

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

DISCLAIMER

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](#).

Because you mention that each Bodhisattva can make individual vows.

S: Yes. In my own case, as most of you probably already know, I took various Vajrayana initiations from different Tibetan lamas when I was in Kalimpong. And of course if one follows the Triyana path correctly the tantric initiation must be preceded by Bodhisattva ordination. In Tibet I'm afraid they've let that rather lapse - you just get a little verse, no more than that, a couple of lines that you recite before entering upon the Vajrayana sadhana. And that passes, apparently for your Bodhisattva ordination. So I felt that I should (as it were) do it properly, and actually take the Bodhisattva ordination, which I did from Dardo Rinpoche, and took (of course) the fifty-odd precepts

... (break in recording) ...

I didn't think in those terms. But that mustn't be taken as any precedent for the FWBO because this is all, so to speak, pre-FWBO days. So I do not hold up my own career, or my own life or experiences as constituting any sort of pattern - because I did not have the benefit of the FWBO, you might say. Just as I don't recommend everybody to take samanera or bhikkhu ordination. But I hope that in the FWBO, in the dharmacari ordination as we call it now, one has really the essence, or at least the seed, of all those things.

Mike Shaw: I'll just change this tape.

Vessantara: It's five past nine. We'll stop.

S: Is it? How many more questions do we have?

Vessantara: There are quite a few still.

S: I think in that case let's have just one more, and then we can finish off the others with an extra session tomorrow. Maybe you can pick quite a good one, so to speak, and we'll wind up with that. So we don't just end too abruptly.

Vessantara: It's hard to know what's a good one. Perhaps we could have one from Devamitra -he (tends)? to ask...

S: Ah! (laughter) Let's just wait for the tape-recorder.

Devamitra: This question arises out of our discussion of anger and hatred, when we begin to (feel)? the nature of the poisons. Over the last two or three years I think I've heard you refer more than once to the general lack of sympathy within the movement...

S: Mmm ... mmm.

Devamitra: ... but I've never heard you speak at length about it. And so I was wondering if you could define for us what it is that you mean by sympathy - what exactly it is that's lacking.

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And also: how does this lack manifest. And thirdly, what do we need to be on our guard against to overcome our lack of sympathy? And fourthly, how to set about cultivating it.

S: Well, here's a good question. (laughter). Sympathy. Sympathy is literally "feeling with", but I don't think the term really expresses what I was trying to get at. I think there's another term which expresses more adequately what I was trying to get at, and that term is "fellow-feeling". Fellow-feeling. So when I speak of a lack of fellow-feeling I mean really a lack of consideration for others; which is the result simply of not feeling for them, not appreciating how they are feeling, not appreciating the sort of

position that they are in, perhaps even the sort of predicament they are in, and acting accordingly, responding accordingly. It seems that very often people are so bound up with their own affairs, their own interests, their own concerns, their own preferences, that they're quite oblivious to the needs of others and the feelings of others. So one thing I think therefore which is needed in connection with the cultivation of this feeling of sympathy, or fellow-feeling, is just awareness of other people. I think the lack of fellow-feeling is to a great extent due to the fact that we're not sufficiently aware of others. And that is also bound up with a sort of lack of imagination, a sort of inability to put ourselves in their shoes, to project ourselves into their shoes, and realise what it must be like for them to be in that sort of position. And again act accordingly.

So I think the very least that we can do in this connection is to try and be more mindful of others, of their needs, of their feelings, and to try to realise 'that we have to consider others more. I can't think off hand of any specific sort of exercise or method or practice that we could undertake. Perhaps it does just depend upon mindfulness. But you know the sort of thing that I'm talking about. You'll recognise that I haven't given any actual examples.

Devamitra: Is there an example that comes to mind you could...

S: Not offhand, I could probably think of one if I tried. But can any of you think of any?

Vessantara: Very often when somebody comes to your Centre or community you (...unclear)... introduce them to where things are (unclear)

S: Yes, that's true. Assume that he knows, or maybe they don't even introduce him properly. Sometimes that happens. Or he's sort of left, almost sort of floundering. Yes, you don't sympathise, or there's no fellow-feeling in the sense that you don't stop and think, well, how it must feel to be a new person, a new arrival, in a Centre, in a community, maybe not feeling quite at ease, maybe not knowing your way around, maybe not knowing what you should do or not do. Being therefore a little uncertain and needing perhaps a bit of assurance, a bit of encouragement. You just don't realise all that, so there's no sympathy: no fellow-feeling, and of course no awareness and imagination.

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Phil Miller: Not answering letters.

S: Yes. Also. Yes, yes. Perhaps not appreciating what the other person may be feeling when he or she doesn't get an answer to their letter. Well, maybe you've a perfectly good reason for not replying, but they don't know that: they're not thought readers presumably, they're not telepathic.

Pranasiddhi: It seems fairly easy to pick out the (person's answers)? you sort of... you know... they should be doing...; you're in communication with the other person... you know, you're sort of aware... he's not doing this, or something like that. But to actually, you know, there's a bit of a sort of need for (unclear)...

S: Yes, it's not only a question of feeling with them, but (sort of) feeling for them, (sort of) sharing their feeling of... appreciating their limitations. And also of course appreciating their good points, their good qualities. So that you're not always dealing with them, or thinking of them, in terms of what needs to be amended or corrected or changed.

I've also expressed this by saying - this lack of sympathy - by simply maybe even more simply and more basically by saying I've often thought - and I'm talking about specifically about the FWBO and situations within the FWBO - that people are not kind enough to one another. I've often been struck by the extent to which people can be quite unkind to one another, almost without cause sometimes. They're not kind-like, by nature or behaviour, only too often. I'm afraid that I have noticed this quite a lot, quite generally. Do you understand what I'm getting at? In other words, one might say still more basic Buddhism, not enough metta, despite the (you know) the daily dose.

Devamitra: Why do you think that should be? Have you thought...

S: I suppose there are all sorts of reasons. You could blame it all onto mother I suppose (laughter). Onto the welfare state, or the weather, or to almost anything. But often people don't seem very pleased, they don't seem very happy, they've no time for other people, they're too self-centred, often. I think the main reason probably why there isn't enough kindness around is that people are too preoccupied with themselves, they're thinking too much about themselves and what they want, and what they would

like, what is due to them, what their rights are, and perhaps... I mean it's our whole sort of modern way of thinking and ideology that has encouraged this, that's made us really very

selfish little animals (you know) in many cases. Quite spoiled I really notice this, by way of contrast, when I go to India sometimes. Everyone seems - at least the people I come into contact with - more kindly.

Pete Dobson: Perhaps people should worry about other peoples' development more.

S: I think it's not even a question about worrying about their development, not to begin with, it's just worrying about even little creature comforts and conveniences - well I think I've mentioned that in the lecture. I mean just helping other people. It doesn't mean you've got to perform some great heroic deed for them. Well you might have to one day but, I mean, it's

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enough just to do little things, because after all, what they like is made up of lots of little things. For instance if someone burns the rice, and then maybe someone is late producing lunch, or then someone borrows your favourite book and forgets to tell you, or someone slammed the door violently as he goes out, there's dozens and dozens of these little annoyances and forgetfulnesses throughout the day. Well that can add up to a quite unpleasant and irritating day for you. So people need to be aware of these sort of things and practise their kindness, and mindfulness, in all these sorts of little ways. Do you see what I mean?

Pranasiddhi: Perhaps this has got something to do with people being in so much of a hurry, they've got so many things to do that they don't take time to look after

S: That may be true, but very they're things for oneself.

Padmavajra: In your lecture "A Case of Dysentery" you refer to the bhikkhus neglecting the monk who had dysentery. They were, presumably, well obviously, not very aware - practising the Dharma. You don't think there is a danger, in practising the Dharma, that if we're not careful we can actually lose sight; be so preoccupied with dealing with our mental state that we can lose sight of basic human kindness.

S: Well, I've touched on this sort of thing recently. It might even have come out in a Mitrata (I've rather lost track of what comes out in Mitrata. I just sort of edit and just hope for the best) (laughter) But there was something pertaining to this which might have come out, you'll probably tell me if it has. And that is that people have started in some cases using the language of "good for my development" in the wrong sort of way. This is often an excuse for doing something that you want to do. For indulging yourself. You say, when justifying yourself to spiritual friends and others (assume to yourself)? "Oh, I think it would be good for my development" - "I think it would be good for my development if I just let myself get angry sometimes" huh? "I think it would be good for my development if I went and found myself a girlfriend" or "I think it would be good for my development if I had more money" or "I think it would be good for my development if I just went off to Greece for a few weeks" (laughter) You see? Because "...good for my development..." this is the accepted language. So one comes in the end to justify things in that sort of way, of course one might be basically leading a very self-centred and selfish life. But when you mentioned this incident, which I mentioned in "A Case of Dysentery", what occurred to me was this: I think I mentioned in the original lecture: that when the monks were asked why they'd not looked after that sick monk, what did they say? What reason did they give for their neglect?

Padmavajra: They said he was useless.

S: Yes, he was not of use to them. Well what a terrible admission, what a giveaway. So often this is the reason for our neglect of people and our lack of, you know, kindness: they're not of use to us, we don't get anything out of it. We're kind enough to those from whom we hope for something, we're ready to scratch their back alright. But what about those

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from whom we don't expect anything, don't look for anything? We just don't bother about them. So such kindness as do practise is not real kindness very often, it's tit for tat, it's, as we say in English, just a sprat to catch a mackerel, huh? That's all it really is. But we're nice to those people that very often we expect something of. It may not be something in the way of a material something, but just ... it may be consideration, regard, praise, some kind of psychological support, some kind of perhaps indulgence, approval, it may be all those sort of things, but we can be nice, we can be kind, even to them, but not to others. So again it seems to come back to our self-centredness, (more for)?? ego-centricity.

Phil Miller: Is that ego-centricity peculiarly Western?

S: Well basically it isn't. They're not Enlightened in India. But they are marginally emotionally more positive, yes. They are more kindly. But one has to say in most cases not in any spiritually significant way. But it is certainly better to be the way that they are than the way that very often people are in the West. There is more sort of warmth or kindness, even though it isn't on a very high level, but in a sense it doesn't have to be, it's a good start. I remember an experience of mine when I was staying in Bombay years ago. I was staying in a block of luxury flats on (Malabar)? Hill with a friend of mine who lived there, and there were a lot of Europeans, especially American and German business people living in that same block of luxury flats. And I used to see some of the children go to school in the morning. And one day I was really struck by the expression on the face of a little German boy - this must have been in about 1954-55. He was going off to school - he was only six or seven - and his face was so cross, so spiteful, it was really astonishing. And especially when you compared his face, his expression, with the expressions on the faces of all the other little Indian boys and girls going along to school. But it was really quite remarkable and it really struck me. And I thought then that it had some significance, though I wasn't sure what it was then. I never saw that sort of expression on the face of an Indian child. So I think we've a lot to learn in this respect. So it's all very well to talk about the Dharma, and practising meditation and Enlightening all beings and all the rest of it, but people do need to start with just being more kindly to one another. Auden speaks of our kindness "to ten persons", well, if we can even be kind to ten people, that's probably quite an achievement! for some people. But it need not stop there obviously. But there should be an element of kindness at least in our attitude to everybody we meet, at least we should have good will towards them, and do what we can for them in at least small ways. So I think there needs to be much more of this sort of spirit even within the movement itself. I'm sure there's 5 more within the movement than there is in the world outside, in (say) England, but that certainly doesn't mean that we should be satisfied with the degree of positivity or degree of kindness that has already been achieved. I mean, people who come into the FWBO, whether to centres or into communities, from outside, really do comment on the positivity and friendliness of the atmosphere. So I certainly don't want to overlook what has already been achieved, or under value that. But there's still a lot more that could be done in this sort of way, in this respect.

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So people might consider making a small start here in Tuscany so that they go back a bit more human and a bit more kindly than they were when they arrived. Perhaps it'll even be noticeable to people when you get back. Members of your community, and people you work with around the centre. Or even your own families might notice that, yes, you have mellowed a bit (laughter) in the course of your "Tuscany experience", yes you're more human, and yes, you're a bit easier to get on with than you were before. So they might be quite happy to let you go again in five or six years (laughter). But anyway, we'd better leave it at that for this evening.

Voices: Thanks very much....

Steve Webster: There'll be a puja in five minutes...

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL Session 4 22nd September 1984
Tuscany

Vessantara: So we're going to carry on from where we were last night. There are still about fifteen questions all, to a greater or lesser extent, concerned with the third lecture on the Bodhisattva's Vow. So we'll start with Greg who's got some questions.

Devamitra: I'll be putting them for him actually...

S: All right.

Devamitra: Greg's sitting out the back. Greg has written this: My question arises out of your comments on the psychologically disturbed and the psychiatric profession. What is the traditional Buddhist understanding of, and approach to, the psychologically disturbed as described in the texts and practised in Buddhist countries? Secondly, you express reservations about the validity of expert help in relation to the psychologically disturbed based upon your contact with this particular field, and go on to express the conviction that "there is no psychological solution for psychological problems - in the long run there's only a spiritual solution." Is this still your conviction? And would you say something about the contact with the field of psychiatry that brought you to it? Thirdly (and finally), one practical possibility of real help that you outline is that of befriending. Is this a concrete application of the principle already stated? If so, do you see that this could be extended to the severely psychologically disturbed in specific cases? If not, what other approaches would express this principle?

S: Hmm. There's quite a lot of questions there. You'd better read them as it were clause by clause. (laughter)

Devamitra: First of all, what is the traditional Buddhist understanding of, and approach to, the psychologically disturbed as described in the texts and practised in Buddhist countries?

S: Well, in the different Buddhist countries the approach varies. For instance, the example that springs to mind immediately is that of Tibet, where, apparently, at least on a popular level, they do believe that

demoniacal possession is one of the reasons for psychological disturbance. I think you'd find that that sort of belief was quite common in a number of Buddhist countries at, sort of, folk level. I don't know whether there are any instances of it in, say, the Pali scriptures. I rather doubt that. There are, as far as I recollect, some references, a few references, in the Pali scriptures, to people who were psychologically disturbed. You could for instance regard Kisagotami as an example of a psychologically disturbed person. She became psychologically disturbed, one might say, through bereavement, that is to say when she lost her child. And we all know how the Buddha dealt with that particular situation. So I don't think we get very much help from the Buddhist texts themselves as regards dealing with the sort of cases that nowadays would be regarded as psychiatric cases. It may be that in the Buddha's time life was much less

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stressful, and that there were fewer such cases. But actually we don't get very much help. And the approaches to these sort of cases, as I've indicated, does vary from one Buddhist country to another. And perhaps most people nowadays in the West wouldn't be very happy about accepting demoniacal possession as an explanation of even certain kinds of mental illness or mental disturbance. Though I myself am not inclined to reject the concept of demoniacal possession as a meaningful concept. I think I have touched upon this at times elsewhere. Anyway go on to the next clause.

Devamitra: You express reservations about the validity of expert help in relation to the psychologically disturbed based your contact with this particular field...

S: Hmm. I'm not sure about that because I have referred here and there, I believe even in these lectures, to the fact that professional help may be necessary for certain people in certain cases. I don't want to deny that trained psychiatrists or trained psychotherapists or psychoanalysts can give some help to some people, certainly of an alleviatory nature. But in those cases where there is a sort of symptom of some deeper (what we may term) existential disturbance, psychiatry in the ordinary medical sense usually doesn't give very much help. I know that there are schools nowadays of, for instance, existential psychology, and they are more aware of the need to go more deeply and to help (perhaps) the patient to confront existential problems. But that sort of psychological approach is, I believe, a minority approach.

Devamitra: I'm not familiar with this distinction. Could you explain the distinction?

S: Well, there is (I believe it is mainly in America) a school of psychology which is called existential psychology. And they are not satisfied with the ordinary Freudian or the Jungian approach, and they have tried to take into consideration the fact that there may be, on the part of the psychiatric patient, a need to confront issues of an existential kind. And it is this need which is basically at the root of his or her symptoms. So I'm not therefore disposed to say, in a sort of sweeping manner, that psychiatry or psychotherapy cannot ever help anybody under any circumstances. But they have very definite limitations, inasmuch as they don't take (usually) into account what I've termed the existential situation, they don't take into account that man is ultimately a spiritual being, and that if his need for spiritual life is frustrated, very deeply frustrated, that may result in mental distress and mental illness of a kind that psychology or psychotherapy or psychiatry, in the ordinary sense, just cannot hope to deal with. I have, for instance (to go back to this same question) I have mentioned that if psychologically disturbed people do come along to centres that if they're seriously disturbed Order members shouldn't attempt to help them. They may need to call some kind of expert help or guidance, at least to an alleviatory extent. If you're confronted by a chronic schizophrenic there's perhaps not very much you can do even though you are skilled and dedicated Order member, unless you know something about schizophrenia, unless you know something about what is happening, what is going on. Anyway, go on to the next clause.

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Devamitra: You go on to express the conviction that there is no psychological solution for psychological problems - in the long run there's only a spiritual solution. Is this still your conviction?...

S: Oh yes, this is just what I've expressed isn't it? Yes, yes.

Devamitra: ...and would you say something about your contact with the field of psychiatry that brought you to it?

S: No it's not a question with contact with psychiatry, it's a contact with human beings. Because psychiatry, in the or.... obviously doesn't have a spiritual basis. It doesn't have a basis in the Dharma or anything corresponding thereto, doesn't have a basis in any kind of spiritual ideals. How can it possibly help or hope to alleviate existential distress? Anyway, go on to the next clause.

Devamitra: Final clause: One practical possibility of real help that you outline is that of befriending. Is this a concrete application of the principle already stated? If so, do you see...

S: I'm not quite sure what principle is referred to.

Devamitra: No psychological solution for psychological problems. So is this a concrete application of the principle already stated? If so, do you see that this could be extended to the severely psychologically disturbed in specific cases?...

S: Yes, just hold on a moment. It does seem that a number of psychological disturbances or mental illnesses of (one might say) a more ordinary type - those which don't represent a great existential crisis - are due to a lack of communication with other human beings, due to lack of any opportunity to be open, to reveal or to disclose oneself. So in such cases obviously the establishment of friendly relations with someone, the opening up of possibilities for communication, can have a very helpful effect. Sometimes of course the person may be so far gone they're not able to initiate the communication themselves, and it may take a great deal of skill and patience and perseverance on the other person's part before communication is initiated. I have given more than once the example of a catatonic patient I read about. Apparently there was a patient in a mental hospital who was just like a vegetable - didn't respond at all, ever, to anybody or to anything. But there was apparently a young nurse in the hospital, in the ward or whatever, and she for some reason or other was convinced that this particular person could be brought to respond. So what she did, every day, was simply to take that person's hand and hold it, and even squeeze it, for half an hour every day. And she did this every day for six months without any response at all, of the slightest. But at the end of that six months she happened to do it and there was the very faintest response. This person squeezed her hand in return. And that was the turning point. And over a period of quite a few months she was able to open up some sort of communication with that person, and that person came out of his catatonic state. So that was the sort of thing I probably had in mind.

Devamitra: What other approaches would express this principle?

S: I must say I can't think of any off hand. I think probably this approach of establishing contact, establishing communication, could have many variations. I do also believe, from what I have seen and what I have heard of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, that one of the very often unacknowledged factors which does contribute to the cure, or at least to the helping of the patient, is that the analyst or whoever is actually listening to that particular person, talking to that particular person. I mean even some ordinary doctors, in the ordinary sense, even the ordinary G.P., is sometimes forced into this position, this sort of situation. Because the person who comes ostensibly as a patient is just sometimes desperate for somebody to talk to, and that does have a helpful and even alleviatory sort of effect. So one might take talking to someone, establishing friendship with them, communication with them, as just one form of human contact, and no doubt other forms of human contact would be possible, like working together, doing something together. perhaps painting together, just doing ordinary jobs together. I think, to sum up, that psychiatry in the ordinary sense, or psychotherapy, psychoanalysis are inadequate basically because they don't have an adequate view of man. Your psychology corresponds to your anthropology, as it were, and your anthropology of course is not unrelated to, let us say, your ontology. So that if you have a limited view of man, you cannot help having a limited view of mental illness, and therefore a limited view of psychotherapy and so on. There must be a very great difference between somebody who sees as a human being as a potential Buddha, and somebody who sees a human being merely as a rational, and not very rational at that, animal. OK, enough of that.

Vessantara: Mike had a question on going out into the world.

Mike Shaw: This came from what you said about the first of the four great vows: May I deliver all beings from difficulty. In the lecture you emphasise that until we're able to give spiritually we should concentrate on helping people in other ways. I expect that most people in the FWBO feel they have a long way to go before they really able to give spiritually, and yet almost all FWBO activities are directed towards these ends, spiritual ends. Why is there not more emphasis on helping people in worldly ways that you suggest in the lecture, as this seems more appropriate to the stage which we are at?

S: Well, perhaps I can also say that even helping people in a worldly way isn't easy. Not because you may not have the energy or the time, but because you may not have the knowledge. Even to help people in a worldly way you have to know, so to speak, what is good for them. If I wanted to be a little paradoxical I might even say that it's easier to help people spiritually than to help them in a worldly way, other factors being equal. Because you could be absolutely sure that meditation would be good for people, if you can only get them to practise it, and if you were yourself qualified to teach it. There's no doubt about that whatever. But whether it would be good, say, for Mrs Brown to move to Bournemouth (laughter) or Mr Bloggs to marry a second time (laughter). That could be quite difficult to sort out, if you see what I mean. It is perhaps significant

that in most Buddhist countries, especially, say, in Theravada countries, within the monastic order, it is only the oldest and most senior and experienced bhikkhus who are usually permitted to advise the laity with regard to their worldly affairs (laughter) . You might have thought it would be the other way round, but in fact it isn't. But coming back to the actual question, I did give that particular lecture many years ago, and of course since then we have started helping people in a more worldly way to some extent, through for instance Aid For India. But nonetheless I think whether we're qualified to give spiritual help or spiritual guidance or not, this is what people in the modern West need more far more than anything else. So if we ourselves are not in a position to give that sort of help directly, we can give it indirectly, or at least helping those who are in a position to give it; backing them up, maybe by freeing them from other responsibilities, maybe by providing facilities of various kinds. For instance you might feel that you're not in a position to help people spiritually, that may well be so; but there's quite a lot you can do nonetheless indirectly, for instance by distributing literature. A lot of people who wouldn't come along to a Buddhist centre or think of learning meditation can be initially quite inspired by Buddhist literature, if they are able to get hold of it. So there is something that you could do. You could help by contributing to the financing, publication, printing, distribution, of our literature. It could certainly be spread around much more widely than it is at present. So the point is that if you do not feel you can do much to spread the Dharma or help people spiritually, not only can you help them to some modest extent perhaps in worldly ways, but, what is perhaps even more important, you can help them spiritually indirectly by helping to provide the sort of facilities that I've mentioned, and also by giving your support to those who are in a position to give spiritual help. Someone for instance might be a good writer, he might not only have spiritual knowledge, knowledge of the Dharma, he might also be able to write, he might be able to give lectures, he might be able to conduct classes and seminars. What a pity if he had to go out into the world and earn his living and all that sort of thing. You would be better occupied perhaps going out and working yourself and supporting him so as to free him for spiritual activities.

Mike Shaw: When you (unclear)... with regard to the four different kinds of people you suggest we could help - you said we could help old people for instance, and that kind of thing - do you think that is a valid thing for people to do if they're involved in the FWBO?

S: I think it depends where you are. For instance it makes a big difference whether you're in England or whether you're in India. I think you have first of all to identify the area of greatest need. And then to assess your own qualifications and your own skills. I'm not suggesting that everybody should do the same kind of thing or do it in the same kind of way. I think, though, as I've said, that over all, probably, the greatest need in the modern West is for some kind of spiritual life, which means some

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kind of spiritual knowledge and spiritual guidance and spiritual practice and so on. So therefore if we possibly can I think it would be most productive first to direct our energies to those fields. If we don't feel able to do that we can either direct them to the other fields that I've mentioned in this particular lecture: say, helping the sick or the aged or we can help those who are able to give spiritual teaching and spiritual help to carry on that work by supporting them in various ways, and providing facilities of various kinds. Sometimes people are drawn to this or that activity for no perceivable reason. It's sometimes a quite (sort of) subjective thing whether you take up this particular line of work or that. And I've sometimes told the story of the man I met in the train in India, years and years ago, when I was working among the ex-untouchables. He thought that I was wasting my time working among the

ex-untouchables and trying to help them. According to him the people who really needed help were the leper~ and I ought to be working among lepers. Well, I could see his point, but he couldn't see mine. I certainly didn't feel that it was wrong for him to be working among lepers, or that he should be working among ex-untouchables instead. But he could not see that working for the ex-untouchables might be just as valid, and just as useful, as working for the ~epers. So we have to careful we don't develop a one-track mind, don't become a sort of mono-maniac and just sort of concentrate on one particular line to the... not only to the exclusion of all other lines but to the point that we can't even appreciate the need for other lines of work. So if say somebody in the FWBO, or if, say, a young Order member, decided that they were going to concentrate, as their particular mission, just on visiting old people, trying to cheer them up, and wherever possible lending books about Buddhism. Maybe teaching them meditation in their own home. Or even just helping them with their shopping or listening to their complaints, I certainly wouldn't attempt to dissuade that person, if that was what they really and truly wanted to do.

Vessantara: There are some questions arising out of the vow to master all dharmas. Devamitra had a question.

Devamitra: To master a dharma implies depth of experience. To master all dharmas implies both depth and breadth of experience. You've said in the past that both breadth and depth of experience must be aimed for by the spiritual aspirant. I was wondering if could say what would be the criteria for determining when in one's life one should concentrate on broadening one's experience, and when on deepening, because it seems, at least in the initial stages, impossible really to concentrate on the two.

S: I think it depends how you started off. Some people start off by deepening their experience (basically)? by following one particular line and going more and more deeply into that, and others start off by taking a very broad survey of the whole field - they concentrate more on breadth than on depth. So if to begin with you've concentrated more on depth, then sooner or later you should get around to concentrating more on breadth, and vice versa. It depends I think upon the original starting point. Or is that not sufficiently specific? Or are you thinking that, for

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instance, when you're young you should concentrate and when you get old concentrate on breadth. Were you thinking of some- thing like that?

Devamitra: There was a particular area that I wondered about I must confess, and that is, in a sense, depth within breadth. Say, for instance you wanted to increase your base of knowledge and experience so that you're better equipped to work for the Dharma, to communicate the Dharma. You've got a choice, presumably, of learning one or two things really thoroughly and really well, or learning a number of things a bit more superficially.

S: I think I've said at some time that there should be at least one thing, possibly two, that you know really well. And that you shouldn't just have a smattering of everything, or just a smattering of a large number of subjects. But there should be at least one subject in which you are, as it were, a specialist, that you do know really well, that you do know deeply, that you do know thoroughly. And of course in the case of a Buddhist, in the case of an Order member especially, you'll need to have - whatever your other interests - you will need to have a very thorough grasp of basic Buddhist principles. Because you will need to have something to which to relate your broadening knowledge, otherwise it'll just be a collection of miscellaneous bits of pieces of information.

Abhaya: How specific should that one thing be could you say? It could be, say, the Majjhima Nikaya

or it could be the Heart Sutra.

S: Well, I wasn't thinking so much of Buddhist studies, though yes, perhaps it would be good to concentrate also on a particular field of Buddhist studies. I was thinking more in terms of the humanities. That for instance you did have a really good knowledge of, let us say, Elizabethan drama, that could be one area. Or for instance, nineteenth century philosophy, or that for instance you knew French literature quite well. Something of that sort, something of (sort of) humane value. It could even be one of the sciences. It could be for instance biology, you could have made a thorough study of evolutionary theory. Or, say, of astronomy, I mean that could be not unrelated to the dharma eventually. I think that what is important is that you have a grasp of the basic principles of the Dharma, you have a grasp of what one might describe as Buddhist philosophy, and you're able to relate to the principles of Buddhist philosophy all the other branches of knowledge with which you come into contact, and with which you acquaint yourself. So that it's not that you've got, say, some knowledge of the dharma on the one hand; on the other a whole mountain (as it were) of bits and pieces of unrelated scraps of knowledge. Of course to begin with it'll be a bit perhaps like putting a jigsaw together. You will, say, accumulate various bits and pieces and you won't see where exactly they fit in. But I think ultimately you must be able to see where they fit in. Otherwise you don't really have knowledge, you simply have a collection of unrelated pieces of information, and that is not knowledge. Knowledge means that you're able to refer things to their principles, that you're able to bring facts under the heading of laws, and so on. So in this way you try to create a sort of cosmos

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out of the chaos (so to speak) of human knowledge and human experience. So this is related to breadth and depth in this way: You could say that your understanding of general principles, in the case of the Dharma your experience even of those general principles, constitutes your depth; and the range of your bits and pieces of information belonging to different fields corresponds to your breadth. And you've got to have... well, the more bits and pieces of information you have, and the greater the number of fields to which they belong, the firmer has got to be your grasp of general principles. Do you see what I mean? You could say that the general principles are like the trunk of a tree and the main branches, the facts are like the leaves. But between the leaves and the main branches there are minor branches, and there are big twigs, and there are minor twigs, and it's the minor twigs that connect with the leaves. So the more leaves you've got, the more careful you have to be to make a connection between leaves and twigs, twigs and big twigs, big twigs and small branches, small branches to medium branches, and then to big branches and the whole trunk. So every time you're drawn to a particular field or you acquire what seems to be a significant piece of information, you have to try to ask yourself "Well, where does it fit in?" and "Where does it belong?" So that your knowledge is a whole, not just a jumble of unrelated fragments.

Padmavajra: What would you say constitutes the basic Buddhist principles that we should know?

S: Well, I think those principles which are set forth in all the traditional explanations(?) including my own writings. In the terms that we usually expound the Dharma one has got the principle of universal conditionality; one has got the two kinds of conditionality, one has got the spiral, one has got the wheel, and so on and so forth; one has got the three characteristics; one has got the four viparyayas: I mean, these are equated (with) the fundamental basic principles. Anyway, what else?

Vessantara: Steve had a question related to mastery of the dharmas.

Steve Webster: I think you've probably answered it already. You say the Bodhisattva should master all the Buddha's teachings, in the numberless religious and philosophical systems, as well as the study of the secular arts and sciences, various trades. I just thought that seemed quite a lot.

S: Yes. (laughter) Well, one must bear in mind the cosmic perspective, and one must remember what I said the other day about tradition envisaging the Bodhisattva's career as covering three asamkheyyas of kalpas, so he has a lot of time, huh? (laughter) to learn all those things. But the general principle is that if you want to be concerned with helping other people, especially establishing a dharmic connection with other people, then the more languages you have at your disposal, the more means of communication you have at your disposal, then the more effectively you'll be able to fulfill that task.

That's not to say that you can't go about it (as it were) more directly. But that isn't easy. One might say that there are two possible approaches, and you can I suppose (sort of) hover between the two sometimes. I remember talking to someone some years ago (it was a young Order member) and I pointed out to him that if he wanted to spread the Dharma (and this is what he wanted to

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do), well, there were really only two ways in which he could do that, in a spiritual sense: either by studying the Dharma and understanding it, as well as practising it, and being well acquainted with arts and sciences and having many mediums of communication with people: that's one way of doing it. The other, for instance, would be concentrating wholeheartedly on, for instance, meditation, to such an extent that you could by your sheer presence (and/of)? personality, without even any words, have a tremendous effect upon the people with whom you came in contact. So you can imagine there being those two possible ways, or two possible approaches, you could (as it were) to some extent combine the two, in varying ways, in varying degrees, but there's no other possibility. So the Bodhisattva Ideal thinks in terms of the first of those possibilities: that you should be well equipped, that you should speak the various languages spoken by other people, you should have all sorts of approaches to them in that way. But there's also the possibility that you don't have any means, or any way, that you yourself are the means, that you yourself are the way. And there are some people, a few people, who can operate in this particular way, even on a comparatively human level, in a comparatively human sense: I mean their personality, even their unenlightened personality, is so attractive and so impressive, I was also going to say 'so charismatic' but that is a dangerous word - I'm not talking about charisma in the ordinary sense. But their personality is so fascinating that they attract people, and people listen to them. But perhaps even in the case of such people unless they are experienced in things like meditation, and have got actual genuine Insight, they may not be able to help those people very much, unless they've got some knowledge of the Dharma also. So one might say one method is more the method of the tortoise, and the other method is the method of the hare; one is the method of slow and patient study and practice and reflection over a period of years, and the other is the method or the way of just doing things (as it were) through sheer (one could say) force of personality but it's more than that, it's something (if you like) more spiritual than that, but in that case, usually, you're born with that sort of personality - it's very difficult if not impossible actually to develop it.

Vessantara: Dipankara also had a question.

Dipankara: My original question, Bhante, was: what was the meaning of "master" in 'master all dharmas', but I feel you've answered that already. What I'd actually like to follow up is your suggestion that we should establish karmic connections with people. Could you say some more about establishing the karmic connection?

S: Hmm. Hmm. ... Well one establishes karmic connection with people by doing the same things that they do, by thinking the same thoughts that they think, and even speaking the same words that they speak. Because where there is karma, there will be karma-vipaka, there will be the results of karma. And if the karma has been common, the vipaka will be common too. So the way to establish karmic connection with people, which means being reborn wherever they are reborn and in situations in which they're then the way is just to be similar to them in your deeds, your actions, of body, speech and mind. So if you want to establish a karmic connection with some- body, and he's a meditator, well you'll just have to meditate too.

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Otherwise he'll be born in an exalted devaloka, not to say brahmaloka, and you won't. (laughter) and so on. So where a number of people are following a common way of life, thinking the same sort of thoughts, performing the same sort of actions, and even using the same kind of language, and where there is a (sort of) emotional rapport between them or among them, the chances are, other factors being equal, that they'll all be reborn to- gether, or of course not be reborn together.

Dipankara: Can I just ask another question that comes to mind? I remember some years ago we had trouble with burglars at Sukhavati. Would that set up a karma whereby those people would again come back within the orbit of the FWBO, so as to balance out their crimes? Would that set up a karmic link to them...?

S: I tend to think that they'd balance out their crimes in a rather different sort of way (laughter). There are people who say - I have heard this in India - that it's better to have a negative connection with holy people than not have any connection at all. There are some famous stories in this connection. I don't think one can take them literally.

Mike Shaw: A bit more about this karmic link: You said that if you're performing the same sort of actions together you'll be quite likely to karmic links. Would that necessitate you doing that physically close to each other or could you be doing that on different sides of the world?

S: Well, yes. You could be doing (that) on different sides of the world. If your thoughts, words and deeds were the same the likeli- hood would be that you would be reborn in the same sphere of existence under the same conditions. And sometimes it is said that to have the actual aspiration to be reborn together in that way does in itself have some sort of karmic effect. 'Mean in some schools of Buddhism they develop a strong aspiration to be reborn in the pure-land so if different people living in different parts of the world, even different parts of the universe, develop that same aspiration, even without knowing one another, well they will be reborn in the pureland presumably. What to speak of those who in addition also happen to know one another and foster that common aspiration.

Phil Miller: How would that apply like to Christians who believe they'll be reborn in heaven... that they'll go to heaven 9

S: Well, they might be (laughter).

Prasannasiddhi: If they do good (laughter) - er - evil.

S: Well, I don't rule out the possibility that amongst all the iTeavens, all the planes and sub-planes that Buddhism enumerates, there's one tucked away there which corresponds to the Christian heaven (laughter) complete with its own little Jehovah. That is not impossible.

Phil Shann: Do you think it's likely that people within the FWBO now have a karmic link from previous lives?

S: That is quite possible. Sometimes it does seem that - it is quite strange the way people have been drawn to the FWBO,

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apparently by "accident" (inverted commas) and the extent to which they feel at home once they make that contact. I suppose you could explain it in a psychological sort of way, but a Buddhist, no doubt, would explain it in terms of people who had perhaps once known one another, or who were certainly originally treading the same spiritual path, have now once again been brought together. I think some of you know the work of Arthur Gurdem(?). He believes, he maintains, that he himself was a Cathar in the Middle Ages, and he believes moreover that he is in this life in contact with a number of people who were in contact in the Middle Ages in France with one another as Cathars. And that in between they were - I forget the details in this case - in contact again with one another during the period of the Napoleonic Wars. And he believes that he has evidence which proves this. I mean in some ways this is the message of the Buddhist Jatakas because the Jatakas show you not only the Buddha being reborn time and time again, but being reborn time and again with the same set of people. I mean, Devadutta is always there - he just shows (unclear) he's always there. Ananda is always there. It's the same sort of cast of characters in each Jataka practically, in different costumes, and playing a different little drama; until they come to the final drama of course, which is that of the Buddha's Enlightenment itself. So it does seem to follow logically that if you are reborn (so to speak) according to your deeds, that if your deeds are similar to those of certain other people, you are likely to be reborn (so to speak) in the same world, and even to know them and be in personal contact with them, especially if you have been already in personal contact with them. Once you accept the doctrines of karma and rebirth, that all seems to logically follow.

Padmavajra: On the question of the Jatakas, it would appear that when the Buddha broke through, that had an effect - that by virtue of doing that it had an effect - on those people around him. Do you think that if one does break through spiritually - if it really is a spiritual attainment - that would have an effect upon others? You could sort of gauge it by its sort of collective effect?

S: Well, all life is interconnected as I was saying the other day. There are all sorts of invisible threads, or even invisible nerves connect all living beings. So that if something was to happen to you - like for instance attaining Enlightenment, which would be a tremendous thing indeed - the shock waves must surely travel along all those nerves and effect, even though perhaps very slightly, all those people with whom you were in contact. It is interesting that in the case of people like the Buddha and even other teachers and sages, very often they take their whole family along with them. Because after all they have had, you know, contact with their family in the first place, and by virtue of the fact that they are related to those particular people. So those people cannot be unaffected by the fact that one of their members - one of their number - does either gain Enlightenment or become a great yogi or something of that sort. It must have some sort of effect upon them. In other words the channels of communication, and of influence, are already there. Of course can resist influences, and sometimes that also happens, but if you're not making a particular effort to resist, and if you are even reasonably open, well something

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will, as it were, percolate through. So one might therefore say that when one becomes, say, an Order member, that cannot but have an effect on all the people you know, especially those that you know well. Because at the very least they will hear that that is what has happened to you, that is what you have done, that is the step you've taken. So that fact will enter in the circle of their awareness, and they will respond or react to it in a particular way. But they can't ignore it. They of course may pretend to ignore it but that's quite another matter. So in a sense by becoming ordained and by Going for Refuge to a very tiny extent you (sort of) take along with you all the people with whom you are in contact. We get representation of this in the Going for Refuge and prostration practice don't we? Where we visualise our mother and all women on one shoulder and our father and all men on the other, there are various ways of practising this, but in one way or another you take the whole human race along with you, because you are interconnected, and what you do has some effect on them, just as what they do, fortunately or unfortunately, has some effect upon you. If for instance a near and dear relation or friend is going through something, having some unfortunate experience, it does have some effect upon effect upon you. You can't exclude that altogether if you know about it from your consciousness, and from your feeling. In the same way, if they know of you (say) that you have Gone for Refuge, you've become a Buddhist, you've become an Order member, however little they know about Buddhism that must in some small way modify their consciousness and modify their being, even if they simply react against it.

Padmavajra: I suppose one of the things I was wondering with this question was how much should ... I mean very often one's criteria for judging one's spiritual development is personally. I sort of wonder how much we should - rather than (sort of) judge it (as it were) collectively, in terms of effect upon others.

S: Well, I have heard a saying to this effect: (I don't remember the exact words, and I don't remember even which tradition it comes from - some of you might have heard it) That if you (I mean it certainly wouldn't be from the Theravada, but anyway it goes like this:) If you really want to know how far a man has got spiritually, look at his wife. (laughter) Because, well, suppose she is subject to hysterics or periodic nervous breakdowns, what does that tell you about him? (pause) Do you see what I mean? I don't want to stretch the point too much, but there is a (sort of) grain of truth in this, that you can (sort of) very often tell where somebody is at, or what he's like, especially if he's a strong character or a dominant character in that particular family group, by looking at those who are close to him, who are actually living with him, and seeing what sort of effect he's having upon them. I remember in this connection meeting with Alan Watts in London many years ago, soon after the FWBO was started. And I noticed his hands were trembling, I afterwards learned that he was an alcoholic at that stage. But his wife was in such a state that she - we were having a meal together, the three of us and his father (Alan Watts had come over from America because it was his father's ninetieth birthday. The old chap was very hail and hearty indeed, a picture of health.)- but poor Alan was, well, was yes, an alcoholic by that time and his wife (I think it was his third wife)

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couldn't finish the meal with us, she went to her room. And she was at that time I understand having a (sort of) nervous break-down. She just (you know) couldn't stand it any more. So what is one to think in cases of that sort? You can't imagine, say, Marpa's wife being in that sort of state - whatever might have happened to Milarepa's! (laughter) Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Antonio had a question about the poisons.

Antonio Perez: I'm just wondering what makes conceit particularly associated with the human realm. Because I mean there are all the poisons.

S: Hmm. Hmm. Well, in the human realm self consciousness is developed isn't it? So if self consciousness is developed you can compare yourself to others. And if you compare yourself to others well then there is the possibility of thinking of yourself as superior and others as inferior and so on. So one might say that therefore conceit particularly characterises the human realm. It's hardly possible to have, say, a conceited animal. Though I won't be completely sure of this but I have seen dogs sometimes (laughter) with what one might describe as conceited expressions on their faces, But then dogs are very close to human beings. You can hardly imagine a conceited preta, because a preta is just so hungry, you know, he just doesn't have a chance (so to speak) to think about other people, how he compares. You can hardly imagine a preta thinking, or saying, well "I'm more hungry than you are." (laughter) It just doesn't work like that. Or a being in hell, you know, "Oh, I'm suffering more than you are!" (unclear) (laughter) suffering is a serious business. I mean you can get hypochondriacal people on earth, human beings, claiming to suffer more than anybody else does, but they're just playing at suffering, but not in hell. You could possibly imagine an asura or a god as being conceited because they like human beings have got self-consciousness, but in the case of the gods, well, perhaps they are too self satisfied to bother about comparing themselves with others, and asuras are in any case busy fighting them, fighting among themselves. So perhaps yes, conceit is especially associated with the human state and therefore perhaps it's something that human beings have particular need to be careful of. The Buddha does say somewhere that one shouldn't think of one- self either as superior to others, or inferior to others, or as equal to others. I think it's that third item that we need to remind ourselves of nowadays; equality is not enough. If you're thinking in terms of equality, if you're very concerned that you should be equal with others, or others should be equal with you, and that everybody should be equal, well this is a form actually of conceit. From a Buddhist point of view one mustn't really think in those terms at all. You'll remember in The Thousand petalled Lotus I've written about the Yalahankar Swami and his methods. According to him humility was a form of egotism. So in the same way the belief in equality too is a form of egotism. You don't escape from egotism, or conceit, by believing or trying to believe, or trying to convince yourself of, trying to convince others that everybody' 5 equal.

Antonio Perez: Could you say that conceit is the principle obstacle being able to appreciate people's qualities, or just appreciating other people in a general sense?

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S: Well, where there is conceit there is a very great need, apparently, to put other people down all the time. This may of course disguise itself as egalitarianism - you may present your- self as a great lover of equality, but what you really- want to do is to bring everybody down to your level, you're very very concerned lest anybody should be superior to you. But this is great weakness, in fact this is a great loss because if there's nobody who is superior to you, spiritually that is to say, well there's nobody that you can look up to, there's nobody you can really learn from, so it is going to be very difficult for you to make any sort of spiritual progress. So conceit really represents a negation of the possibility of spiritual development.

Vessantara: There were a couple of questions about the six element practice.

Will Spens: Yes. In the sixth stage of the six-element practice concerning consciousness, it's very difficult to imagine one's consciousness dissolving into universal consciousness. Could you suggest a way of thinking about this, or possible...

S: Yes. Take that universal consciousness as a sort poetic image. I think it's better to think simply of all limitations to consciousness, all barriers, being removed, and consciousness becoming infinite in all directions. I think it's better to think in those sort of terms and try to experience in that sort of way. It does seem that people find the image of the dewdrop sinking into the shining sea, or slipping into the shining sea, really very helpful. S6 must must just think rather of all barriers being removed, all limitations to consciousness being removed. And can perhaps think in terms of, you know, one's consciousness as being coterminous with the entire universe of which it is possible for that universe to

think.

Will Spens: So what sort of barriers would you think of as being removed, if you were thinking in that sort of way?

S: Well, how does one approach that particular level? You go from space to consciousness, so you have already envisaged the four gross elements that make up your physical body as occupying a certain space as (as it were) delimiting, or demarkating a certain space. So that when those four elements are no longer present that space is no longer being delineated. Do you see what I mean? It's like when for instance you've got an image of mud or clay as occupying a certain space by virtue of the fact that it's a certain shape. But once it's melted, the space it occupied is no longer occupied, the space which it delineated is no longer delineated. So it's as though the line which was drawn between the space which it was occupying and the space which it was not occupying is no longer there. So one thinks in terms of, or speaks in terms of, the smaller space merging with the greater space. Actually of course there is no merging, it's merely that a line of demarkation has been removed. Now, you've got associated with your physical body a certain consciousness, so when the physical body is no longer there the consciousness can no longer be associated with that physical body. When the space even that body was occupying is no longer there, the consciousness can no longer be associated with that particular limited, demarkated space. So if it cannot be ... if there's no demarkated space for it to be associated with or connected with, well, there cannot be really an undemarkated space, i.e. an infinite space,