough to be able to cope with these sort of people, That is the sad truth. So it seems extraordinary that an English Buddhist Movement should have had to intervene and try to help in this way, in however small a way. But actually there is no one else, which is truly extraordinary.

Judith: It is quite poetic though, isn't it, coming back from the west?

S: Yes. Right, Also they trust us because we are not contaminated by the caste system and they are very concerned about that, They trust western monks on the whole, just because they know we don't have that sort of background of caste system and caste prejudice.

Dave R: What about the livelihood situation in Southeast Asia?

S: For whom?

Dave R: For Westerners?

S: That, I think on the whole, is out of the question. It is very, very difficult for Westerners to get work in India, and in a way, quite rightly so. The Indians need the jobs themselves. So what we are doing is, the Upasakas who are working in Pune among the ex-untouchables, certainly Buddhists are being supported from England. We don't at this stage want to take anything from the Indians themselves. There is tremendous generosity and hospitality and one is always being asked out for a meal, and one can't refuse that. But we still send for each of the Upasakas a certain sum each month which is contributed by all the centres. All the centres, or practically all the centres, in England, and I believe this centre, contributes something every month to the Pune account as it is called and out of this money the Upasakas there are supported. We'd rather do things in this way rather than have them dependent on these local people, most of whom are very poor. So that is the livelihood situation at the moment.

Dave M: That is why it would be very important to get as many Indians ordained as possible?

S: Yes, right, I think quite a few will be ordained, but I think it will be a long time before they will be able to function independently, For one thing there is the cultural pressure of their environment, and, in a way, because they have been depressed for hundreds of years, there is a certain lack of self-confidence which you can understand, so they will have to develop much more self-confidence before they are able to function on their own. We hope we can bring some of them to England to experience the Movement there, and the Order there, and also get them out of their own particular cultural conditioning. Well, everybody needs to do this, whether in India or elsewhere. But we are hoping we can take at least a few of them to England for a few months at a time just to give them the experience of Buddhist spiritual fellowship. But it really gives them a boost to find Westerners who are fully sympathising with their plight, Western Buddhists, who are prepared to try to do something to help them or just be with them, and just be friendly with them. That itself means a lot to them that you are willing to go there and meet them. This gives them a tremendous boost

Udaya: I wonder Bhante, if you would like to say something about the two projects we raised money for in our great 'Jack-in-the-box' project, namely, Tyn-y-Ddol and Dhardo?

S: Yes, indeed. But first of all, I must say a few words about this 'Jack-in-the-box' project. I was really surprised, when one day in my mail I got a little parcel from New Zealand - a small square parcel. My secretary Upasaka thought, I hope jokingly, it might be a bomb, but it wasn't. It was a 'Jack-in-the-box'. And I got a letter either just before or after that, saying just what a tremendous thing this 'Jack-in-the-box' project had been, how much energy it had activated and how good things were at the Centre. I was very pleased to hear that, and I was still more pleased when I heard that some of that money had gone to the Tyn-y-Ddol project, and some more of it to Dhardo Rimpoche's school in Kalimpong.

So a few words first about this Tyn-y-Ddol project, I stayed in that area - when was that? - the spring before last it must have been. It is a very beautiful part of North Wales. It is very thickly wooded; there are lots of pine trees in the area, and Tyn-y-Ddol itself is a group of sort of farm buildings. There is - I was going to say a three-storeyed building but that isn't quite accurate - it is three, depending on where you look at it from; from below, it is three storeys; from above it is two storeys; so you get this sort of idea. It is built of rather massive grey stone blocks, and there are several other odd buildings and outhouses and all that sort of thing. It adds up to a quite sizeable sort of complex, with, I think, about one acre of land, And it is backed by a pine-covered mountain, and down below there is a beautiful river and lots of trees along the river and on the other side of the river and then, and then there is a farm the other side, It is a very very beautiful spot - very quiet and quite deserted. The village is about a mile away. So we acquired this place a couple of years ago, and it is being renovated, and there is a team at present, working there; part of the team that renovated Sukhavati; there must be about six people, and they are turning Tyn-y-dol from a sort of farmlike place into a meditation centre or meditation retreat centre. And the idea is that we shall use this place exclusively for meditation. I mean; at present in the Movement in England we have no place devoted exclusively to meditation. I mean in all our communities in all our centres, in all our retreat centres, meditation goes on, but mixed with other things, or combined with other things, So we thought we should have at least one place in the whole Movement in England, which was dedicated only to meditation. So this is what this place is going to be. When I first saw it I thought it looks like a Tibetan monastery, because it is very simple, rather crude in fact. And there is just this plain undressed grey stone with a few slates on the roof; and it looked sort of Tibetan. It was grey and massive and a bit isolated, and the atmosphere was very, very good, I felt, when I first went there. So it is going to be a meditation centre, There is going to be a very small resident community of meditators, maybe three to begin with, possibly rising to five. So they'll be getting on with their own meditation, and they will also look after the place and we shall be having there, taken by me, meditation retreats, That is to say, retreats for meditation only and they may be only for a weekend, maybe for a week, maybe for ten days; and people can come at different times and just be there for meditation following the community pattern, And we are going to have silence, for half of every day up to lunchtime. There is going to be no talking at all by anybody. There will be no study except of literature relating directly with meditation. There will be no discussion, there will be no communication exercises; you will be expected to communicate in a different way, on a different level and just this meditative mindful atmosphere so that someone just going there, even for a weekend will be able to just plunge into it because it is all going on all the time and just have a perfectly calm, a perfectly quiet, a perfectly mindful, meditative weekend and emerge feeling, we hope, spiritually refreshed, even completely different. So this is the Tyn-y-dol project and it should be complete, weather permitting, by this June when I hope to get back and we hope to have our first meditation retreat pretty soon after,

_____ : How long will the retreats be?

S: Pardon?

_____ : How long will the retreats be?

S: Well, they will vary, They may be for a weekend, they may be for a week they may be for 10 days. That means the structured retreats, structured meditation retreats, which are taken either by me or by somebody else. But otherwise the sort of meditative atmosphere and the sort of semi-monastic routine, they will go on all the time. Incidentally in the newsletter after next there will be quite a feature devoted to Tyn-y-dol and what we hope to do there with the place. So that's Tyn-y-dol and then Dhardo Rimpoche's school.

Dhardo Rimpoche as you probably know is one of my own teachers from whom I took the Bodhisattva ordination and some initiations also, and I was very closely connected with him for the greater part of my stay in Kalimpong, especially the last few years and he's quite a well-known Tibetan incarnate Lama who came down from Tibet in, I think, 1946. He was the Head Lama of the Tibetan monastery in Buddhagaya for some time and also head Lama of the Tibetan monastery in Ghoom for some time. Eventually he settled in Kalimpong and he started a school for Tibetan refugee children. He started it when I was in Kalimpong about 21 years ago, and he has at present about 250 children, and the problem of running the school and meeting the running expenses is quite a big one these days. He does get some help from the West Bengal Government, but he doesn't like to take too much because then the school comes completely under the control of the West Bengal government education department and if that happens what they do is eliminate the whole Buddhist side of the school and have a purely secular education. What happens at present is mornings are devoted to the Dharma and the afternoons are devoted to other subjects. So he wants to keep it that way. Includes the Tibetan language and literature also, because he feels the Tibetan children should keep in touch with that. So he is trying to remain more or less independent so that he can continue not only teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but also teaching the Tibetan language and literature, teaching the Dharma. Now they start the morning with Buddhist chanting and Puja, They do invocations to Manjughosa and so on before they start. So if it was taken over by the West Bengal government all that would go, and of course, the children would lose contact with their own language and their own cultural heritage, So over the last year, or year and a half, in England, we've been raising funds for Dhardo Rimpoche and to date, I think, as far as I know, we've raised well over £1200, it was £1200 when I last enquired, and I know it's gone further than that since; and some money, as you know has been contributed from Auckland as well, and other places.

So we're able to do that for Dhardo Rimpoche, and I personally, feel very keen on doing this, just because he was one of my own teachers to begin with, and in that way I owe him a lot, and perhaps I can say through me, other people maybe owe him a lot; and of course what he's doing is intrinsically good, in helping so many of these Tibetan refugee children, and I know from my own experience that he does all this in a truly Bodhisattva-like spirit. In fact I'd even go so far as to say, that he is one of the most Bodhisattva-like people that I've ever met, even among Tibetans. So I'm very, very happy that so many of our friends in the movement, in England and here also, are interested, and able to help in this way, and I can assure everybody that that help is being very, very well-used indeed, and does a lot of good so far as those children are concerned.

Judith: You were mentioning children back there - I was wondering if you could say something about when it seems appropriate to start teaching the Dharma to children - when children should - um - when we should think about teaching our children to meditate?

S: I was asked this quite a bit in India, because in India, among the Buddhists, there are swarms of children. Every single Buddhist meeting there's a solid block of men on this side, and a solid block of women that side, and a swarm of children in front and both sides, you see, and they are not always very quiet, but they are accepted as part of the scene. So people started asking me "when should we start teaching our children Buddhism?" So I tended to put it in this way - it wasn't a question of teaching them Buddhism - when they start asking questions, answer them. I think this is the best approach with children. Children are always asking questions, anything they are interested in. When they ask "Mummy, why do you sit? Why don't you speak for half-an-hour? What are you doing?" Just try to explain: or - "Mummy, why do you keep that figure, or that image, or whatever it is? Why do you light that candle?" Children are always asking questions like this. Well, answer their questions, and as they get older, I'd say, maybe twelve, thirteen, fourteen, then you can go a little more deeply into things, and maybe encourage them to participate; but I think one has to be very

careful. Certainly we have to be careful in the West, that we don't start trying to indoctrinate people with Buddhism in the same way that they are indoctrinated with Christianity, say, when they go to school, or to some other place. I notice in England that children love participating in pujas, they love joining in and making the offerings and sometimes on festival occasions, we get the children to make the offerings. They love festivals most of all. But I think be very cautious about getting children to meditate, certainly, before the age of twelve or thirteen, and be very cautious about taking them along to lectures, especially if they happen to be rather lengthy lectures by me [*Laughter*] If it's somebody else's five or ten minute talk, well, maybe that's a different matter; but don't put them off Buddhism with long lectures, however good those lectures may be. But I think an 'ad hoc' sort of approach, especially just answering questions when those questions arise. I don't think one needs to think in terms of systematic instruction, in terms of classes or study for children, and let them pick it up, like they pick up everything else that they are interested in, and just be sympathetic and helpful, and honest when they ask questions.

Judith: Inevitably, they are being indoctrinated with Christianity, whether we like it or not in schools ...

S: Uh, yes.

Judith: They do come up with very Christian things and questions at times, and I think that is the time when ...

S: Yes ... I think it is quite ... I think with children if their relationship with their parents is good, just come back from school and tell you all about it. For instance, one of my friends, one of our 'Friends' in England, told me a little while ago that his son, who is about eight, came back from school, "Oh daddy, what do you think, they told us about the Virgin Mary today - do we have a Virgin Mary in Buddhism?" So father had to explain and the son listened. So usually the father says "Well in Christianity this is what they say but in Buddhism this is what we say. Think it over and make up your own mind." The child isn't bothered too much about it, he's not bothered maybe in the same way that the adult is. He just wants a bit of information, or just to get his bearings or her bearings; especially if they hear different things from different people. But I noticed in England that quite a few children love to imitate their parents in doing the Puja. There are several families I know where the small boy, especially, has insisted on having his own little shrine, just like his father, with his own Buddha image, and his own incense pot, and sitting when his father sits, not meditating, just sitting, because his father does it. You can't stop them. But he was quite small. He was only six or seven when all this started. He was very keen, he had his own shrine. As far as I know he still has it, he might be about twelve or thirteen. The other son, who is older, wasn't in the least interested, for some reason or other; maybe because he was relatively quite an old child when his father became deeply involved with the movement.

Gina: At Tyn-y-dol, when you're having meditation retreats, will there be any mixed retreats?

S: Probably not. Probably I shall take them separately. Because we also have the possibility of using the cottage down the road. This was originally going to be part of the whole complex, but it's turned out otherwise. So if we want to hold a women's retreat we can put the men members of the community there, and keep the whole of the other buildings for the women. But it isn't a very big place. I think, all together, we can get about twelve.

Gina: What about permanent residents? Are they going to be all male?

S: There'll probably be a men's community.

Trevor: I'd just like to make a point about birth, death and rebirth. Say an Enlightened being would've ... um ... he's reborn he necessarily isn't in the same state as he was in his previous life. Does he have to make up for that, before he can be ...

S: Did you say enlightened being or unenlightened?

Trevor: Say, a Bodhisattva or some being who's attained something like that um ... Why is it that there is a lot of the ... um ... um ... consciousness lost in the Bardo state or something ... um ... he has to make it up in his next life, and meditate ...

S: There are degrees of development even among Bodhisattvas, and some Buddhist schools do hold that it is possible in fact to have continuity of consciousness from life to life; you don't have to lose it; that some people do remember back. I know a few people do remember back. I mentioned Dhardo Rimpoché. I remember talking with him about this and he told me that up to the age of seven he could remember his previous life. Seven seems to be a critical period for some reason or other, (I've heard this from other sources too). He said that up to the age of seven he could remember the details of his previous life, but from the age of seven it started fading and he could only remember remembering but he couldn't directly remember. So memory doesn't necessarily have to fade. You can in some cases, it seems carry something over. It does seem that there are more and more of these sort of cases, or at least alleged cases, coming to light nowadays, and they are beginning to be systematically investigated. There's quite a bit of literature on this, and one gathers, even applying quite critical standards, that there are at least some people who, as far as one can see, do genuinely remember what is in fact a previous existence. At least there are a few such cases that have been more or less demonstrated; whether with complete scientific certainty it is difficult to say, because perhaps complete scientific certainty is not attainable in this field. (pause)

Patrick: Do you envisage that the WBO's ... um ... approach is Mahayana, very much as it is now, or more to Vajrayana, or that it is less developed.

S: Well, it depends what people find useful; because this is the criterion. It isn't a question of deciding abstractly on general philosophical grounds whether we're going to have a bit more Hinayana, or a bit less Mahayana, or a bit more Vajrayana ... It isn't really like that. What we're basically concerned with is people's growth and development, and we certainly find the Buddhist tradition more helpful to us in this way than any other source that is known to us ... So within that Buddhist tradition we find, yes, certain things from the Hinayana or from the Theravada, useful. We find certain things from the Mahayana useful. We find certain things from the Vajrayana, certain things from Zen, certain things from Chinese Buddhism all useful. Now whether that will vary from time to time and place to place is rather difficult to say. For instance, in India at the moment, they definitely find, on the whole, teachings derived from the Theravada sources as more useful. So those are emphasised there. In England some of our friends feel greatly inspired by teachings derived from Mahayana sources. Others find the Tibetan Buddhist literature ... Book of the Dead, Life of Milarepa, Songs of Milarepa, more inspiring and more helpful than anything else. So everybody feels free to draw from the total Buddhist tradition, whatever he finds most helpful to him or to her in the course of their own development. So whether this is likely to change, and whether, within say the FWBO, the majority of people at any given time will find, say, teachings derived from Mahayana sources more useful than teachings derived from any other source, we can't say ... It could be so. We are quite open to that possibility; but it is very difficult to lay it down in advance. In England, at least at present, I would say, that the majority of people, certainly the majority of Order Members find

material drawn from all three Yanas helpful, in some measure or other. For instance as regards study retreats, we find the Udana very helpful and very useful. We find the Bodhicharyavatara very helpful, very useful. The first is from the Pali Buddhist Scriptures, the second is a Mahayana text, and then again so many people find the Songs of Milarepa inspiring, which is a Vajrayana text. So you find that most people, most Order Members in England, draw inspiration from all three; from the Udana, the Bodhicharyavatara, from the Songs of Milarepa and there is a sort of balance, I think, at the moment as far as most people are concerned amongst these different Yanas, these different sources but it could change; it is very difficult to say. It could be that they all suddenly find Milarepa more helpful than any other source. It could happen, depending on their changing spiritual needs. I don't know whether the same is the position here in Auckland; I rather suspect it probably is. You do get people with a slight preference for Zen, but certainly not to the exclusion of the possibility of deriving inspiration from these other sources. But leaving aside that, we even get inspiration from other sources outside traditional Buddhism ... for instance Blake, William Blake, is a source of great inspiration to many people, in the movement in England at present. There is even a Blake study group, even a Shakespeare study group at the moment. A lot of people find inspiration there. So we are open to all these possibilities. And of course there is music; a lot of people find inspiration in that. Recently, during the last few months, we've had our first concerts under the actual auspices of the FWBO. One of our Friends, I think he is a mitra now, in fact, is quite a good harpsichordist, and he's started giving public recitals. So he has given several under our auspices in aid of our funds; playing Bach, Handel and so on.

(End of side one side two)

Dave R: Bhante, I know the question of Ordination presses quite heavy on the minds of quite a few of us; it does so for myself. Could you tell me something about the criteria for Going for Refuge?

S: Well, I hope that word 'heavy' is not to be taken too literally. *[Laughter]* It's not meant to be a heavy sort of thing. But the criteria can be laid down, but in a way they are quite intangible. In a way, I could say, we don't lay down criteria because then you would find it easy to fulfill it then (*soft laughter*). Do you see what I mean? Otherwise it's just like a sort of examination paper. You can swot it up and get all the 'right' answers; so that you can pass, but maybe you have missed the spirit of the whole thing. So we deliberately leave it a bit intangible, so that there aren't just a certain number of specific conditions that you have to fulfill and then you're ordained automatically. No! No! It's not as easy as that *[Laughter]* Even a very difficult list of conditions would be too easy. So we don't let it happen like that; but what happens is, you just have to be around, you have to be in circulation, you have to be especially in contact with other Order Members, and what basically happens is that they have to feel, they have to be convinced, that you are ready. It really boils down to that. You can of course tot up your attendances at Mitra groups and the faithfulness, your regularity, in your meditation and the frequency of your attendance on retreats, and the depth of your knowledge of Buddhism, and ability to give a brilliant lecture. All that can be taken into consideration, but basically it is how other committed people feel about you, how those who have made that commitment to the Buddha-Dharma-Sangha feel about you, whether in you they pick up on a sort of resonance, and feel that, yes, you too could be committed, and therefore could be ordained, and become a member of the Order. This is really what it is all about. So that means you really have to know existing Order Members well, and be open to them, and they have to be open to you, of course. And eventually a feeling develops, a sort of unanimity among the Order Members, that yes, this person should be ordained, they're ready, they're there, and then it just happens. But very often, of course, people think in terms of requirements, and fulfilling requirements, or not fulfilling requirements, or being up to standard, or not being up to standard, being accepted, being rejected, it becomes in that way 'a bit heavy' *[Laughter]*

Dave R: (inaudible comment)

S: So one should just try to increase and intensify one's commitment, and allow that to be seen by others. It is not a question of making it obvious to them, - no, no, no, - it's not as easy as that! But allowing them to see it.

Eve Gill: What happens if the Order Members are not, or do not feel, receptive towards you, would it be best to go to another place where you can work with other Order Members?

S: This is a question which will arise where there is quite a small number of Order Members in any particular centre; maybe even only one, which happens in a few instances. But if you have got quite a wide range, quite a wide choice of Order Members, (in London there's forty to fifty) then even if some Order Members perhaps are not very open to you personally, there are sure to be others who are, and who will see you as you are.

Dave R: Yes, because quite often it will be a question of psychological types, wouldn't it? Why ... the reason why you do not get on with ...

S: Right. This is quite a big question, quite an important question because, if one is committed, if a number of people are committed, difference on the level of personalities, differences of psychological types, will not matter very much; maybe not at all. You can see people getting on very well who are completely different psychological types, just because of their spiritual commitment. But nonetheless that is the ideal situation. Sometimes you may find it happening that personal differences do get in the way, even if you are committed, and sooner or later you obviously will have to deal with that and overcome it, but in the meantime it might be advisable for you to try to relate more with those who are of the same, or at least a harmonious and agreeable personality type. But not that you must give up the battle indefinitely. No! Sooner or later you must be able to relate to anybody regardless of personality type - anybody who is as committed as you are. You must be able to transcend that personality difference, and I know many people are able to do this. I have seen this. (Pause) This is one of the things we certainly found in England, in the early days, - that when there was only a small number of Order Members, and the Movement, itself, was quite small, there were more difficulties on this sort of personality level. And not only on the personality level - there was also the question of accommodating different people's talents and abilities and approaches. But as the whole Movement becomes bigger and wider and more all-embracing, you can take in almost anybody, and find a place for almost anybody, so that he or she can make their own distinctive contribution, and over and above that, relates to virtually to everybody else. In the very early days we had no scope for instance, for an accountant. Why? We had no money! *[Laughter]* But now we have got more room for plenty of accountants, and for all sorts of people of that kind. If a committed person has that knowledge, that sort of skill, well, he can place it at the disposal of the Movement, which was not possible before. Now we have people who can create images. Images cost money to create. Formerly we weren't able to do all those things. We just didn't have the resources, so, the artist who is able to create a visual image, he finds scope for his skill within the Movement. Formerly I, ... I mentioned the case of the harpsichordist, formerly, within the movement there weren't enough people interested in classical harpsichord music, there might have been just a couple, but now there are a dozen, so we get concerts every so often, and also draw in people from outside the movement altogether. So sooner or later, as the movement expands, I am convinced there is room for any particular skill, any particular approach, provided the person with that skill, or making that approach, is spiritually committed. There is room for his skill, there's room for his contribution, or her contribution. We've room nowadays, for all sorts of people; cooks, organizers, accountants, even

solicitors, givers of lectures, editors, publishers, printers, type-setters, cushion-makers, painters, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, heating engineers. We've got room for them all. We've got work for all of them ... *[Laughter]* ... within the movement ... teachers, caretakers, washers-up, retreat organisers.

Megha: Are there any caretakers?

S: What?

Megha: Are there any caretakers?

S: Oh yes - Security Officers *[Laughter]*. Would you like to be a security officer of an FWBO centre *[Laughter]* I'm sure there is a job waiting for you somewhere. Well, this is as important thing if you have a big centre. All sorts of people come, members of the general public ... security becomes important. It isn't nice if someone's shoes disappear, or someone's jacket pocket is picked. So you need to take precautions against that sort of thing. So you have a security officer, who is a member of the Order, who is responsible for locking up and unlocking and keeping an eye on visitors and so on. Otherwise a new person might get a very unpleasant impression if on their first visit they lost some money, or their shoes were taken, or something of that sort.

Bernie: Do people like that ... do they fit in then as the movement, say in Auckland, now we're small - as they get more ... different skills ... Is that hard to balance or is it that you require more of one type of person?

S: Well, it depends on the situation. When we were creating Sukhavati, we required people with building skills. They were in special demand at that time. At one time, I remember, we were desperate for a plumber. And in the end we got a plumber, but it was quite difficult. We were desperate for an electrician at one stage but then we got him. An Order Member's father turned out to be an electrician - we roped him in. He joined the community, it's true he had a drinking problem, but still he was ... (words drowned by laughter) So, you know, the more the movement expands the more room there is for different people's skills and talents. The more skills and talents we manage to accommodate the more the movement expands.

We're even accommodating businessmen. These managerial, entrepreneurial types, there's scope for them now - where five years ago there was no scope for their particular skills, and they have got these skills, which are quite rare skills. It is not a skill that you can very easily develop; apparently you have to be born with it. We've got three or four of these people. They really are useful. They come from business families, they've been dealing with money, handling money, business has been in their lives since they were children, they know all about it. It is nothing for them. Whereas other people find it very, very difficult to do this sort of work. So there are, they are Order Members, their skills are at the disposal of the movement. They are not making money, maybe dishonestly, for themselves, they are making it honestly, in accordance with the principles of Right Livelihood, for the movement.

Patrick: Do you think perhaps in big cities like London, where perhaps you get quite a lot more young people, who start to approach something like Buddhism, not from a very healthy standpoint, but might have perhaps, maybe, sort of Buddhist type ... (inaudible)

S: We did have quite a lot of this in the early days, but the people who are coming along to the centre, now, especially the London Buddhist Centre, especially young people, are more healthy than

ever before. They are in a way quite different from the sort of people who used to come along before. They aren't sort of problem orientated people so much. And some of course made direct contact through the Right Livelihood projects, even without hearing about Buddhism, or knowing about meditation. They were attracted by the way in which we operated, and they get involved in that way, and learn about Buddhism and meditation maybe afterwards, because they realize that's what makes us tick, so they decide to get into it. Originally people used to come either attracted by the meditation classes or the lectures, but now there are some people who approach us via the work, which is quite interesting. We had people coming and joining the Sukhavati community just to do carpentry but sooner or later they got into Buddhism and got into meditation which they really hadn't known about before, but they liked the community, they liked the people, they felt they'd like to live there and help in the work, in that way they got involved: the more sort of practical people.

Gina: Bhante, could you tell me a bit about the Order and families? Are there many families involved in the Order?

S: There are some families, though not many I must admit, because families tend to get sort of disintegrated as families. You know, it's just like you know, what shall I say, it's like a lump in the porridge, you know, you stir the porridge vigorously and the lump dissolves. Families tend to be a bit like that. The people who were in the families remain within the movement as individuals, and continue to relate to each other; this is also important; they don't become estranged, but they relate in a different sort of way from before. So you could say, in this way, yes, the family remains but, in a way, it doesn't remain. Some people find that a bit unnerving, but that's just because of one's own personal feelings of insecurity. Actually, if one wants to think in terms of security at all within the movement, even if one regards it as a sort of group, a positive, healthy group, you find greater security than in a nuclear family, and in a more positive and healthy way, because you are relating to a larger number of people, in a very positive way.

Dave Rice: What about the situation here in Auckland, it is a bit difficult when there is not such a large Order with which we can communicate as in other places like that. How do you feel about the position as it stands presently?

S: Well the position is, of course, changing all the time. Let's wait a few weeks and see! *[Laughter]*. But it is, of course, helpful, within the Order itself, you have people not only of different types, but people in different situations, so that if you come along as a newcomer, you feel that at least on the level on which you approach initially, there's someone to whom you can relate. If for instance you are an artist, but no one in the Order is interested in art as well, as art means a lot to you, and you want to know how that relates to Buddhism, you might have a problem if there's not a single Order Member interested in art. But if you find there is an Order Member who is not only a committed Buddhist but also a practising artist, you feel you can talk things over with him then, and get a better understanding. So this is another reason why we need this broader range of people. And the broader the range, the better, for all the newcomers. There's a greater possibility of them being able to relate, quite closely on the basis of his own interest, to this or that Order Member, because it is very difficult to relate on a sort of high spiritual level straight off. You have to start with more ordinary things, you have in common. I remember this was a great problem in the early days of the movement in England, whether there was a place for the artist or whether if you were an artist, and became involved with the FWBO, you just had to forget all about your art. This was quite a problem in the early days, but it not a problem now, because there are artists among the movement, there are quite a number of them, and all contributing as artists. I mean for instance, there is Chintamani, who makes the images, and paints thangkas, there's Padmapani, who did the fresco for Sukhavati, there's Aloka, who does thangkas and images, and who has recently started producing skulls for meditation purposes

[Laughter] They're just like the real thing, and they are on sale at £5 per ... I was going to say 'head' *[Laughter]* per skull, and he's even got a bit of mould over them *[Laughter]* to make them look as though they've just been dug up. And then there's Siddhiratna, who's done a design course, and who does the graphics usually for the Newsletter: there's Ananda, who's done a graphics course who designs covers of books; there's Devaraja who's also at some kind of art or design school ... but anyway he also designs book-covers. So they all use their skills. There's Buddhadasa whose training was as an interior decorator and designer. He's at present designing our stall for the Festival of Mind, Body and Spirit. So all these skills are useful when the Movement becomes bigger.

Patrick: Do you think when the movement becomes bigger there might possibly be ... ah ... um ... a development of .. um ... perhaps some growth psychology ... in the sense of ... um ... perhaps ... we've got a lot of Western-type psychologists who are attracted to the FWBO ... they might perhaps have a way of presenting sort of ... a superficial sort of presentation of Buddhism, not in Buddhist terms, but what happens, they could become interested in it, and then eventually hooked on to the main stem of Buddhism?

S: That may be possibly, but I must say that the main trend at present in the Friends in England, at least in London is away from psychology. People do find that they relate to others better or more directly without it; or through, just say, meditation, or something like that. Things could change again in the future, but at present the trend seems to be away from psychology.

Patrick: I just thought I'd mention psychology.

S: There is, of course, a Buddhist psychology.

Patrick: Yeah.

S: And one of the most popular study texts which has been gone through again and again is "Mind in Buddhist Psychology", especially that section on the positive mental events. That is psychology. It's Buddhist psychology. But that goes down really well, and people find it really helpful. So maybe that sort of psychology could be spread around more.

Patrick: I could even be using the wrong term. Actually, because what I mean is presenting ... presenting to people in a sort of ... a sort of very sort of simplistic, non-religious sort of way.

S: Well, we do that, you know, when we just speak of 'growth' and 'development', 'human development', 'realising your potential' ... this sort of language is very much used. In fact you will be interested to know, that when we started setting up the co-ops, for the satisfaction of the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, we had to state our aims and objects. We didn't want just to have a secular type co-op, it was definitely based on Buddhism. On the other hand the Registrar of Friendly Societies, or the Acts of Parliament under which he was operating did not permit the usage of 'religious' language in connection with cooperatives. So Subhuti very cunningly translated our completely spiritual Buddhist ideology into language which was quite acceptable to the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, and to those who knows it means Buddhism, but it's been accepted and registered now. So you can say that this is an example of that sort of thing. We've used the language which is understandable and accepted by this Government official, the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, but the message is just Buddhism. There we speak in terms of individual development and so on, and we even go beyond the ordinary psychological sort of development, we've even managed to put that in non Buddhist language. So, you know, this sort of approach makes the Dharma accessible to more people who are put off by what they see as 'religious' language, and religious

terminology, and all the rest of it. This happened especially in Finland. We've a flourishing centre in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, and in Finland, in some circles, there is a very strong reaction against Christianity, and any kind of religious language, so some of our Friends translate our English literature into almost a quite neutral terminology, which is not particularly religious, and which does not spark off any reaction in Finns who might read them and might have a bit of a 'thing' about religions in general. We just have to make ourselves accessible and intelligible. Be sure about the meaning, you know, but not tied down to any particular form of expression. This is certainly happening more and more in England. We are finding our own means of expression, and challenge that expression wherever practical. We really put across the message of the Dharma, but without being too closely tied to the letter of Buddhist tradition.

Judith: So you think a Western idiom will develop?

S: I think a Western idiom is developing. But I think the word 'idiom' is important. It is an 'idiom', not even a language, you might say, and certainly not a message. It's the idiom, this is developing already within the FWBO in England.

Dave R: It seems to me that you yourself can help a lot of us in this area, Bhante, by the way in which you've interpreted the Dharma.

S: I've found an interesting thing. When I came back to India I gave quite a lot of lectures, and people who had heard me lecture before, - some of my older friends, - came up to me afterwards and said, "Oh, there's been a change in your lectures." I said, "Well, what sort of changes?" So they said, "They're much simpler now." [*Laughter*] So I don't know whether it was meant to be a compliment, but I took it as such. I think things, in a way, have been simplified, clarified, and in a way, brought more down to earth, and this is just because one considers what are people's needs. Don't bother about, you know, Buddhist philosophy, for its own sake sort of thing. It isn't for its own sake, it's for the sake of the people. So what does this mean in the sense of - how can it help people? This is something we constantly ask ourselves in the course of our study of Buddhist texts. how does it relate to us? How do we put it into practice? What does it mean to us? We have to ask this question again and again. And this is one of the reasons why people from South-East Asia, even Bhikkhus from South-East Asia, have not been able to succeed in India. They never ask themselves this question, which seems extraordinary, but they don't! Or very, very rarely indeed. They respect the Dharma, sometimes they know the Dharma, intellectually, but they don't know how to relate it to anyone's spiritual needs. So we always ask ourselves - the teaching may be very abstruse, very profound, alright - how do we relate this to our own lives? How do we practise it? Can we practise it at all? If we can't, it doesn't really appertain to us, not yet, anyway, maybe later on. We don't reject it, but we just respectfully put it on one side until we perhaps do need it, or till we can relate it to our own needs, and we concentrate more on those teachings which we can relate in that way to the needs of our own growth, and our own development. And after all, the Buddhist scriptures are really enormous, and you can't expect that everything is going to be equally relevant. That's impossible. Sometimes that will be relevant, sometimes this will be relevant, so on that you concentrate, for the time being, and really try to put it into operation. So this is the principle we follow when we study any of the scriptures, or when we study Blake even. How is it relevant? What difference does it make? How do we practise it? Otherwise Buddhism isn't Buddhism! It isn't meant to be a sort of system of abstract general (...) which we just admire for their beauty at a distance. It isn't that!

Anyway, maybe we should stop there, and I gather that at this point one usually adjourns, if one isn't already there, of course, and has a cup of tea and then back here for a short meditation and concluding Basic Puja.

Handwritten from the tape and typed by persons unknown
Retyped by Paul Doré
Checked and Contented by Silabhadra
Printed and Distributed by Margje Perla-Zeef