

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

Forest Monks of Sri Lanka Contents:

- 1/2 Criteria in the scriptures for establishing the unitary ideal
- 2 The 'Ideal' and lifestyle
- 3/4 Does one need kalyanamitrata to move towards insight?
- 4/5 Were renunciation and monasticism invented just once?
- 5/7 Unity between sensualism and asceticism?
- 8/9 Being 'ascetically inclined'
A hierarchy of lifestyles?
- 10/12 Greater formality within the FWBO Can it discourage people?
- 13 Did the Buddha's rejection of caste weaken after his death?
Did the Buddha reject caste?
- 14 An attempt to reorder the social hierarchy
- 15/16 Acting as a model of renunciation for others to follow?
- 17 Can the forest revival actually be the spiritual life?
Are Sinhalese values Buddhist values?
- 18 The term 'Bodhaneyya'
- 19 The 'appetite for order'
- 20 'Purity'
- 21/22 The place of sila in the FWBO. Is the sila practised by the monks in Sri Lanka that different to that practised by lay followers?
- 23/25 The unifying tendency of dukkha
- 25 Does the FWBO have a "mythic charter"?
The image of the hundred thousand armed Avalokitesvara for the Order
- 26 "Five motives for taking up the spiritual life"
 - i) Revival of Buddhist tradition
 - ii) Escape from social oppression in stratified society
- 27 Co-operative right livelihood
- 28 Creative use of leisure
 - iii) Overcoming economic difficulties
 - iv) Find a way out of psychological distress/ understanding religious experiences
- 29/30 A military career as a prelude to the spiritual life?
The Buddha referring to his bhikkhus as Kshatriyas - warriors
- 31 Changing and developing the mind by changing one's living conditions
- 32 A history of the FWBO using Order members' life stories
- 32/33 The role of the guru in Hindu society
- 33 Becoming monks/nuns to achieve social mobility
- 34 Practical problems (on this seminar) of trying to study so much text each day
- 35 Chapter Two Converting people from the "top" downwards i.e. the most prominent people first.
- 36 Approaching other castes in India, apart from just the Mahars
- 37 Bhante's contact with Nyanatiloka and Nyanaponika
Why did Nyanatiloka not use an existing hermitage?
- 38 The importance of Bhante's poems to his life
Bhante's strong feeling for nature
How Bhante's writings do not fully represent him

39Immersing oneself in nature as a solution to sexual tensions
40An organic awareness of nature
40/43Lama Govinda's opinion of Nyanatiloka
41More about plant life and wildlife
42Nyanatiloka's intellect interfering with his spiritual aspirations
43Goethe and Buddhism
44/46Myths and living out myths
47Are Buddhist and Christian aspiration similar?
48Vedanta and its effect on western culture
Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, 1893, bringing the Eastern religions to meet the west
49The Industrial Revolution and alienation from nature
50The value if any of the Romantic movement
51/52The "spiritual significance" of nature in Chinese Buddhist art/poetry?
52/53The Romantic poets and the subject/object duality
53Does the old "hippy movement" still influence the Order in terms of hunting out spectacular and extraordinary experiences?
54Indirect methods of raising consciousness - as medicine or food.
The passive use of music
55/56A busy life interfering with one's meditation?
57A one month solitary retreat every year
Bhante's definition of a solitary retreat
58Developing insight through intensive writing about the Dharma whilst not doing very much meditation
Use of the word 'Creative'
59Combining writing and meditation
60Excitement as disturbance
61Excitement, enthusiasm, inspiration, stimulation and the way the terms become mixed up
Common misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the *anatta* doctrine
62The Romantic view of self
63Bhante's spiritual experience walking along Tooting Broadway, London!
63The 'influences' on Bhante's spiritual life
64Is there any originality in Nyanatiloka's writings?
65Govinda being a German Romantic writer in a previous life
66Was Nyanatiloka's really a Buddhist way of life?
67Bhante's empathy with all writers and their writings
68/71Living out a childhood dream
Examining one's attraction to Buddhism
71Chairmen not imposing their own limitations on their Centre
72/73Bhante's attraction to Lama Govinda as opposed to Nyanatiloka
73Lama Govinda and Li Gotami's relationship
74The writing of biographies
75/78The value or place, if any, of obedience in monastic life
79/82The Visuddhimagga and Buddhaghosa
83The better translation of the Visuddhimagga?
84The Tipitaka

84/85Purification as the master metaphor of the Buddhist Path?
86/87The seven stages of Insight or panna, by purification
88Do all Buddhists need, to some extent, to be scholars?
88/89An intellectual blueprint for the FWBO?
89/90Order members being excluded from Chapter Meetings?
91/92Is ordination the point of self reliance?
93/95Making a pleasing, favourable impression
Being celibate could give an unfavourable impression
94Selecting handsome men to be monks in Sri Lanka
95/96Bhante's experience of the dhutangas
96/97Sleeping in a sitting position
98Living under trees
99People asking Bhante for practices prematurely
100Bhante's teaching of "element practices" to beginners
101Use of the Vajrasattva mantra outside the Order
102Inappropriate teachings readily available in publications
103The term asceticism as used in the Mangala Sutta
103/104Department in the Order and the FWBO
105/106The twofold purpose of walking and chanting practice
107/108Taking mindfulness from meditation into one's daily affairs
109"Viveka" - individuality
110Not trying to attract homage - Arahant hunting!
Asceticism as training
111Comments on this method of study
111/112Wanting Bhante to lay down rules
113When to ask Bhante for help and when to ask Order members
114How Bhante can get his point heard where others fail
115Access to Bhante. Do people really need individual personal interviews with him?
116/118Next session - Pannananda's life
116/117Bhante's first knowledge of the Forest Monks
119/120The terms "Mahayana" and "Hinayana" can truly be used only to designate attitudes
120/122The advantages of knowing Order members' and others' biographies
Reading biographies of Buddhists in history
123Being familiar with the life of The Buddha
124Bhante's childhood love of fairy stories
Producing children's story books in the FWBO
125-126The concept of Hell in Buddhism
127Enforced celibacy and sadism
128Representing the Hell Realm on the Wheel of Life
129-130The effects of the fear of Hell
130What does the Bodhisattva do in Hell?
131Descents into Hell - Order Members, Dr. Johnson
132-134Psychological implications of the Christian world view
135-137The introduction of caste into Sri Lanka
137Is the Western Buddhist Order a Nikaya?
138-139Differences between the Sri Lankan Nikayas

139-141 Recognition of the WBO and its ordination by the wider Buddhist world
141 Lineage as a psychological support
141-142 Moving away from "Centre Based" activities in the FWBO
143 Maintaining friendly relations with Local Government etc.
143-144 Contact with local Buddhist groups etc.
145 Dealing with "myths" about the FWBO
146 Living out transcendental myths
147 Meditating whilst walking - samatha or vipassana?
148 Where can the pratimoksa be found in literature?
149-150 Chanting of 'pirit' or blessings
151-152 Chanting in Theravada countries
153 Karmic consequences of functioning within the power mode
154 Pannananda's dream of his death
154-155 Analysis of dreams
156 Story telling as a way of trying to organise chaos
156-157 Subjectively embellishing (and editing) objective writings
158 The selectivity of memory
158-159 Bhante's first meetings with particular people
160 Next Session - Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 19th Century
161-163 Chapter Five. The origins of the Jataka stories and their importance
164 Being upset by exaggeration in Indian stories
165-166 Sri Lankan civilisation being unitary and archaic
166-167 Holding the fan before the face when giving talks in Sri Lanka
168 Severing contact with the world in an unhealthy way?
169 Walking in purity
170 The connection between certain actions and certain mental states behind them
171 Incurring bad karma by asking others to kill/commit unskillful acts
172-173 Can the laws of society reflect the laws of karma?
174-176 The Bodhisattvas' mission being the salvation of the whole universe
174-175 Being personally responsible for society's actions
176-177 Intervention of Devas
178 The origin of evil and negative forces in Buddhism
179 The ten paramitas and the ten paramis
Yashodhara - did she exist?
179-181 'Soulmates' being reborn together
181-182 Have the Sinhalese overemphasised pain and renunciation
183-184 Carrithers difficulty in seeing the spiritual in the Forest Monks
185-186 Seeing signs or characteristics of spiritual or transcendental attainments?
186-188 "Passive heroism"??
189 Bringing human emotions into harmony with the spiritual ideal
190 "From the spiritual point of view, there is danger in everthing"
191 "You can change anything except the three refuges"
192 The Buddha's legacy for the structure and organisation of the Sangha
192-193 The Buddha's distinction of major and minor precepts
193 Did Mahakassapa have a 'downer' on Ananda?
194-195 Self ordination

196 Self ordination as the only possible ordination
 There are no valid ordinations anywhere in the Buddhist world!

196-197 The death of the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage

198-199 Does the pupil-teacher relationship stunt the younger one's individuality?

200-202 Hippy influences on the FWBO?

203 Not to be put off by externals

204 The attraction of the FWBO for young people

205 Subodhananda's movement as a reform movement?

206 Was the FWBO started as a reform movement?

207 Gap in recording - upasaka/bhikkhu/dharmachari?

208 A Dharmachari - neither bhikkhu nor lay

209 Sangharakshita being a bridge between two dispensations - a Buddhist Luther!?

210 The Bodhisattva ordination modifies earlier Hinayana ordinations

211 There is no valid bhikkhu ordination anywhere!
 The Mahayana dependence on the spirit and not the letter

212-213 The difficulties of communicating that the FWBO is a many sided movement

214 Sangharakshita's success in founding a Sangha

217-218 What to do if Order members or mitras commit serious criminal offences

218 Animals disguised as monks!

219 The use of beads/rosaries/malas in some Theravada countries
 Very slow walking meditation

220-221 Becoming monks to earn merit for relatives

222 Literal transference of merit in death ceremonies?
 Not thanking your host when in India

223 Shared karma

224 Dissent and segmentation

225 Cemetery meditation. Is it pre-Buddhistic?

225-226 Worship of bones/relics

227 Buddhist and Christian aestheticism compared regarding worship of relics

228 Tapasi Himi and the Mahabodhi Society

229 Why were eunuchs not allowed into the Sangha?

230 Next Session - Chapter Eight Egalitarianism in the Sangha

230-231 Kalyanamitrata or lack of it in Sri Lanka

231 The purpose of the spiritual community as regards society

232 Having to justify oneself

233 Looking after the spiritual needs of society

234 Pupillary succession after a teacher dies

235 Developing decision making machinery within the Order as a whole
 Meeting in large numbers

236-237 The head of the Sangha being appointed by the secular state in some countries

238 The chapters as a sort of counterbalance to the chairmen in the FWBO

239-240 Land owned by individual bhikkhus rather than the Sangha

241-242 The state and the Sangha (continued)

242 Will the WBO and FWBO make a significant impact on the world?

243-244 Smaller Buddhist centres as opposed to a few very large ones

244-245 Literary attainments of bhikkhus

- 246Autobiography writing as a teaching practice?
- 247The difficulty of writing spiritual autobiography
- 248Bhante's plans for his autobiography
- 249Bhante's way of writing - his difficulties with it - form and content
- 249-250Repenting breaches in the Vinaya - (parajikas - rules for expulsion)
- 251Rustication from the Sangha
- 252-254Procedures for dealing with Order members who will not admit faults?
- 253Rules being laid down - the beginning of decay of the Sangha
- 256Many rules and few arahants
- 257Sexual repression in Sri Lanka?
- 258Rational and irrational guilt
- 259Certain sexual indulgence initially among some Theravada Buddhists
- Disrobing for the weekend!
- 260Why celibacy is not compulsory within the FWBO/WBO
- Gradually phasing out sexual activity
- 261The love of virtue or the fear of vice?
- 262Inherently filthy? Excremental imagery and the caste system
- 263Homosexual practice in Buddhist history?
- 264A middle path between repression and permissiveness
- 265Homosexuality and Spiritual Friendship?
- 265-266A.I.D.S. and the FWBO and Communities
- 267-268Alternating between country retreat Centres and city Centres
- 269Next Session - Chapter Nine Lying as a parajika
- 270The Sangha and the state (once more) - The Sangharaja
- 271-272Finding a head of the Order/spiritual movement
- 272The accuracy of the Mahavamsa
- 273The main aspects to be embodied by an ideal Order member
- The Chairman of a Centre being an "all rounder"
- 274All rounders (possibly more worldly people) as leaders
- 274-277A good all round Chairman
- 278Resolving differences in the Order
- 278-279Positive schism - *Sanghabheda*
- 279-281Regular meetings of lay followers in the early Sangha?
- Regular meetings of the bhikkhus in the Buddha's day
- 281-282Going for Refuge yet not being part of the Sangha?
- 282-283Teaching lay followers to respect bhikkhus
- 283-284Simas - physical boundaries or places of ordination
- 285The original constitution of the Sangha
- 286-287Higher criticism of Buddhist Canonical literature
- 287-288Brahmacharya at the age of forty? Is it the same for women and men?
- 288-289Any advantages of Buddhism being recognised as a national religion?
- 290Pluralistic societies
- 290-291The tolerance of Islam towards minority religions (as opposed to the intolerance of many Christian churches)
- 291Thai, Burmese and Sri Lankan Buddhist literature
- 292Mahayana and Vajrayana phases in Sri Lankan history?

292The colour of robes
293Keeping a low profile with regard to the State
293-294Entering Muslim states as a Sufi Brotherhood
294Starting a Buddhist political party?
295-296Assessing readiness for ordination into the WBO
297-298The ease of getting ordained in the East
299-304Starting an FWBO Forest Monks movement in Sri Lanka
305-306Next Session - Attributes of the three jewels
306-307Texts showing the importance of going for refuge
307-309*Ordination and Initiation in the Three Yanas* - Bhante's essay
309-310The four criteria for Mitraship - are they adequate? Shopping around? Regular meditation practice? Helping out around the centre?
311-315The importance of dreams? Some of Bhante's dream experiences
316-317The advantages of romanticism (if balanced by a down to earth attitude)
318-321The beginnings of a new Movement - FWBO history
322Lajjava - "modesty"
323-324Irrational guilt and rational guilt *Hiri and Ottapa*
326-327Government intervention in the Sangha
327-328Monks living up to a public image
329-330Falsely presenting oneself Neurotic desire to get to the top of the "pecking order"
331-332The possible incompatibility between "scholarship" and meditation
333Pressure on monks to be socially useful
333-334Matthew Arnold's poem "The Scholar Gypsy" Wandering scholars
334Positive thoughts from humans influencing animals
335-336The forest as a place of fear
336-337Visualising what we would like to happen
337-338The Order as the Eleven Headed Thousand Armed Avalokitesvara
339-340Being careful of what you day dream about!
340-344Being more truly yourself with your clothes on (or off!)
342Too many penises in FWBO publications?
345An absence of all attributes
346Next Session - Chapter 10 Upasaka ordination in the WBO
347-350Explaining what the WBO is to other Buddhist Groups
348-352Buddhist "etiquette" when with other Buddhist groups
353Placing more emphasis on personal service
354Not to make radical changes immediately after ordination
Travelling (journeying) from Centre to Centre
355Fidelity to one's first teacher
3561956 - the Buddha Jayanti
357Jinavamsa in Sri Lanka and Sangharakshita in Kalimpong - Kindred spirits?
358-360How to introduce innovations into the FWBO
361Jinavamsa's sense of urgency
Is there enough of a sense of urgency in the WBO/FWBO?
362-365Describing oneself as a Priest or as what?
363Working for a 'living'
366Establishing contact with the monks in Sri Lanka, especially Jinavamsa

367-368 Writing article for magazines published by other Buddhist groups
368-369 Individual centres having their own newsletters
370 The WBO's selectivity of people who ask to Go for Refuge
371 Setting up the FWBO in Sri Lanka
372 Four reasons for Jinavamsa's success
373-374 The Siyama Nikaya as representatives abroad of the Sinhalese Sangha
374-375 Anagarika Dharmapala in Sri Lanka
375-376 A Punya Devata - guardian angel?
377 The Buddhist philosophy of the "decline of man"?
378 The use of kalyana mitrata within the meditative context
379 The three officials that attend a bhikkhu ordination
380 The non spiritual, appropriative approach to spiritual things ie. initiations.
381-383 Basic doctrinal categories - the Three Lakshanas, The Five Skandhas, The Eighteen Dhatus, the Eighteen Chittas, The Four Viparyayas
384 Vipassana meditation without sufficient preparation via Samatha
385-388 How certain vipassana meditation methods can have harmful effects.
386 The experience of dukkha being distinct from insight into the truth of Dukkha
388-389 Direct and indirect methods of raising the level of consciousness
389 Bare or Dry Insight
390-391 The roots of Mahayana and Vajrayana meditation in the Hinayana
391 Sunyata and the sunyata mantra in visualisation practices
392-396 Visualisation practice and its vipassana content
393-394 The tara mantras and their meaning
395 The mantra recitation or the visualisation or both?
396 Thinking as well as seeing when visualizing
398 Experiences of the five sense in meditation
399-400 Seeing something in meditation without subvocally naming or commenting on it
400 Visualisation practice as being imaginal
401 The senses are innocent - the mind creates the mischief!
Is vipassana meditation more difficult than samatha meditation?
402 The recollection of death meditation
403-404 Specific meditations for specific temperaments?
404-405 Extreme (Shattering) meditation experiences
405-406 Is there an uninterrupted meditation tradition in the Theravada?
406 Did Bhante have to revive the practise of mindfulness of breathing or metta bhavana?
407 Bhante's early experiences of the metta bhavana
Bhante's System of Meditation as a new innovation
408-409 Meditation diaries Enduring difficulties in meditation
410 Bhante's having never forgotten or lost contact with the Dharma for more than a minute or two
411 Bhante's first years of the Mindfulness of Breathing and his personal emphasis on mindfulness
412 Real Zen Just Sitting as opposed to just sitting
A short enjoyable meditation as opposed to a long unpleasant one
"The clenched teeth approach to meditation"
413-415 Should the pupil or the disciple or some other means choose which sadhana practice is

done by the pupil

416Next Session - Sanskrit

416-417Kasina meditation - hot and cold colours appropriate to temperament

418Possible loss of our colour sense due to modern dyes

419Living in and with colours connected with ones visualisation practice

420What is Padmasambhava's associated colour?

421-422Emotional associations with particular colours

422-423Persian miniature painting, Dante's Inferno and Sufi influences

423-424Fra Angelico and Rembrandt and colour

425Continuity when doing more than one visualisation practice

426Talking with others about ones efforts to meditate

426-428Why Bhante no longer does a formal sitting meditation practice

428-429The best situation for an average, young, newly ordained Order member?

430Ecclesiastical hierarchies in Buddhism

430-431Meeting in large numbers - Chairmen's meetings - are they getting too large?

431-432Keeping up trans-centre, and trans-regional friendships

433-434Gerontocracy in the Sangha - Senior and Responsible Order members

435-437Early history of the FWBO and Bhante's pleasure at its developments now

438A limit of 250 ordained disciples for each Order member

439Reaffirming one's private ordination by doing one's visualisation practice

440Order members confessing to each other. Taking the refuges from each other?

441Visualising Order members during the Order Metta Bhavana

442The need for newly ordained Order members to return to their original Centres

443-445Is there any early biography of the Buddha?

445-447The advantages of Order members studying at university?

445-446Non Buddhist being 'experts' on Buddhism!

447Bhante's points on chapter 12

448Next Session

448-450Dhamma-vicaya

James Joyce and Virginia Woolf

449Authors with a developed moral sense - George Eliot

451The paying down of Samatha in some Vipassana traditions

452Mindfulness, internal and external

453Relinquishing the unskilful and developing the skilful

453-455Having a sense of history The legendary past The history of history

456-457Assimilating the FWBO's history - archives, anniversaries, commemorations

The writing of history

457Brahmacarya is much more than merely celibacy - commitment rather than lifestyle

458-459Anukampa - compassion in the Theravada Arahants following the Bodhisattva Ideal

460The monk's life as an end in itself

461-462Bhikkhus not being permitted to do physical work

Work and the monastic life

463Bhante's lack of physical work

464A definition of Anatta

465-466Western scholarly influence on Eastern Buddhism?

466-467The influence of Bhante's writings and the FWBO in the East

467-468 Forest Monks in Thailand and Burma
468-469 You cannot have forest monks without a forest!
469-470 Trouble at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara!
470 General comments on the book studied
472-474 What individuals felt they have gained from studying the text
475 The monastic Sanghas' need for a laity
477 Being able to recognise the commitment of another person
Strengthening and testing one's own commitment
479 Never questioning an Order Member's commitment