

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/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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This transcript has not been checked by Sangharakshita, and may contain mistakes and mishearings. Checked and reprinted copies of all seminars will be available as part of the [Complete Works Project](#).

thinking aware of itself as thinking. And this introduces of course an element of clarity. You're using, then, thinking, and thinking is not using you. Usually of course thinking uses you, just as your emotions use you. People are not familiar with the idea of your thoughts using you, they're reasonably familiar with the idea of your emotions using you, your emotions possessing you and taking you over. They're not so familiar with this idea of your thoughts using you, your thoughts taking you over. So that you cannot (sort of) stand outside yourself and look at your thoughts. That is critical thinking.

Devamitra: But how far can one distinguish between thoughts and emotions?

S: Well, one can distinguish, they aren't altogether separable in practice and experience, but one might say there is a sort of spectrum where you've got say emotion without any admixture of thought here, and thought without any admixture of emotion there, and then they merge towards the middle (as it were) and you can hardly (sort of) distinguish thought which is imbued with emotion from emotion which is suffused by thought. Which is in a way the more truly human state. But anyway we're getting a little bit away from the main point with which perhaps we should conclude, because I think it's probably time. The main point being, just to reiterate, that we do need to try to achieve a greater clarity of thought, because that does have an important part to play, one might even say an essential part to play in one's whole process of spiritual development. One should be very careful to understand what is actually meant by that, not to confuse it with intellectuality in the modern sense, or with knowledge in the ordinary sense, knowledge in the sense of accumulation of information, or with education, or even with literacy. And don't forget that the Buddha himself was illiterate and hadn't read a book, and neither had even Sariputta, despite being the founder of the Abhidharma tradition, he'd never read a book. So perhaps we should conclude there.

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Jonathan Brazier: I was going to say something rather down to earth: You pointed out that eating takes up a good deal of our lives. So I wondered since you join us for our meals, whether you had any observations on how we should make our mealtimes here more of a spiritual activity

S.: This is something to which I have given some thought, not so much here but perhaps more on previous occasions, previous Tuscanys as well as at Padmaloka. One of the things I've noticed is that people often get very absorbed in their food. Well, I suppose absorption is a good thing; (Laughter) but sometimes they seem to be - and I'm not especially commenting on this course - over-absorbed in their food to the exclusion of all other considerations, for instance, their neighbours requirements and so on. So that's certainly one of the things that I've noticed. Since it is a down to earth question, perhaps I am expected to give a down to earth reply. Sometimes people are quite noisy in their eating. I must say this is something I noticed in one respect at least, at Padmaloka quite a bit recently that there seemed to be a lot of scraping of chairs. I mean if somebody came to the table or got up from the table, there would be a tremendous scraping of chairs, very noisily and I couldn't help wondering why this should be so, why this should be necessary? It seemed that you just lifted your chair and put it down in another place. You didn't sort of drag it along the floor which is what often seemed to happen. This seemed rather strange to me. And also I noticed people sort of hanging things down on the table and making a lot of noise in that sort of way. Of course, some people they sort of chomp a lot (Laughter). It's really quite audible, and I sometimes find this quite unpleasant if the chomper in question is seated immediately next to me because sometimes on certain occasions at Padmaloka, I've found this really quite deafening. (Laughter) It certainly doesn't encourage conversation. I mean the Buddhist scriptures, the Vinaya itself - has something to say about this. I think I've mentioned that the Buddha recommended to the Bhikkhus that they shouldn't eat in the noisy sort of way that the brahmins ate, and he mentions I think, six different kinds of noises that the brahmins make while eating. I can't remember all of them but there's a sort of (makes a noisy chomping sound). And then there's a sort of sucking noise and all those sort of noises the well-trained Bhikkhu, the shaven headed person (Laughter) should do well to avoid. But sometimes people talk with their mouths full, which isn't very pleasant and sometimes of course, they open their mouths wide while their mouths are full of semi-masticated food. Again that isn't very pleasant. Or they put their finger right into their mouths or they clatter with their knives and forks or again they sit hunched up over

their plates, over their meals. Not exactly grimly contemplating, but in a rather odd sort of way.

So these are just some of the things I've noticed at mealtimes. Another objectionable feature which is perhaps unavoidable at a place like Padmaloka, is people having to jump up in the middle of the meal and answer the telephone. I think we really have to try to train our friends to ring us at reasonable hours. Some people in the movement seem to be under the impression that if you want to contact someone at Padmaloka, the best time to do it is mealtimes, because they are sure to be there. So sure enough, between six and six thirty, so many phone calls, both phones busily ringing. Sometimes Subhuti's jumping up, sometimes there's Ven-tara jumping up and Devamitra jumping up, you know, when he's there. (Laughter) Sometimes they just stand firm as it were, and they refuse to answer the phone. They say that, or they give a message to the effect that the person phoning should leave a message or phone again later on. But even for that to happen, someone has had to get up and answer the phone. So that's another sort of

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unpleasant and quite unnecessary perhaps, feature of mealtimes. Of course, not here but at padmaloka. I'm sure if I was to put my mind to it, I would go on talking for a couple of hours about all the not so very pleasant things I've noticed on once occasion or another at mealtimes. I must say also, I don't like people appearing at meals in singlets or even less. Because sometimes if they've been exercising and if one's olfactory nerves are a little sensitive then that too isn't very pleasant. So we really do get down to earth with this down to earth question. So perhaps that's enough for you to be getting on with for the moment. Enough for you just to digest. (Laughter) Mentally digest, I mean, not physically. I think that this is quite important certainly in Buddhist tradition it is regarded as important, because -you are eating - I was going to say all the time - but that isn't true. You're eating not usually more than three times a day. Well you do spend quite a substantial amount of your time eating, it is admittedly, perhaps unfortunately, a necessary activity. But if one is not aware at that particular time and if one is not aware when one is engaged in that particular activity, it means that there's quite a large part of your time, quite a large section of your time during which you're not in fact aware of what you're doing and that must in one way or another, hold you back. Apart from the fact that, sometimes through your unaware, unmindful behaviour, at the meal table, you're causing a certain amount of, perhaps, - admittedly minor - distress to other people. So that's the first one.

Vessantara: A question from Mike who's ill this evening - about mindfulness in everyday activity. Out of your years of practice of mindfulness, are there any specific techniques to help, that you've found useful?

S.: Well, actually there aren't any techniques, I would say, because in order to apply the technique you would have to remember to apply it. And you know, remembrance, recollection, is a form of mindfulness. So the paradox is that you can't practise mindfulness, unless you are mindful of the need to practise it. So probably the best sort of outside help that you could have is spiritual friends more aware, more mindful than yourself, who will draw your attention to any lapse from mindfulness. Who will just point out to you that you are being a little unmindful on this or that occasion. Because even if you sort of frame rules for yourself, you still have to remember to apply those rules. You still have to be aware of the need to apply them in a particular situation and if you can be aware of the need to apply a rule that will help you to be mindful in a particular situation, well, then you can be aware - you can be mindful. You don't need to go about it in that roundabout fashion. Otherwise, we find ourselves involved in a regression to infinity. You perhaps think up what you consider to be a technique to help you with your mindfulness but then you have to be mindful and remember that technique. Then you have to be mindful to be mindful and remember it and so on. So I think the best thing is to have around you people who are more mindful than you and who can point out to you from time to time, your own lapses, your own failures to be mindful. I suppose - this is something that just occurs to me - you could put up little slogans or little notices all over the place. You could say, well, you'd have to remember to look at them, but you could put them in large bold letters so that they hit you in the eye. For instance, over your shaving mirror, you could put up a little notice: 'Please remember to be mindful today' or something of that sort.

Sussidhi: You can have trigger words. Some words that sort of remind you - you know, like words like mindfulness for instance. If someone introduces it into conversation it reminds you. You can extend the number of trigger words you've got.

S~: Then again you'd have to have a friend in your environment pre- sumably who was accustomed to using that word. I remember in this connection in Aldous Huxley's 'Island', don't they have birds of some kind that repeat 'Attend! Attend'~ You could perhaps have a parrot (Laughter) that you train to say, "Be mindful" It's not impossible. I've often mentioned Dharo Rimpoché has or had a mynah bird that he taught to say (imitates) 'Om Mani Padme Hum' (Laughter) So instead of having in our communities a dog or cats, we could perhaps have these trained parrots, who would perhaps say (chants) 'Be mindful' (Loud Laughter) Perhaps that would be a quite helpful sort of technique. Perhaps you could have for instance, a sort of tape recorded saying which automatically switched on at sort of 20 or 30 minute intervals exhorting you to be mindful. I'm sure that some of the more technic- ally minded among you could rig up something of this sort.

Sussidhi: I was wondering whether just one of these watches which goes 'beep' (Laughter)

S.: But the difficulty is you see you get used to these things that the 'beep' would go and you wouldn't take any notice of it. And you might even have this recording apparatus or whatever it was, exhorting you to be mindful. But you just hear the sound, but you wouldn't really wouldn't pay any attention to the meaning of the words. So this again perhaps reinforces what I was saying, and perhaps I have to withdraw my withdrawal that~there's no substitute for mindfulness, just mindfulness.

Kamilasila: You've got to want to be mindful.

S.: Yes. You've also got to obviously to want to be mindful, to make ~effort. But perhaps again as I've said, it's the reminders from your spiritual friends, are the most helpful method of improving your mindfulness.

Pranasiddhi: Periods of silence are perhaps good for this.

S.: Yes, but again, there's no infallible technique or method, because a lot of people I suspect, during periods of silence just go wool-gath- ering. (Laughter) and they're not really aware, not really mindful what thoughts are passing through their minds. This particular topic is rather in my own mind at present because this afternoon I was editing the lec- ture on Perfect Awareness, in the Eight-fold Path series and I was talk- ing in that lecture - the bit I was editing was about this awareness or mindfulness of thoughts, and I think this is something that happens quite a lot, that people aren't aware of what they are thinking. So that the fact that you observe silence doesn't necessarily ensure increased mindfulness~ because you may simply be having the usual unmind- ful flow of thoughts; perhaps it's to an even greater extent because you don't have the relief of actually giving them utterance. So no technique, no method really seems to help very much here. As I've said, there's no substitute for mindfulness.

Vessantara: Another question arising out of our discussion on food:

Phil Shaun: In the text you were emphasizing very strongly the import- ance of vegetarianism. It's common knowledge that most Tibetan Buddhists living in India, eat meat when it's no longer necessary for them, so: 1. Do you think this could be confusing for people in the West and there- fore set a bad example? 2. And if so, do you think it would be a good idea to make some form of protest?

S.: Yes. The answer to the first question is definitely yes! I think it's quite unfortunate. I remember that when the Dalai and Panchen Lamas came to India for the first time in, I think it was the end of 1956 - in connection with the 2,500 Buddha Jayanti celebrations in India - many Indians, that is to say, mainly Hindus, were deeply dismayed to learn that the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas were both non- vegetarians. And I learned from my personal experience, my personal contact with friendly Hindus

who are interested in and even sympathetic to Buddhism, that their faith in the Dali and Panchen Lamas, which had originally been very, very great indeed, dramatically slumped after they read about this in the newspapers. Subsequently, of course, the Dalai Lama himself has become aware of this and to the best of my knowledge he is now a vegetarian. But again, to the best of my knowledge, the vast majority of Tibetan Lamas and monks and lay people in Tibet and in other parts of the world have not followed his example. So it does not constitute a sort of stumbling block, I think, especially for people who.. non-Buddhists who start becoming interested in Buddhism, but become disillusioned when they find that professing Buddhists, do not practise what would seem to be a quite obvious and simple application of a basic Buddhist teaching. But we mustn't, I'm afraid, single out the Tibetans here, because the Thais and the Burmese are if anything, even greater meat eaters than are the Tibetans. And the Majority of Sinhalese monks and laymen are non-vegetarian. Perhaps the Tibetans have less excuse when they are in a country like India where it's very easy to be vegetarian, because they are ostensibly Mahayanists, and therefore pledged to the principle of Compassion in particular. And then again, there is the sort of famous meat-eating chapter in the Lankavatara Sutra, which is a Mahayana sutra. They don't seem to take that very seriously. I'm afraid also in this connection, that Tantric teachings, perhaps not properly understood, do play a part here because I have been told by Tibetan Lamas and other that when an animal is slaughtered, if certain mantras are recited over it, its consciousness is at once released and goes to a sort of heaven. Some Lamas will say that the fact that the flesh of an animal passes through their system ensures the salvation of that animal. I'm not prepared absolutely to dispute that in principle, ultimately, but I'm quite sure that it doesn't... that nothing like that happens in the vast majority of cases. So that really it represents just a rationalization. But certainly, I mean, quite a large part of the Buddhist world doesn't, unfortunately, set a very good example in this way and it must be confusing to people who start looking into Buddhism and inquiring about it. Whether we should make any actual protest, that's very difficult to say. My own experience in the East, with not so much Tibetan Lamas or Tibetan monks but with Thai bhikkhus and Burmese bhikkhus, to a lesser extent with Sinhalese bhikkhus, was that they were very, very resistant to any suggestion that they should change or any suggestion that what they were doing was in any way Wrong. They thought it was just an example of your Western narrow-mindedness and intolerance. For instance, the Thai bhikkhus in particular used to say to, - well they used to say several things to me - but one was that the lay people gave them meat and therefore they couldn't refuse it - so it was just dropped into their bowls. So my reply to that was, the lay people were after all Buddhists and they'd been Buddhists for hundreds of years and the bhikkhus had taught them to do all sorts of things. The bhikkhus for instance, had taught them female Thai Buddhists to offer, to make offerings to them, the monks in all sorts of elaborate ways, you know. Making use of pieces of cloth, handkerchiefs and so on and so forth so as not to come into physical contact with the bhikkhus. So I made the point if they could teach them all these things, then why could they not have taught them not to offer them meat. And in any case, who were their teachers? Were the bhikkhus the teachers of the lay people

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or were lay people the teachers of the monks? Could the monks not explain to the lay people what it was proper to offer? Because after all, they were able to explain that certain kinds of meat were prohibited and should not be offered according to the Theravada Vinaya. That is to say, human flesh and tiger's flesh and so on. Well, could they not ask them not offer any flesh at all? So to these arguments my Thai friends usually have nothing to say. Another favorite argument of theirs was, knowing that I was a vegetarian, they would say: "Oh, your mind is very strong. Our minds are very weak!" (Laughter) So I would say, "nonsense! - because I was brought up as a non-vegetarian. I was accustomed to taking meat. I was conditioned into taking meat. My system was used to meat but I gave it up as soon as it was pointed out to me it was inconsistent for a Buddhist to take meat. And I said, "I've adapted without any difficulty. I'm quite sure you could do the same". But they said, "Oh no! I don't think we could!" (Laughter) I noticed staying with some of my Thai bhikkhus friends especially at Bodhgaya of all places in the new Thai temple; that every single dish they ate was mixed with meat. It was not that they took some meat sometimes, but every single dish was mixed either with chicken or with pork. And sometimes, I quite literally without any exaggeration, when I had a meal with them, all I was able to eat was just rice. There was absolutely nothing else except plain rice that had not been mixed with meat. And I'm afraid the Thais particularly weren't very cooperative. They didn't feel that I was experiencing any genuine difficulty. They quite clearly felt that I was just being awkward and they ought not to help me out of the situation which I had created for myself, just by my sheer awkwardness. The Sinhalese I must say, were much more sympathetic. Some Sinhalese bhikkhus are vegetarians and Sinhalese lay Buddhists appreciate the fact that a monk is a

vegetarian and be very cooperative about that. But not the Thais and not the Burmese. Tibetans, if you tax them with it, will very often say, "Yes, we know we should be vegetarians but it's very difficult in Tibet". But in the case of those who are now in India, I mean, that argument no longer holds good. I have met, incidentally, one Tibetan bhikkhu who was a Gelug, who was a strict vegetarian, and had been, I gathered all his life. He was then about 72 or 73. He was staying with Dharpo Rimpoche. He was very thin, but he was very sort of bright and very wiry and very active. I don't know whether this had anything to do with his vegetarianism but though he was thin, he did seem quite healthy and quite active and for a Tibetan, 73 is a very good age indeed. They usually die quite a long time before that. Though as I say, I'm not sure, whether it would help to make a protest. Philip Kapleau, in his book, 'The Buddhist case for vegetarianism', which I hope everybody has seen, probably read, does make a few quite firm but gentle criticisms of the existing state of affairs in the Buddhist world. I'm quite glad he's done that. But obviously, one doesn't want to make criticisms that will only be counterproductive. I think you've probably just got to work on individual Eastern Buddhists that you happen to meet. The majority of our own friends, Order members, mitras and regular friends in India, for instance, are vegetarian, though many of them were not before they became Buddhists.

Devamtrina: I believe that Dharpo eats meat. I wondered if you'd ever discussed this matter with him?

S.: I've never actually discussed the matter with him. I think I have been told that he finds it difficult to subsist on a vegetarian diet. But I must say, again, I have not actually discussed it with him. Though I have certainly heard him speak in favour of vegetarianism. Otherwise, another point is - maybe I should also have mentioned this - that Tibetans generally when they are engaged in any kind of Puja or spiritual practice connected with Tara or Avalokitesvara do observe

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vegetarianism. They don't take meat. So, I remember Dharpo Rimpoche especially mentioning this. Sometimes these pujas last, say, for 2, 3 days sometimes, even for 10 days and during that period, those involved will abstain from meat. I mean for the obvious reason that Avalokitesvara and Tara are especially associated with compassion.

Vessantara: Phil had another question, about marriage.

Phil Shann: You were talking about the different forms of marriage available in the Buddhist East. Do you think some of the marriage alternatives - I was thinking of polyandry, in particular - could be implemented successfully in the West and that this would be a healthier form of marriage, as it would take the pressure off the man and leave him freer to practise the spiritual life?

S.: I don't know. It's very difficult to say. It sounds logical; that is to say, polyandry. In case anyone is not clear what that involves, polyandry means the sharing of one wife by a number of husbands. It was fairly common in Tibet, the old Tibet. It usually took the form, which anthropologists described as 'fraternal polyandry' and 'non-fraternal polyandry'. Fraternal polyandry is where a number of brothers marry the same woman. This is said to be practised also among the Sikhs, though they usually deny it. But there is the famous story of the Sikh who was in the British Army and who applied for leave to his commanding officer - who was of course, British - on the grounds that his wife had just had a baby. But the commanding officer looking up his records, said "but you've been here on active service for two years!". He said, "Oh yes, that's true but my brother is at home". (Laughter) Usually in polyandry set-ups, the children are regarded as equally the children of all the husbands - especially if all the husbands are brothers. They don't differentiate. I've certainly not found this among Tibetans saying "well, this is my child and that's yours". All the children are all equally the children of all the husbands. So where the husbands are all brothers, and this is I think, the more common form in Tibet, this is known as 'fraternal polyandry'. And usually in those cases, as far as I remember, the wife moves into the brothers' family home. But sometimes it happens that a woman has no brothers, and she inherits her parents' property and then she will marry a number of unrelated men and they will come to live at her house and the house remains her property, incidentally. It does not become their property. It remains her property, but they are living there with her as her husbands. So this arrangement seemed to work in Tibet in the old days and I have been told that jealousy was unknown in that situation. It just shows that human nature is quite adaptable, quite malleable. I've

also been told, in fact I've published a little article in Stepping Stones on Tibetan polyandry by prince Peter of Greece who made a special study of the subject and he related in this article, how he'd talked with an old Tibetan - I think it was in Ladakh.- and the old Tibetan, the old Ladakhian, had been grumbling as old people usually do about the younger generation. And he was saying, "I don't know what to make of these young men. They're so individualistic, so selfish. What do you think, everyone of them wants a wife of his own nowadays?" (Laughter) That's how he looked at it. So one might say, - I wouldn't like to say that I thought it would work, but one might say perhaps that it could work. Though again, one must say that among the Tibetans, it was the usual custom for only one of the husbands to be at home at a time. Others would be off, perhaps, on trading expeditions and away for two or three years.



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So one isn't to think of a situation where you've got three or four husbands all at home at the same time. No, it's more that they, as it were, take it in turns to be at home and to be off, you know, trading, and travelling and so on. Whether you can adapt that and have, as it were, one husband at home while another was on re-treat and another was doing his world dharma preaching tour, I don't know. (Laughter) I'm afraid from what I've observed or from what I've heard, I've become somewhat suspicious of marriage in any of its forms. But it might be interesting for some people to make the experiment. I really don't know. I wouldn't like to be quoted as being either in favour of that particular experiment or not in favour of it. I'd merely observe it, if the experiment ever was made with a certain amount of interest. (Laughter) The principle that is here involved, that one should free oneself from the conditioning of thinking that there is only one possible even conceivable ethical form of marriage. I think that is the main point. These unconventional arrangements are of course, not unknown in the West. There is that famous story about one of the four Georges. Those of you who study history will know which one it is - I think it was George II who was very fond of his wife and who was dying, and his wife - no, I beg your pardon, I've got it the other way. . . - He was very fond of his wife but his wife was dying and he was very distressed at her death and with her last words, she begged him to marry again, when she was no more. So he said, "No, no, no I shall never marry again. I have my mistresses." (Laughter) So as I say, unconventional arrangements were not unknown in the West especially amongst the higher levels of society. There again, the well-known lady in the 18th century - a member of the aristocracy - I think it was Lady Oxford - who had a number of children... I must make sure I've got this right. Yes, she was married to someone called Harley. So there was a famous publication in those days called the 'Harleian miscellany' which I think, Johnson edited. Anyway the children had so many different fathers that they were known collectively at the Harleian Miscellany. (Laughter) So this again illustrates the unconventional arrangements at certain levels of society. I think again, the point that one has to try to understand, it is possible for one particular arrangement, one particular marriage arrangement to be just as ethical as another. I won't say, necessarily so, but it is possible that monogamy certainly does not have the monopoly of morality as it were. (Pause) I mean, whether any particular arrangement is actually ethical rather than non-ethical, obviously depends on the persons actually involved, whatever the nature of the arrangement may be.

Vessantara: Simon had a question.

Simon Turnbull: Yes, it's regarding your comments about our attitude to work in the West. I was wondering whether you thought, considering the amount of work needed to be done in spreading the Dharma, if you thought that people in the movement were working hard enough or too hard or how much you thought people were affected by this?

S.: I must say when I use the expression 'work', I wasn't thinking so much of work in the sense of spreading the Dharma, though that certainly is work. I think I even mention later on, I was thinking of

work in the sense of gainful employment. But since you ask whether I think that people in the movement are working hard enough for the spreading of the Dharma, I would say certainly not! And I think one of the things that demonstrates that is the fact that the Order itself is growing at such a slow rate.

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Because I think one could say that if one as an Order Member, took a genuine interest in the - I was going to say spiritual dev- elopment, but I hope that doesn't sound too narrow - but just took a very definite interest in a certain mitra or friend and developed a real friendship with that person, I think that one could almost guarantee that that particular person, mitra or friend, if he'd been, as it were, rightly chosen, rightly selected after consideration of his capacities, his potential, - I think that say within two years, he could be well on the way to Ordination if not actually Ordained. So I think each single individual Order Member is capable of giving, at least in theory, in principle, that sort of attention to at least one mitra or friend. So that means that every two years the Order would double, but it's not doubling, nothing like that so this would suggest to me that the Order members we at present have, are not working hard enough to spread the Dharma. I'm not thinking here of course, of giving lectures. I'm not thinking of writing books and articles, which some people are doing, because not everybody can do that. But every single Order Member, I'm sure, by virtue of the fact that he is an Order Member, and himself committed to the Three Jewels, can give a measure at least of spiritual friendship to a mitra, to such an extent to help him get ready for Ordination and help him to get ready to commit himself. I should say the fact that this is not being done, and therefore that the Order is not doubling every two or every three years even or every three or four years, shows that there's a lot of room for improvement and that is one very simple example. But I think in other ways too we could redouble our efforts. In almost every respect, double and treble our efforts. I think broadly speaking people are still far too lackadaisical; far too sort of self-indulgent. In some ways, quite lazy, I would say. Obviously I mean, it's a pity that one has to speak in those terms but that is the truth, I think. There are no doubt some people within the Order, within the movement, even some mitras, working very, very hard indeed, even to spread the Dharma, but not everybody I'm afraid, is doing as much, not nearly as much as they could do. And the need is very urgent. There are a lot of people, of whom one could say, in the words of the pali scriptures, I think in the words of Brahma to the Buddha, who are perishing through not hearing the Dharma, you know, quite literally. I think not materially but certainly psychologically and spiritually. This is one of the things that has struck me especially during the last year or two. I mean, as you know, quite a few people write to me, but in the course of the last year to two more and more people have expressed their appreciation of the fact that there is such a thing as the FWBO and that it has been started up, and not only expressed appreciation but have said what a profound relief it was to them to come into contact with a movement such as the FWBO. But one knows that very often people come into contact with it almost by accident and our publicity is so restricted and so limited that only a very small percentage of those who might benefit from contact with the FWBO are even able to hear about it. So we really do need to redouble our efforts. (Pause) The other evening I was talking about skills, especially media type skills -, just because there's the need for us to make ourself known and to present whatever it is we have to offer.

Vessantara: Wade had a question about work.

Wade McKee: In traditional terms, Buddhism begins with dana and under the section - what is given as dana you say, Buddhism starts off right at the bottom (with) material things like food, shelter and clothing. The movement is trying to provide these things through

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its cc-3p5 as best as can. Do you think it's appropriate when friends become more involved with the FWBO, that we should emphasize this basic area of work as not perhaps the beginning of giving but within the context of the movement?

S.: I'm not quite sure what the point of the question is?

Wade: Well, I was thinking in terms of actually the best way for friends who are becoming involved with... in terms of giving, - it's through the area of co-ops which are trying to provide those three basic things?

S.: Do you mean by actually working in a co-op or by providing it with capital?

Wade: No.. well, in working specifically in a co-op.

S.: I'm not so sure about that. One of the things I've been thinking recently, not only recently, is that there is a need for more Order members to work in co-ops, because I think a situation has unfortunately developed to some extent, where co-ops are run or have been run predominantly or even in some cases entirely, by mitras and I think that is altogether wrong. Because one of the things that people working in a co-op need, one of the reasons why they work in a co-op, is spiritual friendship. And you know mitras will certainly look for that to Order members, especially the Order members with whom they are working. So I think it is very, very necessary that in every co-op there should be a core at least of Order members. Otherwise, I don't think a co-op can really function to optimum capacity, certainly not in the spiritual sense and that probably means not really in any sense. And I do know that here and there among some of the mitras, there has been a certain amount of disappointment that more Order members haven't been working in co-ops and that therefore they are deprived of that kind of contact. So yes, certainly I think mitras could be encouraged to work in co-ops, but if they are encouraged to work in co-ops, one should at the same time be very careful to see that they get as it were, a fair deal. And part of the deal to use that term, is that they get in the working situation enough contact with Order members.

(End of Side A)

Phil Miller: In respect of that would it be alright then for an Order member to work under a mitra who was more qualified in that particular field or should the Order member try to take over as it were?

S.: Well, it depends what one means by 'under'. You know some people might not like that term anyway. But in a co-op or in any other situation where there are Order members and non-Order members, the Order members obviously take, to use perhaps what is an equally unfortunate expression 'the lead'. In other words, a certain spiritual weight resides with the Order members by virtue of their commitment to the Three Jewels but that having been said, that certainly doesn't mean that as regards to certain skills and so on, an Order member cannot learn from a non-Order member. Well, obviously they can, but the communication and contact should be such that it's quite possible for someone to learn some skill from somebody else even while that other person from whom he is learning the skill, is able to acknowledge the fact that he is spiritually more committed and respect him for that. The two things should not be incompatible.

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I think if there is maturity on both sides, it will not be incompatible. I mean, for instance, supposing you're an Order member and a mitra is teaching you to drive. Well, the fact that you're an Order member in that situation is quite irrelevant. You'll take note of what the driving instructor is telling you. But you know, once you're out of that situation and even perhaps within it, in a certain sense, you know, the non-Order member will clearly feel a definite respect for the Order member.

Devamitra: I think you touched upon this issue the other evening, but you didn't delve straight into it. My question is, in the lecture you talk about the need to throw off orthodox Christian attitudes to morality in order to establish a new ethic. It would seem at the time you were speaking this question was on that was concerning society as a whole, not just the potentially Buddhist part of it. Recently you have spoken of the emergence of a new orthodoxy in the wider society. Could you therefore, first of all, tell us in what you think that it's a potentially undermining factor in the establishment and maintenance of Buddhist ethic within the FWBO?

S.: Yes, I did mention when I was answering - I think it was your question, a few evenings ago, 'pseudo-egalitarianism'. By which I mean the sort of blind, unthinking assumption that everybody is

quite literally equal and is to be treated accordingly. One could give all sorts of other examples but while I speak of a sort of neo-orthodoxy what I'm getting at is this: in as much as I used the expression neo-orthodoxy, I'm contrasting it with the old orthodoxy, the old-fashioned orthodoxy - that is, traditional Christian orthodoxy. For instance as represented by belief in, say, the divinity of Christ and the Trinity of the God-head. Now in the Middle Ages, and even later, it was considered quite unthinkable to question those doctrines or those dogmas. If you questioned them, well, even down perhaps to the 18th century in Britain, so far as most people were concerned, even you were, almost off your head. You were so obviously flying in the face of a blatantly obvious, a blindingly obvious truth. So you must be absolutely inconceivably stupid or inconceivably wicked. So all decent, right-thinking people would automatically react against you. They might want to imprison you or to burn you at the stake. There was no question of any discussion. There was no question of sitting down and talking with you about it because you were so obviously wrong. So it is in that, that I consider orthodoxy to consist - in the belief that somebody is so obviously wrong, that you can't even sit down shouldn't even sit down and talk the matter over with him. You can only try to dispose of him, that is to say, by force, by violence as quickly as possible. SO when I speak of neo-orthodoxy, I have in mind something like that. Not so much this or that particular doctrine, but the attitude that if someone believes something or does not believe something in which you believe, there's no question of sitting down and talking with him about it, in a quiet friendly way. He is so obviously wrong, that well, he doesn't deserve any better treatment than being just shouted down, denounced, imprisoned~ if possible.

Well, for instance, just to touch on one of these quite explosive sort of topics. The question of racial equality. Now a few years ago, an anthropologist was invited to give a lecture, I think it was in London, probably the University of London, - somewhere like that. And in the course of his lecture, and he was a quite famous - not anthropologist, psychologist, I think he - he attempted to argue that the races were not equal. There were reports in the newspapers. He was shouted down by the students. He was not allowed to finish his lecture. He didn't - I don't think he said which particular race he

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thought was superior to another. Perhaps he didn't even mention the word 'superiority' at all, but he did maintain or he sought to maintain, on the basis of what he considered to be the scientific evidence, that there was no such thing as complete racial equality. That the races were not equal. Now he was shouted down, which meant that no-one was willing to enter into discussion or debate. He was so obviously wrong according to them that he should not be listened to. So this is an example of the sort of thing that I mean.

I'm not saying that he might have been right or that he might have been wrong. The neo-orthodoxy of his student audience considered him not being willing even to discuss the matter with, not even being willing for him to put what he thought was his side of the case to them, but just shouting him down and forcibly disrupting his lecture. Do you see what I mean? So this is what I mean by neo-orthodoxy. Another rather explosive example is the equality of the sexes. If you try to, for instance, argue that one sex is superior to the other in certain circles, you will just be howled down. They won't be prepared to discuss the subject with you. They may even go so far as to threaten you with physical violence. So this is neo-orthodoxy. So I see really no difference between this position and the position of the old orthodoxy in the Middle Ages. It is the same intolerant attitude. I mean sometimes if they do condescend to argue the neo-orthodox people will adduce certain harmful consequences which they believe will follow if you accept such and such a point of view. But they will not discuss, whether the point of view is actually right or wrong. And again the neo-orthodox consists in that. So this is broadly speaking what I mean by neo-orthodoxy.

And of course, you could mean, for different people, the neo-orthodoxy may take a different form. It is not that certain definite beliefs are neo-orthodox beliefs. But an attitude to neo-orthodoxy can attach itself to quite a number of beliefs, though there are a number of what one might call 'pseudo-liberal' beliefs to which the attitude of neo-orthodoxy seems to attach itself rather easily. But it represents a complete negation of the whole idea of rational debate and rational discussion. You are so outraged or you profess to be so outraged by what somebody believes, that you just won't allow him to speak. You just want to silence him or her, as quickly as you can. You don't hesitate to persecute them.

So this is why one of the things I used to say years ago - I don't say it now because I think I've got tired of saying it - is that it's almost impossible nowadays to speak the truth. One isn't allowed to speak the truth, or at least, one isn't really allowed to say what one thinks. There are all sorts of restrictions, all sorts of inhibitions, even in the so-called Western democracies. If one is lucky, one can say what one really thinks aloud just to a small circle of people; not more.

Devamitra: But it seems quite a strange, almost contradictory society which upholds supposedly the idea of freedom of speech.

S.: Oh yes, oh yes.

Devamitra: Effectively, what you're saying is that it doesn't seem to.. it's not...

S.: It's not a perfect freedom of speech. There are certain things one is allowed to say and certain things that one is not allowed to say, effectively. (Pause)

Devamitra: So it would be mistaken to suggest therefore perhaps that a new moral order has established itself in place of the old orthodox Christian one?

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S.: I would say that probably what has happened is that the old Christian moral order has to some extent broken down. In certain respects that isn't a bad thing. But, - simply a breakdown of an old moral order which was, in some respects at least, undesirable, is not in itself tantamount to the establishment of a new moral order. That still needs to be done. I don't think we've-- even cleared the ground. Then again I don't think you can completely abolish the old moral order and the, as it were, del novo, establish your new moral order. The two will always overlap to a great extent. It's not so easy to be off with the old love before you're on with the new. (Pause) Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Is the second part of your question answered?

Devamitra: Well, the second half was dependent on a misunderstanding on my part of what neo-orthodoxy consisted.

Vessantara: Phil had a question about freedom of speech, which seems to follow on.

Phil Shann: This does connect very much with what you were just saying. How much do you tolerate intolerance? And the examples I'm thinking of are the Jesuits who went into Tibet and apparently had a very divisive effect and also the National Front today and the effect that they have. And how much censorship therefore, should be applied?

S.: Yes. I think really there are two or three questions here. I think the first one is a very, very important one. I mean, how does a tolerant belief or teaching or even organization protect itself from an intolerant one? This is really an incredibly difficult question, because usually the one who believes in tolerance believes in non-violence. So it's not really open to him, on principle, even to defend himself perhaps by violent means. But then what does he do? Does he allow himself to be completely overcome and overwhelmed? The only sort of answer that I can see and it may not be a complete one, is that you must be very far-sighted. You must see the danger coming and take steps to counteract it before it reaches the point where it can be counteracted only by violent means. In other words, you've not only got to be very far-sighted, you've got to be perhaps, very diplomatic and even cunning, up to a point. I think also you've not got to hesitate to take full advantage of the law where it is in fact on your side. And I think you've got to engage very freely and vigorously in debate, and present your point of view and argue your point of view and not let your case, as it were, go by default.

I've found this when I was in India, for instance. I'll give you an example. I have mentioned it before, but it may be new to some of you. When I was in Kalimpong, I happened to walk through the bazaar one day, when I saw some posters. And these posters had clearly been put up by a Christian missionary organization and they were addressed to the local Tibetans. They were in Tibetan. So there were two of them which I saw. One depicted a sort of ravine or chasm and there was a bridge over this ravine or chasm. Yes. This side of the chasm was labelled 'sin', the other side was labelled in Tibetan 'salvation'. And the bridge was labelled 'The Bridge of Faith in Jesus Christ'. And then underneath the bridge, there was a cobweb, spun by a spider, and this was labelled, 'The Path of Buddhism' and there was a Lama standing on the hither bank labelled 'sin' pointing to this cobweb and advising people to cross by that, instead of by this great strong bridge above; the Bridge of Faith in Jesus Christ. (Laughter) Then the other poster depicted a sort of rock face. Out of this rock face was carved or was cleft, a great

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cross that was let into the rock. And there was a beautiful young Tibetan girl running to sort of take refuge in this cross-shaped cleft in the rock and sort of hide herself there. And running after her was an evil-looking Lama, hand raised with a knife, about to stab her in the back and prevent her taking refuge there. I don't think this had any actual caption; it didn't need one. So I saw these; I was very annoyed, very upset. So I at once, talked to my Tibetan and other Buddhist friends and said, "We must do something about this!" But to my surprise, they hesitated. To some extent I could understand the Tibetans hesitating because some of them were refugees and didn't want to get into trouble. But even residents, even those who were Indian citizens, they didn't exactly say that it would be wrong to protest or to take any action, but they just didn't feel like doing it. They felt very upset and very hurt that these posters had been put up. They felt in fact quite sort of insulted; but they felt very afraid to try and take any steps about it. So I thought, "Well, I've got to take action." So I wrote a very strong letter to the deputy commissioner in Darjeeling - he being the head of the administration for the whole district, Kalimpong being a subdivision, and I think I actually knew him at the time - they're always changing them. So I wrote a very strong letter, that these posters were insulting to the Buddhist faith and that I feared if they were allowed to continue there could even be a disturbance of the peace etc, etc. I thought, well, I'll make one if nobody else does! (Laughter) So anyway, in fact, I told my friends if nothing happened, I was going to tear them down myself. But anyway, the deputy commissioner, sent order to the sub-divisional officer that these posters were to be taken down forthwith, which they were. So I got that action taken by just having recourse to, well not even the law, just to the administration. And can just do things in that way. But the significant part was that all my Buddhist friends were afraid to do anything. (Pause)

Phil Shann: Why do you think that is?

S.: Oh, it's very difficult to say. In the case of the Tibetans, maybe it was to some extent due to the fact that they'd always lived under an autocracy and weren't accustomed to initiating any action in that sort of way. I think in the case of the non-Tibetans, it might have been due to all sorts of wrong ideas about tolerance - that it would somehow be intolerant of them to get those posters taken down, but I was really quite surprised and quite disillusioned. There were a number of instances like that. It was well-known if there was anything to be protested about of a Buddhist nature, well, it was always Sangharakshita who did it. Nobody else did. And the others would applaud me and even egg me on. (Laughter) But they would never do anything themselves. So they would never actually stick their own necks out. I can't even say that I even stuck my neck out, because I never got into the slightest trouble, though I did develop a reputation for intolerance. For instance, to give you another example. This was in the early 50s. I was down in Calcutta and I was invited to one of these sort of fellowship of faiths meetings and this happened to be presided over by the governor of West Bengal at that time, who was a Christian actually, called Dr. (Mukkus?). He was actually quite an amiable person whom I afterwards met. But anyway, the Shankaracharya (?) of Pune, one of the intolerant ones who was present, made some quite unnecessary remarks about Buddhism and the chairman, that is to say, Dr. Mukkus(?) the governor of West Bengal, also made what I considered some quite inappropriate remarks about Buddhism being the same as Hinduism and also everyone believing in God and so on and so forth. And calling on everyone to unite on a common platform of faith in God and brotherhood of man and all the rest of it. So I happened to

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write in the Mahabodhi journal which I was then editing, a little editorial which I took Dr. (Mukhaji?) to task. And some of my Buddhist friends, not my non-Buddhist friends, were quite upset that I'd ventured to do this. I think their motives were rather mixed. Partly they felt, that, well, after all he was the governor of West Bengal and we ought to keep on the right side of him; we shouldn't offend him. But partly it was as though they felt we didn't have any right to protest against any misrepresentation of the Dharma. And I just couldn't understand that. So I gradually acquired a reputation for intolerance because I protested against misrepresentations of Buddhism. But I mean Buddhists themselves actually became more and more happy with my attitude. In some ways, I'm sorry that I'm no longer in India to protest. I'm sure that nobody else is doing that among Buddhists. If any misrepresentation of Buddhism came out in a newspaper or magazine I'd be sure to protest against it or send in a letter or article or something of that sort, or get some of my contact to take action about it. But the Buddhists struck me as often as a very pusillanimous lot. You know, not understanding their Dharma properly, because the Buddha certainly corrected misunderstandings of his teachings. There's no doubt about that! And one can certainly do that without becoming irate or hysterical and so on and so forth.

Will Spens: Do you think it's this sort of attitude that prevents the Dalai Lama from making a clear distinction between Buddhism and Christianity?

S.: Well, he must surely know the distinction. I think probably that he's just sort of being diplomatic. But I think he doesn't need to be. I don't think he really gains anything by being diplomatic in that sort of way because you can disagree with somebody or say, "No, that is not what Buddhism teaches", but do it so nicely and kindly that if they are reasonable people they don't take offence and the Dalai Lama has got a very good and a very friendly manner. I don't see why he shouldn't point out where necessary, that such and such is not actually what Buddhism teaches. (Pause) I mean, in India, it was only Sangharakshita, the wretchedly unfortunate Sangharakshita, who got a reputation for being intolerant but of course in England, it's the FWBO, (Laughter) that's got the reputation. Well, you know, we just stick up for Buddhism and we stick up for ourselves. But that has in some quarters given us the reputation for being intolerant. The same as some of my bhikkhu friends in Calcutta used to say to me, "Go on, you say it. We can't say these things" or "We don't dare to say these things". But there's no reason why they shouldn't say these things. They're just as much able to say them as I was. In fact in some cases, they were better placed, especially those who were Indian citizens. I, after all, was a foreigner, sort of staying on sufferance. I could have been asked to leave the country whereas they couldn't have been.

Devamitra: The FWBO does seem to have quite, as far as I can tell, outside - well, in the Buddhist movement generally, this reputation for being intolerant. Obviously you wouldn't agree with that, but can you think of any instances at all, where there may have been some incident which would have justified that even to some degree, or do you think that it's all completely....

S.: Well, I think one must define intolerance in that case. I do remember, I did hear some years ago a little story - it might be apocryphal - I don't think it was though in this connection - involving none other than Padmavajra (Raucous laughter). I think this was several years ago. It concerns a meeting, a lecture, at the Buddhist Society. It was given by someone whom I used to know in the old days

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called Mike Hookham who knows quite a lot about Tibetan Buddhism, and was speaking about Tibetan Buddhism but just before he started he became aware, or he was informed that two members of the Western Buddhist Order were in the audience - one of them being Padmavajra. And this information so upset him, made him so nervous, he had difficulty giving his lecture. (Laughter) I don't know quite how Padmavajra managed to look at him but I must say, when I heard this, I was really quite pleased. (Laughter) Because you know, it meant that people like Mike Hookham realize that when members of the Western Buddhist Order were around, they had to be careful what they said, because they were not going to 'tolerate' - inverted commas - any misrepresentation of the Dharma. I don't think in Mike Hookham's case he would have misrepresented the Dharma. He might have soft-pedalled here and there. But I think it's quite a good thing, quite a healthy thing, that we've got this sort of reputation. It does rather keep people on their toes. And so I think a situation has developed in which I think Buddhist organizations in Britain, at least, would think very, very carefully before they crossed the path of the FWBO because they know we wouldn't tolerate it. Well, I think that's quite a good thing because they don't cross our path; they don't get in our way. They don't do anything against us but I think that is because acquired a sort of reputation by just standing up for ourselves; which means actually in effect, no more than speaking our minds or writing what we think. It doesn't go any further than that. Just speaking and writing. But that has been sufficient to prevent any sort of encroachment upon us.

Greg Shanks: I read an article in 'Scientific Buddhism', which was a critique of some of the things you've said, which I would have put in that class and a review of Subhuti's book in the 'Middle Way', which was quite a misrepresentation.

S.: Well, they lifted sentences out of what I had written, in such a way, as to suggest as though I'd spoken those sentences in a dialogue which they proceeded to write. Well, of course, that was a dishonest way of going about things. I came to the conclusion that they were just trying to get a controversy going. Because after all they want to publicize their movement and their little paper and after all, I'm better known than they are. So I decided the best way to deal with this was not to say anything, though I did suggest a little measure to Nagabodhi which he didn't adopt. What was that? I suggested that he put a little quote from this magazine in the Newsletter in a little box, just a couple

of lines. One of them wrote words to this effect, in this little paper that I formerly one had to gain Enlightenment before one could understand what Enlightenment was all about but now thanks to Scientific Buddhism... 'i (Laughter) ... So I suggested to Nagabodhi that he just put that little quote in a little box without any comment (Laughter), but he didn't. I was a bit disappointed about that. (Laughter) But anyway, he didn't. He's just too nice. (Laughter)

Greg Shanks: You don't think there are any unfortunate consequences of this sort of belief in the wider Buddhist world and in England, towards the FWBO of intolerance and the like? You don't think there are any blockages that have been put in the way potentially, to any degree?

S.: I don't think so. I have come to the conclusion that we're not likely to draw into the FWBO, any of the people who are present members of those groups, because they are members of those groups, I think, for the most part, for reasons which have nothing to do with the sorts of reasons people do get involved with the FWBO. So I think, we will, as it were, recruit people entirely from outside.

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But nonetheless, I think it's not a bad thing that we, as it were, keep our end up with these people. And it also prevents them from going too far in an undesirable direction, anyway. In some cases, they've even imitated us in certain respects, for instance, it was one of my criticisms of the Buddhist Society before that you could be a member of the Buddhist Society and even sit on either council and all that without even being a Buddhist. But they have more recently introduced certain restrictions. Admittedly they are nothing like those which we have but nonetheless, they have taken a step in that direction. You can't for instance, be a member of their council unless you've been a regular attendee at their various classes and groups. So at least, that is a step in the right direction. (Pause) So after all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. (Pause) I think I can also say that especially since Subhuti's book was published, broadly speaking, the FWBO has been acquiring an increasingly good reputation. I've had some very positive comments from way outside the movement, even in the course of the last few months. And I think I can say that - as much as I myself criticize Order Members, mitras and friends for slackness, laziness and so on and so forth - outside, the FWBO is regarded as a very lively, very active, very hard-working sort of movement, which it probably is, compared with certain other groups. And I think the FWBO attracts quite a lot of respect. In some cases, it's a slightly grudging respect. I think the respect is there, nonetheless. Not least on account of our Co-ops and of course, our working connection with Aid for India. Those two things, especially the latter, I think, have attracted very widespread notice. Partly because there's no other Buddhist group in the West which is really doing anything like that, especially like Aid for India. Lokamitra found, when he was in Malaysia recently, - most of you know, he had quite an extended tour in Malaysia and Singapore. He must have addressed anything from 40 to 50 different Buddhist groups all over those two countries. Addressed mainly Chinese Buddhists, English speaking Chinese Buddhists. And he said that they all expressed their very great appreciation of Aid for India. All the more so, because, they said they were being constantly criticized by Christians, especially Christian Missionaries, to the effect that Buddhists never did anything for other people. So in Malaysia and Singapore, Buddhists aren't doing anything for other people but when Buddhism is mentioned generally, as not doing anything for other people, they're very happy to be able to cite now the FWBO and its work in India. And he said that among these English speaking Chinese Buddhists the FWBO owes its considerable reputation - and it is very well-known to these Buddhists apparently - to a very great extent to what is doing in India among the ex-Untouchables. And of course, bokamitra has been able to make some very good contacts and raise quite a decent sum of money, during the six weeks that he was there. No doubt more will come. But as I think these things over, I'm more and more in favour of an uncompromising approach. In fact, I've even been wondering whether we are uncompromising enough. We've been having a few experimental contacts with outside groups and organizations. I've even been wondering whether it's worth while, or whether we wouldn't be better off not having even any of those contacts. I mean more organizational-type contacts. I'm not speaking of individual or personal contacts. I think it's still something that we haven't finally made up our minds about. I think we've nothing to gain really from organizational contacts with other groups - not any that I know of.

Devamitra: So your uncompromising approach is in relation to other Buddhist groups?

S.: Mm. Mmm. Anyway, let's pass on.

Rick: This is connection with tolerance. It's to do with the

question of intolerance. When you talk about there being only a few exceptions to general attitude of intolerance amongst Buddhists throughout the entire history of Buddhism. I just wondered whether you could actually specify any further, what those exceptions were or tell us where we might be able to trace them.

S.: I'm not sure that I can cite any example of actual religious intolerance really. Maybe one or two. I'll have to think. What I was mainly thinking of was, was violence as between Buddhists. For instance, Burmese Buddhist kings have invaded Buddhist Thailand and even perhaps destroyed temples and monasteries. But not for doctrinal reasons. Not because the Thais were following the wrong form of Buddhism, or anything like that. But similarly in Japan, there have been armed struggles between different large monasteries. I mean monks of different large monasteries. - But again to the best of my knowledge, not as regards any doctrinal point. It was simply a sort of power struggle. It was simply a struggle for perhaps the ownership of land or from political influence or something of that sort. The only actual example of doctrinal or religious intolerance I can think of, pertains to Tibet, - to the Nyingmapas and the Gelugpas. I have heard from Tibetan friends that there was a famous Tibetan monk in the last generation - that is around the beginning of the century called (Rabongkapa?) Rimpoche and I was told that he was very much opposed to the Nyingmapas and that wherever he went in Tibet - he was a very-famous lama, he was the teacher of the Dalai Lamas - he threw images of Padmasambhava into the river and also Nyin-rnapa texts into the river. He considered them such a bad influence. Well, I happened to meet the reincarnation of this (Rabongkapa?) so I took the opportunity of asking him (laughter) whether this was true and he flatly denied it. He was at that time 16. A very, very bright young monk. Unfortunately he died a few years later, but he denied it. But I did have this from what I considered to be quite trustworthy sources. I believe - though I would have to check this to be quite sure - I believe Dharo Rimpoche also mentioned it to me and deplored it. But that's about all. I mean, there's no question of killing any person or doing any injury to any person, but he was supposed to have thrown images and books of the Nyingmapas into the river. That's all I can think of at this moment, as an example of intolerance from Buddhist history. Yes, there were fierce debates, sometimes continued for years and even centuries within different schools of thought. But it seems that the idea - of - imposing your own views on somebody else by force just never occurred to the Buddhists. It seems really extraordinary. Even if I'm able to think of a few more examples, like the one I've given, it wouldn't really substantially alter the picture. It is extraordinary that one can think of nothing very much more than that. I mean, one sometimes speaks of the Theravadins as intolerant but the Theravadins never persecute Mahayanists. They're quite friendly to them personally, just strongly disagree with their views, and condemn their views, and even give reasons for that. But they never actually attack them. They don't try to imprison them or burn them or anything like that and to the best of my knowledge, never have done so. I think in the Middle Ages, the (Abhayagiri?) Vihara was closed down by the King because the monks of the (Maha ?) Vihara weren't satisfied with the orthodoxy of the monks there. But we don't read that the monks were actually killed or tortured or anything of that sort. I mean that's about the worst sort of example that one can think of. It doesn't really go very far in the direction of intolerance. So this is why, one of the reasons I say, well, for instance, Christians, when you tax Christianity with being intolerant, will say that, well, intolerance isn't really a part of Christianity, you know. That's a degeneration, just a corruption. Well, then I say, well, how is it that Buddhism didn't become degenerate or corrupt in that sort of way?

And then of course, I go on to say that I believe personally there is a streak at least, of intolerance and fanaticism in the Bible itself, in the Gospels themselves, in what purports to be the teaching of Christ himself. And there is not that sort of streak of intolerance in the teaching of the Buddha. By intolerance, of course I mean, in this connection the tendency to coerce others in matters of religious belief. I do not mean by intolerance disagreement or expression of disagreement as regards religious belief. You know, tolerance does not really consist in believing that every religion is the same and teaches the same thing. That is not tolerance. Tolerance is tolerance of difference. You accept, as it were, the other person's right to believe differently. Not that you maintain that what he believes is essentially the same as what you believe. I mean, that doesn't leave any room for tolerance. That cuts every-body down to the same size. Hindus believe that this is tolerance, but I maintain that

this is not the case. You are refusing, in fact, the other person's right to differ from you~ when he genuinely be- lieves that he differs.

Padmavajra: What about the case of intolerance of Buddhists to non- Buddhists? I was thinking of 'the Life and Liberation of Padmasam- bhava' - (tisonng Jetsen?) actually banishes the BonPos from Tibet, or certainly from the Lhasa area. I wonder, could that be a sign of his intolerance, or is it a case of protecting the freedom?

S.: One mustn't forge~that the Bor' Pos had political power, at least, ~ginally in Tibet and that they were constantly plotting to over- throw the King. So, it's quite understandable that the King in those circumstances should banish them. You know, not for their religious belief but because what they wanted to do to him politically. It's much the same in the history of England with the Jesuits in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth did execute Jesuits when- ever she found them in her kingdom, but she didn't execute them for thier Roman Catholic beliefs, but because the Pope at that time had not only excommunicated her, but declared her to be illegitimate - declared her to be an usurper and called upon the people of England to murder her. And the Jesuits were going round spreading this message of the Pope to the people, especially to; the Catholics that it was their duty to murder her, because she was not the Queen at all. Some of these Jesuits have been canonized by Popes as Martyrs to the faith which is absolutely ridiculous. Even history books have been infected by this and the Jesuits are presented as martyrs to their faith, and in a snese they were, but what was their faith? That Queen Elizabeth should be murdered by pious Cath~lics that wanted to carry out the Pope's instructions? So they were executed, not so much for being Catholics, as plotting against the life of the Queen.

Vessantara: What about the case of intolerance by more nominal Buddhists? For instance, this case in Sri Lanka?

S; I think the behaviour of the majority of the population cannot be condoned. I think the Sinhalese, which means unfortunately the Buddhists, have behaved quite badly towards the Tamils. Alright, there is the historical background of invasion by Tamil kings and the gradual establishment of Tamil enclaves, but there's no doubt that the majority, the Sinhalese Buddhists have behaved in a very foolish way. They've tried to relegate the Tamils to a case of secondclass citizenship, in (place) of acting, one might say, more Buddhistically. To the best of my knowledge, this is political rather than religious. Though one cannot ignore the fact that the Tamils are Hindus and not Buddhists. But it would seem to be almost a racial thIng, I'm afraid. This had certainly not helped Buddhism in India

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Ric Cooney: To what extent do the actual Buddhists practising there in a country like that, have a responsibility towards preventing political action like that?

S.: I'm afraid very few Sinhalese Buddhists have risen above these communal passions. Quite a number of Sinhalese bhikkhus have vigorous- ly denounced the Tamils. They have acted as Sinhalese Nationalists rather than as bhikkhus, which is unfortunate. I'm afraid the Sin- halese have in many ways let the side down and are a very poor example of how Buddhists when in the majority should behave twoards a non- Buddhist minority in the population. THEY have behaved hardly better than the Protestants of Ulster.

Vessantara: Are there many other cases in history of Buddhist per- secutions not for religious reasons, but for political reasons?

S. I was going to mention the persecution of mediaeval Christians in Japan, but the persecutions were conducted by Shoguns who were not strictly Buddhist, but then again really for political reasons. The Portuguese and I think the Dutch had made a lot of converts and the Japanese authorities began~ to realize that wherever Christianity went, its representatives tried to seize political power and take over the country. This wss happening all over Asia. So they thought the solution was extirpating these troublesome people, including their converts. From a political point of view, one can hardly blame them.

Padmavajra: Would there ever be ... this is a huge question...

S.: In a way, I know what you're going to say, and I think the answer is what I said a little while ago - foresight. (Laughter) One must look ahead and see it coming. Not let things develop to such a point that one must either knuckle under, or engage in violence. Perhaps we had better end there for this evening.

(End of Session)