General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

□THE DUTIES OF BROTHERHOOD IN ISLAM"

(Study of the text translated from the Ihyā of Imām Al-Ghazāli by Muhtar Holland)

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Held at: Padmaloka (Chairmen's Retreat)

Date: September 1983

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Abhaya, Devaraja, Kuladeva, Kulananda, Nagabodhi, Prakasha, Prasannasiddhi, Ratnavira, Subhuti, Tejamitra, Vajrananda.

Tape 1, Side 1 Day 1

Sangharakshita: I take it everyone has read the translator's foreword and the introduction. We're not going to go through those together; we're going to plunge straight into the text itself. The forewords and the introduction are really quite simple and straightforward.

If anyone wants to read up on al-Ghazali in the course of the ten days, I suggest you consult the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and also Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. There will be some additional information there I think there's a note at the back recommending further reading. I don't have either of the works mentioned by Montgomery Watt - *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* and *Muslim Intellectual: The Struggle and Achievement of al-Ghazali*, but you can make notes of those and maybe follow up later if you want to do so.

Devaraja: Hasting's Encyclopedia.....

S: Of Religion and Ethics. I suggest you look up al-Ghazali in the index rather than going directly to the encyclopedia, because there may be information about him not only under his own name entry but, for instance, under Islamic Philosophy and so on.

Perhaps I should say a few words to begin with as to why we are having this particular seminar, why this particular text has been chosen. Most of you know I think that in the last year or even two years particularly there has been quite a lot of discussion in the Movement, and especially perhaps at Tuscany and growing out of the Tuscany course, on the subject of *kalyana mitrata* - on the subject of spiritual friendship, and indeed on the subject of friendship generally. And it did occur to me that it would be a good idea if we had a whole series of study groups, study retreats, on major texts dealing with the subject of friendship, including spiritual friendship, not only from Buddhist sources but from the Western cultural and philosophical traditions generally. For instance, I thought we might well do the chapters on friendship from Aristotle's

Ethics. We might do, for instance, the *Symposium*, which strikes a rather different note. We might, for instance, do essays by Francis Bacon, Montaigne, Emerson; the Western tradition is quite rich in that sort of material.

But I also happened to come across this particular text on *The Duties of Brotherhood* by al-Ghazali. Now this is from the Islamic tradition - it's right outside the Buddhist tradition, it's right outside the Western cultural tradition. But in going through it I felt that it provided a few insights into friendship, and especially spiritual friendship, which one didn't find in quite the same way either in the Buddhist tradition itself or in the Western cultural tradition generally. So I thought that we might perhaps supplement or even enlarge or deepen our conception of friendship and of spiritual friendship by going through this text.

I also thought it might be a good idea to do this inasmuch as it would provide us with a means of making, within a very limited context, some sort of comparative study of Islam and Buddhism, because I feel that, as the Movement grows and extends and expands, I think some of us at least - some members of the Order at least - have got to have some understanding of major religions and spiritual traditions of the world, and understand to what extent they differ from Buddhism, whether there is any overlap, if so to what extent, in what areas and so on. So this, in addition to being an exploration of the subject of spiritual friendship, is also an exploration within a particular area of a certain aspect of comparative religion as regards Islam and Buddhism.

So these are the two main reasons why we are undertaking the study of this text. If the study is successful, if the proceedings of the discussion are transcribed, if all that is edited, I might well write a proper little introduction, setting forth these considerations at some length. But I think that the few words I said, the main reasons I gave, are reasonably clear. Anyone like to ask anything on those two points?

Prakasha: Are there actually any Buddhist texts that deal specifically with friendship?

S: I am not aware of any full-length texts. There are chapters in works like *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. There are verses here and there. I'm not aware of any systematic treatment. [Pause]

Prasannasiddhi: Are there any good books giving you a good account of Islam, the Islamic tradition?

S: That's a very big subject. Again, Islam in English is a little bit like Buddhism in English. There have been a lot of new works produced in the last ten or fifteen years, written not by Christians but by Muslims, just as there are nowadays a lot more relatively good books written not by non-Buddhists but by Buddhists on Buddhism. I must say I'm not by any means up to date with this material. I have got some works of my own. I'm not quite sure what to recommend, because within the Muslim world itself there are divisions just as there are within the Buddhist world. For instance if one was asked to recommend to a beginner a book on Buddhism, some people might for instance recommend Walpola Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught*, but would everybody agree that that was an adequate representation of Buddhism as such - the total tradition? Some people might think it wasn't, because it was a definitely Theravada-type presentation. So in much the same way, it isn't easy to get a presentation of Islam. If you look at it more closely, you'll find it's Sunni Islam or Shi'a Islam, those being the two main divisions. But it may be possible by the end of the study retreat for me to draw up a reading list of things that are reasonably available. But I think clearly on the whole

it would be better, if we are going to read anything on Islam apart from perhaps historical works, to read books which have been written by Muslims themselves, and feel at least what Muslims themselves, rightly or wrongly, think that their own religion is. Because as Buddhists we've been quite exasperated by non-Buddhists telling us what Buddhism really is.

There is also, apart from the Sunni-Shi'a divide, there is the whole question of Sufism, which is in some ways quite ambiguous. Some authorities - I'm talking now of Muslim authorities, regard Sufism as especially closely connected with the Shi'a tradition. But others don't agree with that. They regard it as something independent, which may be connected either with the Sunni tradition or with the Shi'a tradition. And there are other later very interesting, in some ways most interesting, developments within Islam, especially in Iran, to do with - well, they could be regarded as extreme developments of Shi'a-cum-Sufi tradition - I'm being very approximate here: my terminology is quite loose because this is quite a new field. But it has been described in Western terms as an oriental theosophy. It owes much to Plotinus and to Plato and perhaps to other Eastern sources.

But anyway, not much of all that will emerge in the course of our study, because al-Ghazali - I've assumed that you all knew this, but perhaps I shouldn't have - is of course a Sunni. He is not a Shi'a. But I think this came up in the course of the introduction. He is definitely a proponent of the Sunni tradition, which is of course the major one within Islam, numerically speaking.

Tejamitra: The other division - was that related to Muhammad's daughter-in-law?

S: His daughter and son-in-law, Fatima and Ali. Very broadly speaking, the Sunnis regard the Caliphs as inheriting the secular authority of Muhammad. They don't regard anyone as inheriting his spiritual authority. But the Shi'as regard Ali and his successors as having inherited the spiritual authority - the continuing spiritual authority - of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. So the spiritual heirs of Ali are called Imams, though the Shi'as use the word Imam in a different sense from the Sunnis. In the Sunni tradition Imam means the prayer leader - the leader of the congregational prayer, but in the Shi'a school Imam means a spiritual successor of the Prophet. Then there are Twelve-Imamas, that is to say followers of Twelve-Imam Shi'a tradition, followers of Seven-Imam Shi'a tradition, and so on. Different schools have branched off depending on the number of successors they recognise.

To the best of my knowledge there is only one offshoot, that is the Ismaili tradition, which recognises an Imam right down to the present day. They of course recognise the Aga Khan as their Imam. Others regard the process as having ended various centuries ago: some as ending with the Seventh Imam, others with the Twelfth Imam. But all those who regard the Imam (Maters?) ending on the material plane regard it as having continued on the spiritual plane, so there is what they now call a hidden Imam who is not publicly known, who may not be even a historical figure but who guides and directs the followers of that particular tradition from another plane altogether. We are some distance away from orthodox Sunni Islam by this time - you can appreciate that already.

But the Shi'a tradition is the minority one, though still very substantial. Iran is the main Shi'a country, though there of course in modern times the legalists have taken over. The Ayatollahs are not so much spiritual figures, they are canon lawyers, to use the Western term; they are 'canonists', stressing the letter of the law. But they hold spiritual allegiance to ( ) Hussein, Ali and Fatima. Anyway, that is all by the way.

You should brush up on your Islamic studies, clearly!

But al-Ghazali, as I've said, was a Sunni, though I rather imagine that what he has to say on a subject of this sort, which is a very general subject, would probably be acceptable to all Muslims.

Anyway, let's begin. I'm hoping that we can do one chapter a day. We've got nine days at our disposal and there are eight chapters. But if we find we're not getting through the material in the course of the morning then we may well overflow into the afternoon for a short period, so that we get through the whole text in the course of the nine days and cover it reasonably thoroughly.

AL-GHAZALI

On the Duties of Brotherhood

"Know that the contract of brotherhood is a bond between two persons, like the contract of marriage between two spouses. For just as marriage gives rise to certain duties which must be fulfilled when it is entered into, so does the contract of brotherhood confer upon your brother a certain right touching your property, your person, your tongue and your heart - by way of forgiveness, prayer, sincerity, loyalty, relief and considerateness.

In all this comprises eight duties."

S: So these eight duties are the subject matter of the eight ensuing chapters, one chapter to each duty. So we won't at this stage discuss forgiveness, prayer, sincerity etc. because they are dealt with in the respective chapters. But there are some things which we need to dwell upon here. To begin with, al-Ghazali says: "Know that the contract of brotherhood is a bond between two persons, like the contract of marriage between two spouses." What do you think is the significance of this? Actually, we've touched upon that in a way before in a specifically Buddhist context, but we'll come to that in a minute. What do you think is the significance of this "Know that the contract of brotherhood is a bond between two persons, like the contract of marriage between two spouses."?

Subhuti: Something is formally entered into.

S: Something is formally entered into. But is that the case today in modern Western society? Is that the case today? Does one enter into a contract of brotherhood, normally?

Devaraja: I remember when I was young having blood brothers when you cut yourself .....

S: Well, that is the sort of thing one does after reading about the Red Indians. It isn't usually recognised by parents and elders, in fact they're not usually told about it.

Nagabodhi: I remember when I was a child there would be this idea of contract. You would say to people: 'I'll be your best friend.' I remember that was quite a strong feature in friendship. You actually articulated that you were someone's best friend. Or you wouldn't be their friend any more. Whether that came from books we read or whether that's just some kind of residue from a .....

S: What do you think was the psychological significance of that - that you were professedly someone's best friend? Do you think there was a definite psychological need behind that? If so, what?

Kulananda: It is like having someone on whose affection you can rely.

S: Well, what about mummy and daddy?

Kulananda: It was much more distant than that.

S: Yes.

Ratnavira: It is something you more consciously enter into. With your mother and father you just happen to have a mother and father.

S: It is more a question of conscious choice. I don't think that's the essence of the matter, though. There seems to be something more in it than that. It's as though one needs to have a recognised, a mutually accepted channel of communication, of exchange. [Pause] I think it is not so much having someone on whose affection you can rely, but someone who is always ready to listen to you, someone who is ready to talk with you when you want to talk with someone or when you want someone to listen to you; someone to whose time and attention you have a sort of recognised right.

But obviously we've touched on the point before: in modern Western society friendship has lost all its prerogatives, certainly lost all its rights and in particular as against marriage. Marriage has persisted more or less as a contract, as an institution recognised by society; but not friendship. Friendship is not recognised as having any rights at all against marriage. So much so that the general attitude is that when a man gets married, he virtually says goodbye to his friends. They give him a farewell party, or he gives them a farewell party.

But this arose in a Buddhist context in connection with the *Sigalovada Sutta*, because we saw that there were, according to that sutta, six great relationships, so to speak: the relationship between parents and children, the relationship between husband and wife, employer and employee,

and so on, and including the relationship between friend and friend. So clearly here all these different relationships were given, in a sense, equal status. Certainly the relationship between friends was given equal status to the relationship between husband and wife, which is again not the case in modern society. So here we see the Islamic tradition to some extent really agreeing with the Buddhist tradition. Both agree that brotherhood, in Islamic terms, is a contract. There can be a contract of brotherhood which is quite straightforwardly to be compared with the contract of marriage between two spouses. So here it would seem that the Islamic tradition and Buddhist tradition agree as against modern Western custom and practice, and even perhaps theory.

Prakasha: In marriage there is an actual contract, an actual ceremony which is quite explicit. Are we talking about, in terms of the contract, something explicit, perhaps a ceremony?

S: I think so, yes.

Prakasha: What would that comprise?

S: Al-Ghazali doesn't give us any information about that, not in this particular chapter. It may be simply as in the case of childhood friendship, the expression of "well you be my friend" is considered sufficient. Though there is this similarity between the contract of brotherhood and the contract of marriage in the sense that both are contracts. There is a difference, because in the case of marriage there is the question of progeny, of offspring, so it becomes more of a sort of social matter. In the case of friendship it is much more a private matter between two people. So it doesn't need the recognition of society to the extent that marriage does, even though it may have, in fact does have social and even political repercussions.

Prasannasiddhi: This sort of bond: would there be some western historical context in which this was more prevalent?

S: I think among some ancient peoples, yes, there was a sort of rite of blood brotherhood or something of that sort. I did find it among the Nepalese. They had a sort of ceremony, they had a tradition which they called 'mit' - from *mitra*, in fact: 'mit' is the abbreviation of *mitra*. But 'mit' meant a sort of blood brother. For instance, I remember one of my students was introducing someone to me: 'He is my father's Mit', meaning my father's blood brother. And this apparently developed because many of the Nepalese were traders, and they needed, in the course of their travels and trading operations, to be able to trust certain people and to be able to stay with certain people safely. So the institution of 'mit' was developed out of that necessity. Originally if you went to some strange place, you sought out your 'mit', your blood brother. It was like your own brother. You could stay with him. He would look after you, protect you. He'd help you. And there was a ceremony for making a 'mit' brother in this way.

I gather, though, from my young friends, that the institution is dying out. It is still current among older men who had become 'mits' when they were young, but younger Nepalese tended to look a little askance at this custom - I think mainly because they knew that there was no Western equivalent, and they wanted to be westernised. They didn't want to keep up their own traditions and customs - all that was just old-fashioned.

But again, you may find information about blood-brotherhood and brothers in Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* - it's quite a mine of such information. But the important point here: that brotherhood is given recognition socially, just in the very same way that marriage is. It's not an unimportant little appendage of one's life, marriage being the main thing, so to speak. Because if brotherhood is, so to speak, on a level with marriage, if brotherhood is as important as marriage, it follows that your friend is as important in your life as your wife; which is not a point of view with which we are familiar in modern days in the West.

Then al-Ghazali goes on to give the reason: "For just as marriage gives rise to certain duties which must be fulfilled when it is entered into, so does the contract of brotherhood confer upon your brother a certain right touching your property, your person, your tongue and your heart - by way of forgiveness, prayer, sincerity, loyalty, relief and considerateness. In all, this comprises eight duties." Once you enter into a contract of brotherhood with someone, then you have a duty towards him. He has a duty towards you. You have rights over him. He has rights over you. The rights and the duties are of course the obverse and reverse of the same coin. You consider that you have duties towards him once he has become your friend, and those duties can be quite explicitly stated. It's not just some vague sentiment of friendship, but there are certain definite duties that you take upon yourself when you become somebody's friend and when he becomes your friend.

Abhaya: I suppose that we have it in the *kalyana mitra* ceremony to some extent - a sort of contractual agreement.

S: To some extent, yes. Though of course, that is specifically spiritual friendship, although the general underlying principles are the same.

Prasannasiddhi: Are we going between two people here rather than brotherhood in the wider sense?

S: Yes, this isn't dealt with, at least not in this introductory paragraph, but I would say that within Islam you can have even a marriage relationship with more than one spouse: if you are a man you can have up to four wives. In the same way, presumably you can have more than one friend. How many real friends you can have - this is a subject discussed by Aristotle in his *Ethics*. Clearly one cannot have a very large number, otherwise one's responsibilities and obligations might clash. But I don't think the intention is to limit the number of friends just to one. It's in a way as though the brotherhood of believers consists of pairs of brothers, but it may not be always the same pair, if you see what I mean. You can be a pair in relation to him or with him, but you can also be a pair in relation to or with another person, a third party, who may perhaps, ideally, be also a pair as between themselves. If one were to use an analogy, it is like two steel rings which are linked - do you see what I mean? But then you can have another ring joining on or they can all be mutually joined. It's rather like that.

All right, let's go on to section 1.

1

*"**The first duty** is the material one.*

God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!)

said:
- Two brothers are likened to a pair of hands,
one of which washes the other.

He chose the simile of the two hands, rather than the hand and the foot, because the pair are of mutual assistance towards a single aim. So it is with two brothers; their brotherhood is only complete when they are comrades in a single enterprise. In a sense the two are like one person. This entails a common participation in good fortune and bad, a partnership in the future as in the present moment, an abandonment of possessiveness and selfishness. In thus sharing one's property with one's brother there are three degrees."

S: Now let's go into the first duty: that is, 'the first duty' of brotherhood 'is the material one.' That refers to property in the previous text. 'God's Messenger' - who is God's Messenger for Muslims?

_____: Muhammad.

S: It is Muhammad. And then it is the custom in Islamic texts or even in conversation, after mentioning or referring to Muhammad, to say *'God bless him and give him Peace'*. He said - this is not a quotation of course from the Koran; this is a quotation from a Hadith. You know what a Hadith is? Hadith is a tradition of the prophet Muhammad, a saying attributed to him which is not found in the Koran. Muslims, of course, regard the Koran as the word of God. So no Muslim would say, referring to the Koran, or quoting from the Koran, 'Muhammad said'. That is quite unthinkable, because in the Koran God is speaking. So when a Muslim would refer to Muhammad having said this or Muhammad having said that, he is quoting from a Hadith.

Now there are various collections of Hadiths. There are tens of thousands of Hadiths. They are usually very very short, only a sentence or two; sometimes connected with a particular incident in the life of Muhammad. They are of course of varying degrees of authenticity; one can imagine that. They in some ways constitute a sort of supplementary revelation, because the Koran could not be added to but perhaps a saying of the Prophet could always be found. So among the Muslims themselves the study of Hadith literature is a full-time occupation for many scholars. They have classified Hadiths in various ways. There are some which are recognised by certain schools, others which are not so recognised, and so on. It is almost a theological industry in Islamic scholarly circles, the classification and analysis of Hadiths. But there is a group of admittedly very early ones that everybody recognises and accepts, but there are quite a lot of rather late ones for which the evidence is very scanty, which are accepted or used or quoted only by a few people or by certain schools of thought. I was going to say that Hadith in some ways represents for the Muslim what Shastra represents for the Buddhist; but it's not quite the same, because the Hadiths were all attributed to one person, that is to say to Muhammad himself. But the relationship between Hadith and revelation is very much like the relationship between

Shastra and Sutra for the Buddhist.

Anyway, Muhammad said, or God's Messenger said: 'Two brothers are likened to a pair of hands, one of which washes the other.' You are familiar with the operation, no doubt? 'He chose the simile of the two hands rather than the hand and the foot, because the pair are of mutual assistance towards a single aim.'

I have encountered in Indian literature somewhere a similar comparison of foot washing foot. Indians do not usually wash the feet with the hands, because the feet are impure. They wash one foot with another like this you see, just in the same way as one washes one hand with the other. But here al-Ghazali says Muhammad chose the simile of the two hands rather than a hand and a foot - he doesn't mention foot and foot - 'because the pair are of mutual assistance towards a single aim.' There are not many operations that you do with the help of one hand and one foot, but there are a number of things that you do with the help of two hands. So this is why, al-Ghazali says, quoting this Hadith, Muhammad chose the simile of the two hands, 'because the pair are of mutual assistance towards a single aim'

'So it is with two brothers; their brotherhood is only complete when they are comrades in a single enterprise.' This is very important, isn't it. Why should this be so? Why should it not be possible for one's brotherhood to be complete even in the absence of a single enterprise?

Abhaya: It is a shared experience .....

S: Yes, but even if you're just sitting chatting in a room, that is a shared experience. Why that particular kind of shared experience as represented by the enterprise?

Abhaya: It's a particular aim towards which you are both striving.

S: Yes, but why should your brotherhood be complete only when you have that? Why should your brotherhood not be complete if you're just sitting and smoking your hookahs together? Why does there have to be common enterprise?

Nagabodhi: It's likely to focus more aspects of you, more of your energies, more sides of yourself are involved in action, in directed, purposeful action, so that there'd be a blending of more.

S: That's true. I think one can take it even further than that.

Vajrananda: Is it that the nature of brotherhood is active?

S: But why should it be of the nature of brotherhood to be active? What is it that makes brotherhood active by its very nature? That is the very question that we are asking.

Ratnavira: Co-operation.

S: Well, you can co-operate just quietly sitting together, passing the hookah from hand to hand.

Devaraja: Is it because it makes you go beyond yourself - pulls you out of yourself?

S: That is true. But still, we can go a bit further than that, or at least be a bit clearer than that. I think in considering the nature of brotherhood, whether brotherhood is complete or not, you have to consider the nature of the contracting parties. The contracting parties are two human beings. So is a human being, is an individual human being complete unless he is involved in a particular enterprise?

[End of side one side two]

I would say that brotherhood is complete only when the two are comrades in a single enterprise, because a human <u>being</u> is complete only when he is involved in an enterprise. In other words, your brotherhood should not fall below the level of your common humanity. Enterprise - I'm taking here in not necessarily just an ordinary material sense, although it can include that, but enterprise in the sense of the effort to grow, to develop, to evolve. So your brotherhood is not complete without that because <u>you</u> would not be complete without that. Your brotherhood should give expression to the whole range of your human potential; your whole human potential should be involved in that. And since <u>you</u> as an individual human being are not complete unless you <u>strive</u> for something, strive for some higher goal, so your brotherhood is not complete unless <u>together</u> you are striving for that higher goal. In other words, there can't be any sort of just relaxed brotherhood, it cannot consist in just passing the friendly pipe or anything like that.

Tejamitra: That's what I was going to say, because you're not just talking about a fair-weather friend.

S: But it is more than that. It is not even that someone sticks by you through thick and thin, but that you're actually involved in a common enterprise together. And within a Buddhist context we would say you're involved in treading the spiritual path together or that you're aiming at Enlightenment together. Because supposing individually, let's say separately, you are aiming at Enlightenment, but when you come together as friends you take time off from that and you're not aiming at enlightenment <u>together</u>, then your friendship is not spiritual friendship and your brotherhood, in al-Ghazali's terms, is not complete. Your brotherhood is on a lower level than you are individually, separately; and that should not be. al-Ghazali doesn't specify what the enterprise is. Aristotle has discussed whether people can be friends, genuine real friends, for a bad purpose or whether they can only be friends for a good purpose. The Buddhist view of course is that the height of friendship is spiritual friendship, and that you are together involved in a spiritual quest in spiritual life.

So "<u>in a sense the two are like one person</u>". You notice the qualification 'in a sense'? Why does he not say the two are one person? Well, the plain reason is they are not one person. Because, by engaging in a common enterprise, a single enterprise, they don't forfeit their individual responsibility, so they aren't in fact be one person; they don't literally have one will. And one person's will is not subordinated to the other. There is what I've called a coincidence of wills. So they are in a sense like one person, but they function as one without actually being one.

So 'in a sense the two are like one person. This entails a common participation in good fortune and bad, a partnership in the future as in the present moment, an abandonment of possessiveness and selfishness.' So if you're comrades in a single enterprise, and if you are like one person, this entails a common participation in good fortune and bad. You share your friend's troubles as well as his enjoyments, and 'a partnership in the future as in the present moment.' That's quite important in the light of what I was saying about fidelity recently, in the lecture. In other words, the brotherhood continues. There is continuity. It is not just in the present moment. It isn't just a matter of impulse and whim. It's something you've entered into as a responsible individual, something that you've entered into not only for the present but for the future. It's something that continues from the present into the future; because only in that way can you be an individual.

Prasannasiddhi: Continues for how long?

S: It doesn't say. I think perhaps the assumption is that it continues for this life. Muslims don't usually believe in rebirth. So it wouldn't be for series of existences, but certainly for this life. That at least would be the intention.

But you notice that the ability to enter into a contract, which of course concerns the future, is characteristic of the individual. Just as the ability to make a promise, that is to say a promise to do something at a certain time or a certain place in the future, is a characteristic of the individual. I think I've said that an animal cannot make a promise. A cow cannot make a promise, and a cow cannot enter into a contract. Only a human being can make a promise, only a human being can enter into a contract; only a human being in the sense of a real human being, a true human being - more an individual, albeit as yet with a small 'i'.

So this is why promises and the keeping of promises are so important; why contracts and the adhering to contracts, being faithful to contracts, are so important. This is also why it is important to be clear about one's contracts, clear about one's promises. Quite recently down in London there was a quite sad instance of there being uncertainty as to what had been promised as between two people with regard to a loan - no need to go into the details, but it wasn't clear at all; so therefore one party is under the impression he has honoured the contract, so to speak, and the other party is under the impression that he, that is to say the other person, has not honoured the contract. And therefore there is a certain amount of misunderstanding and even not very positive feeling. So it is very important on entering into a contract you understand, both parties understand, exactly what the terms of the contract are. Similarly when you make a promise. So this may entail a certain amount of what might look, to an unsympathetic outsider, like legalism, or splitting hairs and so on, but one must be clear.

I must say in passing that I've found always my Tibetan friends and contacts very, very good in this respect. If they agreed to do anything, they wanted to be very clear what exactly they were agreeing to. I used to find this when I used to seek the co-operation of various groups of Tibetans in Kalimpong for certain celebrations or anything of that sort. They wanted to know exactly what they had to do, and once they had given their word you could absolutely rely upon them. Whereas the Indian would at once agree to anything you said but you couldn't rely upon him at all. With the Tibetan you had to have a quite tough clarifying session, and sometimes you'd have quite a lot of difficulty convincing them to do what you wanted them to do. But once they'd understood and agreed and given their word, that was that. You could absolutely rely upon them. In that way it was quite refreshing to deal with them. The Nepalese came somewhere in between: they weren't as bad as the Indians, but

not quite as good as the Tibetans.

'An abandonment of possessiveness and selfishness' - well, this is pretty obvious, because with regard to property, as we'll see, your brother has a right from now onwards over your property itself, so there's no room for possessiveness or selfishness.

Devaraja: This might be a bit of a tangent, but it is interesting, this thing about a single enterprise. I mean I think that refers to the marriage state, the traditional marriage state: the enterprise was children.

S: Well, children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren; in other words, the continuation of the family line.

Devaraja: But I think this Western thing of the relationship, there's no shared enterprise at all - no sort of objective enterprise. That is why inevitably it must break down.

S: And does break down. It breaks down even when the two people happen to stay together. In fact sometimes they stay together because it's broken down. They can't unglue themselves, if you see what I mean. They stay together in order to disagree, or to hate each other. Sometimes one sees that; they can't stop hating each other, therefore they stay together unfortunately.

Recently, just a few days ago, as you know I went down to Battle, and I wanted a little light reading matter for the journey, so I got a copy of *Time* magazine. There were three articles on violence within the family: violence towards children, violence between husband and wife - with the wife not always the victim - and violence towards women; and it was really quite horrific, the amount of violence that there is within the family. And I was wondering about this - this is of course the nuclear family - I came to the conclusion that it was partly at least because the nuclear situation is so tight that it is potentially explosive. And so many demands are placed on that particular relationship. It is so weighted and overloaded that there is bound to be trouble, and that often takes the form of violence. So I think if there is so much of violence within the nuclear family, people have really got to seriously ask themselves whether that is a proper model for that type of relationship. It would seem - though we do within the FWBO grumble about relationships from time to time, but we don't actually have any violence within them, as far as I know. Well if anyone has any confession to make? [Laughter]

Abhaya: No, I think there is a lot - in my experience of people in the nuclear family - there is quite a lot of verbal violence; they may not actually resort to physical violence, but there is a lot of aggression verbally.

S: These articles dealt with actual physical violence, because I think the assumption was that verbal violence was probably so common it wasn't worth noting - probably much, much more common than physical violence, which was bad enough and extensive enough anyway. But what I was thinking was that if one is going to have a so-called relationship at all with a member of the opposite sex, it is much better to have it, you being a member of a men's community and she being a member of a women's community; because since there is sufficient space between you it's unlikely that tensions will develop to the extent that they often do within the nuclear situation, and it's unlikely that you will commit violence. You might be feeling rather annoyed with her, perhaps, but you can go back to your men's community and there you'll have a chance to cool down and be in a more positive situation. So I don't know of any instances of physical violence within relationships of that sort within the

Friends, except in one case which was between two women, where one woman actually attacked the other a few months ago. It is rather a sad story but, yes, that did happen.

So this does give one food for thought - that, even if one wants to enter upon, say, marriage as an enterprise and have a family, in that case one should consider the extended rather than the nuclear family, perhaps; and if one just wants to have a relationship, that is no reason whatever for 'shacking up' together - in fact it is a reason against it, because too much tension probably will be generated.

So even though, as I say, we do grumble a bit about relationships within the FWBO - and maybe there are still too many of them, maybe they are still a bit negative or tinged with negativity - at least we can say they don't actually result in violence. That in itself would seem to be quite an achievement these days.

Tejamitra: Does this show that the extended families in India are better from that point of view - at least they are less violent?

S: There does seem to be less, although there is a certain amount of wife-beating, I must admit. But it is not vicious and persistent. It is the occasional thump when she nags too much. First of all, there is a lot of space within the Indian joint family or collective family. The husband and the wife aren't together all that much. In many families - this doesn't apply so much among the ex-Untouchables, but especially among the higher castes, it isn't done for the husband and wife to talk together, at least not too much in front of elders, and to quarrel in front of elders would be regarded as absolutely disgraceful. Even to exchange harsh words in front of elders just isn't done, so what to speak of the husband beating the wife - that is almost unknown in those communities. You see, it's hardly necessary: if the wife isn't behaving very well, the chances are one of the older women will speak to her and the husband will not have to intervene. So tensions are very much reduced. Though there are a few exceptions, there are a few social evils connected with the Indian extended family system, which are peculiar to that system; but that's another story. But they don't seem to be nearly as widespread as the evils attaching to our system; and I would say not attaching inherently to the joint family as such but only to the dowry system.

Anyway, that is going a little off the beaten track. But yes, the point Devaraja is making is correct that the traditional concept of marriage was a sort of enterprise that two people entered upon for raising of a family, continuation of the line, the name and so on. A friend of mine wrote to me the other day - she's about 70, her husband is about 75 - and their son, even though he's a Buddhist, married a girl who became also a Buddhist, and she became a nun, so this friend of mine, aged about 71, writes that 'After 300 years our family has come to an end'. I thought this rather quaint - 'after 300 years'. I suppose 300 years ago it emerged into history - it's a quite well-known Swedish family. But they did feel that regret that the line was coming to an end because he, their son, was not going to have children. But that is the more traditional attitude, she didn't mind the relationship coming to an end, but she was sorry that the family name was coming to an end. She didn't seem to consider the possibility of her son marrying somebody else; but that is another question.

But it does seem to be important to have a common aim. If two people get together for any purpose, or for any reason, it would seem important to have a common aim. Because it is the nature of a human being, as a human being, as someone with self-consciousness, to have an aim. And if your association with another person leads to the stultification of your aim, or leads to your not having an aim at all, that relationship with the

other person cannot but be destructive, because in a way a basic part of yourself is being denied through that relationship. Do you see what I mean? So no relationship with another person can be really successful, I mean an 'on-the-level' relationship, unless you have a common aim. I say an 'on-the-level' relationship because obviously that would not be the case say in your relationship with a child. You don't have a common aim.

But I think people have experienced, especially in the context of a so-called relationship, that if you are in relationship with somebody who doesn't want to develop, who doesn't have that kind of aim and you do, you have either got to go ahead and leave that person behind, or you have got to negate your own spirit of enterprise in order to stay with that person. And you cannot but feel resentful and the relationship cannot but be destructive. So one should say that a golden rule is: Eschew all relationships in which there cannot be a brotherhood, so to speak, in a common enterprise, whatever that may be.

Devaraja: I'm reminded of the *Symposium* of Plato - taking that sort of enterprise of ordinary marriage and talking about reducing the possibility of wisdom.

S: Yes, yes, right, yes. In other words, there can't be a humanly satisfying relationship in which you and the other person just sort of settle down and admire each other, so to speak. Anyway, is that point sufficiently clear? If the very nature of a human being is that he or she evolves, develops, there cannot be any genuine brotherhood which does not take that fact into account, and which is not a common enterprise of that nature.

Prasannasiddhi: This settling down and admiring each other sort of thing - that wouldn't be to say that one couldn't actually admire the other person, but just not stop there, in a sense.

S: Well, one can admire the other person if the other person deserves admiration, but friendship cannot consist of that. It cannot be just a mutual admiration society as we say. Just as in the case of marriage - to go back to that parallel example - the honeymoon does not last for ever. It can't last for ever. But the modern idea of some people is that marriage is a honeymoon that doesn't stop and in which children will only interfere, so of course you don't have them. You just have a sort of lifelong honeymoon. But of course the honey sooner or later turns sour and rather nasty - unless, of course, one does develop a common interest, as some husbands and wives have, even apart from children; a good example was Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who worked together for socialism and wrote books on socialism, Fabian Socialism, together, but obviously that is rather rare. Husbands and wives don't usually write books on socialism together, or even on capitalism.

So inasmuch as the individual human life is itself an enterprise, it must be an enterprise if it is to remain human, so brotherhood too must be an enterprise if it is to be genuinely brotherhood, or at least to be complete.

Anyway that's enough about that. So 'In thus sharing one's property with one's brother there are three degrees." Would someone like to read all those three degrees?

*"**The lowest degree** is where you place your brother on the same footing as your slave or your servant, attending to his need from your surplus. Some need befalls him when you have more than you require to satisfy your own, so you give spontaneously, not obliging him to ask. To oblige him to ask is the ultimate shortcoming in brotherly duty."*

S: Maybe we'd better deal with that first, before going on to the other degrees. So, "the lowest degree" - that is to say the lowest degree of sharing one's property with one's brother - "is where you place your brother on the same footing as your slave or your servant, attending to his need from your surplus." The implication is that you're not really treating him as a brother at all, because a brother should be more than a slave or a servant. So if you merely attend to his need from your surplus, if you merely give your brother what you can easily spare, you're not really treating him as a brother at all.

So suppose 'Some need befalls him when you have more than you require to satisfy your own, so you give spontaneously, not obliging him to ask.' So yes, this is a degree of brotherhood, but it's the lowest degree; but it's a degree of brotherhood only on the understanding that you don't wait for him to ask, you don't oblige him to ask. If you do, if you've much more than you need and he is in need, and he actually has to ask you to give him something, then that is the ultimate shortcoming in brotherly duty. If you give out of your superfluity, without waiting for him to ask, well, that is brotherhood, that is sharing one's property, even though it is of the lowest degree. But if you wait and oblige him to ask, you don't offer spontaneously to share out of your superfluity, then that doesn't even come within the limits of brotherhood. It's a shortcoming in brotherly duty. So what does this imply? There are all sorts of implications here: that you shouldn't oblige your brother, who is in need, to ask you to give from your superfluity.

Ratnavira: You're very aware of him, care -

S: Aware - care - you know that there is a need. And if you don't know, well, what has happened to your brotherhood? Suppose he hasn't told you, that suggests lack of confidence; supposing he's told you but you haven't taken any notice, that suggests lack of care. Supposing you don't know because you haven't seen him for a month, well, what is this? Two brothers haven't met even for a month. But the leading idea is, of course, that if you simply share with your brother, your spiritual brother, out of what you have extra, that is the lowest degree: that is the very least that you can do, the very least that can be expected of you. And even then he shouldn't have to ask. And that suggests that you are sufficiently in touch with him, you keep an eye on his affairs, you know how things stand with him. But 'to oblige him to ask is the ultimate shortcoming in brotherly duty.' Sometimes it can be quite a painful experience to someone to have to ask. You know that he needs, and he knows that you know, but nonetheless you make him ask. You won't give until he asks; well, this is not a very pleasant situation. Why do you think sometimes people do that - they make somebody ask for something, instead of just giving when they know that they need it?

Ratnavira: To humiliate him.

S: To humiliate him or even to assert one's power. All right would you like to carry on and read the second degree?

*"**At the second degree** you place your brother on the same footing as yourself. You are content to have him as a partner in your property and to treat him like yourself, to the point of letting him share it equally. Al-Hasan said there was once a man who would split his waist-band between himself and his brother."*

S: So, "At the second degree you place your brother on the same footing as yourself. You are content to have him as a partner in your property and to treat him like yourself." In the first case, of course, it was that you regarded some part of the property as absolutely yours because it was necessary to you, and then there was another part which you didn't need, and out of what you didn't need you could give to your brother. But here it's not like that. Here you regard your property, your material property, as belonging equally to your and your brother. And al-Ghazali gives an example: "Al-Hasan said" - I don't know who Al-Hasan was; no doubt some Muslim worthy - "said that there was once a man who would split his waist-band between himself and his brother." That is, he would divide and share. If he had one waistband, he wouldn't just keep it, he'd share it with his brother, he'd sort of divide it. Well, that isn't easy to do, is it? Even to go to this second degree and to regard your brother, your friend, as being an actual partner, a sharer, a co-owner almost in your property. That he has an equal right with you. That's a very big step forward.

Subhuti: You must be able to trust him, because if you've got a partner who is a partner in your property, and he acts unwisely, then he has a right to your property.

S: Yes. We'll come to that, in a sense, later on. Because this relates to the choice of friends, with whom you make your brother - you must make a wise choice. You must give due thought, you must realise what you're about, what you're doing, the nature of the contract. It is like marrying a wife. You consider: has she got a bad temper? Is she mean? Is she likely to be unfaithful? etc., etc. In the same way you study the nature of the person with whom you are going to enter into the contract of brotherhood. You may be friends with him for quite a long time before you actually enter into an explicit contract or have an explicit understanding.

Tejamitra: I don't know if this is a bit of a digression, but do you see ordination as entering this sort of area at all? I think you've mentioned at some point in the past how Order members have certain rights over others.

S: Well, yes and no. Yes, inasmuch as the Order, that is to say the Western Buddhist Order, models itself to some extent on the ancient bhikkhu sangha. In the case of the bhikkhu sangha, everything was owned in common. The only things that you owned individually were your three robes, your bowl, your water strainer, your girdle and your razor. Everything else was common property - chairs, tables, buildings, land. And

you were even exhorted to share the contents of your begging bowl with your fellow community members, as we would say. Now, in the case of the Western Buddhist Order, we can't fully apply that because some members of the Order are married, so they have as it were to set aside a certain amount of their property income for their families, that they are not in a position to share with the other members of the Order. But to the extent that you don't have these private or individual responsibilities, yes, you should be willing to share.

Tejamitra: Again, I think that sort of thing can in certain circumstances.... would be better off with clarification. I've experienced in the past people being over casual with.....

S: Well, yes, we did have a discussion about that recently - I can't remember where or when, but quite recently, about whether there should be a common purse in the community. It might have been down at Sukhavati. And I said, broadly, in that connection, that a common purse was definitely an ideal, but it was something to be worked towards gradually, and it obviously involved great mutual responsibility, awareness, and so on, just because we know from experience that very often people aren't sufficiently mature to use the common property in a responsible manner. What belongs to everybody belongs to nobody, so nobody is responsible for looking after it. So one has to be quite sure before one has a common purse or a common anything else, that all the parties to that agreement, so to speak, are fully responsible and aware people.

Tejamitra: And are clear what the idea is.

S: Yes - oh, yes. This is going to be touched upon later on.

All right, the third degree. Let's go into that.

*"**At the third degree**, the highest of all, you prefer your brother to yourself and set his need before your own. This is the degree of the **siddiq**, and the final stage for those united in spiritual love."*

S: There is a note there, 10, the siddiq: it means "faithful witness to the truth"'. This is not truth in a general sense, of course, it is the truth of Islam in this context. So "At the third degree, the highest of all, you prefer your brother to yourself and set his need **before** your own." It's more than equal sharing. There are examples of this in history; there are two examples in Greek history. Who were those two friends, one of whom stood surety for the life of the other when the other was under sentence of death? There's a famous example, isn't there? Do you remember? Someone was condemned to death by a tyrant, but he wanted I think to say goodbye to his wife and family or maybe to his father and mother. So his friend took his place, on the understanding that if his friend didn't come back then he would be executed in his place. And the friend did come back. Everybody thought he wouldn't come back, but his friend thought, 'Yes, he will come back.' He had that faith in him. But he didn't come back until the last minute, he was delayed for some reason or other. So everyone was saying, 'No, he is not going to come back, no he's not going to come back! Of course he's just a fool to believe that he would come back.' But his friend said, 'No, he has given me his word, he is my friend, he will come back.' And he came back, just as his friend was about to be executed. So the tyrant was so impressed, of course

(laughter)..... this is an historical anecdote. One does come across this sort of thing. And there is in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, the hero Sidney Carton who takes the place of a condemned man, and is executed. There is even an instance during the last war - I think is authenticated - when someone took the place of another person who was in a queue for the gas chamber in one of the Nazi concentration camps.

Devaraja: It was a Polish Catholic priest.

S: Right. He just took the person's place; he felt that that person's life was more valuable than his own. So one does come across these instances of one person preferring the life of another person to their own. So it isn't just an impracticable ideal.

So 'at the third degree, the highest of all' and in this particular context - it is with regard to material property, though obviously it can extend beyond that - 'you prefer your brother to yourself and set his need before your own.' This is the degree of the *siddiq* - this would seem to suggest that in order to do this there must be some sort of almost higher spiritual vision - 'and the final stage for those united in spiritual love.' - that ordinary friendship isn't a sufficient basis for this; there must be some element at least of what we call *kalyana mitrata.*

Tejamitra: This would also presuppose a quite healthy, good regard for yourself, before you were able to -

S: Oh yes, it isn't a sort of masochistic self-sacrifice.

Prasannasiddhi: The word *siddiq* seems very similar to the word *siddhi*.

S: I don't think there is any connection, because this is an Arabic word, and Arabic is a Semitic language, quite different from the Indo-Aryan languages, of which Sanskrit is one. Even the 's' is different; I'm not sure what that dot under the 's' means. It probably doesn't mean what it means if the word is a Sanskrit word. Anyway, the 'q', I'm sure, is pronounced differently, with a very guttural sound.

So, 'This is the degree of the **siddiq**, and the final stage for those united in spiritual love.'

All right read on that next paragraph.

"Self-sacrifice is one of the fruits of this degree.
Tradition tells how a Sufi fraternity were
slanderously misrepresented to one of the Caliphs,
who ordered their execution. Now one of their number
was Abu'l-Husayn al-Nuri, who ran forward to the
executioner so that he might be the first to be put
to death. Asked why, he replied:
- I wished that my brothers rather than I

should have that moment to live.

This, to cut a long story short, was the cause of all their lives being saved."

S: So it is the same principle. In the first sentence it says: 'Self-sacrifice is one of the fruits of this degree'. That is the degree of the *siddiq*. It rather reminds me of the 'putting oneself in the place of another' of the *Bodhicaryavatara*, or rather putting another in the place of oneself. 'Tradition tells how a Sufi fraternity were slanderously misrepresented to one of the Caliphs.' The Sufi brotherhoods were an object of some suspicion to orthodox Muslims, and they were often misrepresented and slandered and, as a result of that, persecuted by the authorities, and this is an incident of that sort. You can tell that al-Ghazali has some sympathy for the Sufis from the mere fact that he cites this story, which shows them in a very favourable light.

Prasannasiddhi: What exactly would a Sufi fraternity consist of?

S: This is quite a big subject. There were different Sufi brotherhoods. There were lines of Sufi teachers, much as there were lines of Zen masters and Vajracarya or Vajrayana gurus; and often disciples and guru, they lived together in - well, English writers used to call them convents, that is to say sort of monasteries, except that in most cases they were not single, they were not celibate. They had their wives nearby, even their families. But they normally lived in the convent together, studying, discussing, meditating and so on. That was the Sufi tradition. So there were a number of these brotherhoods in the Muslim world; some survived, though they have been rather badly affected by the secularisation of some of these Muslim states. There were dozens and dozens of well-known Sufi orders. I've got a book on it, in fact. Some overspread the whole Muslim world. Others were confined to one or two countries.

[End of tape one tape two]

There seems to have been some influence of Buddhism here, in my opinion, because some of the Sufi orders in some parts of the Muslim world, especially Central Asia, used to carry begging bowls. Some wandered about, just like Buddhist monks, and some wore blue robes, even.

Prakasha: Were Sufis accepted by the orthodox tradition or did they suffer persecution in the same way that .....?

S: Well, it varied quite a lot, even among the Sufis. There were some Sufis who conformed completely to the requirements of the Sharia, as it's called, the Muslim law; who, to all outward appearances, were orthodox Muslims, who went on pilgrimage, who went to the mosque every Friday, who gave alms, etc., etc., who observed all the requirements of the law; but in their personal spiritual life they were Sufis. There were other Sufis who were rather lax in their observance of the external law, and there were a very few who actually - I won't say denounced; maybe that's too strong a word - but who said the external law was not necessary, or minimised its importance; they were the ones that usually got into trouble. Some Sufis seem to have functioned within a Sunni organisational-cum-doctrinal framework, others within a Shi'a organisational-cum-doctrinal framework. So the situation is in fact quite complex. It is rather different from anything that we have either in Buddhism or in fact in

the Christian tradition.

Tejamitra: What's your impression of the spiritual strength of Sufism as compared with the Vajrayana or Zen traditions?

S: That is quite impossible to say. That would require a very detailed study and some personal contact, otherwise one couldn't say. But certainly there does seem to have been a certain amount of overlap though maybe more in the case of some Sufi orders than others. Some Sufis, for instance, are very tolerant towards other religions, others are quite fanatical. One Sufi master, about whom I read a year or two ago - he was an Indian Sufi master, living in or on the outskirts of Ahmedabad when Ahmedabad was a Muslim kingdom - he had many Hindu admirers, but he used to come out from his convent every morning and curse the Hindus, especially those who were present - he was such a fanatical Muslim as well as being a Sufi. Though it is in some ways rather difficult to see how you can be a genuine Sufi and such a fanatical Muslim. But this is a rather sensitive issue nowadays. For instance, I've seen books on Sufism, recently published, in which, after the events in Iran, there was a slip pasted in that, notwithstanding anything that is written in this book, the requirements of the Shariat, the orthodox law, are definitely to be observed. That is perhaps significant.

Ratnavira: Is there a particular Sufi text?

S: Oh, there is a vast Sufi literature. The Sufis were great writers, especially in poetic form. The greatest is generally considered to be Jalaluddin Rumi, but there are many, many others, a vast literature. I think it is probably much vaster than the corresponding literature in the West. But it does seem that the Sufis, and the Shi'as also, incorporated all sorts of traditions current in those parts of the Muslim world which Islam had overrun. They incorporated many Gnostic elements, it seems, Mazdean elements; even Buddhist elements, Vedantic elements. Though, again, those Sufis who were orthodox Muslims would deny that.

Subhuti: They'd consider it to be a lineage stretching back to the Prophet himself?

S: Oh yes, they regard the Prophet as being the first Sufi.

Prasannasiddhi: Is the Sufi tradition very large in terms of population?

S: Oh yes, it is said in some Muslim countries - I think it was, said for instance of Morocco until very recently - almost every adult male belonged to some Sufi brotherhood or other. Yes, it has been very, very widespread, yes

_____: Not just small - ?

S: Well, in some areas, yes. But in others, by no means. But in modern times the Sufi orders have gone into very serious decline almost everywhere, because the secular government which had taken over, as in say Turkey, was opposed to traditional manners and customs and wanted to westernise everything, and the Sufis were strongholds of what they regarded as reactionary. So the Sufi convents were closed, they

were disestablished - rather like Henry VIII disestablished the monasteries in England.

So Sufism at present, at least organisationally in the Muslim world, is in a quite shaky position, it seems. The revival of Islam, which we read about as having taking place recently, would not seem to include Sufism. It would seem to be a revival of militant, orthodox, very legalistic Islam, as in Iran. The ayatollahs are also professors of Muslim law, they are not mystics - well, one would gather that. [Laughter]

Prasannasiddi: From the pictures one sometimes doesn't really know what to think.

There's an interesting contradiction in the Introduction: 'Most of the vast territories of Islam had been won by the Arabs within a hundred years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad (may God bless him and give him Peace!).'

S: You see, Muslims would not regard that as contradictory. It is contradictory from a Buddhist point of view, but not from a Muslim one.

Subhuti: Peace followed on his victory.

S: True peace, not the false peace of paganism.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose it would be a bit like the early Christian kings who used Christianity to help win their wars.

S: No, I think that's a mistake, because if you regard Christianity as an essentially pacific teaching, you can say that kings used Christianity for non-pacific purposes. But Islam from the very beginning was never a pacific teaching. In Islam religion and politics were never separated, from the beginning. Muhammad himself went to war, and fought himself for Islam, living under the inspiration of God - this is their view. They do not regard violence as wrong.

Subhuti: It was always in my mind, reading *The Duties of Brotherhood*, that it was all right if you were a brother, but if you were outside the Muslim brotherhood then the duties are quite different.

S: Yes.

Subhuti: In a way, it's also placed in terms of duty; it's very little to do with your feelings.

S: Well, I'd tread a bit carefully here, because I don't know what the Arabic word is. Whether duty is a satisfactory equivalent of that, I couldn't say, so perhaps we shouldn't stress the word duty too much. Islam has its own quite specialised vocabulary, just as Buddhism has, which isn't adequately represented probably by these Western terms.

Kulananda: Except inasmuch as it's an essentially authoritarian religion, therefore one would assume that they'd take a more authoritarian -

S: They wouldn't agree with that very classification. We should be quite careful how we apply our terms to them. They would say that authority applies to the justice aspect of God. This is the Muslim view. But there's also the compassion aspect of God. They will say they have a balance between justice and mercy. They even would say, 'How can there be any question of God being authoritarian? God is authority itself.' They wouldn't regard 'authoritarian' as a dirty word in the way that we do. So we mustn't look at them or try to evaluate them as though they shared our assumptions, which they don't. So one has to be quite aware of that.

Kuladeva: Do they have a basic moral code anything like the Ten Commandments or the Five Precepts?

S: Oh yes. They have five basic duties also, which the Muslim is supposed to observe. Anyway, this is -

Prasannasiddhi: It's good stuff!

S: But as Islam is in the news - as we're going to encounter it sooner or later, I think - at least some people ought to know a little bit of what it's about.

Kuladeva: There does seem to be quite a lot of it about in London and some of the industrial cities. There are a number of mosques all over the place, ...

S: Well, this is to some extent because of immigrant populations. On the other hand, there are some Muslims backed by oil money who are concerned to spread Islam.

Tejamitra: Yes, I've got the impression there is a small number of Westerners converting to Islam.

S: Oh yes, there are some - a few, yes.

Abhaya: There are quite a lot in Norwich.

Devaraja: They are quite active nowadays in the South of Spain actually, very active.

S: I thought you were going to say in Brighton.

Devaraja: It's quite interesting, because the tack they're taking - they are backed actually by oil money, because a lot of wealthy Arabs have villas and holiday homes on the Mediterranean coast of Spain - a lot of money is being poured into a kind of Sufi-type convent in Granada.

S: Thin end of the wedge.

Devaraja: Yes. And they're playing on the tack of young Andalusians, saying, 'These are your roots - your roots are really Muslim.'

S: Your pagan roots!

Devaraja: Yes, that's it, that's the tack they've been taking.

S: But how far does one have to go back to find one's real roots? Perhaps before they were Muslim they were Christian, and before they were Christian again they were Roman pagan; before they were Roman pagan they might have been Celtic pagan. So how far back does one have to go to encounter one's real roots?

But no doubt it would be a tack that would appeal to some young people, especially if they found the Catholic church rather oppressive and restrictive, especially in the field of, say, sexual morality. In that field the Muslims have a rather different attitude, a rather different approach.

Devaraja: Yes, especially in that field. One of their advertising things - there are posters saying, 'Are you man enough to cope with more than one wife?' [Laughter] And you guess these young Andalusians go, 'Sure'! [Laughter]

Vajrananda: I was wondering what the FWBO equivalent was - 'Are you man enough to do without **one** wife?'

S: To quote, or semi-quote, Subhuti: 'Are you man enough to realise that women are dangerous?' You were credited with that inspired utterance some years ago, that you'd realised that women were in fact dangerous.

Abhaya: I'm sure it's true.

S: Anyway, perhaps we'd better get back to the text because time is getting short.

Prasannasiddhi: Just a point about these Sufi brotherhoods. They had their families outside; did they all have families, or just - ?

S: The majority, to the best of my knowledge, had families, and celibacy was the exception, though no one seems to have made any point at all about whether you were celibate or whether you were non-celibate; it was a very peripheral issue. I've read quite a bit of Sufi literature, and it doesn't appear to be really discussed anywhere. The social framework was such that the Sufis could function without being really bothered by that particular issue.

Subhuti: I thought it was rather that the orthodox Islamic position was that marriage is a duty and that the Sufis couldn't break away from that without seriously -

S: I don't know. I don't think it was a duty, though it might have been expected. Muhammad certainly expressed himself as not in favour of monkhood. I don't know what word he used; it's translated as monkhood. But certainly those Sufis who wanted to lead celibate lives seem to have been free to do so, though they were in the minority; the majority were married. And they don't seem to have been too much bothered, if at all bothered, by the question that bothers a lot of people in the West - that is heterosexuality versus, or in addition to, or as an alternative to, homosexuality, or the other way round. All these seem to be for them very fringe issues. But what you definitely get are the Sufis established in their convents getting on with their spiritual studies and practices and discussions, and with family life occupying a definitely peripheral place, but there. It's just not bothered about, it's not discussed. There doesn't seem to have been a need to discuss it; you don't even think about it. The social system seems to look after that. For instance, the fact that women don't participate much in public life under Islam, if at all, even may be secluded - from the point of view of a man wanting to lead a spiritual life, that is a very positive arrangement.

There were some women Sufis, incidentally, a few, very often the daughters of Sufis, and they seem to have been accepted on an equal footing with the men Sufis, and even to have given instruction sometimes; but that was quite exceptional. It doesn't seem to have been an issue at all.

So they seem to have either found or worked out a quite viable solution to the problem, as it is for many people in the West, of sex and spiritual life. It had its place, but it was a very definite, circumscribed place, and it didn't intrude in those places where they were getting on with spiritual practice and spiritual life.

So in some ways in the FWBO we seem to have hit upon a not dissimilar solution, where you have people living in spiritual communities - say, men living in spiritual communities with either wives and families or perhaps girlfriends outside. Muslims, of course, would not have had girlfriends - that would have been unknown - but certainly wives and almost always families. And very often the son, as soon as he became 14 or 15, joined his father in the *khanka*(?), as it was called, the convent. And his centre of interest also came to be that; he moved out of home, followed in his father's footsteps.

So they seem to have achieved a quite lasting - until very modern times -sort of *modus vivendi* in this respect. Of course, they supported their families, and most of them engaged in one occupation or another; there were a few in trade and so on; but everything of course under the more relaxed conditions of life in those days. Often the Sufi master himself - well, like Gurdjieff; Gurdjieff followed that tradition, Gurdjieff sold carpets; that's how he maintained himself, or at least he did some business in carpets. Some people say it was just a big bluff, but anyway he had a lot of carpets around and was always selling them, and that was not un-Sufi-like. Some of the Sufi masters themselves, let alone the disciples, did engage in trade, but often they were supported by wealthy people; gifts were given and sultans gave gifts to these convents, which sometimes became quite wealthy and quite big - almost like monasteries in the Buddhist sense, except that there were the wives and families in another part of the town. And they seem to have achieved a sort of balance between the two.

For us that is much more difficult, because there will be a definite pull coming from the home or from the family or from the wife to spend more time there; but apparently this did not happen in the case of the Sufis. Though I have read an account of one Sufi, even under Muslim conditions, who had a virago of a wife who I believe used to beat him, even. He was a leading Sufi of those days, but I've just come across this one solitary example. And apparently one of the disciples wanted to interfere, he was so shocked when he learned his master was beaten by his

wife; so the master said, 'Don't say anything to her. It will only make her worse!' But that was very, very rare, very exceptional. But I mention this as in a way a sort of precedent for us, it does show that that sort of set-up is viable; it is socially viable.

Abhaya: I'm not quite clear - did the men live away from their families most of the time, in their own communities?

S: Yes, they seem to have - but they visited home, obviously. In most cases they didn't want to give up, or they weren't required by their spiritual tradition to give up, sexual activity.

Kuladeva: It sounds a bit like the Spartan system, where men could get married at the age of 20 but they couldn't live with their wives at all until they were 30, and even after the age of 30 they still had to dine in communal messes. So that the family was always peripheral to the main area of social activity.

S: And, of course, in this case the cultural and spiritual activity.

_____: The Cossacks followed a similar pattern.

Prasannasiddhi: And, of course, this was just within the Sufi circles, so presumably there were Muslims outside the Sufis.

S: Yes. But in many areas, in many countries, the Sufis living in their monasteries were highly regarded by the greater part of the Muslim population. Though sometimes, as I mentioned earlier, if the odd Sufi happened to be unobservant of the Muslim law, or even to depreciate it, then the Sufis could get into serious trouble. There's always a sort of tension between the Sufis on the one hand and the legalists on the other - the professors of the religious law, the Sharia. Though again, paradoxically, there were Sufis who were not only Sufi masters and great mystics but also professors of law, which seems to us a very odd combination; but that was the case in many instances. Al-Ghazali himself was a great theologian, as we would say, a great canon lawyer, and also, to say the least, [had] very strong sympathies for mysticism.

So I think one of the interesting things about the whole Islamic tradition is that it helps us to see that certain things that we have been brought up perhaps, as ex-Christians, even if not as Buddhists, to regard as more or less incompatible are <u>not</u> found to be incompatible in that particular tradition. For instance, there is no tension whatever between the demands, say, of your sexual life and the demands of your spiritual life; that sort of tension just doesn't exist within the Islamic tradition, nor within the Sufi tradition, whereas for us in the West it's a <u>major</u> tension, a <u>major</u> area of conflict and difficulty.

Devaraja: Presumably because it is just a sexual life, nothing more than that.

S: Yes, yes, hardly ever. With one or two exceptions, but hardly ever.

Tejamitra: Is there any evidence of a spiritual tradition as such in the orthodox Muslim - outside of the Sufis?

S: Well, in a way the Sufis were the spiritual tradition for all Muslims, with varying degrees of coalescence with - well, even the word orthodoxy isn't the right word here, because orthodoxy in the Islamic tradition includes some things that in the West would be, in the Christian tradition, regarded as unorthodox. The majority of Sufis, I think, would probably be quite shocked at the suggestion that they were in any way unorthodox. But I think that it would be fair to say that those Muslims, whether within the Sunni or the Shi'a fold, who took, in our terms, say maybe religion more seriously, or had a more inward approach to it, would tend towards some form of Sufism. But here again we are discussing one tradition in terms of another - or not of even another tradition, of a non- tradition, as it were; in other words, in terms of modern secular humanism, which may not be quite in order.

Anyway would someone like to read that next paragraph?

"If you do not find yourself at any of these stages
in relation to your brother, then you must realise
that the contract of brotherhood is not yet concluded
in the Inner."

S: Notice 'Inner' with a capital I. This is a technical term - I don't know what it is in Arabic - it means in truth and reality.

"All that lies between you is a formal connexion,
lacking real force in reason or religion."

S: Well, one can see the nature of that distinction, I think, quite easily.

Now what follows are mainly illustrative anecdotes, so perhaps we can go through these a little more quickly.

Maymun ibn Mahran said:
- One who is content not to put his brother first might as well be brother to the People of the Tombs!"

S: The People of the Tombs is a sort of synonym for pagans - those who live around the tombs of - well, in Egypt it would be the old Pharoahs or whatever, people associated with pre-Islamic practices and classical beliefs.

So if you are not content to put your brother first, not to speak of making him equal, if you're not content to put him first, you might just as well be a pagan, might just as well not be a Muslim at all.

Anyway, carry on. All this, as I say, is illustrative.

"As for the lowest degree, this is also unacceptable to truly religious people. Tradition tells that Utba al-Ghulam came to the house of a man whose brother he had become, saying:
- I need four thousand of your money.
The other said:
- Take two thousand.
Utba declined the offer, saying:
- You have preferred this world to God. Are you not ashamed to claim brotherhood in God when you can say such a thing?"

S: Yes, well, far from, say, giving him what he needed apparently out of his superfluity, he tried to reduce his demand. The orthodox or the correct attitude would be to give him double what he needed, but here he is offering half. He needs four thousand, and he's offering two, as though he's sort of haggling; as though it's a sort of bargain or a sort of business transaction.

So 'Utba declined the offer, saying: - You have preferred this world to God.' In other words, you have opted for the material as distinct from the spiritual. You are overwhelmed by material things, material desires; you have no regard for religion if you can say a thing like that. if you can treat your brother in that sort of way. So 'Are you not ashamed to claim brotherhood in God when you can say such a thing?' He doesn't say, 'I'm sorry, I don't have four thousand, I've only got two thousand, please take that.' No, apparently he's got the four thousand, maybe much more; but his business instincts get the better of him to cut down what the other man wants, so he automatically says, 'No, take two thousand.' In other words, he doesn't treat him like a brother at all. So in this way or to this extent he has no regard for religion or spiritual things.

You ought to avoid worldly dealings with one at the lowest stage of brotherhood. Abu Hazim said:
- If you have a spiritual brother, do not deal with him in your worldly affairs.
By this he meant 'if he is at this stage.'"

S: This deals with what we touched on earlier, that is to say about the common purse, not everyone being qualified for that; because if you have a spiritual brother who is only in the lowest degree, who regards you as his slave and is only going to give you out of his superfluity, then you should avoid worldly dealings with him because he'll take advantage of you. In other words, you can't have a common purse with someone who hasn't risen to that level of generosity and true brotherhood; and this is the situation in most of our spiritual communities, isn't it? That means in most spiritual communities you could say, in terms of this classification, people are only on the lowest degree. That would be a fair deduction, wouldn't you say? Because the attitude of the person in that degree is to take more than he gives.

Anyway go onto the highest degree.

"As for the highest degree, this corresponds to the

description of the true believers given by God
(Exalted is He!) when He said:
- They agree their affairs by mutual consultation, and spend freely of what We have bestowed upon them."

S: You might regard the application of the quotation as a little forced, but they have to find some Koranic support for their position. So: 'As for the highest degree' - that is of self-sacrifice, preferring another to oneself - 'this corresponds' - allegedly - 'to the description of the true believers given by God' - in the Koran: 'They agree their affairs by mutual consultation, and spend freely of what We have bestowed upon them.' This isn't quite the same thing, but if one wishes to find justification in the Koran for self-sacrifice, no doubt this verse could be stretched a little.

Tejamitra: This seems to be an aspect of Christianity as well as Islam, where you get what appear to me to be ambiguous terms picked out of the Bible or Koran.

S: Well, this isn't ambiguous. It clearly doesn't cover that. But this is the situation that arises when, in a way, the spiritual development of certain people belonging to a particular tradition seems to go beyond at least the letter of the tradition that they belong to. They then have to re-interpret the letter if they don't want, as usually they don't want, to break with the tradition altogether. And if they regard the tradition as embodied in the Bible or Koran as authoritative because it's coming from God, they cannot break with it, they cannot say that God is wrong. They can only re-interpret, and that very often is by way of introducing all sorts of subtle meanings.

In medieval Christianity, there were seven different levels of meaning. There was the historical, the moral, the allegorical, the mystical and so on. In that way you could get quite a lot out of the Bible. The Jews and Rabbis did likewise. But in a way it has its points, because you've got continuity, and the tradition is continually enriched by these new insights. But sometimes it leads almost to a sort of dishonesty when the clear meaning of the text is quite opposed to the interpretation that you are allegedly getting out of it. There are some things that can't be explained away, so to speak. So you will get other people within the same tradition who don't accept your, let us say for the sake of argument, more liberal or more enlightened tradition, but who insist on the literal meaning.

For instance, I was reading about Milton's *Paradise Lost* recently that there are passages in *Paradise Lost* where Milton represents God as laughing his enemies to scorn and having them in derision; and some commentators on Milton have made the point that that is a very unworthy conception of God on Milton's part; but then others more recently have pointed out that Milton was being very faithful to the biblical tradition - that he was a biblical scholar, he was a biblical Christian, and he could not in honesty leave that very unpleasant characteristic out of his portrait of God, whatever he might have privately thought; because the Old Testament does represent God having his foes in derision. So Milton depicts God accordingly. But a modern Christian would not like that feature of God's character, and would try to explain it away, say it was meant symbolically, etc., etc. But it's there: if you take the Bible at all literally, as you would any other text, you have to recognise that it has this conception of God as a being who is not only capable of anger and indignation and of changing his mind, but also laughing his enemies to scorn and ridiculing them, and holding them in contempt; which aren't very pleasant characteristics even in a human being, not to speak of the embodiment of all perfection - God. [Laughter]

So there is this sort of tension: as people's moral consciousness develops, the traditions from which they emerge or to which they belong have to be sort of re-interpreted in accordance with that emerging moral consciousness; but you can only do this up to a certain point. The Greeks had the same problem with their gods. Some Greeks, later on in Greek history, started feeling that the behaviour of their gods was not to be condoned, it was rather reprehensible; so they started allegorising the Greek myths - the myths about the gods. Some believe that Jews and Christians took over this allegorising of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, from the Greeks via Philo Judaeus, I think it was. Porphyry wrote, for instance, a treatise on the Cave of the Nymphs, an episode from the Odyssey, which he interpreted in accordance with the Neoplatonic philosophy.

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But this is what happens when the original revelation comes from God and is therefore, for that very reason, supremely authoritative and not to be changed. You can only re-interpret; so that's all right so long as you don't realise that this is what you're doing, so long as you honestly believe that you are delving more deeply into the mysteries of the text. But when you become aware, perhaps due to modern scholarship or modern scientific research, that the original meaning was such-and-such, and you no longer believe in that original meaning, then your re-interpretation becomes a highly artificial process, and elements of intellectual dishonesty begins to creep in. And this is the position with many modern Protestants and even Catholics, perhaps. They can no longer genuinely believe that their interpretation of the Bible is actually inherent in the text of the Bible itself; but they are not able to bring themselves to the point of actually rejecting the text, although they have developed now more sophisticated interpretations of the meaning of revelation and to what extent the Bible is the word of God, in what sense. But formerly Protestants especially used to believe that every word of the Bible was inspired and was to be taken literally, and someone once added: 'Yes, and the full stops and commas too!'

Anyway, al-Ghazali to some extent is in this position, because he has made this quite reasonable, quite acceptable classification, these three degrees of brotherhood, but he wants confirmation of them, especially of the higher one, from the Koran, so he cites the nearest verse that he can get; but it doesn't quite fit. There is a slight hiatus.

Vajrananda: What does this quote actually mean? I don't understand it.

S: 'They agree their affairs by mutual consultation' - that is to say those who are friends and brothers - 'and they spend freely' - it doesn't say on what or on whom - 'of what We have bestowed upon them.' So, according to al-Ghazali, this refers to the third degree, the highest degree of brotherhood. But the connection, for an unbeliever, is not so clear. But he is simply trying to adduce some Koranic support for his position.

Abhaya: The 'We' is God.

S: Yes, 'We' is God.

Vajrananda: What has he bestowed upon them, and how are they spending it freely? It doesn't seem to .....

S: Well, whatever he has bestowed upon them in the way of material goods.

Vajrananda: Definitely material goods?

S: Yes, it is property that is under discussion, though again the Koranic text might not be directed to that. According to the Koran, everything comes from God, everything is given by God, including life itself.

Prakasha: So spending freely would be without self-interest?

S: Well, we've got just the text or rather the quotation from the text. 'Spend freely' is understood as referring to the third degree of brotherhood. I take it we don't need to bother about this too much; just take it as an example of trying to find a text to support your position. That just seems to be what it is. If there had been a better or more apposite text, no doubt he would have produced it, because he knew the Koran undoubtedly by heart. It is not a very long text, by the way: it's no longer than the New Testament in the Bible. Carry on then.

"That is, they are co-owners of worldly goods without distinctions of status. There were those who would shun the fellowship of a man who used the expression 'my shoe', thereby attributing it to himself."

S: This is al-Ghazali's own comment, and here we see him stressing the principle of what we would call common ownership: that you shouldn't even think that the shoe is your private personal property, it belongs just as much to your brother - provided it fits him, of course.

Nagabodhi: He may want to drink champagne out of it.

S: So "There were those who would shun the fellowship of a man who used the expression '**my** shoe'." Why should they shun his fellowship, do you think? What's the meaning of that? What's the force of that?

Subhuti: They couldn't enter into full brotherhood with him.

S: Yes, they didn't want to develop that sort of attitude, the attitude which he had. They were trying to develop another attitude. Perhaps he again is referring to the Sufis - we don't know. Anyway carry on and read the whole of the next anecdote.

"Fath al-Mawsili once came to a brother's house while he was away. Telling his brother's wife to bring out his chest, he opened it and took from it what he

needed. When the slave-girl later informed her
master he exclaimed:
- If what you say is true, you are a free woman for the sake of God!
So delighted was he at his brother's deed."

S: Notice the reference to slavery. Islam does not condemn slavery. Well, no, Islam has a completely different attitude towards slavery from people in the West. They don't necessarily regard slavery as a bad thing. For instance, on the previous page there is a reference to Utba al-Ghulam. But do you know what al-Ghulam means? Al-Ghulam means the slave, and this is a name; it is even an honorific expression - the slave of God. Muhammad is referred to as the slave of God. So the Muslim position is that every human being is the slave of God; at least he should aspire to be the slave of God. So slavery is sort of idealised - or maybe even idealised is the wrong term, but slavery is regarded as a desirable condition or the natural condition of man in relation to God. So slavery becomes invested with a sort of spiritual significance. When everybody is the slave of God, what does it matter if one man is the slave of another? He is the slave of a slave. Their attitude is quite different from the Christian one deriving from the Greeks, according to which to be a slave is a dreadful thing, a disgusting thing, which is opposed to the human condition of freedom and independence. The Muslim view is that the human condition is essentially one of slavery, in a highly positive sense - slavery to God; because man is entirely the creature of God. So they don't see slavery in the same way that Western ex-Christians see it.

Kuladeva: But nevertheless it seems that it has only really been since the 19th century that the church has really been opposed to slavery. Because apparently, although I haven't really studied it in any great depth, when the church emerged in Rome and became part of the establishment, it sort of gave its blessing to the form of slavery that was then in practice, and that the codes of slavery under Christian emperors was much more extensive than it had been in pre-Christian times.

S: Well, this was largely because of St. Paul. St. Paul said, *'Submit yourself to the powers that be'*, and he advised a runaway slave to return to his master. Whether that is in accordance with the teaching of Christ himself, well that can be debated, but Christians fell back on those verses, so that enabled them not to oppose the current social system. But the Greeks of course regarded slavery as a very deplorable condition for a human being -

Kuladeva: For a Greek. They didn't deplore it for other people, because they did actually say -

S: Well, they didn't even deplore it for other Greeks, in a sense; but they regarded the state of slavery as something unfortunate, something to be avoided at all costs. The Muslims did not have that view, so that one can even find someone rising to high rank in the state, even becoming a prime minister, a vizier, and still being a slave - legally the slave of some other person, maybe the slave, the legal slave, of the sultan. That to us is a rather unthinkable situation.

Kuladeva: But at the same time that sort of institution did exist in the Roman Empire. Certainly when Rome became an empire with an emperor, then generally the emperor would trust more his personal slaves than he would do - .....

S: Yes, but this didn't affect the status of the slave as it were morally. Slavery was regarded as something unfortunate which you should avoid. Anyone in Western Europe would have said to be a slave is much worse than to be a free man, it is better to be a free man; but that sort of distinction didn't obtain in the Muslim world. It didn't matter, in a sense, if you were a slave, because everybody was a slave, the king was a slave; the king even was the slave of God, so you were only the slave of a slave of a slave. So what did slavery matter? So therefore slavery becomes almost - I won't say an ideal, but certainly regarded in a very different way from what we have regarded it.

Kuladeva: I can see what you're saying - that they've got a very different attitude towards slavery - but nevertheless I think there are some kind of parallels, because a number of slaves did rise to prominence in the Roman Empire -

S: No, that's not the point I'm making. The point I'm making is that slavery [is] - I don't want to use the word idealised because that suggests that for Islam slavery was something as it were undesirable, but it was idealised and made desirable even though it wasn't intrinsically so. They seem to have regarded slavery as part of the very nature of things, and not only part of the nature of things but even, inasmuch as they represented the way things were - representing the way that things ought to be - that there was only one power in the universe and that was God, that was Allah; everybody else was dependent, and dependent to such a degree as to be describable as a slave, and that was the way things were, so their vocabulary reflected that; so that Ghulam or slave became not exactly an honorific but almost a respectable term, which - as far as I know, in the West, slave was never a respectable term in itself, however high a slave, if one was a slave in fact, might have risen at any time.

Prasannasiddhi: So even the slaves didn't mind being slaves?

S: No - also it must be said - usually, under the Muslims, slaves were not treated in the way that slaves were treated, especially by the Romans. Slaves were not tortured, as far as I know, or anything of that sort; they were well treated. But legally they were the property of their masters.

Prasannasiddhi: And they were happy being the property of their masters?

S: Well, it didn't make any difference! To ask even if they were happy suggests a non-Islamic point of view.

Kulananda: But then why would this chap give his slave girl freedom out of his delight, if there was - ?

S: Well, as a slave girl, you might say - what was the position of a slave girl, in, say, a household? She was a servant. She belonged - she was a concubine, perhaps; maybe he bought her for that purpose. If she was given her freedom she could marry perhaps the man of her choice and set up independently.

Prasannasiddhi: So therefore she wouldn't like being a slave for that reason then?

S: Well, it would depend on the situation - for instance, how she got on with his wife, the other concubines etc., etc. The point here is simply to express his joy at getting this news from her: that his friend has come and opened the chest and taken from it whatever he needed. We don't even

know where this took place, in what particular country, what particular conditions there were. It might even have been a non-Muslim slave girl who would have been glad to get away from a Muslim family, because sometimes Muslims had Christian slaves who had other views than themselves. But that is the point here, that he was overjoyed at his friend's, as we would say, freedom, taking that freedom with his money; so delighted was he at his brother's deed.

Vajrananda: What was the Arabic term?

S: Ghulam.

Vajrananda: Al-Ghulam?

S: No, 'al' is 'the'. Ghulam is slave. You find it in the names of many politicians. There was a prime minister or president of Pakistan, Ghulam Mohammed, the Slave of Muhammad: it's a very common Muslim name.

Devaraja: Was there - if it's too much of a digression let's drop it - but was there a tradition of slavery in Buddhist India? Was that an institution?

S: There doesn't seem to have been slavery in the sense in which there was slavery in the Roman Empire. But there was certainly a sort of system of serfdom, one might say, where people belonged to a certain village - they belonged to the land and they couldn't move about freely. And there is the term dasa, which is sometimes translated as servant, sometimes as slave. It seems to come somewhere in between the two. But it doesn't seem that there was slavery in the Roman sense.

Kuladeva: Bond-slave.

S: Bond - yes.

Kuladeva: There's a very good book by M.I.Findlay(?) on slavery, in which he defines all the different types of slavery that existed in Greek and Roman times. It's not just Greek and Roman times, but exist in society generally. He gives about half a dozen different types.

Subhuti: We do have to be a bit careful about reacting too much to the word slavery, because it means so many different things in different contexts and cultures.

S: Well, the fact that we react to it means we take it in a certain sense. For instance, taking slavery in a Muslim context as being what we would feel about slavery.

Subhuti: Because often freedom for a slave in some cultures would mean starvation.

S: Well, this is what happened, of course, in Russia. When the serfs - of course, they were not slaves but serfs - when the serfs were freed many of them did starve.

Kuladeva: It's also the case in Homeric society when it was more desirable to be some kind of - it wasn't actually called a slave, but to be tied to your master, because then you would be guaranteed a roof above your head and food, than it would be to be a free man, as is the case when Odysseus returns to Ithaca and meets his shepherd who was actually in his own service previously, and he explains how he's happier to be in that situation than he would be to be freely wandering around and not knowing where his next meal or where his next work is coming from.

S: So it goes to show that what one might call the liberal outlook is in a way taken for granted by many people, One has to be very careful not to automatically apply its categories where they don't really belong.

Kuladeva: I think the thing about being a slave of any kind is it means you are partly dependent on your master, and there are good masters and bad masters.

S: Of course, within Islamic contexts even that doesn't ultimately matter, because everyone depends upon God, and if your master is a bad master they might say that that is also the will of God, and you have to submit. Islam means just that: Islam means submission.

Kuladeva: That might be the case with Islam, but I'm thinking of human beings as human beings. Who would like to be a slave, let's say to a bad master? I personally would not want to.

S: That raises the question: what do you mean by bad? A bad master might be one who made you get up early in the morning, actually made you work! He might even, in theory, have made you meditate.

Kuladeva: I think a bad master is someone who hasn't got your best interests at heart. And that is obviously -

S: Well, <u>then</u> it has sometimes been said that everybody is a slave inasmuch as he is a slave to himself. He hasn't got his <u>own</u> best interests at heart, so many of those who think that they are free are in fact slaves - slaves of their own lower nature, one might say. So you might imagine, say, a traditional Muslim arguing in this way and saying: 'Christians think that they are free, but we are happy to be slaves of God, because God knows what is good for us. God has revealed his will through the Koran, but here are these people just following their own passions. They are the real slaves.' So even it becomes doubtful what is meant by slavery, what is meant by freedom. Even in the case of the Greeks, they regarded, very often, the barbarians as natural slaves because they regarded the barbarians as inferior to themselves and not, in a way, capable of being free men - whether rightly or wrongly.

So we have to understand what real freedom consists in and what real slavery consists in. Because, yes, it's terrible to serve a bad master, but if you serve yourself, inasmuch as you are free, too often you serve a very bad master indeed!

Abhaya: In the positive sense, the less spiritually developed have to be slaves, until they are spiritually mature.

S: Yes, well, they are of course slaves in the sense that they are slaves to themselves. But then you are often made to do what you don't want to do by the law, because you won't yourself recognise certain obligations. For instance, if you contract a debt the law obliges you to honour that debt, so in that sense the law compels you, the law is your master, you are in a way a slave to that, you could say.

Anyway, this is perhaps just an instance of cultural relativity.

Kuladeva: But how does that tie in, for instance, with the condition of the ex-Untouchables, or the Untouchables as they were, because they are people who have been enslaved by society in some ways?

S: Well, they were sort of serfs. But if one actually has contact with them one sees that they are morally and spiritually no less than the people who enslave them; in some cases they are very much better.

Kuladeva: That might be the case, but Dr. Ambedkar saw reason to change the status of their -

S: That is because their status didn't correspond to their real nature. This is how I would see it.

Kuladeva: Well, surely Dr. Ambedkar and the Untouchables see that move as being some kind of liberation?

S: Yes, because under the existing state of affairs they weren't able to develop their full human potential, and they wanted to, and many of them, a majority of them - I must say that some among them, even those who say that they are Buddhists, they don't really want to develop their human potential; they've just gone along with that mass movement - but the vast majority of them, I would say from my experience, do want to develop their human potential even though they might have a quite limited conception of that. That is their ideal, they do feel restricted.

Subhuti: The point is you're not arguing that slavery is a good thing; you're simply saying that you must look at people's position -

S: I'm not saying that slavery is a good thing; I am not necessarily saying that, let us say. What I am saying is that we mustn't read into the Muslim tradition our particular Western Christian, ex-classical or ex-Christian conception of slavery. I was saying that Muslims saw it in a quite different way. This is the only point I am making.

Subhuti: Presumably we can take up some evaluative position in relation to it, but that evaluative position mustn't be from our own cultural conditioning.

S: No. Before we evaluate we must be clear what they are saying and what they believe. After that we are free to agree or disagree. But we

mustn't assume, when the word slavery is pronounced, that they have the same attitude that we have. It could be, it probably is, that they are completely wrong. But nonetheless they had a different view, saw things quite differently. It's not that they thought slavery was a good thing; not that they defined slavery as we define it and then said it was a good thing. Their definition of what we call slavery was quite different, because they were possessed, one might say, with this idea of the overriding sovereignty of God - this is the dominant feature of Islam and in relation to him, all created beings are slaves. Therefore you can have a name like Ghulam Mohammed, slave of Muhammad - yes, it is an ideal to be the slave of Muhammad - not servant but slave, and some modern Muslims insist upon this; they don't want it watered down to servant. Christians speak of being the servant of God, but they don't usually speak of being the slave of God. But Muslims habitually speak of being the slave of God and the slave of Muhammad and slave of the Imam and so on. This is very positive language to them.

So this suggests that the word slavery does not have the exclusively negative associations for them that it has for us.

Devaraja: The slaves weren't necessarily something to be despised and say 'Ah, just a slave!' and treated worse than some dog or something like that. It was actually part of the whole natural order of society, and it wasn't a dishonourable position to be in.

S: Yes. No, it wasn't dishonourable, just as in some societies poverty is not dishonourable. In India poverty was never dishonourable. Poverty, which we regard as a great evil, was associated with religion and spiritual life. In the same way we might say the concept of slavery in Islam was at least to a great extent associated with religion and spiritual life, as a sort of spiritual status.

But the main point is we mustn't import our understanding of these terms into another tradition, otherwise we misjudge. They may be wrong in their attitude - well, from a Buddhist point of view they must be, because we don't accept the idea of supreme power in that sense.

Devaraja: For me, the idea of being a slave is ghastly because it seems like some limitation on my mobility. But I suppose in a very ordered society, almost like a kind of a static society, that had been so decided and decreed and defined by God, in a way you wouldn't have a desire for that sort of mobility. You'd have your position and -

S: Well, I think it goes further even than that, because if you think that you are the slave of God, in a way your relationship as a slave in the legal sense to your master mirrors your relationship with God. So there is a sort of rightness about it, or at least a naturalness about it, in a way that we find it difficult to understand.

Devaraja: And also that is associated with fate, which is very strong in Islam - Kismet; it's decreed, it's almost a decree by God that that should be your position in life.

S: It's a quite different attitude. It's a different way of life, therefore.

Prasannasiddhi: Yet nevertheless, he does proclaim, when he's in an exuberant state and overjoyed, that 'You are a free woman', so that seems to imply -

S: Well, we have to be careful not to read our understanding of 'free' here. What does it mean to be a free woman? As I suggested, maybe it means that she can have a husband just for her as it were perhaps instead of sharing with the wife and perhaps other concubines. Or it could be - again, we don't know the details of the story - that she was a Christian, as often was the case, and wouldn't have welcomed being a slave in a Muslim household. Anyway let's go on.

"Once a man approached Abu Hurayra (may God be pleased with him!) and said:
- I wish to take you as my brother in God.
- Do you know what brotherhood entails?
- No.
- That you have no greater right to your pounds or your pence than I have.
- I have not yet reached that stage.
- Then begone from me!"

S: So which of the three degrees does this pertain to? It's the second of the two. But here there is a difference, because the person who is approached understands that he is not ready for that particular degree. He is honest, he knows himself. He says, 'I have not yet reached that stage'. So this suggests it's important to know exactly where one stands before entering into any such contract.

And the next story really illustrates the same point.

"Ali son of al-Husayn (may God be pleased with both!) said to a man:"

S: The proper names here suggest that they are Shi'as and not Sunnis, Hassan being one of the sons of Ali.

"- Does one of you put his hand in the pocket or purse of his brother and take what he needs without permission?
- No.
- Then you are not brothers!"

S: Again, because there's no common purse, there's no sharing - this is the criterion, it seems, of at least the second stage. The third stage undoubtedly goes beyond that.

This is quite customary in works of this sort in Islam, that there is a discussion of general principles, then a citation of a number of little stories illustrating the principles.

"Some people called upon al-Hasan (may God be pleased with him!) and asked:
*- Abu Sa'id, have you done your **salat** prayer?*
- Yes.
- Because the market folk have not yet prayed.
- And who takes his religion from the market folk? I hear that one of them would refuse his brother a penny.
Al-Hasan said this as if it amazed him."

S: Do you follow this? 'Some people called upon Al-Hasan and asked: 'Abu Sa'id, have you done your *salat* prayer?' The *salat* is the five daily prayers. 'Have you done your particular daily prayer, the morning one or the afternoon one?' He says yes. Then the questioner goes on to explain, 'Because the market folk have not **yet** prayed.' He suspects that Abu-Sa'id has in fact performed his namaja(?), as we usually say, but the strange thing is that the other people, people in the market, haven't yet done it. But Abu Sa'id apparently had already done his. But then, Abu Sa'id, to justify himself, says: 'And who takes his religion from the market folk? I hear that one of them would refuse his brother a penny.' Al-Hasan said this as if it amazed him.' In other words, one can't copy the market people in anything. He uses the fact that he doesn't even do his *namaja* at exactly the same time that they do to illustrate that he doesn't follow their ways. They're so bad, as it were, so un-Islamic, that even if their brother needed a penny they wouldn't give it. So this is all to illustrate the importance of sharing and giving. All right let's go onto the next one.

"A man came to Ibrahim ibn Adham (may God be pleased with him!) as the latter was leaving for Jerusalem, and said:
- I wish to be your travelling-companion.
- On condition that I have more right to your goods than you yourself.
-No.
- I admire your sincerity!"

S: He was asking whether he couldn't practise the third degree, apparently: 'On condition that I have **more** right to your goods than you yourself.' In other words, I will only keep company with you if you are capable of the third degree of brotherhood. He said no, then he replies 'I admire your sincerity'. At least he is straightforward, he knows what he is not capable of, he doesn't enter into any false contract on the basis of any misunderstanding. He is not willing to promise more than he knows he can actually fulfil.

Prasannasiddhi: This seems to suggest perhaps that there is an element of discrimination in this giving away of one's goods even oneself for the sake of another.

S: Well, according to this text, one doesn't just give away. You enter into a definite contract of brotherhood with someone and apparently you know on which level that stands and you behave accordingly. Maybe there is a prior understanding on which level the contract is going to take

place. Just as in the case of a community, perhaps you should be clear whether you have a common purse or not. If some members of the community think there is a common purse and others don't, there could be confusion. [Pause] All right another story.

"Now this Ibrahim ibn Adham (may God be pleased with him!) would never differ with a man who accompanied him on a journey, and he would only choose for a companion someone who was in harmony with him. His fellow on one occasion was a sandal-thong merchant. At a certain staging-post someone presented Ibrahim with a bowl of broth. He opened his companion's bag, took a bundle of thongs, set them in the bowl and returned it to the giver of the present. When his companion came along he asked:
- Where are the thongs?
- That broth I ate, what did it cost?
- You must have given him two or three thongs.
- Be generous and generosity will be shown you!"

S: The reply: 'That broth I ate, what did it cost?' would seem to be a sort of hint as to what had happened. And the other person caught the hint pretty quickly it seems.

Here there seem to be two principles involved, that is to say one is the relationship with your brother, sharing everything, and then generosity even to those who aren't brothers.

Tejamitra: That's a very interesting principle. What I was thinking about when we were talking about this generosity and abandonment of possessiveness was, in the position I'm in at least in our co-op, we often have to decide about who can have what with regard to things above ordinary support, like going on retreats and that, but it's a very different thing to considering when you're actually giving your own money away or giving something that's your own. But perhaps, according to this - well, what's happening here is that the companion just completely assumes that his friend's possessions are his own, so he just acts and that's it.

S: Well, he doesn't take for himself, which is the position, say, within the community in this sort of case. You're not saying within the community situation, 'OK, let's give *dana* to this particular object rather than that.' You're saying, 'Let's give *dana* to me', if it's, say, for your retreat rather than somebody else's; so that perhaps rather alters the situation.

Tejamitra: Yes, it does. I'm talking about internal things like if someone in our meeting says, 'I want to go on such and such a retreat', then I'm in the position to say what I feel about that, but the decision isn't - I'm not deciding or saying my views on something that's my money: it's the co-op's money.

S: But then again, you see, the co-op doesn't exist apart from you, because you all are the co-op. So it's not as though you're deciding on the use of money which doesn't belong to any of you, it belongs to all of you. It's just that it doesn't belong to any of you individually in the sense of separately.

Subhuti: Can't you try to follow the Koran: 'They agree their affairs by mutual consultation, and spend freely of what We have bestowed upon them'? That's the principle of the co-op, in a way.

S: Except that there's a question of spending not only on objects external to the co-op or the community but objects which are part of the co-op or community. That seems to be more difficult, so Tejamitra was saying. Maybe there is an element of self-consciousness here.

Tejamitra: Yes, I do feel a sort of conflict between trying to act with generosity and at the same time trying to be economic.

S: Or mindful of one's own needs.

This raises the question also of to what extent one is able to be generous at one's own expense. This perhaps depends upon recognising what level you're actually at, what degree you have attained. Maybe you would like ideally to sacrifice all your needs to somebody else or to other people generally. But are you in a position, are you spiritually on a level that you could actually do that? That is to say, do that without there being unskilful repercussions in the form of resentment perhaps on your part? Perhaps you have to recognise that you're <u>not</u> in the position of being able always to give the other person preference: sometimes, perhaps, but not always.

There's also the question if you were all of you at the same time giving the other person preference, nobody would ever go on retreat because you wouldn't be able to agree. So absolute agreement is as stultifying as absolute disagreement.

Tejamitra: Yes! Never been in my experience!

S: Though perhaps the difficulty arises when one, maybe, does regard, say, the money that is under discussion as being common property, but one doesn't regard oneself as being common property. That is to say, you have to say to yourself: 'Look, I belong to this community, I'm at the disposal of this community, how can I best serve this community? Well, I'd serve it better if I was away on retreat, so therefore it would be good if <u>I</u> went because if I don't go I'm not going to be able to serve the community' - or whatever, the co-op - 'in a way that I would like and which is needed.' It should be possible, I think, for one to see things in this way.

Anyway another story.

"He once gave a donkey belonging to his companion, without his permission, to a man he saw walking. When his companion came along he said nothing and did not disapprove."

S: That's short and to the point, isn't it?

[End of tape two tape 3]

All right, next story.

"Umar's son (may God be pleased with them both!) said that one of the companions of God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) was given a sheep's head. He said: - My brother so-and-so needs it more than I do, and sent it to him. That person sent it on to another. Thus it was passed from one to another till it came round again to the first, after being through seven hands."

S: Sheep's head, of course, is considered a delicacy, I believe, among the Arabs. If you were at a feast and you were given the sheep's head, that was a mark of honour - a bit like being given the parson's nose. [Laughter] I've related how, in Kalimpong, Tibetans used to give boxes of biscuits when they came to see you, and we used to joke sometimes that the same box of biscuits had been all the way round Kalimpong, offered from one person to another. If I went to see somebody and I didn't have time to buy a box of biscuits I'd just take the box that I'd been given, and pass it on in that way. So it's much the same sort of thing.

_____: Wonder what a sheep's head would smell like after that.

S: Especially in the desert.

[Comments and laughter.]

S: All right, carry on, then. The principles are being well illustrated - full details.

*"Tradition tells that Masruq owed a heavy debt. His brother Khaythama was also in debt, so Masruq went and paid off Khaythama's debt without his knowledge, and Khaythama went and paid off Masruq's debt without **his** knowledge."*

S: This shows how they were -

Kulananda: It's impossible!

Prasannasiddhi: No, it's not. He just acquired some money. They both just acquired money; maybe they earned the money, but before they paid their own debt they paid off their brother's debt.

S: Yes, they both owed money, presumably to different people, but each, on acquiring money, paid off the brother's debt without the brother's knowledge, rather than paying off first their own debt. That seems to be - in other words preferring their brothers to themselves.

"When God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) witnessed the brotherhood between Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf and Sa'd ibn al-Rabi', the latter offered to put the former first both materially and spiritually. Abd al-Rahman said:
- God bless you in both respects,

thus preferring his brother in the same way as his brother preferred him. It was as if he accepted then returned the compliment. This is equalising, whereas the first gesture was preferment. Preferment is worthier than equalising."

S: It's as though paradoxically you can have an equalisation of preferments. Each prefers the other to himself, as in the case of the two brothers and the debts. But obviously there mustn't be an agreement to give each other preference. If there's an agreement, it ceases to be a genuine giving of preference. It has to be, as it were a spontaneous happening, because in the case of the story about the debt, neither says anything to the other.

Subhuti: This does sound like a formal contract, doesn't it? - Muhammad being a witness to the brotherhood.

S: I don't know whether it meant 'witness' in the sense of a formal witnessing. I think he just observed or just happened to see. It's as though the first person, that is to say the latter, Sa'd ibn al-Rabi', 'offered to put the former first, both materially and spiritually', since he is the first to, as it were, make the offer; he can do that, but the other cannot say, 'In return I will do it to you', he cannot say that, because that would be equalising, and that would not be giving preference. So he says, 'God bless you in both respects' - that is, indirectly he shows that that is his spirit and intention without making it a matter of sort of formal contract; thus in fact preferring his brother in the same way as his brother preferred him. 'It was as if he accepted then returned the compliment'; but not in such a way - he was clever enough to avoid that - as to revert to the level of equalising; he remained, or he placed himself on, the level of preferring his friend to himself, because 'preferment is worthier than equalising.' So he is almost in a sort of Zen-like position, and he gets out of it quite neatly. His friend having said, 'I will give you the preference, both materially and spiritually', he cannot then say, 'I will give **you** the preference both materially and spiritually', because that would make it equalising. But he wants to reciprocate, if that is the word, not with equalising but with giving his friend the preference - so he therefore says, 'God bless you in both respects' - may that befall you - not that 'I undertake to do that'.

Prasannasiddhi: I don't quite get it - 'God bless you in both respects'.

S: Well, 'May you be blessed with someone giving you preference'. Not that he is saying 'I will give you preference', because that would mean he would then be occupying the second degree whereas he wants to occupy the first degree. In other words, he has to find, in a sense, another form of words to make that clear: that he is not responding to his friend's third degree with his second degree. He wants to respond with the third degree, but he can't say so in so many words because, if he did that, it would automatically then be second degree. So he has to find an indirect form of words which would in fact convey the same thing but not in a literal way. So therefore he says, 'God bless you in both respects,' It's not any doing of mine, it's God's doing.'

Subhuti: Although al-Ghazali does say that whatever it is that Abd al-Rahman says is equalising. 'It was as if he accepted then returned the compliment. This is equalising.'

S: Yes, but it wasn't literally equalising. You might even argue that, yes, the form of words was equalising, but then that would mean you couldn't have that relationship of reciprocal giving preference, as the previous story seems to maintain.

Kulananda: Perhaps acceptance in that way is allowing preference in some ways, because if it's considered to be highly favourable action to give in that way, by accepting you're also giving, you're allowing the person to take that step.

S: But can you not, if they offer? If you are going to have a contract of brotherhood, can you not have a contract of the third degree? To my mind, the incident seems to mean the person who takes the initiative can take the initiative in proposing that he treats his friend according to the third degree, but the friend cannot reciprocate in a bargain-like way: 'OK, because you're going to treat me in that way, all right, I will treat you in that way', because that automatically makes it second degree, which perhaps he doesn't want to do. So how would he then give expression, if he gives expression at all, to his wish to adopt a third-degree attitude towards the friend who had adopted a third-degree attitude towards him? Either he would have to remain silent and keep his intention in his own mind, or give expression to a different form, an indirect form, of words. Perhaps one can disagree with al-Ghazali; that is not impossible!

Prasannasiddhi: So the 'God bless you in both respects' - is that actually saying that 'I hope you get the opportunity to - ' - ?

S: If the second person is simply using that form of words simply to avoid using the previous form of words in a purely legalistic way, he would nonetheless remain on the second degree. But if he did it with some genuine understanding of the situation, and because he did <u>not</u> want to remain on the second degree, then it would, I suppose, be an expression of brotherhood of the third degree - if you admit that that possibility is there at all.

Kuladeva: He wouldn't have put it this way, saying that 'This was equalising, whereas the first gesture was preferment', on the basis that the other took the initiative, and the other reciprocated, returned the compliment?

S: It could be that, but then one can spark off another, and the second - the one who is sparked off - can be nonetheless genuine for being sparked off by the first. But if he's just replying out of politeness, then however he varies the form of words he would be just where he was.

Abhaya: Also, to put it in the same form: 'I will put you first both materially and spiritually' to sort of negate what the other person is offering to do, isn't it? If someone says, 'I will put you first' -

S: Literally, yes, but not spiritually.

Abhaya: - and then you say the same thing to me, it's like cancelling out my ability -

S: Yes. So it remains as it were equal. So how are you to respond when someone offers to put you first, if you genuinely also want to put the other person first? You can't respond in such a way as to make it seem like an agreement, or to make it seem like a response, otherwise it automatically becomes of the second degree. So either you say nothing at all or you must use some indirect means. But al-Ghazali seems to regard even the 'God bless you in both respects' as not adequate. It could be that. It's almost as though, however you respond, maybe you'll fall into the trap - give expression only to the second degree. But I say that it would be possible to regard the 'God bless you in both respects' as a

sort of saying without saying, giving notice of your intention but not in a sort of - what shall I say? - complementary as distinct from complimentary manner. Because you could say 'God bless you in both respects' as it were spontaneously. And he seems to be saying, 'Let God bring it about' rather than that 'I will do this or I will do that'. In a way it is a Zen-like situation - well, it's a Catch-22 sort of situation, isn't it? Perhaps I don't personally quite agree with al-Ghazali here in the interpretation of the incident. That is, one might say, part of the nature of such incidents. As with Zen stories, you don't have to look at them in a definite particular way, you can disagree in your interpretation.

"Abu Sulayman al-Darani used to say:
- If I owned the whole world to put in the mouth of a brother of mine I would still deem it too little for him.
He also said:
- I feed a morsel to a brother of mine and find the taste of it in my own throat."

S: So these are instances of sharing, one could say. One does sometimes have that experience - that you give somebody something, or you do something for them, and you experience it yourself as a pleasure.

"Spending on brothers is even worthier than giving alms to the poor, for Ali (may God be pleased with him!) said:
- Twenty dirhams I give to my brother in God are dearer to me than one hundred I give in alms to the needy."

S: This is in some ways rather shocking - at least, it would be for some people: that you give preference to your friend over the poor. It's rather like the Buddhist preference of the holy to the not so holy - it's better to give alms to the Sangha than to give alms to the laity, or better to give alms to - well, to an arahant than to a non-arahant. It smacks, as some people think, of élitism, which is another dirty word in the modern liberal vocabulary. But can one justify this? Is it in fact worthier to give to one's brothers than to the poor? But that's assuming your brother doesn't want to give to the poor so that you could give to them together. But what is the sense of this? Is one's brother to be preferred to the poor? And if so, why? In what sense is his need greater than theirs? Maybe he doesn't have a need; they do, they're poor. So why is it, on what basis, on what principle? This is a quite serious matter. One may of course agree or disagree with the text but why do they - ?

Nagabodhi: Could your giving to the poor merely be a kind of conventional morality, as opposed to the more - ?

S: However conventional, if the poor are poor, there's nothing conventional about your money: that actually will help them, objectively, maybe save them from starvation. It doesn't matter if your motivation is imperfect, you have actually helped them, the money has helped them even if you haven't.

Kuladeva: Could it have anything to do with the fact that you're more likely to identify with your brother than you are to the poor whom you don't particularly know at all?

S: But why should that enter into the matter? The poor are helped, whether you identify with them or not. Isn't it a good thing that they should be helped?

Kuladeva: Sure. I was just thinking that the experience of the person who is giving - he gets more satisfaction because he -

S: Well, why should that be the criterion? That sounds very selfish and self-indulgent -

Kuladeva: I'm not saying it doesn't. I'm saying it could be that -

S: It could be, but could that be the reason in the context here?

Ratnavira: Isn't it more a recognition of the value of spiritual hierarchy?

Kulananda: Or the creation of valued spiritual friendship?

S: If anything, it must be to emphasise the importance and value of spiritual friendship, of brotherhood. [Pause] There's a sort of parallel to this in one of the gospels, isn't there? Do you remember? Can you think of the incident I'm thinking of - St. Mary Magdalen? The box of ointment?

_____: Oh yes.

S: What did the disciples say when she breaks this box of precious ointment over the feet of Christ? What is their objection, or their comment anyway?

Abhaya: It could have been sold and the money given to the poor.

S: Yes, yes. What is Christ's response to this?

Nagabodhi: The poor are always with you.

S: Yes. So it's as though in that particular context that opportunity, represented by that kind of contact with Christ, was very rare. He was going to die, according to the gospel, and similarly one might say here that brotherhood is a much more precious thing even than relieving the needs of the poor. Again, that suggests a different scale of values. Yes, it's good that the needs of the poor are relieved. That is not underestimated, because the giving of alms is one of the five duties of the Muslim. It's not that the Muslim disregards helping the poor - I believe a Muslim swears to give a definite percentage of his income to the poor - but brotherhood is valued even more highly. Valuable as giving to the poor is, necessary as it is, the cultivation of brotherhood is even more important. But why should it be even more important? Having established that it is, at least to the Muslim - but why should it be more important?

Kuladeva: You're sustaining a higher form of life, a higher value.

S: Yes. It's more distinctively human. You can give help to animals, even, be kind to animals; you can spend money for them, so it's not all that different spending money to help needy people whom you have no particular personal contact with or with whom you're not developing a higher value; but brotherhood is something that reinforces your common humanity in a very intensive way. So that is given even higher value. Not that giving to the poor is not valued; it is valued. But it's not valued to the same extent or to the same degree. That would seem to be the meaning here.

Kuladeva: There's also the fact that life will continue anyway but the Dharma may not continue.

S: Yes, there's that too.

Abhaya: Doesn't it depend on the individual cases? I mean you can have people who prefer to help the poor on a ..... scale, but not pay so much attention to their immediate friends. There could be examples where that was equally as worthy. Can one generalise to such an extent?

S: Well, the story seems to generalise, and to be intended to be taken in this way, whether it's right or wrong. But sometimes, of course, in Indian tradition there is a particular category called *stuti apasamsa*(?), where there is a deliberate exaggeration in order to underline a point, and one may look at it in that way. But it is certainly not meant to encourage neglect of the poor, but on the other hand to stress the importance of cultivating brotherhood. All right carry on then. It looks as though we can get through this before lunch.

"He also said:
- To make a meal and gather my brothers in God around it is dearer to me than to free a slave."

S: You notice he says, 'is dearer to **me** than to free a slave.' Not dearer to the slave - one might say that was obvious - but 'dearer to me'. So why should freeing a slave be dear to him?

Kulananda: He gets pleasure from generosity.

S: Yes, the slave is regarded as an item of property that you have given away. The slave is, as it were, given to the slave. So 'to make a meal and gather my brothers in God around it is dearer to me than' to give away a valuable piece of property. All right carry straight on.

"In putting others first, all follow the example of God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!)."

S: Here Muhammad himself is regarded as an embodiment of all the virtues, the spiritual ..... virtues. We are accustomed in the West to regard Muhammad as a not particularly moral type of person, as falling short in all sorts of ways. The Islamic world does not so regard him. They regard Muhammad as the absolute embodiment of all conceivable moral virtues. So we have to adopt, within this sort of context, a quite different attitude. Recently I was rereading Dante; I hadn't really read Dante straight through since I was in my teens, but I've just finished *The*

Inferno, and - I hadn't remembered Dante's *Inferno* very clearly - I was surprised to find Muhammad in one of the lower circles of Hell, split down the middle, cloven like a cask according to Dante, as a schismatic. So this is what Christians traditionally have thought about Muhammad. In modern times something of that lingers as a vague idea that - well, not such a vague idea because it's a matter of historic fact - that he engaged in war, that he had lots and lots of wives and was very self-indulgent and even told lies or was a bit of a charlatan. But Muslims, needless to say, do not see him in that way at all. He's an absolute moral pattern, and their explanations of all these incidents in his life are quite interesting, one might say quite ingenious. One can see something in them. They've got a different point of view. But on the other hand, one can't completely give up one's own view, at least as a Buddhist, in certain respects. So one mustn't be surprised to find al-Ghazali saying: 'In putting others first, all follow the example of God's Messenger.' They are only doing what Muhammad [did]; he regularly put others before him, or put at least his brothers before him, even if he didn't put non-Muslims before him. So here follows the story.

"He once entered a thicket with one of his companions and gathered two toothpicks, one of them crooked and the other straight."

S: Yes, apparently in Arabia or whatever it was, as in India, you take your toothpick or your toothbrush straight off a tree, a little stick.

"The straight one he gave to his companion, who said:
- O Messenger of God, you are more entitled to the straight one than I!
But he replied:
- When a comrade accompanies a comrade, if only for one hour of the day, he will be asked to account for his companionship, whether he fulfilled his duty to God therein or whether he neglected it.
He indicated by his own example that putting the companion first is to fulfil one's duty to God in fellowship."

S: It's as though there doesn't even need to be a formal long-term contract of brotherhood. Even if you're together with someone just for an hour, it's as though the duties of brotherhood, at least to some extent, or in a sense, do prevail and should be observed. In other words, if you just happen to be with someone for a short while, do your best to treat him as a real brother. That would seem to be the moral here, so to speak. Anyway let's carry on.

On another occasion God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) went out to a well to wash at it. Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman took a robe and stood screening God's Messenger while he washed."

S: According to Arab ideas it was not very decent to uncover the body in public or in such a way as to be seen by other people, hence the screening with the robe.

"Then Hudhayfa sat down to wash himself, and God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) took his turn to stand screening Hudhayfa from view with the robe. But he objected saying:
- My father be your ransom, and my mother too! O Messenger of God, do not do it!"

S: He thought that Muhammad was performing too humble a duty as it were in relation to himself.

"Yet he (God bless him and give him Peace!) insisted on holding the robe as a screen while Hudhayfa washed, and he said:
- Each time two people are in company together, the dearer to God is he who is kinder to his companion."

S: So it isn't even a question, one might say, of the formal contract of brotherhood. It's just whomever you happen to be with, though it seems that the person here was one of his own companions or followers. So in other words observe the duties of brotherhood whenever you get an opportunity. Don't just restrict your observation of the duties of brotherhood to people with whom you have a formal contract or explicit understanding with. Potentially every human being, you could say, is a brother in this sense. So if you find yourself together with him for any length of time, treat him as a brother in as full a sense as you can, in as full a sense as the situation or the conditions permit. In a way, this would actually go against traditional Islam in the long run, because, yes, Muslims do tend to treat only other Muslims as brothers, very often. But if one takes this incident at all literally, or even maybe takes just the spirit of it, well you should really treat all human beings as brothers. And this would certainly be the Buddhist view - *sabbe satta sukhi hontu* - may <u>all</u> beings be happy, not just Buddhists; not even all human beings. All right let's go straight on.

"Tradition tells that Malik ibn Dinar and Muhammad ibn Wasi' went together to the house of al-Hasan while he was out. Muhammad ibn Wasi' took out a basket of food from under al-Hasan's bed and began to eat. Malik said to him:
- Clap your hands to fetch the master of the house.
But Muhammad paid no attention to his words and went on eating, for Malik was more for politeness and manners than he. Then al-Hasan arrived and said:
- My dear Malik, we were not used to being so shy of one another till you and your fellows appeared.
With this he indicated that to make oneself at home in one's brothers' homes is part of true brotherhood. And indeed, God (Exalted is He!) said:
- Or of your friend, or to which you have the keys. ***(Qu'ran 24.61)***
For although one brother would give the keys of his house to another, permitting him to act as he saw fit, a brother felt that piety required him to refrain from eating, until God (Exalted is He!) revealed this Verse and allowed them to help themselves to the food of brothers and friends."

S: There's a note there, 12: *'There is no fault ... in your eating from your houses, or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or the houses of your uncles and aunts, paternal and maternal, <u>or of your friend, or to which you have the keys.</u>'* If you have the keys of someone's house it is equivalent to standing in those degrees of relationship to them and confers on you the sort of freedom that the Koranic verse mentions. It's rather interesting that in the modern West it's very different. I've known families where the grown-up son maybe goes to visit his mother or father, and certainly wouldn't help himself to something without asking permission. So it's exactly the reverse tendency. One couldn't feel that sort of freedom, even with these blood relations, now, in many cases. Does one agree or has one not noticed that or observed that?

Kulananda: It's English, I'd say.

Voices: Yes.

S: Yes; or with brothers - I mean actual brothers in the literal sense. You wouldn't feel very pleased to go along to their house and just help yourself to something in the fridge, perhaps. Especially if his brother's wife was around! When you think that, well, you are his brother! (Murmurs of agreement.) This is quite interesting. Some weeks ago in Sukhavati, an Indian came to see me with a problem, and it was about his relationship with his elder brother. He was really upset that his brother was annoyed with him, and so annoyed that even though the brother was sick he wouldn't allow him, the younger brother, to go and look after him. And he was really taking this to heart. He had a wife, he had children, he was about 35; everything - his business - was all right, but he was really upset. He was even crying over it. He said, 'I'm so fond of my brother, but he's annoyed with me. He won't let me go and look after him even though he is ill.' It was as though that bad relationship with his brother more than counterbalanced his good relationship with his wife, his children, his work. He said he just couldn't stop thinking about it. He woke up at night thinking that his brother was displeased with him. And he clearly had a very strong feeling for his brother. This is quite unusual among English people - though maybe not unknown.

So, as I say, we sort of have reversed the trend. You don't feel free to help yourself to the contents of anybody's fridge, whether related or unrelated. I take that as an example. One notices it with even, say use of cars. Leaving aside the question of people misusing cars, I noticed in the States apparently people lend their cars much more readily and freely. Cars are much more in common. They don't seem to have a strong sense of possessiveness about cars. I don't know whether Americans tend to treat other people's cars more carefully than people in England. I don't know whether there is any connection, but the fact is, I believe, that Americans are much more free in lending their cars. They just throw you the keys. 'Has anybody got a car?' they ask. 'Oh yes, I've got one', hand you the keys and off you go. There isn't this sense of 'It's my car and nobody else can drive it.' So it would suggest that in modern Western, at least in modern English, society there is much more individualism than there is in many traditional societies. Maybe there are other counterbalancing factors, but this does seem to be a loss in this particular area, one might say; at least if one takes it by itself.

Kuladeva: I noticed when I was travelling in Italy that the Italians seem to be quite generous. On one occasion I was actually given a belt. I didn't want it, but I didn't want to hurt the feelings of the person who was giving it. And also ordinary people on trains would just very often share their food if they started eating.

S: Yes, that's not very common in England. People would regard it almost as an imposition, or that you were trying to get to know them and taking a liberty. But in India, of course - it also isn't quite as it is in Italy, perhaps, because there the question of caste intervenes, unfortunately, even though Indians are naturally generous. But caste rather messes things up because you wouldn't dream of offering something to somebody of a lower caste, or a higher caste, rather.

Nagabodhi: I noticed in India on trains that people would just take newspapers from each other. They won't say, 'Do you mind if I borrow your newspaper?' They'll just take it when you've finished with it.

S: Oh yes. A newspaper is sort of common property. Also, I've seen this in Calcutta, a group of people standing on a corner reading somebody

else's newspaper while he's reading it! This is not considered impolite, whereas in an English train or ....., if you just happen to glance at somebody's paper, ... there's a little reaction ..... you're actually looking at his paper - his paper. You jolly well go and buy your own! In India it's not like that, four or five people will quite happily be sharing the same paper which one person has bought. They don't think anything of it.

Nagabodhi: I'd be writing up my diary sometimes in a café, and people would be saying, 'What does that word mean?' [Laughter]

S: The same with letters. Letters in India tend to be regarded as public property. They don't think it wrong to read your letters if they're lying around.

Kulananda: They certainly are in our Movement - public property.

S: Well, sometimes people like to share letters, and they read them out. But even in the Movement people might hesitate to pick up a letter and read it, perhaps, or certainly to open a drawer and take out a letter and read it. Anyway, the bell has gone and probably that applies to us as well as the community, so perhaps we should come to an end. But any general point or observation or comment? Has it been too Islamic, or has one been able to cope or translate into one's own terms, or is there a certain amount of genuine overlap, would one say?

Vajrananda: I thought with the way it's set out it seems quite acceptable and so on, quite a high social etiquette, or even more than that. But I got the impression in some parts of it that if you weren't a brother then you might be completely out of it, you were then, you didn't have anything.

S: Though that does seem to be to some extent corrected by the latter stories, which seem to suggest that anybody who is with you, even for an hour, is at least in a sense a brother and should be treated accordingly.

Vajrananda: Doesn't that just apply to people of Islam?

S: Well, that is not specifically stated, but I think there is a sort of assumption here - though one could argue whether that was true to original Islam or not, etc., etc. But the fact is that in practice Muslims very decidedly treat other Muslims as brothers, and not non-Muslims. In fact, very often they will regard them as enemies and be quite unfriendly and hostile.

Vajrananda: It just strikes me that if you take the spirit of this text you'd have to start applying it to all human beings.

S: Yes. I don't think the Muslims in fact do that, or would wish to do that or would think it even right to do that.

Vajrananda: Does seem a bit inconsistent.

Devaraja: ..... Moroccans ..... I was travelling on a bus with Moroccans, just plying almost everyone in the last three rows of the bus with food, all the way down through Europe and Spain - very generous -

S: One must also remember that Muslims make a distinction between two kinds of non-Muslim. There are the People of the Book and there are pagans, or I think at least sometimes called Kafirs, and of course idol worshippers were a separate category altogether. That would include Buddhists and Hindus. But the People of the Book are the Christians and the Jews, because Muslims do not reject previous revelations in the sense of the Christian or the Jewish, though they do maintain that Christians and Jews have misunderstood the revelations. But they do revere the figures of Christ and Moses and Abraham and so on. They have a sort of - well, Western scholars say, garbled version of certain Old Testament incidents, incorporated in the Koran.

[End of Side One Side Two]

S: Nevertheless even People of the Book, under a Muslim regime, had - at least in former times - to pay a special poll tax because they were non-Muslims, and they were subject to various disabilities, under certain regimes anyway. Whereas in the case of the Kafirs, those who were not People of the Book, who were not Christians and not Jews, they were treated in a very different way, a much less friendly way; weren't even allowed to pay poll tax. Sometimes Zoroastrians were treated as People of the Book because they did have a written scriptures. But in modern times, of course, in modern Iran, the Zoroastrians, and of course the wretched Baha'is who were a sort of heretical - in the eyes of the Muslims heretical sect - they've been treated very, very badly; indeed, many have been massacred, as in fact they were in the last century. Thousands were massacred in the last century because they believe that there was a prophet after Muhammad. Muslims are quite prepared to recognise prophets before Muhammad, but they are not prepared to recognise prophets after Muhammad. According to them Muhammad is the last or the *Seal*, as they say, of the prophets. After him there can be no prophet. So they are able, therefore, to recognise Christ though as a prophet and a good man, not as the son of God, or not the son of God in the trinitarian sense. And they are able to recognise Abraham, and they are able to recognise Moses. Some modern Muslims say they are able to recognise the Buddha, but as a prophet; a prophet superseded by the full revelation of Muhammad himself. But their tolerance and in practice their brotherliness is quite limited; it's usually limited to Muslims. One certainly finds this in India, very largely, as between Muslims and Hindus. Though Muslims, in some areas at least, are quite friendly towards Buddhists because very often the Buddhists come from the same ex-Untouchable community as the Muslim converts themselves originally came from. And they've kept up, over the ages almost, at least social contact. And they are both minorities threatened by the Hindu majority. But how strong that friendliness of those Muslims towards the Buddhists is, it would be difficult to say. Some Muslims might even argue that the Indian Muslims are corrupted by their Hindu surroundings, they are not fully Islamic, not so exclusive as they ought to be. On my last trip I made a point of visiting some mosques and Sufi tombs which I'd never visited before. It was interesting that one place I went into there were decided signs of hostility because I was in my yellow robe, and they must have thought I was a Hindu, though I was accompanied by several Buddhists whom they might have thought were Hindus also. So someone actually inquired of them who I was, and he said, 'Oh, he's from England.' As soon as he said that, everything was all right. Oh yes, it was quite remarkable. As soon as they learned I was from England - quite all right, quite welcome. Yes, I was quite struck by that. I don't know how they classified me - whether they thought I was some kind of Christian or missionary, or whatever, but as I was English that was OK. It was as though being English covered a multitude of sins.

Kuladeva: Do you foresee trouble with the world of Islam and the FWBO?

S: Oh yes ,if you enter it and try to preach Buddhism there.

Kuladeva: I don't mean simply the Middle East, but confrontation between the two traditions, not necessarily in that particular part of the world.

S: I really don't know. I haven't had any personal contact with Muslims - though with one or two Sufis, very sort of diluted Sufis, Western Sufis in the West; they were quite nice people. I haven't had any contact with full-blooded Muslims, though I believe some of our Friends have, and I think they haven't always been very pleasant or very friendly.

Kuladeva: I met an Arab in Rome. He gave me his address, took my address and insisted on corresponding. I haven't actually got a letter from him - can't remember .....

S: I suppose among Westernised Muslims one might even find some interest in non-Islamic traditions though I think it would be quite rare. I myself gave a lecture in Cairo. There were many Muslims in the audience, but they were very sophisticated sort of people mostly came .....

Subhuti: There is a certain amount of difficulty in Malaysia.

S: There is, yes. But the general trend in Islamic countries seems to be - well, to use the current vocabulary, rather reactionary: anti-liberal and anti-Western. The trend of the last hundred or so years is being reversed, notably in Persia, in Iran. So I think, if ever we come into contact with that sort of attitude, that sort of spirit, it will be like a contact with communism. It will be very difficult for us. They would really sort of test us.

Devaraja: How do you think we'd be coming into contact with communism? Are you thinking in terms, say, of our going into an eastern European country, or Russia, or what? What were you - ?

S: It's very difficult to come into contact, because one isn't allowed to, one isn't admitted very often, not as a Buddhist, to conduct any sort of Buddhist activity. We are free to conduct our activities now in Catholic countries, but not in Muslim countries or in communist countries. I feel that our way into the communist countries probably lies through India. I think we have to rely on our Indian Order members, because India and Russia at least have very friendly contacts; there is a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, and it isn't difficult for an Indian to get to Russia as part of a cultural delegation, to give lectures there, and so on. Some of my own friends have been. I think probably that is the way for us. Or even via Finland - some of our Finnish Order members could get in, and have got in. I know Vajradaka got in too, but that was only for a few days.

Subhuti: Vajrabodhi's just done quite an extensive tour.

S: But that is as a private individual. If one wanted, well, could one set up a centre? That would be the real test. Probably not. On the other hand,

a little discreet activity among Buryat(?) Mongol Buddhists - that's not impossible for someone from the East, and maybe the government would just regard it as friendly cultural relations. It all fits within their international brotherhood plan. and they'd just overlook it or tolerate it. It's not impossible. But it would be very difficult to do from this country. I don't know about the Muslim countries - some have been secularised. I think in Turkey we might be able to do something, certainly in Istanbul. But those which become secularised usually become a bit Marxist, so one loses out either way. But we have to try, we have to ( ) sooner or later. Maybe Indonesia would be an easy option. That's at the farthermost end of the Muslim world, they're a bit unorthodox there. There are a few Buddhists there already, anyway, and of course some Hindus.

Subhuti: There are a lot of Muslims in Western countries, aren't there?

S: Yes.

Subhuti: That might be a way. A lot in America, Manjuvajra .....

S: Ah yes. All right, let's leave it there for today.

[Next Session]

S: On to chapter 2. Actually chapter 2 is the shortest in the whole text, and chapter 3 is the longest, so I expect what we will have to do is probably finish chapter 2 by break time and start on chapter 3 after the break.

Vajrananda: Did we actually finish reading chapter 1?

S: We did, actually, though we did rather whiz through the last few pages because they consisted mainly of illustrative stories, you may remember, some of which didn't really require much discussion.

"2

*The **second duty** is to render personal aid in the satisfaction of needs, attending to them without waiting to be asked, and giving them priority over private needs."*

S: That's the main point. You may remember from the beginning of the first chapter, or rather the preface, in a way, to the first chapter, it was said that 'the contract of brotherhood confers upon your brother a certain right touching your property,' - that was dealt with in chapter 1 - 'your person' - so this deals with one's person. 'The second duty', therefore, 'is to render personal aid in the satisfaction of needs, attending to them without waiting to be asked, and giving them priority over private needs.' I think the expression 'personal aid' is intended to convey that one should do it oneself, not necessarily arrange for it to be done, or get somebody else to do it. This immediately reminds me of the Tibetan

Buddhist custom or tradition that if, for instance, you receive your teacher - supposing you are a lay person - at your own house, supposing you invite him for a meal or something of that sort, and - it's much the same in India, in fact - even if you have many servants and so on, and many dependants, you are supposed to wait upon your teacher yourself. The Tibetans are very particular about this, that you yourself should actually lift up the cup of tea and offer it to him; not allow a servant or dependant to do it. So there is some similarity here, one may say. 'The second duty is to render **personal** aid in the satisfaction of needs, attending to them' - that is to say one's brothers - 'without waiting to be asked'. Without waiting to be asked: obviously, this is quite significant. You don't wait to be asked to help. You're on the alert to see any need. ' - and giving them priority over private needs.' I'm not sure what 'private needs' means, whether it means your personal private needs or even those of your whole family. Maybe that will transpire from what we study subsequently.

Vajrananda: This corresponds to the third degree of brotherhood?

S: Well, the next paragraph goes on to say that 'Here too there are different degrees', and perhaps they do correspond. We shall see.

"Here too there are different degrees, as in the case of material support.
The lowest degree consists in attending to the need when asked and when in plenty, though with joy and cheerfulness, showing pleasure and gratitude."

S: This is the lowest degree. It consists in 'attending to the need when asked'. This is one of the reasons why it's lowest, because you've actually waited to be asked. 'and when in plenty', when you can actually afford quite easily to help. 'though with joy and cheerfulness, showing pleasure and gratitude'. In a way, if you've been asked and you've plenty in the way of material goods from which you can give help, it isn't a test. You can help without any trouble or difficulty to yourself. So this ranks as the lowest degree, even though you may attend to the need of your brother 'when asked ... with joy and cheerfulness,' and 'showing pleasure and gratitude'. The possibility of your giving without joy and cheerfulness and without showing pleasure and gratitude - this isn't even considered. This isn't even regarded as giving at all or 'attending to the need' at all, at least so far as your brother is concerned. Within that context that particular possibility doesn't even exist.

Prasannasiddhi: At least as far as your brother is concerned?

S: Yes, because I'm thinking in the case, say, of giving to the poor, that might count as giving, even though you gave rather grudgingly. But in the case of your brother it can't possibly count even as the lowest degree unless you give with joy and cheerfulness and showing pleasure and gratitude.

Prasannasiddhi: That does sound a little bit biased, but maybe -

S: We saw in the last chapter that there was a bias in favour of the brother, as distinguished from the poor and the needy - a quite explicit and deliberate bias, if that is the word.

Vajrananda: I'm not actually clear as to what 'personal aid' represents, practically. What does it cover?

S: What do you think it might cover, 'personal aid'? Just think of maybe rather simple conditions of life. Someone in your family dies and you need help in organising the funeral. That is a very common thing in India, for instance, still.

Subhuti: Or a law suit or something.

S: Yes, something of that sort. You need someone to stand security for a loan, or to bear witness on your behalf or to intercede on your behalf with a magistrate, or to ransom you if you're thrown into prison, pay your fine. All these sort of things, presumably. Or in siding with you in a feud.

Subhuti: Or even just quite practically come and help you with a bit of farming.

S: Yes, farming, or help you repair your house. I think it's quite simple things of this sort that are meant. One does see in India today occasions for giving this sort of personal assistance to your friends, in the course of ordinary social life. Except perhaps for people living in villages, in this country we are to a great extent cut off from this sort of thing. For instance, in India among the ex-Untouchables they live in the same localities. There's a whole group of them together. They've lived perhaps in that particular locality for years and years, if not decades. They know one another very very well. They know all the people round about. They're in and out of one another's houses constantly. And there may be particular friendships between particular people, and they do help one another. They render personal assistance, especially for instance when there is a death in the family, or maybe a child has to be taken to hospital or something of that sort. We tend to call upon various impersonal agents. If someone dies you telephone the funeral parlour; you don't have to ask for help from your friends. But in India, apart from the big cities to some extent, there's nothing of that sort. I think I've mentioned before that if someone is very mean and ungenerous in dealing with people, and gets a bad reputation, sometimes it is said of him - or even said to him that - 'If you behave like that, when you die there'll be no one to take up your body.' That is to say there will be no - what do we call them?

Subhuti: Pall bearers.

S: Not pall bearers - they carry the canopy over the coffin. Because usually in India a body is placed on a sort of stretcher and four men shoulder that. So if you are so unpopular that when your dead body is lying there, there are not in the surrounding area four people who come forward to shoulder that and carry it to the cremation ground, well then you are in a very bad way. It's a terrible disgrace. So you're threatened with that sometimes, if you behave rather badly - that on the occasion of your death there will be no one to shoulder your dead body and carry it away. So this is the sort of assistance, I think, that the author of this section had in mind. In a less governed, a less bureaucratically controlled society, there are many more occasions on which you would just have to fall back on the personal help of your friends.

Ratnavira: Strikes me as the kind of duty that has a lot more significance in the context of our communities than in Western society as a whole - just lots of small ..... say someone is not very well - quite small incidents can be very significant in showing an overall attitude, say if someone

who is not very well in the community, they're not very well looked after it implies quite a definite sort of attitude in the community, which is shown up by this.

S: Yes.

Kulananda: These things apply more to us inasmuch as we don't have a family to rely on.

S: That's true. Because in a more traditional society you relied in the first place on your relations, in the second place on your friends; not on impersonal governmental agencies.

Subhuti: I'm thinking a bit about the work that Virabhadra's instituting in India. Presumably you've got to be careful not to replace natural relationships with the impersonal agency that -

S: Well, sometimes specialist knowledge is required. For instance, they've got the traditional midwife who shares the superstitions of her clients - so actually Virabhadra has tried not to make the traditional midwife feel superseded. He's tried to include her and tried to sort of upgrade her a bit, teach her. Though it isn't always easy. Anyway, that's pretty clear, isn't it? - what is meant by rendering personal aid. So 'the lowest degree consists in attending to the need when asked' - but only when asked - 'and when in plenty' - when one is well off oneself - 'though with joy and cheerfulness, showing pleasure and gratitude.' The story seems to illustrate this degree, so let's go on.

"Someone said:
*- If you ask your brother to satisfy a need, and he does not do so, then remind him, for he may have forgotten. If he still does not do it, pronounce '**Allahu akbar!**' over him and recite this Verse: 'As for the dead, God will raise them up.' (Qu'ran 6.36)"*

S: There are two points perhaps here that need to be discussed. 'Someone said: - If you ask your brother to satisfy a need and he does not do so, then remind him, for he may have forgotten.' So what does this suggest? It suggests you should give your brother the benefit of the doubt. I think this is very important. I think in the *Sigalovada Sutta* also it says, discussing the whole question of friendship, that one should not be quick to suspect a breach. So 'If you ask your brother to satisfy a need, and he does not do so', don't jump to the conclusion immediately that he doesn't care for you any more, or he can't be bothered. He may simply have forgotten. Give him the benefit of the doubt, and remind him. So this implies trust. And this is where trust is very very important. I think last year we were discussing this quite a bit. That appearances may be against someone, may in this case be against your friend, but you should know your friend well enough to be able to trust him under those circumstances and not suspect a breach; to give him the benefit of the doubt. For instance, supposing you have arranged to meet someone and he doesn't turn up. You shouldn't at once jump to the conclusion that he hasn't bothered to keep the appointment. He may have fallen ill; he may have been waylaid by something. You don't know, so you should wait. Give him the benefit of the doubt, not immediately react, much less still take action on the basis of your emotional reaction. One does see a lot of this sort of thing. People are so unwilling, I've noticed, to give other people the benefit of the doubt and just wait and see. Someone perhaps doesn't turn up for a class, doesn't turn up for a meeting; well, they may not have bothered, but on the other hand they may have a perfectly good reason for not coming. So you should wait before reacting, and ascertain what

that reason may be. If, of course, they have in fact neglected their duty, fair enough; you can give them a bit of fierce friendship then; but it's pointless to get annoyed and irritated and worked up, and then to discover that the person was in fact completely blameless. So 'If you ask your brother to satisfy a need, and he does not do so, then remind him, for he may have forgotten.' Yes, he might have been very busy, and all sorts of other affairs may have obtruded themselves on his attention. 'If he **still** does not do it, pronounce "Allahu akbar!" over him and recite this verse: "As for the dead, God will raise them up."' It isn't quite clear what the significance of this is. The general significance is clear; that if your brother doesn't satisfy your need even when reminded of it, well so far as you are concerned he's dead. In other words, he's no longer your brother. He's broken the contract, as it were, and you can regard him as dead and gone. So it may be that the 'Allahu akbar!' formula, that quotation from the Koran, is part of, say, the Islamic funeral service. It may, I don't know this for sure, but it may have that significance; it may be used in that connection. But anyway, as I've said, the general significance is clear: that that person who doesn't help you, doesn't meet your need even when reminded, is as good as dead so far as you are concerned. Your contract of brotherhood with him is therefore at an end just as it would be if he had actually died. But have you ever had this experience of asking someone to do something, or to help you, and then having to remind him, and he still doesn't do it? This can be very discouraging if he just isn't bothering, as distinct from just not being in a position to help you and telling you that frankly.

"Ibn Shubruma once satisfied a great need for one of his brothers, who later brought him a present.
- What is this? asked Ibn Shubruma.
- For the favour you did me.
*- Keep it and may God preserve you! If you ask your brother for something you need and he does not exert himself to satisfy your need, then wash for prayers, pronounce four **takbir** over him and count him among the dead."*

S: So what is this anecdote illustrating? What point is it making?

Subhuti: It's not an exchange or bargain.

S: Yes. There's no question of exchange or bargain. There's no question of a mental keeping of accounts. It's very easy to do this, even unintentionally. And of course, it is part of social life, isn't it? If, say, someone sends you a Christmas card at Christmas, you're supposed to send them one. And if someone gives you a present you're supposed to return it, or someone does something for you you're supposed to do something for them; and - well, even in connection with this question of invitations to dinner, one hears of discussions between husband and wife: 'I suppose we'd better invite the Joneses because they did ask us six months ago' - though You don't particularly want to ask them, but because they asked you you're under some sort of social obligation to ask them back. Some people with an active social life keep a sort of list of these kinds of things. But this has got nothing to do with brotherhood, nothing to do with true friendship. Brothers, or friends shouldn't keep these sort of mental accounts. I was going to say the slate ought to be wiped clean each time, but actually of course there isn't a slate at all.

So there should be no such underlying thought as, 'Oh, I've done so many things for him, but he didn't do it for me.' If you can even think like that, it means you've been keeping an account all the time, which you shouldn't have been doing. Here, of course, the person is keeping an account of what his friend has done for him, but even that is in a sense not right, not correct. He should have accepted the help and, well, that's

that. There's nothing to be repaid. Not that he doesn't remember the friend's help with gratitude, but he doesn't remember it as a debt to be repaid.

Tejamitra: I heard - is it true that you don't even say thank you in Tibet?

S: No, this is not true in the case of Tibet, because the Tibetans do say thank you very frequently. '*Tu chen chey*'(?), they say. This is very polite. Among Indians it is not considered polite to thank anybody for something they've done for you or given to you, whether among Hindus or Buddhists; this is a general Indian custom. Thanks are not expected. In fact, people feel embarrassed if you try to thank them. They just don't know what it's all about, that sort of thing.

Tejamitra: That's very interesting as compared with the way I was brought up. If you don't say thank you for something that you're given it's really -

S: You can certainly smile and show your pleasure, but to thank them suggests that they've done something especially meritorious, whereas their attitude is that they have not done anything especially meritorious. They are just behaving in the natural and to be expected manner. If you go to someone's house, of course they will entertain you to the best of their abilities. That is the natural thing to do. Who would do anything else? It isn't anything requiring any thanks. So if you try to thank your hosts on your departure for the lovely meal, they'll just be embarrassed. If you're a religious person you can evoke a blessing on them. That's a different kind of thing. But even then it's not exactly in return. They've done what is right and natural for them. You've done what is right and natural for you, i.e. to give the blessing.

Kulananda: Also in some ways you've fulfilled your part of it by accepting their hospitality.

S: Yes. Sometimes this is explicitly stated - that you are conferring the benefit on them, not them on you. You are giving them an opportunity to perform their duty as householders, which is to entertain guests. I mean, the orthodox Hindu attitude - this is the very strictly orthodox, this is not by any means universally followed - but the strictly orthodox Hindu attitude is that the principal reason for a man getting married and establishing a home and so on and so forth is so that he may entertain guests. Yes! Even progeny is given for this purpose relatively a second place, important though that is for orthodox Hindus. So if the householder, together with his wife and his children and attendants, are not entertaining guests, they are not really fulfilling their function as householders, it's considered.....

[End of Tape 3, Tape 4]

..... an opportunity of fulfilling his true social function. It's like the workman who is grateful to his customers. He doesn't expect thanks from his customers for the work he does, because he should be grateful to them because they are providing him with a livelihood.

The Chinese attitude is very different. I think I have dwelt on or just mentioned this on some previous occasion. There, the host is very much in command, as it were, and the guest is in the subordinate position; whereas, in India, it isn't like that. The guest is as it were in command and the host is in a subordinate position. Very often when you enter an Indian home, the first thing that they will say is, 'Please treat this house as your

own', and they mean it. If you call for something or ask for something, they really are pleased that you are making yourself at home. This is their attitude. If you call for a pillow to rest your elbow on, or something like that, they are happy to provide it: you are making yourself at home. Anyway, that's by the way.

So this little anecdote makes the point that in the contract of brotherhood there is no question of any bargain or keeping an account; there's no question of any repayment. So 'if you ask your brother for something you need and he does not **exert** himself to satisfy your need' - you notice this phrase 'exert himself to satisfy your need'. Even if your need cannot be easily satisfied, it's his duty, so to speak, to **exert** himself to satisfy it. If he doesn't do that, then 'wash for prayers,' - you know that Muslims wash before praying - 'pronounce four **takbirs**' - I think that's the exclamation 'God is great!' - 'and count him among the dead', as in the previous anecdote. Consider your contract of brotherhood with him as at an end.

Tejamitra: Sounds a bit heavy, actually. The consequences of it - 'count him among the dead' - it gives me the slight, vague flavour of - I don't know - the inherent sort of cruelty or whatever that's behind a lot of this, with regard to people who aren't part of the brotherhood.

S: Hm, but the other side of that is that brotherhood is taken very seriously: that either you're a brother or you're not. If you don't behave like a brother, you're not a brother, and you can no longer be regarded as a brother. The possibility of the brother as it were coming back from the dead, that is to say regretting his mistake and apologising and re-establishing the contract of brotherhood - this presumably is not excluded, but it's beyond human aid as it were; the problem is beyond human solution. This is perhaps why, in the first story, you were to say: 'As for the dead, God will raise them up', just as at the last day, according to Islamic theology, God will raise everybody up from the dead. So once your brother has ceased to behave as a brother, you break off contact with him; he's dead, so far as brotherhood is concerned. It's up to God to bring about a change in his heart; you can do nothing more.

Subhuti: It's the equivalent of divorce.

S: Yes, for the unruly wife, a wife who doesn't fulfil her duty. Inasmuch as there is a sort of formal contract, there is the possibility of a breach of that formal contract occurring, and therefore of the contract coming to an end.

I think, also, that in modern times, at least in some circles, we've got into the habit of thinking, well it doesn't matter so much what you do so long as your attitude is all right, if your intentions are good, but I think, in the Islamic tradition at least, this is not considered nearly good enough. I think this is one of the reasons for - or it may be the other way round - for what often strikes us as the excessive Islamic legalism: that the religious leaders are the canon lawyers, the experts in the religious law, the Shariat. For instance, in the case of the ordinary Muslim it's not enough that he just believes in God or has a sort of reverential attitude. He's got to do his ceremonial prayer five times a day. It's got to find a very concrete embodiment, otherwise he's not a pious Muslim. So, if you think of it, five times a day! And you know what that means: unrolling the mat, and bowing and reciting certain prayers, verses from the Koran and so on, five times a day! And many Muslims still, in Muslim countries, do this, and in former times it was practically universal. So this is a very big, a very heavy demand in a way on the ordinary - not the especially pious, but the ordinary nominal Muslim. But many of them do fulfil that.

So in Islam one does get perhaps the realisation that for ordinary people the duties of religion need to be embodied in very concrete performances that can be actually checked up on, in a way. Otherwise your religious life, if you're not careful, can just resolve itself into pious sentiment and just pious wishes without any actual practice.

So I think it is because brotherhood is taken so seriously - the idea is that you should actually practise it - that you have this quite rigorous approach. You're either someone's friend or you're not; you're either someone's brother or you're not. There's no halfway house.

So this can sometimes give a bit of an edge to things, and perhaps the Muslims generally overdo the edge. I think sometimes it's all edge, as it were; but, on the other hand, some people, not excluding Buddhists, might go to the other extreme, of being too vague, too general, too wishy-washy, too willing to accept excuses, and so on. There's no question of a third chance, even; you're given a second chance, but not a third chance.

Vajrananda: There's no mention in this as to the obvious area of reasonable and unreasonable demands upon you. It's all rather clear and cut-and-dried.

S: But what is meant by unreasonable? Do you mean objectively unreasonable?

Vajrananda: Yes.

S: Well, supposing your brother has a need, and that represents a demand upon you - perhaps the Muslim wouldn't say an unreasonable [but] a very excessive, demand - you've got to do your best to rise to the occasion. He might have got seriously in debt and be in danger of prison. He might need, say, a thousand pounds. Well, that might be all the money that you've got, so in a way it's - well, is it an unreasonable demand or is it really an excessive one? But if he is your brother and you regard yourself as his brother, well you've just got - happily and joyfully - to hand over the thousand pounds, even though it represents everything that you've got.

Devaraja: You'd hand over the thousand pounds for your child, so why not for your brother?

S: Yes.

Vajrananda: Yes, it's a bit difficult to get into what is reasonable and what is unreasonable, but I was thinking of - in terms of personal aid -

S: No, if someone makes an unreasonable demand - for instance, your brother - supposing he's seen a very, very expensive ring in a jeweller's shop window and he asks you for the money to buy that. Well, you could say that that was an unreasonable demand, but would someone who was a real brother **make** a demand of that sort?

And the word 'need' is used: 'personal aid in the satisfaction of needs.' I think the suggestion is that 'need' means a genuine, objective need, as for food, clothing, help in time of trouble; not to satisfy whims and fancies.

Subhuti: It's also a question of the degree of brotherhood, isn't it? - because the lowest degree is only out of your plenty that you give.

S: Yes, yes, right. So you may say frankly: 'Well, I'm sorry I'm not capable of that degree of brotherhood', as in fact we did find some people saying in the previous chapter. You recognise your limitations, you know where you stand.

Vajrananda: Would you perhaps have different degrees of brotherhood towards different people?

S: Presumably that would be possible, yes. Yes, indeed.

Vajrananda: You might say that you aren't capable of fulfilling more than this to anyone in particular.

S: Well, supposing two friends, in a sense two brothers, simultaneously ask you for the same one thousand pounds; what are you going to do? Are you going to give that amount to one person only, are you going to split it between them, or what are you going to do? I think it is accepted that there may well be different degrees of brotherhood in respect of different persons.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose it would depend on how much you know a person. For instance, if you know a person really well, then you would know, if he asked for something, that he really would need it; whereas someone else could ask you for two thousand pounds, and if you don't know them, they could want it for anything. They might want it to use in some bad way, so -

S: All right, let's go on, there's another little anecdote.

"Ja'far ibn Muhammad said:
- I make haste to satisfy the needs of my enemies, lest I reject them and they do without me.

If this be the attitude towards enemies, how then towards friends?"

S: That last sentence is of course al-Ghazali's own comment. 'Ja'far ibn Muhammad said: - I make haste to satisfy the needs of my enemies, lest I reject them and they do without me.' What do you think this signifies, this 'rejecting them and they do without me'? [Pause] Well, it suggests a situation - if you like, a society - in which the bonds of human solidarity are considered very, very important. You shouldn't estrange even your enemies. You shouldn't cut off contact completely even with enemies. So if you have an opportunity of satisfying the needs of your enemies, do that, because then you will not have rejected them, and they will not have learned to do without you completely. There will not be an utter breach between you. In other words, even with your enemies, keep up some kind of human contact if you possibly can.

Again, I remember an incident in connection with my life in Kalimpong. I had some friends - there was a Sikkimese Kasi who was married to a European wife, who was a rather militant sort of lady. And he happened to be the head of a certain political party in Sikkim, and obviously, as a politician, he had political enemies - people belonging to other parties, even people belonging to his own party trying to oust him. But what would happen sometimes he would be at home and political enemies would call on him, and he would behave in the friendliest way, and offer them tea and run around seeing that they got everything that they wanted; and his wife, who was European, was very very indignant: 'How can he possibly treat his enemies [like that]? They've been trying to do him down, they've been trying to stab him in the back, and here he is offering them tea and beaming and smiling and running around for them.' She used to get very annoyed and upset, she just couldn't understand it. But he made the point - because the three of us discussed it - that they'd come to his house - yes, they were his political enemies, and yes, they had tried to do him down, but so what? They were his guests for the time being and he should treat them accordingly. In other words, he wouldn't allow a political enemy to disrupt the human connection altogether. And there seems to be some hint of that here.

So even if you see that your enemies have a certain need, fulfil that, because that will show your recognition of the fact that there is an overriding human solidarity irrespective of all disagreements. It's a bit like in time of war; at least formerly there were certain conventions, international conventions or things just generally recognised - certain things you just didn't do, even to your enemy. For instance, in the Middle Ages, if your enemy was on horseback and you dismounted him in the course of fighting, you being also on horseback - if you happened to knock him off his horse, you waited until he got back on it before continuing the fight. [Laughter] There was no such thing as total war.

In the same way, here, it would seem, there is no such thing as total enmity. And also it's as though the author of this saying regards it as the worst situation in which he rejects his enemies 'and they do without me'. They do without him; in other words, they are able to live their life, even though they're enemies, completely disregarding them. Such a state of affairs he seems to regard as completely undesirable.

Kulananda: That's strange. One would think such a state of affairs be desirable rather than undesirable.

Subhuti: That means there are no connections at all.

S: The wife of this friend of mine regarded her husband's behaviour as in a sense hypocritical. But he didn't see it like that at all, and he quite genuinely welcomed them and gave his enemy tea. I could see that. He wasn't just hiding his enmity and pretending to be friendly; on that occasion, at least, he was genuinely friendly.

Nagabodhi: George Orwell, during the war, wrote quite a few articles condemning certain uses of propaganda and rumour-mongering. For example, when communists in Italy were told that if they surrendered they would be treated well, when this was in fact a lie. He said that the saturation-bombing of German towns was preferable to this sort of thing, because false propaganda undermined the roots of human solidarity and could undermine it for ever, whereas a war is something that people see coming and going. But when people start to treat each other with absolutely no respect, then much much more serious harm is done.

Kulananda: There's a profound lack of respect in saturation bombing.

Nagabodhi: Well, yes. I'll show you the article some time.

S: So probably, inasmuch as George Orwell said that, it would mean that he was making the point even more strongly, because he would have said it's even worse than saturation bombing - and I mean he would regard saturation bombing as being pretty awful anyway.

Therefore, al-Ghazali's comment is 'If this be the attitude towards **enemies**, how then towards friends?' - if you should not be willing to disrupt the bonds of human solidarity even with enemies, what to speak of disrupting them with friends? And even between friends there can be foolish little misunderstandings and squabbles, which are obviously such a pity. One can consider - well, even within the Order, there should not be any breach at all of human solidarity. Unfortunately one does see instances of this from time to time, and Order members who are not on speaking terms for a while or who have misunderstandings. There are one or two instances in my mind at this moment, but I think I won't actually mention them - they are too regrettable even to dwell upon, otherwise ..... do something about bringing them to an end.

So one can perhaps emphasise that 'If this be the attitude towards enemies, how then towards friends?' All right the whole of that next paragraph including the little saying.

"A Muslim in the early days would see to the maintenance of his brother's wife and children for forty years after his brother's death, attending to their needs, visiting them daily, and providing for them from his wealth so that they missed only the father's person; indeed they were treated as not even by their father in his lifetime. It was known for a man to go regularly to the door of his
brother's household and enquire:
- Have you oil? Have you salt? Is there anything you need?
If anything was needed he would attend to it unbeknown to his brother."

S: The introductory little phrase here is very revealing, I think. Al-Ghazali says, 'A Muslim in the **early days**'. In the early days of what? - well, of Islam. So what does it suggest that he says, 'A Muslim in the early days'?

Abhaya: Just that it's degenerated.

S: Yes, and when is al-Ghazali's date? It's about -

Abhaya: 1066.

S: Yes, and what was the date of the Hegira?

_____: 622.

S: Yes, so it's only 400 years. There's only been four hundred years of Islam, and already someone like al-Ghazali is saying, 'A Muslim in the early days', as though there has been a degeneration, there has been a decline, and the example of the ancient worthies is being held up.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think this would be factual, or just him, you know - ?

S: Well, probably both. No doubt there was a factual element in it, but there is this tendency always to hold up the past as an ideal and to compare the present with the past unfavourably.

I haven't yet heard anybody saying in this sense: 'Ah! In the early days of the FWBO - !' That hasn't come about yet! It's usually the other way round, so far as I'm concerned, anyway.

Kulananda: One hears tales of Sukhavati in the old days, 'when men were men'!

_____: True!

S: So 'A Muslim in the early days would see to the maintenance of his brother's wife and children for **forty years** after his brother's death.' This is a very long period. It suggests long after they're grown up and have got, in the case of the children, families of their own. This does suggest a patriarchal type of family in which the father himself assumes responsibility for the whole family even after they reach adulthood themselves. Suggests a sort of joint or collective family set-up, doesn't it? Some people might think this is a little smothering.

So, 'attending to their needs, visiting them daily, and providing for them from his wealth so that they missed only the father's person; indeed they were treated as not even by their father in his lifetime.' And then he goes on to say this - now it is speaking about a brother's behaviour during the lifetime of his brother - 'It was known for a man to go regularly to the door of his brother's household and enquire: - Have you oil? Have you salt? Is there anything you need? If anything was needed he would attend to it unbeknown to his brother.'

Vajrananda: It does suggest there also that it doesn't happen any more: 'It was known.'

S: Yes. It's as though the past is being held up as an example and an incitement to the present.

That degree of concern for somebody else's welfare, and even the welfare of his dependants, is quite unusual, even quite extraordinary, nowadays. One hardly ever meets with any such thing.

Prasannasiddhi: Although I imagine there would have been something like this even in England in previous centuries.

S: Well, in some ways it was a necessity inasmuch as the various social agencies that we have now didn't exist. As I was saying the other day, in India most people are still dependent for support in their old age upon their children, because there is no such thing as an old age pension; there

is no such thing as social welfare. So if your children don't support you - or some other blood relations - you may well have to starve or to become a beggar, and just go begging from house to house, if you can't work any longer.

Abhaya: In a way, social welfare has led to a sort of impersonalisation.

S: Yes. Well, one doesn't want to idealise the past, especially the past of the early and middle industrial period, but the traditional arrangements for coping with people's needs just broke down because of the vast populations that grew up in the big new cities. There had to be some sort of as it were impersonal governmental social agency to cope with all those things. The traditional structures simply broke down under the impact of that aspect of the industrial revolution. Back in the villages from which many people came, back in the small towns, everybody was known to everybody else. If you were in need, it would be known; someone would help you. But if you migrated to the big city in search of work and you didn't get it, well, no one would know and there would be thousands, even tens of thousands of you, all suffering, all in need, all starving, all miserable. So you couldn't help one another because you were all in the same condition, and the rich just lived in another part of the city, didn't have any traditional ties with you, just didn't want to know. So the government had to intervene. Maybe a few pious or charitable individuals intervened, but that wasn't sufficient. The state had to accept the responsibility under those conditions.

Kulananda: It's interesting to see the horror in certain circles with which Mrs. Thatcher's proposals that more be thrown back on the family are being met. It's quite an interesting conflict there -

S: Well, it's all right to speak in terms of throwing people back on the family if families of that type are there and willing and able to help. And that supposes a certain ideology - a certain ideal, even; a certain mental attitude at least. People no longer regard even their old parents as their responsibility, whereas in India still they do. But even in India, some people don't. Even in former times, there were children who neglected their parents; that wasn't unknown. But the general ethos has always been - well, in all traditional societies, I think - that the children should support their parents. Though I think, under modern conditions - especially conditions of housing, where you don't even have room, perhaps - children would regard their parents as a burden and certainly not wish them to live with them.

Kuladeva: I think this whole thing about retirement benefit is going to be a problem confronting the FWBO in about 20 years' time or so, given that we don't pay National Insurance contributions in a co-op. Because, given the steady decline of the economy - and also there's just the whole change in production, away from a labour-intensive economy to a capital- intensive - it means that there's going to be a hell of a lot of people out of work probably at the end of the century. And I shouldn't imagine that there's any guarantee that people who haven't paid National Insurance contributions will be supported by the state in, say, 20 or 30 years' time, because I don't think there can be any guarantee.

S: Well, we'll just have to go on working. That wouldn't be a bad thing, anyway! Why should we think in terms of retirement? Not if you're doing the sort of work that we are. If you're physically incapable, well that's another matter, and perhaps under those circumstances the state would look after you. But I think the idea should be to carry on working until we drop - working in one way or another. It need not be something very physically active. You may just be around and talking with younger people and giving the benefit of your advice and experience.

Kuladeva: I wasn't so much thinking in terms of not being active at all in any way, but just that as people get older they'll be less capable of being of any value in terms of economic production. Therefore there will be a lot of older Order members in 20-30 years' time.

S: Their production is of a different kind.

Kuladeva: Yes, they will be producing, in a different way, yes; but they'll still need to be supported to do the kind of work that they will be doing.

S: Well, people will just have to share. Those who are working and earning in any way will have to cut down on their needs and share with the older people who are not earning. There's probably always room for that.

Abhaya: You'll be all right, Devaraja! (Laughter.)

S: Especially with all these stalwart young men he's got in Brighton. They'll probably be caring for him like anything!

Devaraja: There are issues - perhaps they're not very prominent issues at the present time, but I sometimes think I'd like to be able to - I mean one day one of my parents is going to cop it, and that's going to leave either my mother or my father on their own. I feel that I want to be able to look after them, not just to leave them isolated in some sort of -

S: Well, it depends very much on their particular situation, because my mother lives on her own; but luckily she's got very good neighbours on both sides of the house, and they're in and out all the time and they help with her shopping and do everything that is needed. At the same time, she herself is physically quite active and can do everything within the home.

But then that is a question - well, supposing one's parents, or a parent, is isolated. What degree of responsibility does one have? No doubt at least one has the responsibility to keep up some kind of contact. But if it comes to weighing that against, say, one's work for the Movement, what criterion shall one adopt? It isn't easy then. I think for an Order member the principle is don't give any more hostages to fortune than is absolutely necessary. Because, all right, supposing you've got a wife; supposing you've got children. Well, if at the time of becoming an Order member you've had them, there's not very much you can do about that. But if after becoming an Order member you take on those responsibilities - responsibilities which may well, sooner or later, conflict with your responsibilities as an Order member - that's quite another matter. And, after all, parents are a responsibility that - well, surely you're born with parents [Laughter] , so there's nothing you can [do] - well, unless you're an orphan .... in a manner of speaking.

Prasannasiddhi: You might only have one parent, and she may even die after a year or two.

S: So you have some responsibilities, in most cases, already, which you can hardly ignore - certainly not ignore altogether. So as an Order member you should think very seriously, to say the least, before taking on yourself extra responsibilities which may well conflict with your

responsibilities as an Order member.

Anyway, let's pass on. The comment is: 'If anything was needed he would attend to it unbeknown to his brother.' Well, you don't always have to make known to the other person that you are helping them. Sometimes you can help them quite unobtrusively. All right, let's carry on then.

"This is how brotherhood and compassion are shown. If a man does not manifest compassion towards his brother in the same degree as to himself, then there is no goodness in it.

Maymun ibn Mahran said:
- If you reap no benefit from a man's friendship his enmity will not hurt you.
God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:
- Surely God has vessels on His earth, namely our hearts. And the vessels dearest to God (Exalted is He!) are the purest and strongest and finest: purest from sins, strongest in the Faith, finest towards their brothers."

S: So 'This is how brotherhood and compassion are shown. If a man does not manifest compassion towards his brother in the same degree as to himself, then there is no goodness in it.' At least you must treat your brother in the same way that you treat yourself. I think in this chapter the degrees - though there is mention of different degrees at the beginning, a mention of the lowest degree - the different degrees of rendering personal aid aren't so clearly differentiated. But here it does seem that you are placing your brother at least on an equality with yourself.

Then Maymun ibn Mahran is quoted as saying: 'If you reap no benefit from a man's friendship, his enmity will not hurt you.' Do you think this is altogether true? Or true unconditionally?

Kulananda: I don't understand it.

S: Well, it could be understood as saying if you don't reap any benefit from someone's friendship then losing that friendship will not result in the loss of any benefit and so it will not hurt you. It could be taken in that way.

Kulananda: But then could it have been friendship in the first place?

S: But on the other hand, if you take it as meaning - 'if you reap no benefit from a man's friendship his enmity will not hurt you' - that is to say, 'If you cease to be friends with him he is incapable of harming you at all in any respect' - well, that would not be true. One can take it, I think, in either way.

So 'God's Messenger said' - Muhammad said - '- Surely God has vessels on His earth, namely our hearts. And the vessels dearest to God are the purest and strongest and finest: purest from sins, strongest in the Faith, finest towards their brothers.' This seems to be very, very general. Anyway, let's carry on.

"In short, your brother's need ought to be like your own, or even more important than your own. You should be on the watch for times of need, not neglecting his situation any more than you would your own. You should see that he does not have to ask, nor to reveal his need to appeal for help. Rather should you attend to it as if you did not know that you had done so. You should not see yourself as having earned any right by virtue of what you have done, but rather count it a blessing that he accepts your effort on his behalf and your attention to his affair. You should not confine yourself to satisfying his need, but try from the start to be even more generous, to prefer him and put him before relatives and children."

S: This is rather more comprehensive, isn't it? 'In short, your brother's need ought to be **like** your own, or **even** more important than your own.' This does suggest a kind of difference of degrees. In the one case you regard your brother's need as being as important as your own need, as the same as your own need, but in the second case you regard it as being even more important than your own - in other words, you give preference to your brother's need. That would seem to represent a higher degree. 'You should be on the **watch** for times of need, not neglecting his situation any more than you would your own.' Well, in the case of an ordinary person who is looking after, say, his own family and his own affairs, he's always on the watch in case some need may arise. He thinks of the future, he provides for the future. So the brother should take the same sort of attitude towards the needs of his own brother, being watchful and farsighted, so to speak, on his behalf. 'You should be on the watch for times of need, not neglecting his situation any more than you would your own.' For instance, you see that there's going to be a bad harvest; well, you lay up something not only for yourself but for your brother too. 'You should see that he does not have to ask, nor to **reveal** his need to appeal for help. Rather should you attend to it as if you did not know that you had done so' - with no self-consciousness about helping; do it as a perfectly natural thing. Not that you shouldn't be aware or mindful of what you are doing, but you are not overly conscious of it, you don't make much of it; you don't, in fact, make anything of it.

'You should not see yourself as having earned any **right** by virtue of what you have done, but rather count it a blessing that he accepts your effort on his behalf and your attention to his affair.' This is rather like what we were talking about formerly in the case of the Indians' attitude to hospitality. One shouldn't claim any credit for one's .....

'You should not confine yourself to satisfying his need, but try from the start to be even more generous' - not just giving him exactly what he needs - giving a bit more, a bit extra - 'to prefer him and put him before relatives and children.' So here again the brother is put before relatives and children. And there's a reason given for this, which is quite important. Would someone like to read that next little anecdote.

"Al-Hasan used to say:
- Our brothers are dearer to us than our families and our children, because our families remind us of this world while our brothers remind us of the Other."

S: 'The Other' with a capital O means the Other World, or even the Other in the sense of the Transcendental. Sometimes, I think, Allah in Islamic tradition is referred to as the Other. 'The Other' refers to everything that pertains to religion.

There is something of this sort of contrast in Pali, in the *Dhammapada* - 'here' and 'there', or 'this shore' and 'the other shore'. But do you think this is true? - that 'families remind us of this world while our brothers remind us of the Other'?

[End of side one side two]

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps there's an element of truth in it, or a degree of truth.

S: The question is, how big a degree?

Kulananda: By definition, if by 'brother' one means 'spiritual friend'.

S: Yes. Because one doesn't have any necessary spiritual bond with one's family. Well, there is a biological bond, of course, but it isn't necessarily a spiritual bond, though it sometimes may become such.

Kuladeva: It seems to be more incidental rather than inherent in the family relationship.

S: Yes. So would you agree with this, that inasmuch as our families remind us of the world while our brothers remind us of the Other, our brother should be dearer to us than our families and we should even give preference? How would that work out? It goes against current wisdom, or at least current practice, doesn't it? Families might not accept it.

Abhaya: It goes against the idea that charity begins at home, too, doesn't it?

Kulananda: It depends where home is.

S: Or what home is.

Subhuti: Home is where your heart is. (Laughter.)

Nagabodhi: Is it that in forming a friendship - a brotherhood friendship - you are not using any of the unconscious tendencies and needs? It is a definite expansion of consciousness.

S: It's a more truly human act.

Nagabodhi: I mean, is it taking you closer to the transcendence of the self-other dichotomy? Is that the crux of it?

S: Because in a way your family is an extension of yourself, in a - what shall I say? - in an unconscious sense, a group sense. Whereas if you

speak of your brother as an extension of yourself - if you use that language at all - in a rather different sort of sense.

Kulananda: I was quite shocked recently with my family to realise that they actually believed in ties of the blood. They actually thought that because I was related that there should be some kind of connection which I should experience with them.

S: Well, I think in a sense there should be, and there normally is, but it's also true that that tie can be superseded. But I think one is in quite a dangerous state if one doesn't recognise ties of the blood and one is not bound by any tie which supersedes ties of the blood. In other words, you are just being as it were selfish and individualistic. Do you see what I mean?

Tejamitra: What he's talking about here is actually quite a high degree of perhaps commitment of some sort.

S: Also, the person who is speaking, as a Muslim, presumably regards the family as important. It is not that he is saying, 'The family is unimportant, it's brotherhood that is important'; he is saying, 'Yes, the family is very important, yes, the family is the foundation of ordinary society, but brotherhood is even more important.' It's not that you are simply depreciating the family - you continue to give that its measure of recognition - but you recognise also that the needs of brotherhood go far beyond that.

So it's as though one is justified in negating the ties of family only in the interest of something of a higher nature - something, say, represented by the word brotherhood or *kalyana mitrata*; not just out of selfishness and indifference.

So perhaps, maybe in your case, as in many others, inasmuch as the family isn't able to appreciate that higher ideal, your as it were neglect of them appears to be just indifference and selfishness. Because they can't imagine, or they can't envisage, the claims of a higher kind of bond.

Kulananda: It also went a bit further than that. The idea was that I should simply appreciate being with them and appreciate seeing them in itself, without the need for any communication - that somehow mere physical presence satisfied the blood demand, as it were. That was all that was required. One didn't have to communicate or relate in any way. But there was this tie, which was enough - sufficient unto itself.

S: Well, that is perhaps true at an infantile level, but as one becomes an adult, it's no longer sufficient. Unless one remains, even as an adult, on the infantile level.

Again, there is this saying, or this statement, in an Indian Hindu orthodox text, to the effect that - addressing the father - when your son becomes 16 years of age, cease to regard him as a son and regard him as a friend. So obviously friendship is something to be cultivated. So if you want to regard your son as a friend, you've got to work at it, as with any other friend.

Abhaya: Where does that come from?

S: It is one of the Dharmasastras, but I'm not quite sure which one -

Abhaya: Hindu?

S: It might even be the Manusastra, which despite the fact that it was burned by Dr. Ambedkar, it does contain a few sayings which are worth preserving. It is rather a mixed work, in fact, with some deplorable parts - in fact, very deplorable parts - and other parts which are in fact quite useful.

It's a question of priorities, it's a question of a scale of values, a hierarchy of values. I think the point here is not that the family is being depreciated but that brotherhood is being appreciated even more highly. I don't think blood ties can be negated so easily - well, that is to say when one has been actually brought up by one's biological parents - because one is often emotionally tied up with one's parents, and one has to have some attitude towards them, it's unavoidable, and if it isn't a positive one it'll only be a negative one, so therefore one is obliged to develop a positive one, even in the interests of one's own spiritual development.

I don't think it is possible for one's parents to be just like any other people, assuming that you were actually brought up by them and weren't separated from them at birth. I don't think it's realistic to adopt the attitude that now you're grown up they are just like any other people. I don't think that is so, whether one recognises it or not.

So you've got to do something about your parents. Whether you actually see them or not is another matter, but at least psychologically you've got to do something about them, especially if your relationship with them or attitude towards them is a psychologically negative one, or emotionally negative one.

Anyway, al-Hasan has something more to say.

"Al-Hasan also said:
- If a man stands by his brother to the end, then on the Day of Resurrection God will send angels from beneath His Throne to escort him to the Garden of Paradise."

S: This is elaborating in Islamic mythological terms, you might say, the importance and value of brotherhood. Brotherhood leads to the Garden of Paradise. In other words, brotherhood is invested with a highly religious and spiritual significance.

Kulananda: Isn't there something in the Western tradition? I think maybe you mentioned this to me, Prasannasiddhi - friendship and angels.

Subhuti: There's Johnson.

Kulananda: Was that it? How did that go?

S: Johnson's *Ode to Friendship*.

Prasannasiddhi: *To men and angels only given....*

S: *To all the lower world denied*. Yes, '*Friendship, peculiar boon of heaven*' - I forget what the second line is - 'something something pride.' *'To men and angels only given, To all the lower worlds denied.*'

But I think I have quoted in a previous seminar what follows immediately afterwards, where an angel is mentioned:

"Tradition tells that whenever a man visits a brother, longing to meet him, an angel calls out from behind him:
- You have done well, and it shall be well for you in the Garden of Paradise!"

I have quoted this on some seminar on some occasion, so some echo of that might have reached you.

Abhaya: Incidentally, what's the Islamic belief about the after-life and angels, and that sort of thing?

S: Well, you could say there's an exoteric one and an esoteric one, though it is interesting here that belief in angels is one of the basic doctrinal requirements of Islam. There's belief in God, there's belief in his Prophet, there's belief in the Last Day - the Day of Judgement, and there's belief in Heaven and Hell, and there is belief in angels. I think these are the five basic - I think it's five - basic requirements. That's rather interesting.

Abhaya: What about the Jinns?

S: The Jinns seem to be figures in popular belief, but Muslims sometimes speak of them as *fallen* angels. But actually the fact that Islam recognises belief in angels as a fundamental doctrinal position has vast repercussions for Islamic thought right down to the present. This is a very, very important point indeed, because it provides for the existence of a whole hierarchy of intermediate intelligences between man and Allah, and therefore reinforces the whole hierarchical conception of existence. I can't go into this in detail, but as I say it has got vast implications, vast ramifications over the whole of Islamic thought, especially that which is - well, perhaps more especially Shi'a thought, and various forms of Islamic gnosticism.

And there is also a link-up with Neoplatonism and the doctrine of emanations. There is also a link-up with Zoroastrianism, with Mazdeism. So this is much more important and significant than one might have thought. Angels do figure quite prominently in Islam, because one probably remembers that, according to Islamic tradition, it was the archangel Gabriel who brought the revelation of the Koran to Muhammad.

So the figure of the Angel, or angels in general, is very prominent in the Islamic tradition throughout. So 'Tradition tells that whenever a man visits a brother, **longing to meet him**' - maybe this clause is important - 'an angel calls out from behind him: - You have done well, and it shall be well for you in the Garden of Paradise!' In other words, in going to visit your brother, and longing to meet him, you are in fact doing something

which is of the highest spiritual significance. This is what it in fact means. In other words, brotherhood is of the highest spiritual significance, and in fulfilling the duties of brotherhood you are doing something of the highest spiritual significance. Fulfilling the duties of brotherhood is an essentially human, and therefore at the same time essentially a spiritual act. So an angel follows you behind, so to speak - that's a poetic way of putting it. One could of course take it literally.

Kulananda: I suppose it implies the communication will be of a higher order.

S: One of the functions of the angel, of course, is to be a messenger, an intermediary; therefore a symbol of communication. Anyway, let's press on.

"Ata said:
- Seek out your brothers after three occasions. If they are sick, visit them. If they are busy, help them. If they have forgotten, remind them."

S: This, one could say, is directly applicable to the situation within a community, or within the Order generally: 'Seek out your brothers after three occasions. If they are sick, visit them.' Not just take them a bunch of flowers, of course, but maybe help nurse them. 'If they are busy, help them' - especially if they're a busy chairman! 'If they have forgotten, remind them.' If they have forgotten - not just anything of material significance, but any spiritual duty, any particular quality that they should be cultivating and developing, remind them of it.

Subhuti: I think it also means remind them of the friendship. Is that an implication?

S: Yes, well anything of a skilful nature that they might have forgotten, including no doubt the friendship itself.

Subhuti: Well, that's important - that you don't, just because they haven't contacted you, you don't just wait for them to contact you, you remind them.

S: Right, yes, yes.

"It is related that Ibn Umar was looking about to right and left in the presence of God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!), who asked the reason. He replied:
- There is someone dear to me and I am searching for him, but do not see him.

- If you love someone, ask his name, his father's name, and where he lives, then if he is sick, visit him, and if he is busy, help him.
(Another version adds the words, '... and the name of his grandfather and that of his tribe.')"

S: So the second part of the incident is Muhammad's comment. He says, 'If you love someone, ask his name, his father's name etc.' - because it

seems Ibn Umar was looking for someone, searching for someone who was dear to him, but did not see him. He didn't know where to look. In other words, he had not ascertained who that person actually was, he may have just seen him in passing, or just had a chat with him without actually inquiring his name.

So Muhammad is saying: if there is someone who is dear to you, you should inform yourself about him, find out what his name is, his father's name, where he lives, so that you can track him down, so that you can go and visit him when he is sick; know where he is, what he is doing, otherwise you can't give expression to your sense of brotherhood. I don't know to what extent this depends upon conditions at the time. Don't forget many of these people were nomads. You would need to know someone's father's name, even grandfather's name and the name of his tribe, to be able to track him down. Houses weren't numbered, and there were no streets, probably - well, in many cases there were probably only tents in some cases, which could move from place to place.

So if you really want to be friends with somebody, if you really want to follow it up, you must inform yourself about the person concerned. That seems to be the point of the anecdote, and that is enlarged upon in what follows.

"Al-Sha'bi said of a man who keeps the company of another, then says he knows his face but not his name:
- That is the knowledge of fools."

S: In other words, you've not taken the trouble to find out about him properly. You've met him, you've had a pleasant conversation, you've liked him, but at the end of it you haven't said, 'By the way, what's your name? Where do you live?' That sort of knowledge, simply to know the person's face, is the knowledge of fools.

Kulananda: It also implies you need to go into people's background a bit, to know them, to find out about their family and how they live.

S: Otherwise you won't know what their needs might be. Let's carry on then.

"Ibn Abbas was asked:
- Who is the dearest of men to you?
- One who sits in my company, he replied."

S: What does that suggest?

Kulananda: Someone who shares his outlook, perhaps; who can share his world in some way.

S: To me it seems to run counter to the attitude of *'The grass is greener on the other side of the fence.'* Don't think, 'Oh, if I only had a friend like this or like that, or if only So-and-so was with me, then I could be a real friend' - no, treat the person who is actually with you at this time, at this moment, as your friend. It's only too easy to say, 'Ah, well, if only the people in my community were a bit better than they are, a bit more

positive in their attitude, then perhaps I could develop a real friendship with them.' No, you're landed in that community with those very people; those are the people you've got to work with and work on.

Or even if you just happen to be landed with some boring person, on a bus or something, and he insists on talking to you - well, make the best of it. Don't be thinking of the wonderful conversations you could be having with somebody else. This is what is implied here, isn't it? Deal with the situation in hand, make the most of it. Make the most of the person with whom you actually are. So long as you are together, treat him as a friend and as a brother to the fullest extent that you can.

Devaraja: It's also sort of saying that giving yourself completely to them, ...

S: Yes, that's true -

Devaraja: - not kind of thinking, 'Oh, I wish So-and-so was here', and -

S: Yes, yes, yes. It's very easy to do that - to begrudge having to spend time with certain people when circumstances do bring that about.

Kuladeva: The same thing can apply to class situations, when people coming along are not the sort of people who might -

S: Yes. They don't seem brilliant and they don't seem inspired, and they're a bit difficult and they've got a few problems; well, they're the people you've got to deal with. You've got to give yourself fully to that situation. It would be wonderful to have brilliant, positive people, but if you haven't got them you have to make the best of the situation, work as hard as you can with the people you actually have. People can change, anyway.

I think it was a little interesting in connection with Tuscany, in connection with assigning Mitras to Order members: I won't say there was competition for certain Mitras, but I do believe that in some cases at least - well, everybody knows what I mean, maybe I won't -

Subhuti: I don't know what you mean!

S: .....

Vajrananda: And you were there!

Subhuti: Was I?

S: I am referring to this year.

Vajrananda: Oh, this year.

S: Maybe I can go on with that. Some Mitras are really popular: they're young, bright, blue-eyed, golden-haired, really on the ball, very kind, helpful, co-operative, all sorts of skills - a bit of money, too! [Laughter] But if the Mitra is a bit old, a bit argumentative, a bit difficult, always asks the wrong questions, always wants to see you at the wrong time, wants to go for a walk when you want to meditate, and pesters you generally - he's on the whole a rather unattractive personality: there's not much competition for being his *kalyana mitra*! [Laughter] This is putting it rather strongly, of course, but there is an element of truth in it.

Maybe on future occasions, Order members should just draw lots.

Devaraja: The short straw!

S: So in a way this is quite Zen-like, one could say: 'Who is the dearest of men to you? - One who sits in my company, he replied.'

Kulananda: Very noble, but one also thinks of the idea that one can only have two or three people whom one can really call friends. And it might seem to contradict that.

S: But none the less it means make the best of the opportunities that you actually have. If you cannot be with the person whom you would most like to be with, or whose company you regard as most productive, don't for that reason refuse to do your best with and for the people that you are, so to speak, actually landed with.

Devaraja: It's really practical, this section, really good.

S: All right, there's another saying - in fact two more sayings by the same person. Let's have those.

"He also said:
- If someone sits in my company three times without having need of me, I learn where he is placed in the world."

S: Mm, that's rather mysterious. What do you think that means? 'If someone sits in my company **three times without having need of me**, I learn where he is placed in the world.' I can think of one possible explanation, but it may not be the right one.

Vajrananda: Is it so that he can go and make sure that he is of some use to him, goes and finds out where he is. Is that - ?

Kulananda: That's one possibility.

S: No, I don't think grammatically it would bear that interpretation. It could mean - 'I know where he is placed in the world' - 'I know what his

position is, I know what his mental and spiritual state is' - that is to say someone without needs; it could mean that. If I can have someone sitting in my company three times and he doesn't manifest any need, then I can take it that he is in a quite high spiritual position. The words could be taken to mean that, though whether that is the actual meaning I can't be sure.

Kulananda: Could it mean someone who isn't capable of being a brother because he can't ask for help in any way?

S: A brother doesn't need to ask for help. It is a bit mysterious, isn't it?

Nagabodhi: Could it be that his attention to somebody is so great that after even three fairly casual acquaintances he's seen absolutely everything there is to see, at least in those terms?

S: Yes - yes -

Subhuti: Yes, it's as if it's saying, 'Even without having need of me, I learn where he is placed in the world'.

S: Does it say 'even'?

Subhuti: No, I mean that's understood, if you read that in that sense.

S: Yes, if he sits with me three times and there is no mention of his needing money, there's no mention of his needing advice, there's no mention of his needing any material thing, then I learn where he is placed in the world. I know that he is a man without needs, or at least a man who feels no need for anything. Perhaps it could mean something like that. But it isn't completely clear, is it? Not at least unambiguously clear. It may, of course, depend on the translation - the translation may not be bringing out the force of the Arabic clearly.

"Sa'id ibn al-As said:
- I owe my sitting-companion three things: on his approach I greet him; on his arrival I make him welcome; when he sits I make him comfortable."

S: I wonder what the expression 'sitting-companion' means, because there has been the expression before - 'one who sits in my company', and then 'someone sits in my company'. But 'sitting-companion' - it's probably just an idiom in Arabic. Someone who comes and sits beside you. On a divan, perhaps, or maybe on the carpet.

Nagabodhi: My experience of Islamic countries, for what it's worth, is that men do seem to spend an awful lot of time just sitting around together.

S: In cafés and so on.

Nagabodhi: Yes, playing with their beads, and playing backgammon, spending hours.

S: And is 'sitting-companion' to be distinguished from 'brother'? Presumably it is. So 'I owe my sitting-companion three things. On his approach I greet him.' This seems to be considered quite important in all traditional societies - the greeting of a new arrival in the appropriate manner. Tibetans - Tibetan Buddhists - are very particular about this, the way they greet you. Why do you think this is important, let's say psychologically perhaps, that you greet someone?

Abhaya: Well, the other person definitely feels recognised -

S: Feels recognised -

Abhaya: - and accepted.

S: A contact is established. We have discussed this in the past on a number of occasions, in the context of people newly arriving at Centres, and perhaps not being welcomed, and people at Centres not knowing, even, not being sure how to welcome the new arrival. I think that is to some extent a thing of the past now, but it does still seem to apply to some extent in communities, people not being always properly welcomed. Someone arrives, and he's just left standing there; no one takes much notice. It's almost in some cases as though it's a left-over from the hippy era when you behave in this frightfully cool sort of way - everyone is supposed to be at home instantly, to feel at home instantly.

Devaraja: I think it's because people in those days were too paralysed to get up - they were stoned out of their heads! [Laughter]

S: It was supposed, I believe, in those days - in fact I witnessed it to some extent - to be very uncool to greet anyone or to ask them to sit down or even to ask them if they wanted a cup of coffee, because they were supposed, if they wanted a cup of coffee, just to wander into the kitchen and make it themselves.

But speech is important in human relations, and it's important to be explicit and actually to greet people. People on the continent have in some respects quite different manners and customs from at least some people in England; especially, I believe, in the northern European countries. My experience has been that very often people meeting you announce their names and shake you by the hand vigorously, both when they meet you and when they part from you.

Devaraja: I noticed this on the Convention - I think it was the one before last. You were doing a Question and Answer session, and - perhaps it was with people who were thinking in terms of being meditation class leaders and so on later on. But I noticed that everybody was sitting down and just firing questions at you, but the only person who stood up was - I think it was Gunavati, from Finland.

S: Ah, yes -

Devaraja: She stood up and, if I remember, she identified herself. And I remember that really struck me at the time how lax everybody had been, but she -

S: Mm, mm. So first of all there's greeting. 'On his arrival I make him welcome.' You don't just say hello, you actually make him welcome, by inquiring after his health, the health of his family, and friends and dependants, and maybe just inviting him to be seated and so on. 'And when he sits I make him comfortable.' Well, no details are given, but maybe you make sure he's got some refreshments, or - this being an Islamic context - a hookah or hubble-bubble or whatever, ..., or a plate of sweets. But the spirit is very clear, isn't it?

So this is only with regard to the sitting-companion, not to speak of the brother, who seems to be someone even more important.

All right, let's complete this chapter, then. There's a quotation from the Koran coming now.

"God (Exalted is He!) said:
- Full of mercy one to another. (Qu'ran 48.29)

These words point to compassion and generous treatment."

S: One has got to find, no doubt, a Koranic authority for all this, but it's of a very general nature, as in the case of the last chapter. Not that the saying itself isn't a good saying, but [Laughter] it doesn't quite cover in detail whatever has been discussed in this particular chapter. All right, someone read the last paragraph then.

"Part of complete compassion is not to partake in solitude of delicious food, nor to enjoy alone an occasion of happiness; rather should the brother's absence be distressing and the separation sad."

S: Mm. There's a parallel sentiment expressed in Buddhist literature, isn't there? 'Part of complete compassion is not to partake in solitude of delicious food'. In the *Sigalovada Sutta*, dealing with the relations between employer and employee, the Buddha says the employer should not enjoy any delicacy by himself but should share it with his dependants. Do you remember that? It's the same kind of general sentiment - not enjoying something alone, in this case, regardless of the brother.

'Nor to enjoy alone an occasion of happiness. Rather should the brother's absence be distressing and the separation sad.' If there is something to be enjoyed, you should at once think of sharing it with your brother, whether it's money you've come into, or whether it's a book you've read, something good that you've discovered, or just something to eat.

Even in ordinary social life, if someone goes and buys himself maybe a bar of chocolate, and just sits there and works his way steadily through the whole bar and doesn't offer anybody a piece, it isn't looked upon with any favour, is it, that sort of behaviour? It doesn't increase the bonds

of human solidarity. It's like an animal - an animal does this very often: it seizes hold of a piece of meat and rushes away into a corner, and snarls at anyone who tries to approach, and does its best to gobble it all quickly before anybody else can take it away. So human beings shouldn't behave like that.

Kuladeva: It does seem to be the prevailing attitude in this country, though.

S: Do you think so?

Kuladeva: I think just - maybe not among intimates and people who are established as friends, but it was something that I did definitely notice when I was in Italy, that if people were eating on a train they would generally - regardless of whether they knew the other people in the carriage or not - ask them if they wanted some.

S: We'd better be prepared, hadn't we?

Kuladeva: I was also speaking to some Indian people recently who live in the same building as me, and they were saying that when they first noticed people eating on their own, they thought it was really bad manners.

S: Yes, in India, if someone is visiting you, you wouldn't think of getting on with your meal without inviting them to share it. It would be unthinkable. If you hadn't enough to go round, you might just postpone your meal, or you might invite them to share - or you might just give it to them and not have any yourself; but you certainly wouldn't just sit there eating when guests were present and not taking part in it - it's quite unthinkable. Unless - well, I was going to say unless you were a haughty brahmin type, but in that case you'd be unlikely to have people of lower caste near you at that particular time anyway.

Indians don't share food usually when travelling, for caste reasons, but that is an exceptional circumstance - one might say the caste system comes in the way of their natural generosity, or at least channels it in a particular way.

Anyway, we've gone through, now, this chapter - 'The second duty is to render personal aid in the satisfaction of needs, attending to them' - that is to say one's brothers - 'without waiting to be asked, and giving them priority over private needs.' The grades aren't clearly distinguished, but I think you can make them out more or less - or the degrees, the different degrees aren't very clearly distinguished, but they can be made out.

Any additional point about that before we share a cup of tea, or coffee?

Prasannasiddhi: The last point about not enjoying alone an occasion of happiness - that's quite interesting.

S: Yes, it's not just food.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe someone sitting alone in their bedroom playing the stereo or something like that ..... Well, that seems to include anything you do, virtually. If you are setting out to enjoy yourself and you are going to do it alone -

S: (interrupting) Or some enjoyment just befalls you.

[End of Tape 4 Tape 5]

S: ..... [Tea Break discussion] .....- or 'angelology', as it's called, far beyond -

Prakasha: More so than Christianity?

S: Oh yes, yes. Especially in the more philosophical sense. I believe in one school, as far as I remember, angels are identified with the ideas of Plato.

Prakasha: Do they have the same sort of series of hierarchies - nine - is it nine?

S: Actually I believe there's ten in Islam. And in some schools of thought the Gabriel is the tenth and lowest, and represents the common soul of the human race. There are many interesting speculations on that sort of thing.

Prasannasiddhi: It's quite rich - what I've seen in terms of art, with the angels, it's quite a rich area.

S: There is some information in that book called *Angels*, which you might have seen. I've got a copy of it.

Prakasha: Do they get depicted in Islamic art?

S: Oh yes, oh yes. But I think - I'm not quite sure, I'm guessing a bit here - I think the iconography of the angel in Islam is derived from Graeco-Roman sources, because in Graeco-Roman art there are a number of winged figures. I think they were taken over both by the Islamic tradition and also by Christianity, to represent angels.

[BREAK IN RECORDING - END OF SESSION?]

[Next Session]

S: ..... of this work and it's devoted to the duty of holding one's tongue, but it's only one of two chapters dealing with the tongue, because the third duty is holding one's tongue, the fourth duty is speaking out. So we see that out of eight duties, two are concerned with speech which is rather interesting. This parallels the fact perhaps that in the case of the ten silas no less than four of them are concerned with speech. This also

indicates the importance of speech in human life and even in ethical and spiritual life.

The other day I was editing for translation and publication in *Buddhayan* a talk which I gave in a locality in Ahmedabad and I was talking about the right use of the vihara in very elementary terms, for the benefit of people who had just built a vihara. So one of the things I was saying at one stage was that it was very difficult to actually break the precepts while in the vihara, except for one precept and that was the precept relating to speech or precepts relating to speech. It was quite easy to break those in the vihara. I said you couldn't very easily take life in the vihara and you couldn't easily steal and it wasn't very convenient even to commit adultery [Laughter] and so on, but you might well break all the speech precepts when you were in the vihara, especially by gossiping, even if you didn't actually tell a lie, by gossiping, and I said that because just before the meeting started there's been an absolutely deafening outburst of gossiping. Were you there? Oh yes, from the ladies. Do you remember this? Oh yes. There were 500 of them jammed into this vihara, the men on this occasion were looking in through the windows with the boys, and their noise was absolutely deafening. It almost made one ill to sit there on the platform hearing this. It was thunderous! So I referred to it in the case of my talk and you'll be glad to hear that when editing my lecture I added a footnote on the subject of the gossiping tendencies of women and the need for organisers to ensure that, for the sake of the speaker, so to speak, you didn't get this mass of women occupying the whole vihara and the men just stooping in through the doors and windows. That things should be otherwise arranged. [Laughter] So speech is really very important. Speech really does need four whole precepts to cover it. It's so ubiquitous.

Prasannasiddhi: What does the term 'Vihara' exactly mean?

S: Among the ex-Untouchables it's just a Buddhist meeting place, but it's usually a room or a hall, large or small with an image of the Buddha at one end and a sort of shrine, just like we have here. They have to be restrained from in a way using it for all purposes, because formerly they had a sort of caste meeting place. Some of these caste meeting places have been turned into viharas, where they just did everything. They'd celebrate weddings and they'd have caste meetings and they'd worship their old deities and so on, so our emphasis is on trying to keep the vihara for puja, for dharma study and discussion and religious celebrations, but not to use it just to meet and gossip and read newspapers and all the rest of it. A place where the women foregather and gossip. But they really are dreadful, the womenfolk in India among the ex-Untouchables in this respect. Almost all meetings are disturbed, especially large meetings, are disturbed by several hundred women sort of gossiping at the same time. They just lose interest in the lecture. Their capacity for sustained attention is very limited and they just start gossiping among themselves and it grows and grows and more and more women start gossiping and in the end the sound of the gossip drowns the speaker's voice and then the men raise shouts of protest and say, 'Keep quiet, keep quiet', the women by that time are talking and gossiping so loudly they don't hear these shouts and one or the organisers has to bellow through the microphone, 'Women, keep quiet! Stop talking!', and if he shouts very very loudly and the men in the audience shout, women sort of hear this and they look up with some surprise, 'oh, he means us, oh we're talking!' and then they gradually subside like the clucking of chickens gradually subsiding, and then the lecture continues.

I don't care what the feminists say but on this occasion you do get the impression that women are a different breed. Even making allowance for lack of education, that isn't really the excuse there because a lot of the men there are not educated - they're illiterate just like the women, but they do pay attention, they are interested. The women very easily are distracted and start gossiping. They just want to be there and to do their own thing as it were. They just like to be there and enjoy the group atmosphere but they don't really want very often to pay attention to what is being

said. They don't want to understand in the way that the men do. Almost always you find that the men in these audiences, they really want to understand. They are finding it quite difficult, especially the older men. They sit there with their brows knitted, they're trying hard to follow. You don't find the women doing that usually, only in very rare instances. You do get the impression of almost two different breeds, two different species, so I think some of our feminist friends or feminist sympathizers in this country ought to be able to experience these occasions. I think it might be a bit of an eye opener to them, because it's as though the women reveal themselves in almost their true colours on these occasions. They don't keep up any pretence of being interested, they're just not interested, not in that way, not in actually what is being said about the dharma - they're only interested in it as a social occasion. After ten minutes they get bored with the lecture and they just start gossiping among themselves. This happens almost invariably especially at bigger meetings. I had very few meetings where this sort of interruption did not take place, hence my footnote to this particular lecture, where things really got out of hand. Not so much in the course of the meeting, the course of the lecture, but beforehand. It was totally inappropriate behaviour. Anyway enough said.

"3

***The third duty** concerns the tongue, which should sometimes be silent and at other times speak out.*
As for silence, the tongue should mention a brother's faults in his absence or his presence. Rather should you feign ignorance. You should not contradict him when he talks nor dispute him or argue with him. You should not pry and quiz him about his affairs. On seeing him in the street or about some business, you should not start a conversation about the object of your coming and going, nor ask him about his, for perhaps it would be troublesome to him to discuss it, or he may have to lie about it." [Laughter]

S: So 'As for silence', let's go through these one by one, 'the tongue should not mention the brother's faults in his absence or his presence.' Obviously a brother's faults shouldn't be spoken of in his absence. With perhaps certain exceptions which we could mention. Or his presence. Presumably in his presence means when other people are present too. Not when you are bringing something to his attention that he needs to do something about. The only sort of exception is for instance as when say Order Members are discussing a Mitra's readiness for ordination. They may have to mention certain faults that the Mitra concerned should pay attention to and work upon, but it is very important that that is relayed to the Mitra himself, so that it doesn't just become talking about him.

Vajrananda: Is that the only occasion when one should mention a brother's faults?

S: Or perhaps when someone is being considered for a particular job or responsibility. You might say well he's not quite suited for such and such reason. That's not exactly a question of his faults, maybe it's more a question of lack of skills or knowledge. I think one should be very very cautious about this and maybe not admit too many exceptions. It even goes so far as to say, 'Rather should you feign ignorance' - feign, pretend almost that you just don't know about those faults. This is again rather opposed to our everything up front sort of attitude that we've imbibed perhaps from some forms of psychotherapy. Again I remember among Tibetan Buddhists, this is regarded as the proper behaviour, not just to speak about people's faults or shortcomings - again this was a subject of disagreement between my Sikkimese friend and his European wife. She believed in dragging everything out into the open and sort of shaming and disgracing people publicly wherever possible. He felt this just wasn't on - No, no you might know something about someone, you might know that they'd done a certain thing which wasn't very decent but

you should just keep quiet about it. You shouldn't expose him, and that was his attitude. Hers was that you should take full advantage of the opportunity and do them down. She also in a way professed to be a Buddhist but she spent many many years as a Christian and as a journalist and as a barrister. So her attitude was rather different.

He'd spent in his earlier life, twelve or fourteen years in a monastery. That might have accounted for his difference of attitude. But it is often said in Buddhist tradition as well as in Islamic tradition that you should conceal people's faults rather than reveal them. A very different sort of attitude from ours perhaps. At least keep quiet about them. Certainly not be in a hurry to expose them.

Tejamitra: Do you think that taking that up would be a useful thing say in a Chapter, from the point of view of just improving the general atmosphere?

S: Well it would improve the general atmosphere but if someone's fault is to be mentioned only for a definitely positive reason, that you want something to be done about it, especially you want him to do something about it, which means eventually, sooner or later in a friendly way, preferably in private, bringing it to his attention, bringing it to his notice.

Openness is all very well but perhaps we should concentrate on being open about positive things rather than about negative things, especially when the negative things pertain or belong to other people. Perhaps there isn't enough rejoicing in merit as we say.

Prasannasiddhi: It's the aspect of dwelling on the negative.

S: Yes, perhaps there is occasion sometimes to mention the negative but one should never dwell upon it. In fact try to dwell upon the positive side of things. If someone is snow white in other respects one little speck of black does rather stand out so rather draws one's attention, causing one perhaps to forget that vast expanse that is snow white. But 'you should not contradict him when he talks, nor dispute nor argue with him.' How literally do you think you should take this. What is meant by contradicting him? Why should you not contradict him? What does contradicting mean in this context?

Abhaya: Does it mean arguing?

S: Well arguing is mentioned, isn't it. '...nor dispute nor argue with him'. Contradict seems to mean a direct blunt. To say, 'no, it isn't so, you're wrong!' Not supplementing his information or even disagreeing with him. It's more this sort of direct blunt confrontation. I knew somebody once who if he thought somebody was mistaken he would always say that he would accuse them of lying, which was really very regrettable. For instance if someone said 'Oh I happened to meet so and so yesterday', he would say 'No, you're telling a lie, you met them the day before.' When it was just clearly and inadvertence which had led them to say that it was yesterday. He'd accused them of lying. This sort of thing perhaps - this is a very extreme sort..... by contradiction.

Subhuti: It seems just a lack of receptivity.

S: Well no, the other person may be wrong. He may be making a wrong statement but you shouldn't, if you are a friend, directly and bluntly contradict him, especially perhaps in front of other people. Revert to the matter later on. And when it says 'you should not contradict him when he talks' perhaps it means you shouldn't break in with a contradiction. Let him finish what he is saying and perhaps in a proper manner draw his attention to the fact that what he says is not quite correct.

'Nor dispute nor argue with him' Clearly disputing and arguing are distinguished from reasonable discussion. One can usually tell when a discussion starts to become an argument or a dispute. There is a definite change of tone, change of atmosphere almost. Obviously within the spiritual community there cannot be dispute or argument in this sort of sense. I think there's been a great improvement in the Order over the years, because I have heard at Order meetings, especially the larger ones that we used to have, large mixed ones I mean, occasionally someone would say something quite outrageous and even quite stupid, but no one would react. They'd just hear it. It would just be obvious to everybody that the statement was outrageous and stupid and no one needed actually to say so. So that marked quite an advance, whereas a few years earlier it might have led to a fierce argument or something of that sort between at least a few people.

'You should not pry and quiz him about his affairs'. Do you think people tend to do that? I don't think they probably do it in England, if anything they go to the other extreme don't they? At least in India people certainly do this and think they've a right to do it. Just wait for him to communicate matters to you. Don't sort of cross examine it. Sometimes relations do this. Wives do this I believe, I've heard. 'Where have you been, why are you so late? Oh you're five minutes later than you were yesterday. Did you stop anywhere on the way? Did you meet anybody? Did you speak to anybody? Why are you late? The dinner's ....etc., etc.' It is said that wives sometimes do this but this is sort of quizzing and prying.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe to be distinguished from the sort of genuine interest.

S: Yes, genuine interest or genuine concern. 'On seeing him in the street or about some business, you should not start a conversation about the object of your coming and going, nor ask him about his, for perhaps it will be troublesome to him to discuss it, or he may have to lie about it.' It may be some confidential business matter that..... People do, even within the FWBO, commit mistakes in this sort of way. I had a little experience of this just recently. On my return from Battle I was just ringing the bell of the flat and a woman happened to see me from the *Cherry Orchard* and at once tried to start up a conversation about a book that she'd lent me which I'd just returned, and it was completely inappropriate. It was clear I'd arrived back from somewhere and I didn't want just to stay shouting down into the *Cherry Orchard* what I felt about this book but she seemed completely oblivious to this. So it's that kind of thing, though it's a mild form, I've no objection to anybody knowing what I thought about that particular book but that just wasn't the right occasion.

Or similarly I've often suffered from this - you've just got a mouthful of potato and right in the middle of the meal someone wants to know all about *Nirvana* [Laughter]. That's quite inappropriate! I often find, especially this tends to happen around the LBC, if I'm sort of going here or coming from there, people try to intercept me when I'm clearly on the way to a meeting or something is on my mind, but they want to discuss some quite complex matter right on the spot. They've just caught me. This is very inconsiderate. I can see some of you also have suffered from

this. So one must be more mindful in this sort of way. So 'On seeing him in the street or about some business, you should not start a conversation about the object of your coming and going, nor ask him about his, for perhaps it will be troublesome to him to discuss it, or he may have to lie about it.' It will be your responsibility in a way, though perhaps you should be able to find some way around that.

*[Note from transcriber: Recording quality is **very** poor on this section of the tape - Bhante is barely audible and other comments are inaudible.]*

Kulananda: .....

S: I think that's probably so in all traditional societies. wouldn't you say?

Kulananda: .....

S: But do you think here there's a question of keeping up faith particularly? Faith strictly speaking is partly preconception. Isn't it a question of tact? For instance supposing someone passes you in the street and says, 'oh did you get that loan from the bank manager?' well that lets everybody in earshot know that you've been borrowing money from the bank. You might not want everybody to know that, because that might suggest your business is in financial difficulty and it undermines your credit. Do you see what I mean?

[Tape quality back to normal]

I think it's that sort of thing that the author has in mind. So you might, in the interests of your business say. 'no, loan, no!' It might be an absolute lie but you might think that well your business is being seriously compromised, so you might consider it justified that you even tell a lie quickly and then talk with the person afterwards and say 'well look actually I did take a loan but that wasn't the place to talk about it. I just didn't want everybody to know.' You are not exactly keeping up face. Perhaps it rather is a thin dividing line! [Laughter] But you see what I mean. You shouldn't want to embarrass people. This is I think what the point of difference what the point of difference here between my Sikkimese friend and his European wife amounted to - she didn't mind embarrassing people. He thought that it wasn't right to embarrass people and that it should be avoided. You shouldn't even embarrass your enemies.

All right let's carry on then.

"Keep silent also about the secrets he confides in you, and on no account divulge them to a third party - not even to his closest friends."

S: Sometimes people think well they're also close friends, I'm a close friend, what does it matter if I tell them, but no you shouldn't. If he's told only you, you should keep it to yourself

"Do not reveal anything about them, not even after separation and estrangement, for to do so would be meanness of character and impurity of the Inner."

S: But that sort of thing is so common in modern times, especially among politicians isn't it. They hasten into print and they blurt out all sorts of confidential matters, embarrassing their former colleagues and no one apparently thinks anything of it any longer, but it's really quite disgusting and quite unethical and it does undermine confidence between people and in government itself.

Kuladeva: There was an instance the other day where Robin Day divulged a private conversation he's had with Michael Foot. Michael Foot, according to Robin Day said that he agreed with Margaret Thatcher sinking the *Belgrano*, and that was a private conversation. Michael Foot at the time when he made that statement was giving his support to an enquiry into the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

Prasannasiddhi: Some of these newspapers are full of all the sort of gossipy thing about the secret lives of so and so.

S: Yes, or someone who worked at Buckingham Palace, who was a footman, he sells his recollections to a newspaper. It really is quite disgusting, especially when it's done blatantly for money.

Devaraja: Just trying to look at the mechanics of it, maybe people don't feel so worried about that because they feel that ... . public figure because they give across an image. If their private life doesn't come across as dignified, sober, moral, upright.....

S: Well that's fair enough if you weren't formerly in a confidential position. When you accept that confidential position as an employee well there is a definite understanding. In fact in this particular case I believe even there was a sort of legal contract. I think there is something you have to sign to the effect that on leaving the service you will not do such and such and such and such and such - well you break that, you break your word in a way. If quite honestly and legitimately you have a different experience of someone than other people well yes you are quite, in a manner of speaking, within your rights to make that known, just as everybody else makes know their impressions or their views, but not when it involves a breach of understood confidentiality. For instance if Michael Foot has said, 'well look Robin this is off the record but this is what I think', well if Robin Day thought he was going to have to reveal that he'd say well look, stop, if it's off the record I don't want to know, but then he listens, he says, 'yes it's OK Michael, it's off the record' his big ears start flapping and then later on he blurts it all out. This is really quite unethical. assuming that that was in fact the case.

Devaraja: Was that not the case though that Michael Foot was pushing his investigation into the sinking of the *Belgrano* so subsequently ....

Kuladeva: Yes, but it was a private conversation. I mean Robin Day did apologise in public. He said he'd said it in the heat of the moment. The other thing to bear in mind, according to Michael Foot at least was that it was the information that he had. On that information he would have done the same thing but it also transpires that Margaret Thatcher had additional information. I mean the main point is that it was a private conversation. It was in confidence.

S: If you hear something and agree to hear something in confidence then it is a breach of confidentiality if you impart that information to a third

party afterwards.

Devaraja: I suppose that's also allowing the circumstances ..... over and above that confidentiality. For example.....

S: But then you have to be open with the original person and say look you've told me this, but I consider this so important as regards the Nation that I'm afraid if you don't tell people about it I'm afraid, notwithstanding the privacy of our conversation, I will have to do so. In that case you have to be quite open about that, but not just leave the person with the impression that yes, so far as you are concerned it's a private conversation, but then afterwards he learns that you have broken that confidentiality. Otherwise mutual confidence is undermined. Probably in this case perhaps Michael Foot will never have a private conversation with Robin Day again. The loss is Robin Day's presumably. But that sort of incident is not really surprising in view of the breaches of confidentiality that one is encountering all the time in public life. There have been some political memoirs in recent years that have been quite notorious in this respect, haven't they? Someone had said that well under certain governments the chief reason for someone becoming a cabinet minister was so that they could keep a diary which they could sell to a Sunday newspaper in a few years' time. The less said about that the better perhaps.

As regards these secrets, 'do not reveal anything about them, not even after separation and estrangement.' You have to recognise a limit. Enmity cannot be carried to the nth degree 'for to do so would be meanness of character and impurity of the Inner' Some people think if they quarrel with someone that absolves them of all responsibility towards that person thereafter. That isn't really the case. You find this between husbands and wives who have parted. All sorts of things are said and come out in course of divorce proceedings and so on. Nothing is respected. 'Impurity of the Inner'. The Inner here covers everything subjective, the heart, the soul, spiritual life.

"Keep silent from criticism of his dear ones, his family and his children; also from relating other people's criticism of him, for it is your informant who directly abuses you."

S: So 'keep silent from criticism of his dear ones, his family and his children'. Do you think this is justified? Or what do you think it the reason behind this? Why should you keep silent from such criticism?

Ratnavira: It's an indirect criticism of him.

S: Yes, it would be painful to him. But does that mean you shouldn't give him any advice?

Subhuti: I imagine it's carping criticism.

Devaraja: I noticed it on one or two occasions. I think ..... insensitive but sometimes my father rings up and some of the lads do a kind of imitation of my father in a jokey sort of way but actually I really take umbridge at it. They don't know him. It's almost like they have an image of him.

S: Yes, the fact that they take him off is a sort of indirect criticism or maybe not so indirect.

Devaraja: Maybe, well maybe not, but it's a bit like they don't really know him so in a way it's just not appropriate.

S: But the point here would be that even if they knew him thoroughly there would still be no justification in criticising him to you.

Devaraja: Because there's always a sort of insensitivity to what might be polite or might not be towards my father.

S: To them it's just a joke but to you it isn't.

Devaraja: He is my father!

S: Yes. You notice wives aren't mentioned here because normally you wouldn't see your friend's wife because she'd always be veiled. And anybody wouldn't visit his home in that sort of way. She'd be in the Zenana perhaps, the women's appartments, so that question wouldn't arise. You'd have no opportunity of criticising your brother's wife. You probably wouldn't know her at all. In India, even among Hindus you can be very close friends with someone and never have met his wife for decades. It just doesn't happen in certain communities or certain castes. Not so much among the ex-Untouchables because due to their poverty and so on they are much freer in their social life.

Abhaya: Is that what they do, send their wives to the Zenana?

S: Well I believe in all traditional Muslim households there is a separate women's quarter. However small the house may be, at least a room with a curtain in front of it which men other than the husband never enter. Sort of secluded appartment. In the case of a palace of course it's a whole series of rooms, but the principle I think is widely observed in traditional Muslim society, though encroached upon nowadays obviously.

So 'keep silent from criticism of his dear ones, his family and his children.' There's also the fact that in the case of traditional society you are quite free as a friend to speak directly to your brother's children if you see them misbehaving. Any elder has that sort of freedom if you see what I mean, which is not the case in our society where parents strongly object to anybody else correcting their children. That isn't so in India. Any elder can say 'look sonny don't do that' or something like that. So you don't need to criticise the child through his father, you yourself can say something to the child if you think it necessary, just in the same way as the father himself would.

Devaraja: Is that because in a way they're your responsibility too because you are his brother?

S: Not only that, no. In India at least the whole community has responsibility for the children in some degree. They're everybody's children in some degree.

Kulananda: They're all around running in and out of everyone's houses.

S: Yes, so there's no question of your not correcting children because they're somebody else's children. They don't think like that. Certainly men don't don't. I'm sorry to say perhaps the women do sometimes but the men certainly don't. Sometimes there are squabbles between women because a woman has slapped somebody else's child but I think you don't get that among men, and certainly it's generally accepted that any elder has the right to speak to and correct the younger person, especially a small child, just tell them to stop doing this or not to do that.

Nagabodhi: I remember even when I was a kid there would be that awe of grown ups, maybe shouting a little, but I don't think the feeling of that's survived even.....

S: Well nowadays I think perhaps even your own parents can't do that! What to speak of others.

Devaraja: It's quite difficult now, in the short time when I was doing a bit of teaching it's often quite difficult to actually chastise. There'd be often case of parents coming and beating up teachers because of that. It got completely out of hand!

S: This happened at Sukhavati didn't it. I think it was Ratnapala clipped a little lad round the ear and his father came round and was quite violent.

_____: He hit him on the head with a fire extinguisher.

S: In a traditional society a father would be first of all grateful to another adult for correcting his child and second he'd be ashamed that his own child needed correction. Anyway it says keep silent 'also from relating other people's criticism of him, for it is your informant who directly abuses you.' This is quite interesting isn't it. If you relay criticism to someone, you are not just relaying it, you are the one who is actually saying it, so in a sense it comes from you, it is felt as coming from you. The person who hears it doesn't think that you are only the mouthpiece, you are only relaying - his experience is that it is coming from you, so you shouldn't relay other people's criticism to your brother. That may affect his attitude towards you or may affect relations between you. You shouldn't say 'oh so and so said that about such a party' or 'what do you think so and so and so said about you', unless it is something he really needs to know for his own safety and defence.

It could approach perilously near to what Buddhism describes as backbiting where it does create dissension. Sometimes people say negative things just in the course of conversation without really meaning them so it isn't really fair to repeat everything of that sort. They shouldn't even say them in that way but sometimes they do.

Anyway there's an anecdote now to illustrate that point.

"Anas said that God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) never faced anyone with something displeasing to him, for the hurt comes immediately from the informant and only indirectly from the original speaker."

S: Sometimes though surely one may have to face someone with something. Supposing you know that a policeman is coming to arrest your friend, well you have to tell him that presumably. Perhaps the statement here isn't to be taken too literally. You just shouldn't convey silly criticisms or negative utterances. Anyway next paragraph.

"Of course you should not hide any praise you may hear, for the pleasure in it is received directly from the conveyer of the compliment as well as indirectly from the original source. Concealment here would mean envy."

S: Hmm, if you hear something good about your friend, about your brother, well by all means repeat that to him, in fact you almost have a duty to do that, you shouldn't conceal it, you shouldn't hold it back. That will enhance your own friendship. I think in England at least sometimes people feel a little embarrassed about repeating to someone praises which they have heard. Have you noticed this? Sometimes people feel embarrassed about saying to somebody 'what do you think so and so said about you? He said you were a thoroughly good chap'. Perhaps people feel uncomfortable about praising anyway. I think it is very important, speaking more generally, to express appreciation on certain occasions, maybe even formally, as on the occasion of a farewell banquet or something of that sort. Again the Tibetans are very particular about this, and I believe the Chinese too. Among our Indian friends also they are very concerned at the end of a meeting or programme as they call it, that everybody who has participated should be thanked and recognised by the presentation of a garland or something of that sort. No one is left out, however small their contribution to the success of the function.

I think we tend not to do that. We tend to take things a little for granted and perhaps we err in that respect to some extent. No one ever passes a vote of thanks or very rarely passes a vote of thanks. Perhaps we should think about that. Do you know the sort of thing I'm referring to? Someone might have done some quite onerous piece of work for say a FWBO Council but the fact may be just passed over. It is never actually mentioned that the person has done that particular job and the Council thanks him for it. Sometimes thanks are expressed by a Council but very rarely. No doubt they could be expressed more frequently. Usually you thank someone if it's outside the FWBO who's done something for you or if that particular person is leaving after say three years as a treasurer. You briefly thank them for what they've done and pass on to the next item of business. Perhaps we should make much more of all that and express - well first of all it's a question of feeling, feel genuine appreciation and express it in some more or less formal manner.

Anyway carry on with the next paragraph.

"In short, you should keep silent about any speech unpleasant to him in general and in particular - unless obliged to speak out to promote good and prevent evil, and even then only if you can find no valid excuse for saying nothing. In such cases you need not worry about his disapproval, since what you do is beneficial to him when rightly understood, even if it looks bad at first sight."

S: So this paragraph seems to admit the possibility of what we call 'fierce friendship'. There is a note about this 'promote good and prevent evil' - it says, *'to promote good and prevent evil is an overriding duty for the Muslim'.* This is understood in a quite special or quite particular or definite way by most Muslims, to advance the interests of Islam and do down the non-Muslim. It's very often used, this very phrase, in these sort of situations. This phrase must have been on the lips of the Ayatollahs of Iran constantly. Promoting good and preventing evil. It can be

applied to war with a non-Muslim country. You are promoting good and preventing evil. It can be applied to the religious war, the Jihad. It can be applied to any action taken against the non-Muslim.

Prasannasiddhi: You do get the feeling of quite a sort of different levels. On the one hand there are these things being said which are very good, though on the other hand you get some pretty nasty things happening as well.

S: Well you get something of that sort in the case of Christianity where it's even been said by some people that the reason why you burned heretics at the stake was out of your love for them, in the hope that at the last minute at least when they actually felt the flames they would repent and renounce their heresy. So you burned them out of love for them. So Christians say 'well yes you should love everybody but in the case of the heretic loving them means burning them at the stake', So again an excellent principle but what we would regard as a very perverted application of that principle. Anyway let's pass on.

"As for mentioning his misdeeds and faults, and the misdeeds of his family, this is slander and unlawful in respect of every Muslim."

S: Yes 'mentioning his misdeeds and faults and the misdeeds of his family' - this presumably means in the course of general conversation without any sort of practical skilful end in view. This is quite a thought in a way. Especially when newspapers are so full of stories about peoples misdeeds and faults. Do we really need to know all that? Do we really need to know all the dreadful things done by people we have never even heard of, are never going to meet and so on. Is it really necessary, do we need to know all the details of a divorce case or a murder? Is it really necessary. Perhaps it needs to be available to somebody or other but does it have to be front page news? It isn't in communist countries for instance, and here their practice seems to be rather better than that of other countries.

Kulananda: It does point to a market demand.

S: Yes indeed. Why do people want to feast every Sunday on the misdeeds of other people virtually? It's really a very extraordinary state of affairs. Perhaps we've got so used to it that we don't realise how extraordinary it is.

Kulananda: Is it some form of projection? Projection of one's own desires perhaps.

S: Well one would perhaps like to have behaved like that if one had the courage? If it is say information about the political goings on in another country and that may be of general concern to the population in this country, well that is another matter, but do we really need to know all the details of the lives of pop stars and film stars and boxers and conductors of orchestras and all the misdeeds of politicians which have no bearing upon the public interest? Do we need to know these things? Some people seem to as I say feast over this, to gloat over it, to want to know all about this, to wallow in that.

Devaraja: They put these people up and on the other hand they will pull them down again and put somebody else up!

S: Yes, a similar sort of passage I came across reading Dante the other day. There is one episode in one of the chapters of the *Inferno* where two characters in Hell get involved in a quarrel in the presence of Dante and Virgil (Virgil of course is Dante's guide through Hell and through Purgatory) and Dante just stops for a minute to listen to this exchange of abuse, and Virgil rebukes him and says that to want to listen to people quarrelling is a mark of a vulgar mind. So I thought that quite remarkable and quite striking.

It must be the mark of a vulgar mind, if you want to know about such things and to want to derive entertainment from them. Surely we've got better things to do than to occupy our minds with material of that sort, of doings of that sort. Papers like the *News of the World* and various others whose names I don't know. One gathers they're stuffed with this sort of thing.

"Two things should turn you from it"

That is mentioning your brother's misdeeds and faults and the misdeeds of his family. Let's see what those two things are.

"First examine your own condition and if you find there one blameworthy thing then be tolerant of what you see in your brother. It may that he is unable to control himself in that particular characteristic, just as you are impotent in the face of your own difficulty. So do not be too heavy on him on account of one blameworthy trait - what man is completely upright? Wherever you find yourself lacking in your duty to God, do not expect as much from your brother in his duty to you, for your right over him is not greater than God's right over you."

S: One has noticed that people are very selective in their judgements. For instance someone may have a particular weakness and you may criticise him for that but forgetting that you have a weakness of your own, not the same weakness as that person has, but you attach more importance to that matter in respect of which he is weak than that matter in respect of which you are weak. So one should remember in criticising or being tempted to criticise someone, that well you may not have that fault but you may have another fault which is equally bad or even worse. But there is this celebrated couplet in Butler's (.....?.....) Do you remember that, I've quoted it before, about people who *'compound for sins that they're inclined to, by damning those they have no mind to.'* They make up for, they compensate for the sins they commit out of inclination to commit those sins for damning and condemning people for committing those sins which they're not tempted themselves to commit. So 'compound for sins that they're inclined to, by damning those they have no mind to.' Referring to the Puritans. The Seventeenth Century poet, a satirical poem. But this is what we do the time if we're not careful.

Different people have got different virtues. They've got different weaknesses and it's very difficult to strike a balance and to decide well he on the whole is better than he is or vice versa. So it's very important to try to see a person in the wrong as a whole and not give too much importance to weaknesses, not realising that there are certain counterbalancing virtues and good qualities that that person has.

Ratnavira: It's the kind of attitude that's at the root of most negative sorts of stereotype labelling. It's as though just one particular aspect of a person gets blown up.

S: You have your own particular favourite virtue. That may be the virtue you find particularly easy. So you are rather hard on those people who

don't find that particular virtue easy. They may find other virtues easier to practise than you do. You may for instance specialise in truthfulness or you may specialise in celibacy or you may specialise in dutifulness, so you tend to attach exaggerated importance to the virtue that you find relatively easy, and judge people entirely by that if you're not careful. They stand or fall by that one particular quality which happens to by your quality. You forget those qualities that you don't yourself possess and which other people perhaps do. Sometimes you can attach an exaggerated importance to what may seem a comparatively minor matter. You ignore for instance a person's very considerable virtue and you perhaps may concentrate all your attention on the fact that he smokes, and dismiss him just for that reason. Well he's no good, he smokes, at least two cigarettes a day, good heavens! I'm not saying that smoking is to be condoned of course. [Laughter] Please don't misquote me, but that is not the sole criteria of a person's worth, that he smokes or doesn't smoke. You have to see the whole person.

'So first examine your own condition and if you find there one blameworthy thing then be tolerant of what you see in your brother. It may be that he is unable to control himself in that particular characteristic, just as you are impotent in the face of your own difficulty. So do not be too heavy on account of one blameworthy trait - what man is completely upright?' and also he goes on to say 'Wherever you find yourself lacking in your duty to God, do not expect as much from your brother in his duty to you, for your right over him is not greater than God's right over you.' So you might even translate this more or less into Buddhist terms and say well how devoted are you to the spiritual life, how great a part do the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha play in your life? So if you find that your brother, your friend, is not showing sufficient concern for you well how can you blame him? How much concern do you yourself show what to speak to a friend or brother, what concern do you show for the Three Jewels themselves, for your own spiritual life? You might even say well you can't blame him for not being a true friend to you if you're not even a true friend to yourself.

All right, the second of the two things that should turn you from mentioning misdeeds.

"Second, you know that were you to seek for someone free of all blemish you would exhaust the entire Creation without ever finding a companion. For there is not one human being who does not have both good qualities and bad, and if the good outweigh the bad that is the most that can be hoped for."

S: Would a Buddhist necessarily agree with this? I mean in absolute terms.

Nagabodhi: In absolute terms no.

S: No, because we do recognise the possibility of attaining Enlightenment, but anyway Enlightened beings are admittedly very very rare. In the case of the vast majority of other human beings, you'll have to be satisfied with something less than perfection. So if you wait for an Enlightened companion before having a companion at all you may have to wait a very long time. It's best to make do, so to speak, with the person who is immediately to hand, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. *'Who is the dearest of men to you?' - 'One who sits in my company' he replied'* It's the same sort of principle. make a companion of the best person that you can find, and accept the fact that he's going to have some weaknesses as well perhaps as many virtues, and reflect on the fact that you have weaknesses yourself. When you are yourself imperfect you can hardly expect perfection from another, though that is very often just what people do. The more imperfect they are the more

perfection they expect from you.

Anyway this morning's portion of the text has been rather down to earth hasn't it. Any more general question on anything that we've done this morning? We've covered that whole chapter about the second duty of rendering personal aid and we've made a start on the third duty of sometimes being silent.

With regard to this question of keeping silent, we tend to assume I think in modern times, that to tell all is a sort of virtue, that reticence is not a virtue. For instance in writing somebody's biography, you're supposed to tell everything, even things that that particular person wanted to conceal. Well that may or may not be the right attitude but that is our attitude, that we want to bring out everything into the open as we say and that everything be known. That everything be a matter of public knowledge, even the weaknesses of some famous man, or <u>especially</u> the weaknesses of some famous man. There was a whole school of debunking biographers wasn't there, before the war. Maybe that's a bit significant, a bit symptomatic. You want to undermine people, you don't want to believe that there are others perhaps who are better than we are ourselves. We want to show the weaker side of these great men. Perhaps that isn't altogether a healthy tendency, as it leads to us not appreciating them for their actual achievements in some cases.

Abhaya: What do you think underlies that?

S: I think basically it's probably this anti-hierarchical principle and pseudo-democracy, pseudo-egalitarianism. You resent the fact that someone is great, does surpass you in certain respects. You want to bring him down to your own level as much as you possibly can.

Kulananda: Surely one can be truthful without actually undermining.

S: One can be truthful without <u>wishing</u> to undermine. You may be truthful and undermine because you are truthful.

Kulananda: The willingness to expose everything is not necessarily negativity.

S: Not necessarily, but I think that in modern times it almost invariably is. Sometimes you can tell the whole truth or try to tell the whole truth about a person because you really do love that person and you really do see them as a whole and for you those defects do not cancel out the overall work and value of that person, but that is not the attitude of many biographers these days it would seem. They seem to take a delight in debunking. If of course someone has falsely built up a reputation for himself well that is another matter, perhaps, but very often our debunking tendencies amount to a denial of <u>all</u> greatness, of <u>all</u> superiority, of <u>all</u> higher qualities.

Sometimes people use Freudianism in this sort of way, to reduce all cultural achievements and all higher human achievements just to some kind of redirection or misdirection of the sexual impulse. [Laughter] It's all basically sex. Being assumed of course that sex is something low and inferior anyway which suggests a sort of perverted hierarchy. Because even if you think in terms of reducing something to something else, well that does imply a hierarchy doesn't it, otherwise how could you think in terms of reducing?

Devaraja: So let me just clarify that. So what it seems that they do, the person who does follow that argument, does actually acknowledge a kind of hierarchy.

S: Yes in a sort of indirect way. But if that person consciously is thinking in terms of reduction. If, for instance, you do believe that higher cultural achievements can be reduced to sex, and if you use that term 'reduced', and if you think of it actually as a reduction; if you actually believe that sex is something lower; well, something that is lower can only be lower in comparison with something else that is higher. So in that respect to speak of something as lower means that you are recognising a hierarchy, because you are indirectly speaking of something which is higher. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: I'm not altogether sure of the logic. I wonder if you can't talk about reducing certain facts in an argument to one salient point, whether that implies there is a hierarchy of points.

S: Ah, no, that is different. If you speak of reducing, that means condensing or making what is the real point clearer. I don't think 'reducing' there is used in the same sense as 'reducing' when you speak of, say, reducing a cultural achievement to a matter of sex.

Devaraja: So maybe do you think that use of that terminology implies some sort of guilt or shame about sexuality?

S: Actually, yes, it does. Actually you're not regarding sex, perhaps, in the way that you're professing to regard it; but you do almost unconsciously accept or recognise a hierarchy of values.

Devaraja: But in Freud - didn't he speak more of sublimation?

S: He did, especially in his later work, speak of civilisation itself as a result of an inhibition of the sexual impulse. But his point of view or his attitude was rather more subtle than that of some of his so-called followers or popularisers, or people who just use Freudian terminology without really understanding what it means.

When Freud said that civilisation was achieved as a result of the inhibition of the sexual impulse, he did not mean to deny the value of civilisation. He was more concerned, one might say, simply to state the conditions under which civilisation arose, according to him, from his psychoanalytical standpoint. He wasn't depreciating civilisation, but sometimes people do that - 'Well, it's only sex at bottom'; a great artist or a great musician is only expressing his sexual feelings in an indirect way, so therefore his aesthetic achievement has no real value, it's just sex at bottom, and sex has no higher value. But that was not Freud's position, as far as I can see.

Devaraja: I think there are other examples of this, aren't there, not necessarily in the area of sex? In the '*Mao to Mozart*' film - I don't know if you've seen it at all -

S: No.

Devaraja: - there is a minor confrontation between Isaac Stern and, I think, the Chinese Political Commissar at a music school, who says that Mozart's achievement sprang directly out of the move of society in Europe at that time from a feudal structure to an early capitalist structure. I mean Stern completely dismisses it. In a way, that's a kind of example of the same thing - of reducing it to just economic forces.

S: Yes. Well, it's quite true that those historical and even economic factors determined the greater part of the structure of Mozart's life - even his professional life, his personal life - but the genius, the sheer quality of his music, cannot be explained exclusively in those terms. That is presumably the point at issue. The hard-line Marxist would apparently try to reduce everything to those particular historic and economic circumstances without remainder. You could say that the fact that Mozart had to work for wealthy patrons - well that was the result of certain social and economic factors. Or even that his music assumed the form it did. After all, what was the symphony? The three or the four-movement symphony was a stringing together of a series of dance tunes in different time. But the genius of various musicians created something out of that which went far beyond the original social function of those dances.

Devaraja: At one point I think Dhammarati was arguing that the Renaissance sprang out of a particular - well, maybe I got the wrong end of the stick - sprang out of economic and historical forces at that time, which produced a particular kind of merchant society structure which made the Renaissance virtually possible.

S: Well, it depends what you mean by 'sprang out of'. Is the effect contained completely in the cause? This is the basic as it were philosophical point, isn't it? (Murmurs of agreement.)

Devaraja: Yes, making a cause rather than a condition for the -

S: Rather than a condition. A cause of the very essence of the phenomenon rather than a condition for its particular form. We know, of course, that if there had not been wealth available in, say, Florence, those palaces and churches could not have been built. But you cannot reduce the value and significance of those buildings entirely to social and economic factors.

Kulananda: Perhaps, in fact, the notion of reduction is in itself false.

S: Well, yes, yes. Well, a Marxist would say no. He might even deny that he was being reductionist, but there is a difference between the two points of view. But I think people must be really clear what they mean by 'sprang out of', and such very vague ambiguous expressions. I mean you might look at the FWBO in this particular way. You might say, what were the conditions out of which the FWBO sprang?

Devaraja: Hashish! [Laughter]

S: All these young people who had nothing better to do, they were out of work and needed to pass their time, in some way they couldn't cope

with the conditions of life in London, say, in the middle of the 20th century - etc., etc. - leaving out of all account any question of idealism, feeling for individual growth and so on and so forth. One might ask oneself is one conscious of having been determined in one's, say, spiritual life, entirely by social and economic factors? You can admit that they were there. For instance, you can admit that, yes, the fact that you went to university, or the fact that your parents were able to pay for you to go to university, has had some influence on your subsequent career, but does that factor - or do factors of that sort - account entirely for the particular direction that you have taken, and in particular your involvement with the FWBO and with Buddhism? Would you reduce that involvement entirely to those factors? You'd probably say no, definitely not. Though at the same time you admit that those factors might have had considerable weight.

Devaraja: This seems to be a tendency quite a lot, because as I understand - my knowledge of Marx is extremely limited - but I even get to understand from - well, really from reading about Marx through Fromm mainly - that -

S: - who takes a very favourable view of Marx, very often.

Devaraja: Yes, he said that this tendency to reduce everything to economic and historical forces is absolutely against the spirit of Marx.

S: Well, I don't know about against the - 'The causes of this very complex historical phenomenon were - one, two, three, four' - that is, I think, very difficult to do, just as when people ask 'What was the cause of the disappearance of Buddhism from India?' It's as though they expect you to say just one thing: 'Oh, it was the enmity of the brahmins', or 'It was the Muslim invasion', or 'It was the degeneration produced by the Tantric tradition'. But no, the causes or conditions for the decline of Buddhism in India were numerous and quite complex, and maybe we haven't even yet ascertained them all. We know very little about economic conditions at that time, for instance.

But people want to simplify things, and so therefore they often demand very simplistic answers. You can't always give them those answers; that means you can't always satisfy them. So what was the cause of the decline of Buddhism in India, what was the cause of the Renaissance, what was the cause of the rise of Islam? How can you say? Unless your answer is purely theological, for instance that God sent Muhammad - well, that's pretty simple, but you can't dispose of the Renaissance like that.

I think very often people are unwilling to do justice to the complexity of experience and the complexity of history. They want to simplify things. Well, it's understandable for the purposes of understanding, but very often if you simplify in order to understand, you just misunderstand, you don't understand anything at all, you just distort.

Devaraja: It seems that there's two reasons for that tendency in people: that one is actually trying to somehow know and therefore be in charge of the facts at their command .....

S: Or at least come to terms with.

Devaraja: - but another thing is people want something that can be a basis for action. They can somehow move forward and live from that,

which seems quite a valid -

S: But, in the case that Kulananda mentioned, saying that the causes of the Renaissance were this, that and the other - well, what bearing does that have upon one's personal, practical life? Perhaps one wants to give the impression of being oneself a very down-to-earth character.

Sometimes I find it quite difficult to answer people's simple questions because what they are actually asking one for is a simplistic answer, and one can't give that. And in fact the more one knows about the subject about which one is being asked, the less able one is to give that sort of answer. If you just have a smattering of knowledge it's very easy to give a simplistic answer to a question, but the more knowledge you acquire the more difficult it becomes to give perhaps any answer at all.

Kulananda: But inevitably statements about causes, for example, end up being statements about the person making the statement, because their statements have a point of view. They show where he is looking from, and therefore what he is looking at.

S: Though of course they're usually not points of view in the sense of being entirely points of view, because that would be itself a species of reductionism to say that. There is some objective basis, but very often what happens is that people ignore other facts or they exaggerate the importance or significance of the facts which are of a special significance to them.

Kulananda: Well, because of where they are, certain things stand out, because of their position.

S: Mm. So one has to take that fact into consideration too, ask oneself where one oneself stands, because one might be doing that very thing. There are some people who exaggerate the importance of the Renaissance itself. Some historians regard the Renaissance as an episode of really quite minor importance - so I've heard.

Anyway, perhaps we'll end there and have lunch.

Day 3 Tape 6

S: We carry on with chapter or section 3, which is on the third duty which 'concerns the tongue, which should sometimes be silent and at other times speak out.' And the chapter is of course concerned with being silent, and we've got to the top of page 37, beginning with the words 'The noble believer'.

"The noble believer always keeps present in himself the good qualities of his brother, so that his heart may be the source of honour, affection and respect. As for the hypocrite of low character, he is always noticing misdeeds and faults.

Ibn al-Mubarak said:
- The believer tries to find excuses for others, while the hypocrite looks out for mistakes.

Al-Fudayl said:
- Manliness is pardoning the slips of one's brothers."

S: 'The noble believer always keeps present in himself the good qualities of his brother, **so that** his heart may be the source of honour, affection and respect.' You see the connection there?

The way in which you see somebody determines your attitude towards them, so you must be careful, in a way, how you see them. You should 'always keep present in you' - that is to say constantly remember or bear in mind - the good qualities of your brother, so that you can have the emotional attitude appropriate to those good qualities.

It's as though the author is saying that it's good that your heart should produce sentiments of honour, affection, and respect for others, but you will only be able to do that - which is good for you as well as for the other person - only if you bear in mind constantly the good qualities of the other person. In other words, to translate perhaps into more Buddhistic terms, it will be very difficult for you to develop the emotion of mettā if you are constantly dwelling upon the faults of other people. If you want to develop mettā you have to dwell upon their positive qualities. If you have mettā, you see people in a positive manner. If you see people in a positive manner, you have mettā. But to see people in a negative manner and have mettā is very difficult, if not impossible.

It's as though the keeping present in oneself the good qualities of one's brother is envisaged almost as a sort of spiritual practice, because you do that so that your own heart may be the source of these other good qualities of honour, affection and respect towards others.

Abhaya: Yes, I think if you get into a tangle with someone, or into a really strong negative exchange, say over a certain period of time, you tend to get locked into seeing that other person exclusively in terms of what we were referring to last night as his black spot. It's very hard to get out of that - you've got to actually work hard to get out of that.

S: Especially if, of course - to extend the metaphor - that black spot impinges upon you in any particular way. That black spot in him may correspond to a weak spot in you.

Then the author goes on to say: 'As for the hypocrite of low character, he is always noticing misdeeds and faults.' Well, why is he a hypocrite as well as being of low character?

Devaraja: Well, I suppose because the black spot corresponds to the weak area.

S: Well, the fact that he's always noticing misdeeds and faults as though he had none himself. The fact that he is always noticing misdeeds and faults conveys - in fact, is even perhaps intended to convey - how good he himself is, and how free from those things. So it amounts to hypocrisy. And he is of low character, anyway.

Then 'Ibn al-Mubarak said: - The believer tries to find excuses for others, while the hypocrite looks out for mistakes.' Two different, even contrary, attitudes. Often one finds people are quite reluctant to make excuses for others. This is when one gives people the benefit of the doubt because you have a certain amount of faith in them. You don't immediately put an unfavourable construction on something that they have done. You try to find excuses in the sense that you try to find explanations for what they have done which will at least to some extent exculpate them. You make allowances. If, for instance, someone is late for an appointment, you think, well, maybe their car broke down, maybe they're not well. Maybe there was a sudden accident in the family. You make excuses in this way. If an unskilful action has been performed, it is not that you are saying it is not unskilful, but when it is actually in doubt what someone has actually done, you are ready to find excuses in the sense of always being willing to consider that they were not in fact at fault and have in fact not committed an unskilful action, even though appearances may be against them. But in the absence of any hard evidence, you don't jump to that conclusion - that they have been guilty of an unskilful action, as in the instance I mentioned.

It is rather labouring the point, but this is the sort of thing that so often happens. People assume - of course, sometimes, unfortunately, if one has had extensive experience of somebody, you may be justified in assuming some fault on their part - but even if you have had, say, 99 unpleasant experiences or disappointing experiences with someone, that is no logical reason for concluding that on this hundredth occasion also they must have let you down. Even on the hundredth occasion you should wait and see, and if possible make excuses.

So 'the believer tries to find excuses for others', because the believer, by virtue of the very fact that he is a believer, is trying to see things positively, trying to be positive himself, in our terms.

Subhuti: Couldn't this amount to almost stupidity? You have to recognise faults when you see them.

S: Yes, you have to recognise them when you see them, but not until you see them. I think that is the real point. And even when you see them, you have to take into account all the other circumstances, and not even identify the person with that particular fault.

But, to go into this a little more - supposing, for instance, someone is late for an appointment, someone doesn't turn up. Well, very often what happens is you feel so annoyed that the person is not there on time, you feel so angry, that you want to lash out at somebody, and that is, so to speak, the natural person at whom you lash out, because after all you are waiting for him and he has not turned up, so you vent your anger on him, at least in imagination, until he turns up. But, actually, he may not be at fault at all. It may not be his responsibility that he was late or did not turn up in any way. But you have this tendency to prejudge because of your irritation at being kept waiting. You're looking for an outlet, so to speak, for your negative emotion.

Sometimes you may find yourself in the embarrassing position of getting more and more furious with someone who is keeping you waiting, and he does turn up in the end, maybe an hour late or two hours late, and you're very, very angry and you feel like perhaps bursting out with an expression of your anger; but as soon as he arrives he gives you a perfectly watertight reason. You've absolutely no reason to be angry, and you can see that, but what are you going to do with the anger? You're bursting with it, and you can see that he's completely innocent. But the fact that you are angry without reason might spoil the time that you then proceed to spend with that person.

Vajrananda: Especially after the 99th occasion of him letting you down!

S: So one should be very willing always to give the other person the benefit of the doubt right up to the last minute.

If, of course, you have made appointments with someone that he has failed to keep through carelessness, well you should bear that in mind next time you make an appointment with him, and warn yourself in advance that you may be let down, so you should be on the alert and not be too disappointed or upset. But even then you give him the benefit of the doubt and think well even on this occasion he might have been late due to no fault of his own.

But the point I am really getting at, and I think what the text is really getting at, we are very ready to blame prematurely, before we really know that someone deserves blame. And even when we do know that in that particular instance someone does deserve blame, we are too inclined to see them entirely in terms of that blameworthy quality or characteristic, ignoring perhaps other good qualities that they have, or good things that they've done.

And then: 'Al-Fudayl said: - Manliness is pardoning the slips of one's brothers.' I don't know what the original Arabic here is for 'manliness', and what exactly is the connotation, but perhaps we can just take the English word in a quite straightforward way; presumably it represents something of the sense of the original. So 'Manliness is pardoning the slips of one's brothers.' Why should one think that manliness was anything else? Does anybody think that manliness consists in not pardoning the slips of one's brothers? In what sense could that be?

Abhaya: You've got to be tough with them.

Subhuti: It is a sort of affront to your manliness.

S: Yes, being tough; yes. 'Manliness' consists in being tough and unforgiving and not accepting excuses and all that sort of thing. Being difficult to please, rigid, severe; difficult to placate. Sounds very much like the God of the Old Testament.

In other words, it's not a weakness to pardon the slips of other people, because you also may be guilty of slips.

Nagabodhi: Is Allah meant to be a forgiving God, a loving God?

S: Well, the Koran is said to stress both aspects, the aspect of rigour and the aspect of leniency, or the aspect of justice and the aspect of compassion. The Koran sort of oscillates between the two. The unbeliever, in the Muslim sense, could perhaps be excused for getting an impression almost as though Muhammad could not make up his mind whether God was a god of justice or a god of forgiveness, and kept oscillating between the two conceptions. That is the sort of impression one gets reading the Koran.

Muslims, of course, do not see it in that way. For instance, the Koran says repeatedly something like: 'And if you do such-and-such, God will punish you on the day of judgement. He will send you to hell; nevertheless he is a God of mercy and forgiveness.' As though having gone very much to one extreme, whoever is speaking hastily recovers himself and veers a bit to the other extreme. One gets this, as far as I can remember from my reading of the Koran, constantly throughout the text. Which is, of course, a problem in Christian theology, too - the reconciliation of the justice of God with his mercy - it's the sort of problem that Buddhists fortunately don't have to deal with. Not that Buddhists, of course, don't have philosophical problems of their own.

Devaraja: Like what, in particular? What prompted you to say that - you had something in mind?

S: Well, no; not that we should settle back in a complacent manner and think that all our problems are solved, we have no intellectual problems! We don't have that particular one, but, yes, we do have others. At least, I hope we do, because if people are not aware of any problems it means that they haven't really been thinking about Buddhist philosophy.

Anyway, let's carry on.

"This is why the Prophet (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:
- Seek refuge with God from the bad neighbour who sees some good and conceals it, sees some bad and reveals it.
There is no-one at all whose condition cannot be improved in some respects, or made worse."

S: 'Seek refuge with God from the bad neighbour who sees some good and conceals it, [and] sees some bad and reveals it' - well, this is a very bad neighbour indeed. If you have a neighbour of this sort, if you live in close proximity with someone of this sort, then you are really quite unfortunate, you have to seek refuge with God, so to speak. Only God can help you then.

But this is a quite unpleasant characteristic, isn't it? - seeing something good and concealing it, and seeing something bad and revealing it. It suggests a really sort of ghoul-like temperament. Seeing some good quality and concealing it, suggests almost jealousy and envy and unwillingness to recognise the good qualities of another.

Kulananda: It's interesting that it actually seems unnatural. It seems like a perversion, it seems unnatural. So that would imply that we take to be natural, things which tend to be slightly good - that doing good to other people is more of a natural way of going about things - the perversion is doing harm.

S: I wonder why it is that people see some good and conceal it. What makes people behave in this sort of way? Why aren't they able to rejoice in somebody's merits?

Abhaya: I think it's as you say, jealousy - jealousy and envy -

S: But why should one be jealous, and why should one be envious? It is apparently a quality that does not benefit one in any way, oneself.

Subhuti: It highlights your own faults and shortcomings.

S: Mm. Perhaps it reveals your own inadequacy, because you're comparing all the time.

Subhuti: That's where it really comes from, isn't it - .....

S: You want to exalt yourself by depreciating others. You could even go so far as to say that it's the result of an unwillingness to accept the principle of hierarchy. You are unwilling to accept just where you actually are in the hierarchy of human attainment, let us say. You are unwilling to recognise that someone may have gone beyond you, someone may have surpassed you. You think that that does you down, it makes you inferior, because you assume, apparently, either that you should all be equal or that you should be superior to the other person. I think this idea or this feeling of not wanting to be inferior is at the root of a lot of our problems in the modern West. It's at the root of a lot of feminism.

Subhuti: In Vajrabodhi's letter this morning there was quite a long passage about - there's a problem in Finland with religious groups. Apparently Anandamarga has just been pilloried in the press - among other things for teaching the '*Uebermensch*'. I don't think they actually teach that, but this is the way it's been interpreted, because they've been teaching that it's possible for somebody to attain spiritually. This has been interpreted as elitism and so forth.

S: This sort of egalitarianism is a real curse.

Nagabodhi: The fear of being inferior - is it a fear in itself, or do you think it does stem from a time when to be inferior meant that you were less in God's eyes and therefore liable to be judged and condemned? Do you think it's something in itself, the fear of being inferior?

S: Well, in Christian, and perhaps Muslim, terms, it would seem to be the Luciferian weakness of wanting to be what you are not, or to be recognised for what you are not. In Christian theological terms it's the sin of pride, and as Marlowe says: 'By that sin fell the angels.'

[Transcriber's note: Shakespeare, Henry VIII, III. ii: *referring to ambition*].

Nagabodhi: So it's a sort of primary attitude.

S: It's no doubt part of *moha*. It's an unwillingness to see yourself as you are in relation to others. It's an unwillingness, in the long run, I suppose, to recognise the existence of Stream Entrants and so on up to Arahants and Bodhisattvas.

Kulananda: It implies a lack of faith in the possibility of spiritual development - because if you believed in the possibility of spiritual development -

S: It seems to represent a sort of negation of the very concept of spiritual development, because that would suggest that some are more developed than others - unless you assume that everybody evolves at exactly the same rate, exactly the same pace, so that at any particular step you are all on the same level.

Kulananda: Yes. And if you do accept the possibility then you needn't ever feel envious, because you know that in due course, if you make the effort, you .....

S: And also you feel inspired and encouraged to think, or to see, that there are others more developed, more experienced than you. They can help you, etc. They provide in themselves a source of encouragement and inspiration.

Kulananda: It also shows you what's possible for oneself.

S: So I think - to go back for a moment to feminism, say - one of its strengths, and therefore one of its weaknesses, is the fact that it draws on this pseudo-egalitarian philosophy - that women must be equal to men. Not simply that they are equal, but because nobody can not be equal to anybody else. Do you see what I mean? It's not so much a misstatement of fact - if it is a misstatement of fact - so much as the invoking of a wrong philosophical concept. Though, of course, paradoxically, or illogically, it doesn't prevent some feminists from claiming to be superior to men. How they reconcile that I've not yet found any explanation.

But this general egalitarian or pseudo-egalitarian philosophy is really very pernicious; it really cuts at the root of any sort of spiritual way of life.

Devaraja: That they must be equal to men, not that they might be? Is that what you said?

S: Yes. Because, yes, one admits that an individual woman may be the equal of an individual man, but not that no woman can be inferior to a man because nobody can be inferior to anybody else ever - because everybody is automatically and necessarily equal to everybody else. This is extraordinarily strong, this sort of view, in Finland. I don't really comprehend why. Perhaps it's the manifestation of Finnish individualism, which is rather rugged, to say the least.

Subhuti: I saw a statement by, I think it was Tony Benn, recently in which he said socialism wasn't a question of equality of opportunity but of equality of fact - that everybody must be made to be equal.

S: Oh dear - whether they liked it or not?

Subhuti: Effectively, yes. I think it was Benn.

Kulananda: That's extraordinary.

S: This is one of the things I've been thinking about. I've been developing - it's not really the best time to say anything about it - a sort of critique of the concept of equality. I maintain that the concept of equality is inapplicable to human beings: that you cannot speak of human beings as being either equal or unequal in the strict sense. Because you can speak of, say, a pound of apples being equal to a pound of oranges in weight; but can you really apply that concept, derived from the material world, to human individuals?

_____: There's qualities and qualities, isn't there?

Kulananda: Which factors do you take into account?

S: Well, even physically, clearly people are not equal: they don't weigh exactly the same, they're not exactly the same height, they don't have exactly the same colour hair or eyes.

Kulananda: Or number of brain cells.

S: Or number of brain cells. So what is meant by saying - leaving aside whether you agree with it or not - first of all examine what is meant by saying that two people are equal. I think if one goes into this at all thoroughly one will find that the statement is completely meaningless. It's nonsensical. Therefore also you cannot speak in terms of inequality.

Kulananda: You can only speak of equality in respect of something. Say in what respect -

S: Well, in respect of something which is quantifiable. So, when you say - this is where I still have further work to do on my critique - if you say, for instance, that someone has more mettā than another, what do you mean by that statement? It isn't immediately clear. Can you quantify mettā, how can you measure mettā? etc. No doubt the concept of quantity of mettā can be employed metaphorically and loosely. But you have to be very careful how you do that, because clearly mettā is not measurable on a scale, so to speak. Unless - I don't know - the Transcendental Meditation people might have developed a mettā scale for all I know! They are rather fond of measuring and quantifying these things.

Kulananda: Then how can you talk about mettā at all, if you don't know what it is?

S: No, I'm not saying that you don't know what it is: I'm only questioning whether it is actually measurable in a quantitative sort of way, so that one person can be said to have more mettā than another.

Vajrananda: Are you saying that it's impossible to talk in terms of quantity or that it's just very very difficult to quantify?

S: No, I think all I'm doing is pointing out that when you quantify something you are treating it as something which is material, which it in fact is not. But all the time, of course, we are applying concepts derived from the material world to psychological facts and experiences, so we

cannot not do it, but we should at least be aware of the limitations of our language. Mr. Benn, or whoever it was made that statement, would seem to be not aware of them, and seems to believe that human beings can actually, in fact, be made equal. Presumably it would mean living in exactly the same kind of house, of exactly the same size, with exactly the same appliances, and with exactly the same number of children.

Kulananda: You'd have to look the same.

S: Probably you would have to have 2.3 children, [Laughter] or whatever it is; perhaps you'd have to be a clone to ensure your complete resemblance to all the other people in the street.

Prakasha: There is in a general sense, say, equality before the law, in which, say, individuals are equal.

S: Yes, that is quite different. One can certainly have equality before the law, at least in theory. Because, as someone once pointed out, both the rich and the poor are prohibited from stealing with complete impartiality. [Laughter]

Kulananda: Well, not quite!

S: The rich and the poor, yes, they're equal before the law, but a rich man can hire a good lawyer, under our system, a very brilliant lawyer, and the poor man perhaps cannot.

Devaraja: There was a good example of that recently - a woman, obviously from the upper middle class, an upper-class woman, she killed her husband, shot her husband, and I think she got off with just - I think they just let her go; because it became apparent from the story that she received a sympathy which someone from another background wouldn't have received. She'd been able to call loads of witnesses who all had titles or this that and the other to verify to her character. They had an incredible argument, and he was having an affair with some other woman, and she just pulled out her gun and shot him, which somebody else could not have got away with.

S: Well, there was another instance in, I think, last weekend's paper, a continuation of a correspondence. A couple living in what was apparently a quiet cul-de-sac had written - I hadn't seen this letter - to the paper, saying that they had a noise problem, because every Saturday night the quiet cul-de-sac was turned into a very, very noisy disco which kept everybody awake the whole night, and they were unable to do anything about this. They complained to the local authority, but they hadn't done anything. Someone had then written in to say that it was a very simple matter to get an injunction from a solicitor, and that they should do that. They then wrote to say that they had looked into that and they had found that an injunction from a solicitor would cost them at least £600 for each injunction, and since there were a number of people, a number of households, contributing to this noise, there would have to be a separate injunction served on every one of those parties. And they simply did not have those resources. They had a little money. Because they had that little money they didn't qualify for legal aid, so they were caught. So they had decided to use their little money, to put their little money towards moving out. You see? So they were, so to speak, equal before the law, they had legal rights, but on account of lack of money they were unable to have those rights enforced.

So the whole concept of equality before the law, though admirable in theory, I think in practice is riddled with ambiguities and difficulties.

Devaraja: Perhaps that is what Tony Benn was trying to get at.

Tejamitra: No, it would be more likely to be equal opportunity.

Subhuti: No, he was specifically denying equality of opportunity.

Tejamitra: Really?

Subhuti: He was saying that it was not a question of equality of opportunity, but equality of fact; so that people should have the same standard of living. I think that was mainly what he was getting at.

S: Yes. So, for instance, how do you balance one thing against another - how do you balance a refrigerator against a motor-car? You can't have both - right, which do you have? Or how big a refrigerator balances against how small a car? And so on. So it is very difficult to quantify, and therefore to equalise, things of this sort, and of course human beings.

So why is it that people have got this terrible disinclination in so many quarters not to recognise anything as better than themselves? - that is, intrinsically better? One would have thought that it was a very liberating experience to be able to look up to someone who was actually better than you.

Vajrananda: You have to have quite a strong faith in being able to develop.

S: I think it's because one thinks, or sees things, in terms of status rather than growth. Just as, for instance, you might have in a firm - your boss may actually be no better at his job than you are. He may know no more about the business of the firm than you do; but he is in a superior position. And one thinks of superiority - and even superiority in a spiritual context - in that sort of sense, as entirely accidental and external, not as anything intrinsic: a mere difference of position without any real meaning.

Subhuti: Don't the same philosophical problems attach to hierarchy as to equality?

S: Well, if you as it were quantify it. If you say, well look, on stage 1 one has got, say, two units of mettā, but on stage two you've got four units of mettā, and on stage three you've got eight units of mettā - if you look at it too literalistically like that, problems do arise. But then, of course, the question is, how do you look at it? How do you measure the intangible? Well, the idea of measurement itself can be applied, perhaps, only metaphorically.

Kulananda: But then you do have means of judgement - through behaviour.

S: Mm, ah, yes - that is another line of thought. But even there you apply quantitative vocabulary. You say, 'He is more fond of me than he is.'

Kulananda: You could say, 'He gives more evidence of fondness of me than he does.'

S: But the word 'more' is still used. You're still thinking really in terms of one thing being bigger than another. And bigness and smallness are categories derived from material experience.

[End of side one side two]

Kulananda: It is a material experience. If you say that somebody gives more evidence of affection, that is referring to a material experience.

S: Well, so you might say someone showed affection to you on seven occasions. Somebody else showed affection to you on one occasion. But then it could be argued that the one occasion was several times as intense as the seven occasions put together.

Kulananda: It could be argued that you're left with your own experience and you have a feeling that this one is more affectionate than that one.

S: Your feeling, of course, may be right or it may be wrong. [Laughter]
Kulananda: I can see that, yes. When you're talking about spiritual hierarchy I think it would be a great mistake to be absolutist. You can only say, 'It would appear that so-and- so is more developed than so-and-so', but you don't know.

S: Well, does that mean that one says, 'It would **appear** that an arahant is more developed than a non-arahant?

Kulananda: Well, I think you have to say - speaking as a non-arahant - you couldn't really make many statements with any degree of certainty, but you could talk about appearances and your own feelings. But I think to make statements - quasi-objective statements - would be a great mistake, because you just don't know.

S: But the difficulty is with people who support pseudo-egalitarianism that they do not say that it is difficult to tell the difference between, say, an arahant and a non-arahant. They will say 'There is no such difference at all. That kind of distinction is completely meaningless or illusory. There are no arahants.' And this is why, perhaps, in many places in the Pali Canon the Buddha mentions something like - what is it? - describing conditions for something or other, he says that people have faith in the law of karma and they believe that there are arahants in the world. In other words, they recognise this principle of what we've come to call spiritual hierarchy. They recognise that there are beings in the world more highly developed than themselves. But if you refuse to recognise that, then in Buddhist terms at least you negate the possibility of spiritual development, and therefore of spiritual life.

Kulananda: It all does hang from faith.

S: Well, I wouldn't say that. For instance, if one looks at the evolutionary process - well, let's say a mammal is a higher form of life than is a plant. That involves a sort of hierarchical principle. Some people would deny this [and say] that they are merely different; that the mammal is not higher in any sense than the plant, they are merely two different forms of life.

Kulananda: It's highly arguable, those statements.

S: Or, to put it more extremely, that some forms of life, say as far as we can see, are not conscious, or not so highly conscious. Other forms are conscious or more highly conscious. Well, some would question even that kind of statement. Nonetheless you can have a conversation, you can have a communication, with another human being, even with an animal to some extent, but with a plant it's much more difficult, and with a stone almost impossible. [Laughter]

Kulananda: Except that it could easily be pointed out that that might simply be a limitation of your own consciousness.

S: But even if there was a limitation of your own consciousness, there are degrees of limitation of your own consciousness, and therefore at least you have a hierarchy of degrees of consciousness.

Kulananda: Very sneaky! [Laughter]

S: Anyway, this is all, as it were, exploratory, because this does seem to be a very difficult, not to say touchy, area of modern popular thought.

Tejamitra: Can I just bring us back to feminism? Do you think that there is anything in that movement that could be of value to us? Do you see still current attitudes being - well, we're accused of male chauvinism etc. - is there still something in what the feminists are saying?

S: Well, I always distrust the thinking of people who use slogans, and I think 'male chauvinism' is just one of those slogans. And I think, as soon as one starts using expressions of that sort, all rational argument and rational discussion is at an end. You just pin a label onto someone. And if feminists assume, as some of them seem to, that every man by nature or by nature, by birth is a male chauvinist pig, there is no possibility of any discussion.

Tejamitra: Right.

S: It's just a waste of time. The woman's got a psychological problem and you're not going to solve it.

Tejamitra: Recently I had an experience in this. I've always been slightly baffled by what they've been going on about, but I recently had a talk with a woman about it and I was reasonably impressed. She's quite - she's now a Mitra, I think - she's quite well involved now. But the only thing that she was enthusiastic about was that women were just treated as individuals more, and that there was a tendency for them to be treated

as objects because of their sex.

S: I tend to take the line that this line of talk, coming from feminists, and women in particular, is just stupid, because it presupposes two things: that everybody is an individual, and that normally people treat others as individuals; that men treat one another as individuals but they don't treat women as individuals. Well, first of all, I don't agree that everybody is an individual anyway, whether male or female, and so treating them as an individual in the strict sense is really inappropriate. And then I don't accept the assumption here that men universally treat one another as individuals, it's only women that they don't treat as individuals. People are usually not treated by other people as individuals. One could say this is a point, in a way, that Ibn-al-Mubarak is making.

So the feminist seems to assume here that men go around treating other men as individuals, but when it comes to women, they don't treat them as individuals, and this is entirely wrong, I think. It's very difficult, first of all, for anyone to be an individual, it's very difficult to treat another person as an individual. So I think the feminists are grossly mistaken in thinking that it's only they who are treated by men as non-individuals, just because they are women. I think the general rule is that, assuming someone is an individual, the better you know them, the more you do treat them as an individual, assuming that you're an individual yourself to begin with. In the same way, feminists talk a lot of nonsense about men treating women as sex objects. Well, of course they treat them as sex objects.

Kulananda: Because they behave like sex objects.

S: No, because a male human being is a male human being, and a woman is a female human being, and of course males see females as females, just as females see males as males. That isn't the whole story, by any means, just because sex is not the whole story; but to think that a man can close his eyes to the fact that a woman is a woman is absolute nonsense. And similarly that a woman can close her eyes to the fact that a man is a man. It shows either incredible naïveté or an incredible unwillingness to face facts if a woman thinks that she can be anything - at least to begin with, or to some extent - in a man's eyes, than a sex object and vice versa. Do you think that women don't see men as sex objects? Well, in their case, they see men as a sex object - yes, a sex object with a meal-ticket attached to it. [Laughter] But this is incredibly clumsy thinking.

Devaraja: I have noticed one thing, though. A lot of the most militant feminists that I've come across are incredibly unattractive, I mean just physically unattractive. And I wonder to what extent the fact that they aren't attractive in just physical terms does actually - a lot of it's turned -

S: No, I don't know, because you can find some very unattractive women who are quite popular with men. And also one must admit, just for the sake of argument, or to make it more difficult - there are some feminists who are attractive. One can't deny this.

Devaraja: They are in the minority! [Laughter]

S: But what I'm concerned with is the logic of the arguments, and the pitiful assumptions that they make. Sometimes men also make the same pitiful assumptions as women. In fact, sometimes I think the feminists get most of their arguments from male sympathisers with the cause, from John Stuart Mill onwards. But then again there is the point that women say that they don't want to be treated as sex objects, but they very often

behave in exactly that way, without realising it perhaps, always. But to think that you, as a member of one sex, cannot be a sex object to a member of the opposite sex shows, I think, almost wilful stupidity.

Subhuti: Sona was saying that on the Swedish retreat there was a lot of topless sunbathing, and he protested at this; and he was accused of sexism because he was treating them as sex objects.

S: Well yes, that is utterly ridiculous.

Subhuti: Incredible.

S: Really one wonders how - well, I say it's wilful stupidity.

Subhuti: Apparently some of the Order members supported this view.

S: Well, I think, you see, that in the Order itself there needs to be more clear thinking. It's really stupid if Order members indulge in this degree of stupidity. Maybe we should discuss this under the heading of a uniform policy as it were on retreats and other occasions on the part of Order members. A woman Order member talked to me about this 'bra-lessness' on retreats, and seemed to think it a great joke. But sometimes one is - what shall I say? - one really wonders what to think when people seem to be, as I say, so wilfully stupid and just not want to think clearly and logically and intelligently.

Kulananda: It's interesting that feminists - well, many of the ones I've met, certainly in our Order - are highly reluctant to give up their physical attractiveness. Well, it's a very big weapon, I think, in their personal armoury. And so, on the one hand, you're accused of treating them as sex objects, on the other hand they're continually flaunting their sexuality.

S: Yes, right. I think some women are what I would call semi-feminists or dishonest feminists. They use feminist arguments and tactics as weapons in the sex battle with men. This is what it really amounts to.

Even all this talk about not being treated as sex objects - it's all part of a ploy. It's a part of the game in relationship with men. It's to give them an advantage over men. That is not to say that a man who is trying to be an individual will try to see women as individuals too, to the extent that they are individuals, and treat them as such. But it must be honest. The woman concerned must really be trying to be an individual, and the man must be trying to be an individual, and there mustn't be all this talk of not being sex objects as really part of the game of being a sex object.

Devaraja: It's unreasonable for a woman, if she is in a sexual relationship with someone, to take that position. If she really wants not to be treated as a sex object, she must not be in a sexual relationship.

S: Well, I wouldn't put it as extremely as that, but the sexual relationship mustn't be the central fact in her life. Because, yes, you do have a

physical existence, yes, you do belong to a particular sex, and, yes, there is a sexual feeling, and yes, there may be a sexual relationship, but the more you are an individual the more peripheral that becomes. So on appropriate occasions you can, at least for the time being and to a limited extent, treat the other person as a sex object. You may try, at the same time, to hold in consciousness the fact that they're not merely a sex object, that they are not merely a member of the opposite sex, but that is extremely difficult, at least at the time when that particular factor is uppermost.

Kulananda: That makes the sexual relationship a sort of mutual exploitation, doesn't it?

S: Well, this is what it is. You could also say it's nature exploiting both parties, for the ends - the perfectly legitimate ends, so to speak - of perpetuating the species.

But I sometimes almost despair of the human race, when I find people so illogical, and so wilfully illogical. Just to come back, just finally, again, to the feminists - I don't say that individual women may not have a point; maybe they have been treated badly in individual instances. Some men have been treated badly by some women, so one shouldn't close one's eyes to actual facts. But the logical arguments of the feminists, I think, are completely unacceptable, usually.

Though, I think, as regards retreats, and especially mixed retreats, there must be a clear policy on the part of Order members, in accordance with FWBO principles, that we'll have no truck with this sort of pseudo-feminism; otherwise why should we hold retreats at all? Why should we hold mixed retreats on which men are unnecessarily frustrated, and so on and so forth? The Indians take the view that if you have men and women together you're going to get some form of sexual hanky-panky, so if you don't want that you keep them apart.

So I think we really need to consider what our policy is going to be on mixed retreats, or even whether we're going to have them at all. If you're going to have mixed retreats with women walking around without their bras and all that sort of thing, you'd better not have mixed retreats at all, because why should you? You're not doing it just for fun, or it's not just a holiday. You're doing it for the furtherance of the ideals of the FWBO and the spiritual life. That's why you're doing it, otherwise it's a sheer waste of time. And if some Order members, whether male or female, think that you can legitimately have that sort of mixed retreat, well they'd better think again: they've got something seriously wrong.

Devaraja: And so, if you've got someone who's coming to a retreat for the first time, perhaps - a woman - and she's, say, sunbathing topless, it's up to the woman Order member to go in and -

S: Yes. It is up to the women Order members especially. It's difficult for a male Order member to intervene. So the women Order members have got to get it right. If they haven't got it right, they shouldn't be invited to help lead mixed retreats again. And if the woman concerned, even after it's been explained by a woman Order member, doesn't wish to comply, she should be asked to leave the retreat. I think we must be very clear about this.

Kuladeva: Did the women eventually comply on the Swedish retreat?

Subhuti: Nobody attempted to make them do so. Sona was the only person, as far as I understand - apart from Dharmavira -

S: And he didn't get backing, as far as I've understood, from the other Order members present.

Subhuti: No, apart from Dharmavira.

S: Apart from Dharmavira - oh, that's good.

So perhaps we ought to even publish something about this in *Shabda*, or let it be discussed at an Order weekend and thrashed out, and a definite policy adopted. And maybe people could be encouraged to listen to the tapes of this study retreat. Because we have to ask ourselves, why are we in business at all? What are we really trying to achieve? I know, when it's a question of open, mixed retreats, and there's a lot of beginners, there has to be a bit of leeway; you can't expect people at once to comply with FWBO requirements or see things in the way that we see them. But Order members present should at least be clear and at least people should be gently nudged in a particular direction; because they <u>are</u> coming on a Buddhist retreat - they know that. They're not coming on a sort of free-for-all. They're coming on a Buddhist retreat which is run by Buddhists - and presumably they want to find out about Buddhism, or get involved with Buddhism, at least to a limited extent. So they cannot be allowed to behave in a way which is completely contrary to that.

_____: It's utterly outrageous.

Prasannasiddhi: There seems to have been a tendency in the past for people to deny that these things have an effect on them, and to think that somehow it doesn't have an effect, even just seeing women around and having women -

S: Well, that's one might say, a relic of Victorianism - yes! [Laughter] - to pretend that it's not there, to pretend that sexual feelings are not present; that when they are there, in very many instances, and sometimes quite strongly. We have to chat with women, and talk, and be polite, and hand them cups of tea, pretending that you don't feel a thing - that you're completely oblivious of the fact that it's a young woman - that it's just the same, so far as you are concerned, as an old man. This is what you're supposed to pretend. So what is this, if it isn't Victorian? Or you're supposed to pretend that you can see a half-naked woman lying beside the swimming pool and not feel a thing, oh no! [Laughter] She's just another individual! It might just as well be an old man, for all you feel! So, is it really honest?

Kulananda: It's extremely alienated.

Subhuti: It was put the other way, apparently: Sona was accused of being just a hung-up Englishman with sexual problems.

S: That's another thing with some continentals - they ascribe it to English hung-upness. Well, it could be that some people on the continent, some men, <u>are</u> still so Victorian, they've repressed their natural sexual feeling to such an extent, that they are not conscious of being affected at all. I would say, if they're not, they're in a bad way, because they've repressed their natural sexuality to that extent. You ought not, as a healthy

male human being, to be able to be in proximity of a woman in that situation without feeling it to some extent - unless you're at least a Stream Entrant or something of that sort.

Prasannasiddhi: Or maybe pretty old. [Laughter]

Devaraja: Well, I don't know about that!

Prasannasiddhi: Are you speaking from experience?

Devaraja: Speaking from age!

Prasannasiddhi: Well, you're not very old, you're only 38.

S: But it seems to - it's almost a lack of honesty, a lack of clear thinking. There's so much of this sort of pseudo-ideological claptrap. I wonder how on earth people got into it. In India they're so clear; they don't really believe it's possible for a young man and a young woman to be left alone for two minutes without something happening! They won't believe that it won't happen, so they keep them separate, when it's necessary to keep them separate. It's only on recognised occasions, when they get married, that, well, yes, they're allowed to be together. They expect that the inevitable will happen and that babies will follow; and babies invariably do. But until the society wants it to happen, they keep the sexes completely separate. That is the wisdom of their tradition, almost. But it's as though we refuse to face the facts, very often - we pretend that the facts are not there, that the situation is other than what it is. Anyway, enough said about that.

I suggest that if you've got a mixed retreat and it's led by a mixed team, you've got to sort out things in advance with the women Order members, and if you have your preliminary team retreat, as often you do, that's the time to do it, and no sort of hanky-panky. If you've got hanky-panky going on on that mixed team retreat itself, how can you sort things out? So you have to be very careful to guard against that.

Kuladeva: I wonder if on retreats generally we shouldn't observe the *brahmacarya* vow as at Vajraloka -

S: Well, that would be a good thing.

Kuladeva: Maybe not on a beginners' retreat.

S: You couldn't ask beginners to observe it - people coming to the retreat from outside; but certainly it would be a good idea if the team observed it. But obviously that must be by - well, I'd rather assumed that they did anyway.

Kulananda: I see no reason why we can't ask other people to: why we can't we ask beginners.

S: No, I think that is a little difficult.

Kulananda: If they're going on a Buddhist retreat.

S: If it was a meditation retreat, say at Vajraloka, perhaps. But I think an open retreat - it might be difficult.

Prasannasiddhi: Especially if they're very new.

S: And very young.

Devaraja: I can't imagine that the team would not be observing *brahmacarya*.

S: Well, I think I have heard of occasions on which they have not, but on the whole I tend to assume that they do. And not just by as it were accident, but because they have resolved to apply their minds definitely to that situation and be contributing to it, and therefore have no time for anything else, anyway.

Kuladeva: Well, I was quite surprised to read in one of the reportings-in in a recent *Shabda*s, not the latest one, about the last Mixed Order Convention - that there was some apparently some flirtation going on. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but that would imply that people weren't wholeheartedly practising it - Order members -

S: Well, one must be a bit careful, because what does one mean by 'flirtation'? Some women find it very difficult not to be flirtatious in small ways - you know, just the way they chat. So perhaps one shouldn't make too much of that. I must say that the last - well, I did hear about, as I mentioned, I think - the last (of course, mixed) Convention - that there was no hanky-panky. This is what I had understood. But apparently other people who were there, including at least one Mitra working in the kitchen, had other impressions, quite definitely - a Mitra who subsequently became an Order member.

But I think if you get men and women together, especially young ones, I think there is going to be an element of flirtatiousness, at least of a mild kind. I think it's going to be very difficult to obviate that. So I think if one does accept that there are going to be mixed situations, you're going to accept at least a little bit of - one might say socially acceptable flirtatiousness, which perhaps shouldn't be taken too seriously. But the sort of thing that happened on the Swedish retreat shouldn't be allowed.

Nagabodhi: I think the only alternative would be to have no mixed events at all.

S: I think that is quite difficult at the present stage. But if we did find that mixed events were in fact not events at all, because -

Nagabodhi: - if they had no value, if they resulted in no people .....

S: It's clearly a question of weighing one thing against another, and I think we have so far concluded that mixed events on the whole are valuable and useful, and therefore we continue having them. But I think the higher the degree of awareness on the part of the Order members involved, both men and women, the more likely that they will continue to be valuable and useful. And therefore when the mixed team has its own preliminary retreat before the main retreat, they must be very careful to get these things sorted out, they must be very careful to be agreed.

And I think it rests - perhaps it isn't in a way quite fair to say this - but I think it rests very much with the women Order members, how they behave, because that affects the women on the retreat, the non-Order members. And I think women can be flirtatious in a way that men usually are not. So perhaps a little onus rests upon them. They might not agree with this. They might say that men were equally flirtatious, but I'm not so sure of that. Anyway, let's carry on.

So the conclusion is: 'There is no one at all whose condition cannot be improved in some respects, or made worse'. Don't judge anyone too absolutely.

All right, let's carry on, then, with the traditional stories.

"Tradition tells how a certain man praised another in the presence of God's Messenger (God bless him and give him Peace!) then blamed him the very next day. So he (Peace upon him!)...."

S: He means of course Muhammad

"said:
- You praise him one day and blame him the next!
- Yesterday I told the truth about him, and today I did not lie about him. He pleased me yesterday so I told the best I knew of him. He angered me today so I spoke the worst I knew of him.
To this he (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:
- Reasoned argument can be sorcery.
He evidently disapproved of it, since he likened it to sorcery."

S: Ah! Now that's quite interesting. It ties up to some extent with what we've been talking about. Apparently the man's position was quite logical and quite reasonable: 'Yes, I praised him yesterday because he did something good. I blame him today because he did something bad.' But the prophet says: 'Reasoned argument can be sorcery.' He doesn't say it is sorcery [but] it can be sorcery. So he doesn't accept the other person's statement at its face value. Muhammad seems to think that the other person is, as we would say, rationalising; because it's true that you can speak well of a person on one occasion and not so well on another, according to circumstances, but this person, apparently, was not doing that in an honest way. He was finding an excuse for his own negativity. He was using reasoned argument, but it was like sorcery.

And I think this is what the sort of people do who argue along the lines that we were mentioning: saying that a woman is not a sex object and all the rest of it. It's reasoned argument, but it is, in Muhammad's terms, sort of sorcery. It's rationalisation. It's dishonest. [Pause]

_____: Shall we go on?

S: Yes - anything more to say about that? The text says: 'He evidently disapproved of it, since he likened it to sorcery' - sorcery being for Muhammad, apparently, a very negative term indeed. So reasoned argument can be sorcery. It can be like witchcraft. It can be a sort of black magic. It can cast a sort of very negative spell. And this is exactly what ideologies like Feminism with a capital F, and egalitarianism - or pseudo-Egalitarianism with a capital E - do actually do.

It really is astonishing the hold that these sort of ideologies have upon people, and how impermeable people holding to these ideologies are to rational argument, even to discussion. They think that truth is so much on their side, they have only got to mouth their particular slogans and you're supposed to collapse. If someone says to you, 'Ah! You're being sexist!' well you're supposed to immediately collapse, you're supposed to weaken at the knees and fall down flat.

And I think we've got to stand up to this sort of thing much more than we actually do. I think people are much too apologetic and knock-kneed, because it's as though the pseudo-liberals have got everybody else on the run. They're making the running, as it seems - at least in certain circles. So I hope that Order members will really stand up and fight these wrong ideologies. Of course, you've got to be able to argue yourself, or you've got to be able to persuade the other person to discuss the matter instead of just mouthing these slogans.

But it's almost as though we're confronted by a new sort of pseudo-orthodoxy - just as, say, in the middle ages, if someone could say, 'Ah, that's heretical!', at once you'd go out of your way to prove that, oh no, you're not a heretic, you're utterly orthodox, please don't call me a heretic! In the same way, if someone points to you and says, 'You're sexist', you're at once supposed to say, 'Oh no, no, no, I'm not a sexist, please don't say that I'm a sexist; no, no, no, I believe in equality. I believe that women are just as good as men if not better', etc., etc. You're supposed to be reduced - and sometimes are reduced - to an abject, grovelling state, and you can only apologise and wriggle on your belly on the ground in front of these clamorous creatures.

Subhuti: I've begun to be a bit concerned because they're actually being sanctioned by law now, aren't they?

S: Yes, indeed, yes.

Subhuti: There's actually persecuting power behind these ideologies.

Kuladeva: On some of the councils in London - most of the Labour-controlled ones - have got women's committees, and they are trying to change things like terminology.

Kulananda: My god, it's the Inquisition, isn't it?

S: I'm not saying that women may not have special difficulties, and that there may not need to be special provision made for women and special care for women under certain circumstances. We mustn't deny that, and that is certainly true. But on the other hand, a certain ideology is being enforced by law with which one may not be in agreement, and the ideology itself may be very much at fault.

Devaraja: There's another thing: there's what they call positive discrimination, if you've heard about that: that women are positively discriminated for.

S: Which assumes that they've been discriminated before against, which is not necessarily the case. It's like saying that the cat was being discriminated against because the mouse could run! So the mouse is forbidden to run because that would be discriminating against the cat! That's positive discrimination in favour of the cat: all mice are hereby forbidden to run!

It's really pathetic that people are duped by this and misled by this - men too. Men on the whole seem rather puzzled, because they're rather taken aback by the fierceness and militancy of the women, and they can't help thinking, maybe they've got a point; maybe there's some right on their side; and, yes, there sometimes are incidents of individual injustice or suffering, which can't be overlooked. But the men themselves don't have a well thought-out philosophical position, so they're unable, really, to say anything against these ideologies.

Kuladeva: I think generally among young men there is unquestioning acceptance of a lot of these things.

S: Oh dear.

Kuladeva: I've noticed that at university, actually. Not that anybody, apart from people who are interested in politics, talks about it very much, but when people do open their mouths and talk about it, there's no - They just assume that it's right.

S: But none the less instinct goes along in its own way. Men actually do treat women as sex objects; whatever they may say that women should be treated as individuals, the average young man continues to treat women as sex objects, even perhaps in an undesirable way, in a way that we would not agree with, and does in fact often sexually exploit women.

I remember the hippies used to do this - male hippies, I mean. If a woman wouldn't immediately jump into bed with them, what would the hippies say? Some of you may remember: 'Oh, the poor so-and-so, she's hung up, she's got a thing about sex', etc., etc. They'd just say she was hung up. But they would say this just in the interests of their own sexual appetite. They weren't really concerned that she was hung up and wanting to do something about it. That was just part of the manoeuvre of getting her straight away into bed.

But, yes, there must be more clarity of thought and more determination.

Nagabodhi: The one that I get quite a lot of stick about is this language one, the 'he-his' terminology'. If I entered this sort of area on this recent mixed retreat, the only area that actually did upset me and cause me quite a lot of thought, was the complaint that the readings were in male language, or your lectures were in male language, which really - it gave me some food for thought, because I did have, say, 60 women at one point and only 20 men. But it just seemed that what we were dealing with was the Dharma, which was so clearly and palpably having a good effect on the women there, in no matter what terms it was being presented, that for people to carp about the language -

S: Well, one can understand, for instance, that if you've a lot of women present and all the readings are about incidents from the lives of monks, and not a single one from nuns, yes, that is understandable. By all means have readings from the lives of the nuns, because that shows that women too can develop spiritually. It would be unskilful to have only readings which pertained to men. Certainly one can say that.

Vajrananda: Well, we did this.

S: But you can't evade the fact that the Buddha was a man, and there you've got this - I noticed this on the women's retreat that I went to at Battle - there is this male figure seated there on the altar. So how are you going to get around that? - unless you insist on having only Tara or a female Buddha form, which I suppose you could; but then even so the historical founder of Buddhism happened to be a man. You can't get around that fact. And most of the leading disciples, and most of the leading inspiring figures of Buddhism happened to be men; you can't get away from that. All right, we quote from, we read from, the *Songs of Milarepa* - all right, if there is an equally inspired set of songs by a woman yogi, by all means let us use them, let us use them on men's retreats too. But where <u>are</u> those equally inspired songs by a woman yogi? All right, yes, if there is a text written by a woman equally inspiring with Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*, <u>by all means</u> let us study it, but where is that text?

So we are also landed, in a way, with the historical situation. We can't bring in something by women for the sake of bringing in something by women. Certainly we can be skilful and make it possible for women to feel involved, but we can't go to the extremes that the feminists would seem to expect and to demand.

For instance, I did hear that some of the women on that retreat felt that inasmuch as a majority of women were present, it should have been -

[End of tape six]