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

Questions and answers on Chapter Three, The Forest Monks Of Sri Lanka

7th August 1985

S: ....did raise it arising out of the account of the life of Nyanatiloka, the question of obedience, do you remember that? Obedience is one of the three foundations, or requirements of monastic life in Christianity. A monk is vowed to Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. But in the case of Buddhism there is no question of obedience to any personal superior in the way that there is in Christianity, and this was one of the aspects of Buddhism that appealed to Nyanatiloka, that one was more free. But is it in fact as simple as that in the case say of Theravada Buddhism?

So really there are two questions here, one is the question of the value if any, or place if any, of obedience in monastic life or spiritual life, and two; whether the element of obedience is so absent from Theravada Buddhism as the author seems to believe. Does anybody have anything to say on either of these two points?

Abhaya : You did say something on this in Tuscany last year Bhante and you did say there is a place perhaps in Buddhism, or in the Movement, for obedience, but that it requires a high level of individuality on the part of the person who is obeying.

S: And also of course that obedience cannot be absolute. You obey that which you yourself recognise to be higher, because it is higher. Or you obey someone who is more experienced, or more advanced than you are, because you yourself recognise him to be more experienced, or more advanced. Not because he has been placed over you by some external, ecclesiastical authority. I think I mentioned in this connection, Thomas Merton's experience, as described by Monica Furlong in her biography. It seems to me when I read that biography - I don't know if anybody else has read it - that this was the great issue, as it were, really between him and the Christian Monastic life, or even possibly between him and Catholicism. It seemed to me when I read this biography that really he skated round this problem, or shirked this

problem. He didn't really face up to the fact that he was not happy with this principle of obedience. He got round it as best he could, without actually questioning it explicitly. That seemed in some ways the least satisfactory aspect of his life and the one that did give him the greatest trouble. So perhaps there is a limited place for obedience, though in Buddhism, in the spiritual life, but not in the Christian sense of a practically blind obedience to an authority appointed by the ecclesiastical superiors.

Buddhadasa : What about in Buddhism, obedience to a collective? You suggested that you can as it were be obedient to someone that you recognised as being in a higher way with more experience than yourself, but is there not a case for saying that one can be obedient to the majority of one's fellow Order Members that you respect?

S: Well if we take the Bhikkhu Sangha as our model, there is no question of obedience to the majority, because all questions concerning the Sangha have to be settled by consensus. There is no question of the odd man out having to obey the majority, merely because it is the majority.

Anyway not to linger over that particular question of obedience too much. It seems to me that in the Theravada there is actually obedience, but it is not to any person, as in Christianity. The obedience that is required of the monk is to the whole monastic discipline. For instance, Nyanatiloka, I think it is, makes the point, or maybe Nyanamoli made it, I think and the author quotes that, that when you obey the monastic discipline you are relieved of a great deal of trouble, because the scope of choice is restricted and very few alternatives are left to you. The monastic rule, the monastic law, tells you what you may do, what you may not do, and that relieves you from possible conflict, possible doubt. It simplifies life, but that is also the very point that is made in the context of Christian monasticism with regard to obeying a personal monastic superior. You have only one responsibility then - just to obey, and that will greatly simplify life. No problems, no psychological conflicts, it is all so simple so easy.

So one does find that in the monastic rule, in the monastic law, the Vinaya, in Buddhism, there is a sort of impersonal monastic superior, who tells you what to do, and makes life simple and, in a sense, easy for you by so telling you. Therefore, I say that it seems to me that perhaps Nyanatiloka was not quite so free from the necessity of obedience in Theravada Buddhism as a monk, as he seems to have believed. Not that it is quite the same, being told what to do by a personal superior, and being told so to speak, metaphorically, by the Vinaya. But there is certainly a common element, and therefore, also an element of obedience in both cases.

Kamalasila : What about the relationship between a bhikkhu and his preceptor, the relationship with the nissaya? I thought that in the *Three Jewels*, you said this was that he was obedient to him at all times, it might be for several years, or it might be for his whole life?

S: Yes, in a sense he is obedient, but it is not unqualified. For instance, he is not obliged to do anything which his teacher or preceptor may ask him to do if he feels it is against the Vinaya, or against the Buddha's teaching. In fact there is even provision made, where necessary, for the pupil, the disciple to point out his preceptor's mistakes, or even criticise him, which is not the case in Christian monastic life, at least not in most Orders as far as I can remember. So the obedience is far from being absolute, and one might say that in the case of Christianity, the training or the object of the training is to make the monk more and more obedient. But in Buddhism the aim is to make the monk less and less obedient. The aim of the training is to make him self dependent. You are as it were, apprenticed to an older monk, as to someone who is more experienced, more skilled than you, and his job is to train you so that you become as he is, you become as responsible as he is, and able to take charge, so to speak, of your own destiny.

So the obedience is quite limited, and quite provisional in the case of Buddhism. But perhaps in the West for certain well known reasons we tend to go to the other extreme. Perhaps in reaction in some cases, to the extreme of the Christian type of obedience. We start thinking that disobedience is a virtue, where as, in the middle, in between, you have the Buddhist conception of a sort of limited and provisional obedience, not unlike on its own level, the obedience of the child to the parents. Perhaps it is not without significance that even that obedience, or at least the idea of that obedience, seems to be rather in abeyance nowadays. We tend to think very often, that it is disgraceful to obey. You feel humiliated by having to obey somebody, even when he's giving a quite reasonable sort of command, or just asking you or telling you to do something.

Even in the case of some modern apprentices, the master says, "Give me that piece of wood," and the apprentice says, "I am not going to be

ordered around, I didn't come here for that!" You see what I mean? There is that sort of attitude. So nissaya means dependence, but it is dependence with a view to eventual independence. It is dependence in order that you may become independent. Usually it is considered that a monk needs to stay depending on his teacher for five years, or anything up to ten years. Quite a few monks choose to remain technically dependent indefinitely. They are not in a hurry to become independent by any means, and this is not for any negative reasons. They may be very strong characters in their own right, but they prefer to remain dependent on, in that sense, their teachers and to defer to their teachers. That certainly doesn't mean that they would surrender their power of judgement, or anything of that sort, or their own consciences.

It's a well known comparison in Christian monastic circles and monastic life, that the disciple is to be just like a corpse in the hands of his superior. I think the Jesuits make much of this. You have no more volition of your own than a corpse has. Bit this sort of way of looking at obedience would be quite unthinkable in Buddhism, because Buddhism does prize autonomy and responsibility so greatly. None the less, having said that, I think in these days it wouldn't be a bad idea if someone, at least for a limited period, as an experience, was to place himself under somebody's direction or guidance, especially say in a situation like that at Vajraloka, where life is quite simple, and aim simply to be obedient and to do as he was told, or to do as he was asked. I think that would be a very useful discipline, because he could be quite sure he wouldn't be asked to do anything unskilful, or anything that didn't help him, but he might be asked to do things he did not particularly want to do, or did not like doing, and that would be an extremely good discipline for him, and would also help him to realise the extent of his own self will. I think it should be just for a limited period, so to speak, for the sake of the experience. Because very often people are a mass of quite irrational preferences and whims and fancies, and it is better if these things are just put out of the way.

Kamalasila : What do you think is behind the Christian form of obedience. Obedience becomes increasingly greater. Why do you there is that attitude?

S: Well, of course the spiritual superior, say the abbot in the case of the monk, stands in the place of God. He is God's representative, so absolute obedience is owing to him, because it is owing to God. You have the same sort of way of looking at things in political terms, say in English history in connection with the divine right of kings. You have to obey the king. It's a sin to rebel against him because he has been appointed by God, and in rebelling against him, you are rebelling against God. So behind the ecclesiastical, or the political authority in such cases, stands the theological authority, the greatest authority of all, namely God. You don't see God, but God is there behind his representatives. The Pope also, in much the same way is his representative. So in disobeying the representative, you disobey God. Obedience to the representative is obedience to God, and a theist hardly needs to be told that obedience to God is a virtue.

I did hold forth once upon the Islamic idea of one being a slave of God, and tried to explain how because Muslims saw themselves and saw all good people as slaves of God, they did not look upon slavery as such in the way that we tend to do, and people find it quite hard to understand that in fact as far as I remember, they could not really take the point I was actually making at all on that occasion. But they don't regard slavery in the way that we would regard it, because they see God as the ultimate Master, and everybody being a slave to some extent, and they see that kind of slavery as constituting an ideal.

So if one man is a slave to another, he is only, as it were, reflecting the relationship which all men in any case have to God. That is in passing. I

was making that point to illustrate a different point of view, but at that time it was not very well appreciated (laughter). Some people almost felt I was trying to defend slavery, but I wasn't.

Devaraja : I think people did actually understand your point, it was only one or two Order Members who did not.

S: I am sure some of them didn't. Anyway I have made the point now just in case. Perhaps we should pass on to today's questions.

Devamitra : The first question comes from Dhammaloka and concerns the Vissuddhimagga.

Dhammaloka : By way of introducing the Visuddhimagga in Chapter three, Carrithers gives a number of statements which concern both the importance and contents of the Visuddhimagga. He says, "*Richard Gombrich, calls the Vissudhimagga the unitary standard of doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravada Buddhists*" and then he goes on saying, "*Nyanamoli calls it a detailed manual for meditation masters, and the work of referenc*e". Then he himself calls the Visuddhimagga, "*a systematisation of the Buddhist path, and the central text of the living and learned tradition*," He adds later on that "*it contains a line of thought not entirely consistent with the central intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice.*" Could you please comment on these statements, and could you say which importance and emphasis we should give to the study of the Visuddhimagga, as certain of its teachings are of especially practical relevance for us, while others may perhaps be outdated. And which is the best translation of the text?

S: All right, Richard Gombrich calls the Visuddhimagga, "The unitary standard of doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravada Buddhists." I think that's a fair statement of the situation. Whether it is rightly such a standard, that is another matter. But that is the present state of affairs, and has been for a very long time. "Nyanamoli, Nyanatiloka's English pupil, calls it a detailed manual for meditation masters and a work of reference." I think this statement requires some qualification. It is a detailed manual for meditation masters in the sense that it does contain, especially in part two, the Samadhi section, quite a lot of information about different types of meditation practice. It contains information about all the forty Khammatthanas, it also contains some general advice about the preparation for meditation, and so on, and to that extent it is a work of reference.

In the third section, the Prajna section, it does contain a detailed account of Buddhist doctrine from the Theravada point of view, and of course Buddhist doctrine whether Theravadin or any other, it is not doctrine for its own sake. It is doctrine in the sense of a conceptual support, even a systematic or systematically formulated conceptual support for the development of insight. So there is a definite connection there. So it could be said therefore that the Visuddhimagga is a detailed manual for meditation masters, and a work of reference, because it contains a very great deal of information, indeed. But having said that, I certainly don't think that it contains all the information that the meditation master needs. One even gets the impression that Buddhaghosa himself was not a meditation master, and probably had very little experience, practical experience, of the techniques that he describes. When I originally read the Visuddhimagga, I got the impression that he wrote from personal experience, as far as I could gather, only with regard to one of the Khammatthanas, that was the asubha bhavana, the contemplation of impurity, that was definitely my feeling.

So I think if someone was actually teaching meditation and had to help his meditation pupils resolve all sorts of problems, I think he would find

the Vissudhimagga of very limited use. If he had to give a lecture on meditation, he would find the Vissudhimagga very useful! Especially if he gave it just on Theravada meditation, but I don't think it can be regarded as a manual for meditation masters in the full sense. In the sense of meeting all their requirements and covering all possible contingencies and eventualities. There is a lot that it leaves out, and a lot that isn't necessary and has very little bearing on actual practical meditation. So it has its limitations, and those limitations are not indicated here. So the statement of Nyanamoli requires qualifications. What were the other points, where did they come from?

Dhammaloka : Carrithers calls it, "A systematisation of the Buddhist path, and central text of the living and learned tradition." This is on page forty six, the first part of the chapter. We deal with the Visuddhimagga and the systematisation of the Buddhist path.

S: A systematisation of the Buddhist path, and the central text of the living and learned tradition. All right, yes, it is certainly a systematisation of the Buddhist path. It is a systematisation based on the Pali Canon. But one could say that though very learned and, in some respects, very exhaustive, it is based on a somewhat selective reading of the Pali Canon. There is a lot that gets left out, perhaps that is inevitable. So it is a systematisation of the Buddhist path as represented by the Pali Canon, but it systematises a selection of material. So in that sense also it has its limitations. For that reason this ties up with something that I commented earlier on. Gombrich calls, the Visuddhimagga, " The unitary standard of doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravada Buddhists," and that is true, but in as much as Buddhaghosa's systematisation of the path based on the Pali Canon is a systematisation based on a selective reading of that Canon, the standard of doctrinal orthodoxy to which that gives rise is somewhat limited. In other words, to put it in simple terms, there are important teachings of the Buddha in the Pali Canon that Buddhaghosa either does not mention, which do not enter into his synthesis, or which he underestimates, or underemphasises. So there are certain qualifications to be introduced here. And what were the other points?

Dhammaloka : Yes, Carrithers goes on and says, "It contains lines of thought, not entirely consistent with the central, intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice." This is at the top of page forty-seven.

S: "It contains lines of thought, not entirely consistent, with the central intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice. In the second part of the chapter, I will trace the most important of these, the idea of asceticism, as an end in itself, rather than as a means to enlightenment." Well, if the Visuddhimagga does in fact tend to treat the ideal of asceticism as an end in itself rather than as a means to enlightenment, then that particular line of thought is certainly not entirely consistent with "the central intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice."

Dhammaloka : Would you suggest then that the Visuddhimagga does interpret asceticism as an end in itself?

S: No, not in so many words. But look for instance at the very title of the work - Visuddhimagga. The framework of the Visuddhimagga is two-fold as the author makes clear. There is first of all the threefold framework of sila, samadhi, and prajna, and then superimposed upon that is the seven-fold framework of the seven stages of purity, or of purification. The work derives its title from that seven-fold subdivision, not from the three-fold sub-division. Because, as he says, "the Visuddhimagga takes the form of a commentary on the following verse from the Canon :

When the wise man established well in virtue,

Develops concentration and understanding,
Then as a Bhikkhu ardent and sagacious
He succeeds in disentangling this tangle." Not a word about purification there. Purification comes in the case of the seven-fold classification, and where does that seven-fold classification come from? It is from the Ratanavinnita Sutta isn't it? And that seven-fold classification occurs only in the Ratanavinnita Sutta, and as far as I recollect it, nowhere else. In other words, by its very title, and the whole treatment of the subject, the Visuddhimagga gives what seems to be a disproportionate emphasis on the notion of purification, or purity, and I think the author shows in the book generally, that in Sinhalese Buddhism, in Sinhalese monastic life, and in the lives of the Forest Monks, there was a very distinctive emphasis on purification, and asceticism as purification, or purification as asceticism. It would seem that that represents very broadly speaking " A line of thought not entirely consistent with the central intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice."

In other words, one could even say that, starting with Buddhaghosa, there has been in Sinhalese Buddhism generally, and in Sinhalese Buddhist monasticism in particular, not only a sort of disproportionate emphasis on purity and purification, but perhaps a rather peculiar interpretation of that even, at least in practical terms. Because he does mention about the importance of moral purity and purification in Sinhalese life generally, doesn't he? There is almost a sort of Brahmanical element.

Padmavajra : I have a question related to that. Do you think that the descendants of Buddhaghosa are actually selective about what they actually take up as a path of purification? I am thinking of the very good descriptions for example of the Brahmavihara practices. Do you think that they are selective?

S: Well, Buddhaghosa is well known for a quite wide range of scriptural reference. It may well be that in his account of the Brahmaviharas he does take into account all the things that are said in the Pali Canon about those Brahmaviharas. But that by itself is simply an assembling of material, but there is still the question of interpretation, getting the material in perspective, relating it to wider issues. Perhaps Buddhaghosa falls down there.
I think there was another question that Dhammaloka had, that I think ties up with what you are saying. What was that question?

Dhammaloka : Which importance and emphasis should we give to the study of the Visuddhimagga?

S: I think certainly the Visuddhimagga is a text which at least some of us should study, and there are certain sections or portions of the Visuddhimagga which are particularly useful, and perhaps the section mentioned by Padmavajra is one of those. I do not think at this stage, we can say which particular parts of the Visuddhimagga we are going to find especially helpful or especially useful in the FWBO. It would be premature to try to say. But I am quite sure that we shall find some or parts at least quite useful and that some part or some sections may pass into general circulation, for instance, within the FWBO. I think this is more than likely.

But I think not everything that the Visuddhimagga says is relevant, nor perhaps is its overall standpoint especially relevant, though I do believe that the concept of purification does have an important place in Buddhist spiritual life. For instance there is an example of Buddhaghosa's over emphasis on purity and on purity and on sila as purity and purification. For instance here is Buddhaghosa's original composition which is not

from the Pali Canon:

"No Ganges , and no Yamuna", (these are all names of rivers), *"no Sarabhu, Sarassati, or flowing Achiravati, or noble river of Mahi, is able to wash out the stain of things that breathe here in the world, for only virtue's water can wash out the stain in living things.*" That is completely heterodox, completely heretical. (laughter) It is completely wrong, in a way it contradicts even what he says in the Visuddhimagga if you just take it at its face values. How is that?

A Voice : It is only wisdom that brings out the.....

S: Yes indeed, yes! How can virtue wash out the stain in living things? It cannot. The Dhammapada says very clearly : "Worst of all stains, worst of all impurities, is the stain of ignorance. Wipe out that stain, 0 Bhikkhus, and be stainless." So there is an over evaluation of sila, there is an over evaluation of purity in a very limited sense. Perhaps this characterises Sinhalese Buddhism as a whole. I mentioned when I used to meet Sinhalese people, lay people especially, on pilgrimage, they always used to say, "Our Bhikkhus are so pure," "Our Buddhism is so pure." This was their constant refrain. So perhaps we can see the beginnings of that in Buddhaghosa's own emphases in this particular work.

Dhammaloka : There is one last bit, which translation is the best?

S: The better. There are only two. I think they should be used in conjunction. Probably Nyanamoli's is better as a translation in the linguistic sense, but his terminology is rather idiosyncratic and the book is dreadfully printed. Not that there are misprints but it is laid out in a most irritating way, and almost impossible to find the passage that you want. The three volume Pali Text Society translation is much more accessible, so I suggest that those who are just concerned with a general knowledge of some particularly relevant or interesting section of the Visuddhimagga, should stick to the three volume translation. Those who are closer students read both, or rather read the three volume one, and whenever you wish to go into something in greater detail, see what the corresponding translation of that particular passage in Nyanamoli's version is like. Both are fortunately in print. Every reasonably sized community should have both.

Dharmapriya : Bhante, I actually have a point following on from
Padmavajra's. In our study group we seemed to come to the conclusion that in fact, modern Theravada is quite selective of the Visuddhimagga, partly for the reason that Padmavajra mentioned, and also of the large chunk we have here, which seems to be a version of the positive nidanas, which as you have often pointed out is completely ignored by the Theravada.

S: Right, indeed. One could even say that Theravada Buddhism gets more and more selective as the centuries roll by and you end up with just a handful of Suttas and other Texts which are well known and in general circulation, and a great part of the Buddhas' teaching is ignored. By the way when I referred to the two translations of the Visuddhimagga, these of course are English translations, but we mustn't forget Nyanatiloka's own German translation. I don't know whether that is in print, but if it is in print that could prove very useful to those who do know German. You have seen that translation?

Dhammaloka : Yes.

S: Ah, good.

Suvajra : I have a question, just following on from what you said about Buddhaghosa's stature, and the question of insight present. How much reliance can we put on his material?

S: He is traditionally regarded as an Arahant, but we have really no means of knowing. My personal impression is of a great scholar with a penetrating mind. I must say I don't get the impression of spirituality, but on the other hand he is often much more of an editor than an original author. Much more of a compiler, a putter-together of material, extracts and so on. So perhaps we can't come to any definite conclusions.

Suvajra : Does that hold true for his commentaries - that those are compilations?

S: Well, there is quite a bit of discussion about all that. It seems that he was not the original author of the commentaries that bear his name, but he was the translator of them from Sinhalese into Pali. And of course, in translating he may have compressed, enlarged, expanded, edited, amplified, and so on, we just don't know. But it is certainly the definite tradition that he rendered the Sinhalese commentaries on the books of the Tipitika into Pali. The Tipitika is supposed to have gone to Ceylon in orally transmitted form at the time of Ashoka. It had been written down about say, two hundred and fifty to three hundred years later. It was also believed that ever since the introduction of the Tipitaka as an oral tradition alongside the transmission of the Tipitaka orally and later in writing, there had been an oral tradition of explanation. So that oral tradition or explanation was not written down in Sinhalese.

But Buddhaghosa when he came to Sri Lanka, came into contact with Bhikkhus who were the transmitters of those oral explanations of the meaning of the Pali Texts, the Tipitaka, and he reduced that to writing in Pali. So he translated a Sinhalese oral commentarial tradition into a Pali written commentarial tradition. How faithful a translator he was, as I mentioned, how much he added, how much he elaborated, condensed, selected, we simply do not know because the Sinhalese commentaries were never written down in Sinhalese. The Sinhalese oral tradition of exposition was never written down in Sinhalese.

Devamitra : We have one or two questions still surrounding the Visuddhimagga. First of all from Abhaya.

Abhaya : This is not so much to do with the Text, it is a concept of purification. The Chapter refers to purification as the master metaphor of the Path. I personally have an ambivalent attitude to this method, the Buddhist path as one of purification rather than for example, the path of Liberation, the creative process of development, or unfolding. On the one hand, it has the positive emphasis of clearing away, or burning away the dross of negative emotion and false views from the original stainless nature, as for example the Vajrasattva practice. On the other hand it has the weak rather alienating associations with the Christian concept of purity which sees the body as impure, or even filth. Also the book hints that it can lead the Sri Lankans into preoccupation with physical purification, which could be the thin end of the wedge of a sort of neurotic obsession with personal cleanliness. From your experience, do you think this aspect of the Path is one that we should make more of in the movement, or

one that we should deliberately underplay?

S: Well, the author does use the expression, " this systematic clarity, is in so far as its author is concerned, entailed in its master metaphor purity." So certainly purity, or purification, is Buddhaghosa's master metaphor, his master metaphor for the whole process of the spiritual life, the path. But as I have already indicated, purity or purification is not the master metaphor of the Pali scriptures themselves. It is one metaphor among quite a number of others. It is not the master metaphor for the path, and in this connection it is very interesting that Buddhaghosa's work, the Visuddhimagga, is to some extent, modelled upon an earlier work that has survived only in Chinese translation, having been completely superseded by Buddhaghosa's work and that earlier work was called the Vimuttimagga, or Path of Freedom, and that is perhaps very significant.

It is as though Buddhaghosa changed the emphasis. So I think we do not necessarily have to accept Buddhaghosa's metaphor of purity or purification as the master metaphor for the spiritual path. Though having said that, I think probably in the FWBO, including the Order, we have underplayed the concept of purification. Perhaps there wouldn't be any harm in our giving it a little more emphasis, but not perhaps as much emphasis as it is given, especially in terms of sila in the Theravada Buddhism of Ceylon.

Padmavajra : A couple of questions from me. First of all, in the Pali scriptures I looked up the word Visuddhi, and I noticed its prime meaning was "brightness," or "splendour". Does that mean that there is much more of a positive content to the metaphor of purity in the Pali Scriptures than the Theravada could.....

S: That could be so, if "visuddhi," means splendour, then purification is a process of uncovering the hidden splendour, removing the dirt from the diamond so that the pristine splendour of the diamond can shine forth. But if you are too much obsessed with the idea of purification, you go on purifying and purifying, not until you have just removed the dirt, but until you have removed everything! You see what I mean? In that way, purification becomes an end in itself. So if I suggest that we do emphasise purity or purification more in the FWBO, it is perhaps in that more aesthetic sense rather than in the narrowly ascetic sense.

Vessantara : Has it been a deliberate policy to underplay the emphasis on purity within the FWBO?

S: Not on my #art, it may be that instinctively I felt that purity or purification was not something that needed to be emphasised. I certainly didn't make a conscious decision. It's as though just in the course of my contact with or interaction with, or communication with people, it did not seem necessary or helpful to introduce that particular concept. But perhaps now that we are rising above people's initial limitations, and trying to draw upon a wider range of reference within the teaching itself, perhaps this concept of purity, or purification does now fall to be considered.

Dhammaloka : Could we make use of any Western ideas of purity and purification, either Christian or non-Christian? Do you think that we might usefully emphasise these?

S: I don't know, I must say that I have not given this particular question any consideration. I cannot say that I am especially clear about the

Christian conception of purity or purification, except that it does seem, superficially at least, often to be associated, or frequently to be associated with sexuality and physical virginity, which has its own symbolical associations. So far as I am concerned, the matter awaits further exploration.

Abhaya : There is also the Christian conception of purgatory, which is the soul being cleansed of all its dross and stains.

S: Yes, going back a bit, and then going off on a bit of a tangent, (Laughter) I think leaving aside the question of purity, and purification, I think within communities and centres there could be a greater emphasis on cleanliness, freedom from dirt (laughter). Perhaps that does not require enlarging upon, because dirt breeds disease and so on.

Devamitra : Can we back-track to purification once more, because Kamalasila has got a question concerning the five purifications of 'panna'.

Kamalasila : Yes, it is a double question. On the bottom of page fifty-two, in the Visuddhimagga, there are seven purifications which include five stages of insight or 'panna', which are purification of view. Purification by overcoming doubt, purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path, purification by knowledge and vision of the way, and purification by knowledge and vision. Going just by the names, and a brief look at the Visuddhimagga itself, this seems to give us the progressive path to insight, apparently, a fairly accessible one. Do you think this is a useful list?

S: Yes, I have indeed sometimes thought that, and years and years ago when I was in London (that is to say living in London), I more than once thought of giving a lecture on these seven stages of purification, basing myself mainly on the Ratanavanita Sutta, and on the Visuddhimagga. I never got around to it, but I think it is a formulation we could make use of, quite definitely.

Kamalasila : The five stages of prajna, or the seven stages ?

S: Well, we could for the sake of comprehensiveness, or when we want to be more comprehensive, make use of the formulation of seven stages, because the first is Sila, the second is Samadhi, but Prajna is dealt with in a more detailed manner which could, as you say, makes it more accessible, at least to some people, or give people a clearer idea of what they were trying to do when they were developing prajna, or developing insight leading to prajna. One does not have to expound or explain those five stages in narrowly Theravadin terms. One can go back to the Pali Sutta, and ponder upon the words of the Sutta, and try to understand for oneself what those words mean, and what those five stages represent.

One may take note of what Buddhaghosa has to say, but one need feel under no obligation to be bound by that. For instance, this very concept or this notion of knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path. This can be a very useful exercise to consider that. How could you possibly develop Insight without having a very clear knowledge and vision of what actually was the path, and what wasn't the path. It really means distinguishing between what pertains to the Round, and what pertains to the Spiral, in our terms. So it is highly relevant though we need not throw away the baby with the bathwater.

Kamalasila : Yes, I had a second part of the question, which is a little later on page fifty-four. The author explains Insight as the discrimination

and renunciation of increasingly subtle mental states, unskilful mental states. We do not usually think of insight in this way. Do you think it is a useful way to look at it?

S: Say that again, this quotation.

Kamalasila : He explained insight as discrimination and renunciation of increasingly subtle mental states - unskilful mental states.

S: I think one would have to be very careful how one understood mental states, otherwise it might seem that you were still concerned with Samadhi, that you had not broken through into Prajna. But yes, misunderstandings do become more and more subtle, one finds that for instance in the case of Han Shan's commentary on, or exposition of, the Diamond Sutra. He says that the whole Diamond Sutra, in its two parts is concerned with the removal of more and more subtle misunderstandings of Prajna, or Prajnaparamita itself, or if you like more and more subtle misunderstandings of reality. So yes, one could usefully look at it in that way provided one introduced that more, as it were, conceptual element. And then what did you go on to ask?

Kamalasila : Do you think it is a useful way of looking at it?

S: Yes, with that proviso, yes indeed. Yes, because it is true that the mundane does become more and more subtle, and you need to develop a more and more subtle and more and more penetrating insight to resolve that.

Devamitra : Moving on from purification, but staying on Wisdom in a sense we've got a question from Nagabodhi about an intellectual blueprint.

Nagabodhi : On page forty-seven we find this short point; "Every monk must be to some extent, a scholar." I'll just leave it at that. Do you have in your mind any kind of blueprint for the intellectual development of the movement which you have not yet felt able to reveal in its fullness? Could the recently introduced Mitra Study Course, represent any kind of move to the unveiling of such a blueprint, which might in time result in the development of a more scholarly wing of the Order, and a more scholarly approach to the Dharma within the movement at large?
S: Let's have that initial quote again to begin with, there is something to be said on that.

Nagabodhi : "Every monk must be to some extent a scholar."

S: Well, were the Buddha's own enlightened disciples scholars? Was the Buddha himself a scholar? So what does that mean? I think there is a confusion here, and a misunderstanding here. I think what is really meant is, or how it should be taken, is that every person who is seriously involved in the spiritual life and who is trying to develop insight or wisdom, must have some acquaintance with the conceptual formulations of the teaching, or rather the conceptual formulations which act as pointers to ultimate reality. Those conceptual formulations are of course found in Buddhist literature, especially in the Canon, so in a secondary sense, you need to have some acquaintance with that Canon, that literature, and therefore need to be a scholar in that sense. Not that you need to be a scholar in the sense of a learned exegete, one deeply versed in philology, and philosophy, and epistemology, and all the rest of it. But that at the very least, you need to have a clear mental or intellectual understanding

of let's say the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold path, the Three characteristics, the four Viparyasas, those simple conceptual formulations which point you in the direction of ultimate reality. You need to have some acquaintance with them, so that you can make them the objects of your reflection with your concentrated mind. You can bring your concentrated mind to bear upon them in such a way that you are able to develop insight. You need to be a scholar in that sense and no more, from the point of view of the actual practice of the path.

Of course there are refinements of misunderstandings, so some people need perhaps to follow those up and these can be the scholars in the more - what shall I say? - the more professional sense almost, or the more highly specialised sense. But that's still not scholarship in the ordinary modern, secular sense by any means. Perhaps not even scholarship in the sense that Buddhaghosa represents scholarship. So having made that clear, let's go on to your actual question.

Nagabodhi : Do you have in your mind any kind of blueprint for the intellectual development of the movement which you have not yet felt able to reveal in its fullness?

S: No. I'm afraid I don't no. Whether for better or for worse, but I would obviously like to see people using their minds more, becoming mentally more active, mentally more competent, more penetrating, more able to see through fallacies, better acquainted with the teaching, but all the time remembering and bearing in mind its practical bearing, its practical application, and never getting lost in the byways of learning for their own sake. So far we have proceeded upon a quite ad hoc sort of basis, and perhaps, we have to do that for some time. Perhaps it will take a hundred, or two hundred or three hundred years, for some giant intellect to come along and take up, to gather all the threads together and produce a synthesis on the intellectual level, of the FWBO's interpretation of the Buddhist tradition, and the Buddha's teaching. I think it would be totally premature for us to try to do that. I think to us belongs the credit for having got things started and I don't think we are going to be able to carry them through to perfection, or to develop them fully. We have just started something in certain areas. There are lots of areas that we haven't got around to doing anything about as yet.

For instance, you can see what we have done, to take an example, in the field of Buddhist art. How far have we gone towards creating a Western Buddhist art? We have not even made any progress at all, but we've got Chintamani's excellent thanka paintings, and we have now offerings from our glorious young friend down in Brighton, and one or two other things of that sort. So yes, we are aware of that need, but we have not been able to do anything really towards fulfilling it, so our intellectual work is on much that sort of level. There is much that sort of relation between what we have actually been able to achieve in the way of intellectual blueprints so far, and what needs to be achieved. It is going to take several generations I think, to come to that point. So I do not have a personal intellectual blueprint, or blueprint of scholarship or study in that sort of way. It would be quite premature. One might have a bit of vision, in a very general way as to what might be required, but no more than that. Was that all?

Devamitra : We have now, several questions relating to the Sangha. Buddhadasa has a question about the possible exclusion of an Order Member from an Order meeting.

Buddhadasa : Arising from a statement on page fifty three; "Indeed, this rigorous exclusion of the impure, is written into the rules of gatherings

of the Sangha, so that the monk who has committed a transgression without purifying himself by confession, may not attend." Is there a lesson for the Order here? How does a Chapter of the Order decide whether or not an Order Member should be admitted to a Chapter meeting? Can you envisage any circumstances when this might arise, for example in cases of severe breaches of the precepts?

S: Well, so far we have not considered this question, though it has begun to be considered by one of the Chapters in India for the sort of reasons you mentioned. I'm afraid we have a case of alcoholism on our hands, which is unfortunate. There was one particular Order Member whom I have known for years and years, twenty odd years perhaps. It did seem that he had got over his problem of alcoholism, mainly due to being taken away from his old environment and working in, and on the retreat centre. Recently though, he has fallen back, and fallen back in such a way that some at least of the members of his Chapter, feel that he should be asked to resign.

So I am at present considering their very detailed discussion of the whole matter, and considering what each member of the Chapter said. Several have suggested that he is officially called in my name as it were, and given a last chance to reform himself. Some are very, very reluctant to ask him to resign, but others feel there is no alternative. So I am at present considering what is best to be done, because it is obviously a very very serious matter. When we come on to study some of these Forest Monks and their various movements we shall see the importance of the place occupied in their lives by this idea of exclusion, the exclusion of the impure. But I really wonder whether that is the right way of looking at it. Because I think if you start thinking in that kind of way, you end up with a situation in which you could probably find at times some grounds for excluding almost anybody. You'd have perhaps, if things really degenerated, just everybody wanting to exclude everybody else. So I really doubt whether we should adopt this sort of attitude at all to begin with. All right, what has been our experience so far? Supposing an Order member does drop out of contact, fall by the wayside, or be doing something unethical, one of the things that happens is that he does not go along to Chapter meetings, or he doesn't keep in contact with fellow Order members. So the question of excluding him doesn't arise. It isn't as though he is notoriously breaking the precepts, but at the same time he is insisting on taking a very prominent part in all activities. That sort of situation does not arise.

It is more that people cease to perhaps observe a precept or two very strictly and at the same time they tend to drift out of circulation, so I think in our case the problem is rather the other way around. We should be thinking of trying to include people rather than excluding them. If anybody is guilty of breaching the precepts, well, if he is in contact with fellow Order Members there is a greater chance of his turning over a new leaf and reforming himself. But the idea of excluding people on principle is something that perhaps we shouldn't entertain. It may be that one day we are forced to, but I cannot really foresee that sort of situation arising. I think we should really be very forbearing and, in a way, long suffering. Of course sometimes people do not listen but you have got to be very patient. I think we are very unwise, even if someone did say commit some unethical action, that at once his chapter started speaking in terms of "Well, he ought to be expelled, we don't want him, and he is not good enough." Because people do have their ups and downs and they can change.

So without condoning in any way the unethical behaviour, I think one should make every effort to keep up contact with that person, and be very careful not to exclude that person. But, as we shall see, that was not the attitude of the Forest Monks, in a sense by virtue of the very situation in which they found themselves.

Devamitra : We have a question from Kulamitra, on the Sangha, if it has not already been dealt with in the previous question.

Kulamitra : We heard about the 'nissaya' earlier on when it was brought up by Kamalasila. In this question it is; if the principle of nissaya is a monk's dependence on his teacher until self reliance in the training is attained, how are we to apply it in the FWBO? Is ordination the point of self reliance or should new Order members rely on yourself or senior Order members, until the self reliance of perhaps stream entry?

S: I think one must perhaps recall the historical situation, the historical context. For instance, originally, and I think even nowadays to some extent, before you were ordained, you did not even know what rules you would have to observe. The monastic rule, the Vinaya, could only be taught to someone who was already ordained. So one must not forget that. So when you were perhaps attracted by the saintly appearance of a particular teacher, or you had an indefinable urge to leave the household life and live with and like the monks, you would not know the exact rules that they were observing except in a few instances which were more obvious. You would know that they lived on alms and so on, but you would not know in detail how they conducted themselves, how they lived their lives and how they went about their Sangha business. You would know very little of the teaching, if anything at all.

So if you were to learn anything about the monastic rules, about the teaching, you would have to stay and study with a teacher. And it was in that that the dependence mainly consisted. In learning from him what it was that made, let us say, a good monk, what is was that made a good Buddhist, and how you followed the spiritual path, what you had to do, how you had to conduct yourself, how you were to meditate, because you wouldn't have read lots of books before you took that step. Do you see what I mean? So one must bear that in mind too. So clearly that is not the case with the FWBO.

So where does that leave us with regards to dependence? It seems to be more a question of spiritual friendship, rather than of information or teaching in the narrower sense. Your dependence is on a spiritual friend as a spiritual friend. You could say when we have the Kalyana Mitra ceremonies that is in a way formalising a sort of nissaya, but the dependence is on a friend for the sake of friendship, or for the sake of spiritual friendship, because spiritual friendship occupies an important part in the spiritual life. From your spiritual friends, you do get emotional support, even spiritual support when that's needed, but eventually the aim is, as we often point out that friendship eventually becomes a friendship between equals, it becomes mutual. Though in many cases perhaps, the person who was the spiritual friend to begin with, the Kalyana mitra, always manages to stay just a little bit ahead. But in some cases he may well be overtaken, or his mitra who has taken him for his Kalyana mitra, may come up level with him after a few years. That can be a very, as it were, pleasant experience for the Kalyana mitra concerned, because the friendship, the spiritual friendship, does not decrease, and if anything it intensifies. But it's now a friendship between two equals, between two people who are roughly of equal spiritual experience and responsibility and so on. No longer between senior and junior.

So perhaps we should see nissaya ourselves within the context of spiritual friendship. Perhaps that is all I can say at the moment. I suspect it requires perhaps further examination in perhaps more, inverted commas, 'organisational' terms, but I have nothing to say about that at the moment.

Kulamitra : Bhante, just to go a little bit further perhaps, it seems that within the Order, different Order members perhaps have different ideas on,

in a sense, their own degree of self reliance. For instance, some people would always talk over with other Order Members, probably with you as well, before making any major decisions. Some Order Members, don't seem to think in that way. They come to their own decisions, and then maybe announce; "This is what I intend to do." Do you think that is covered in that sort of spiritual friendship? Does that imply that people should .....

S: I think if there is spiritual friendship, you will consult in that way, however confident you may feel, because you could have overlooked something, and you would want just to make quite sure. In any case you would want your spiritual friend to know what you were doing, just as a matter of communication, and in case they had any useful suggestion. So I think even though someone may be self confident, in the sense of feeling able to take decisions off his own bat, it is not quite that sort of independence that the Buddhist tradition really has in mind. You are not really ready to give up your nissaya on your teacher say, just because psychologically you feel self confident. That self confidence can be based on quite mundane factors, not on spiritual maturity. There are some people who very self confidently, with the utmost self confidence, go and do all sorts of foolish things, and get into all sorts of messes. They wouldn't think of asking anybody's advice beforehand, because of this blind self confidence that they have. But other people might be much more cautious, and ask everybody and let everybody know what they are doing and ask for feedback and comment, but actually they may have a greater degree of spiritual maturity. Some people may not ask for advice, because they have invested so much of themselves in a particular project that they just don't want to take the risk of their pet project with which they are so identified, being undermined, or being shown to be impracticable.

Devamitra : OK. I believe Aryamitra has a question on the possibly ascetic profile o# the FWBO?

S: It sounds very interesting! (laughter)

Aryamitra : Well, ah, ascetic in inverted commas. Bhante, do you see any ascetic or other practices which might give a better impression to the public, as well as enhancing our own spiritual life? This came out of a chapter on the effect the monks had on the general public.

S: Of course you are using the word ascetic in quite a broad sense. And when you say the public or the general public are you thinking of the public at large, or the Buddhist public, in the sense of the rest of the Buddhist movement say in Britain, or in the West?

Aryamitra : The public at large

S: I think in the case of the public at large, we probably don't need to give an impression of asceticism particularly, even in the broader sense, but I think the impression we give is important. What is stressed in all forms of Buddhism, in the Theravada, or in the Mahayana, though there is a difference of emphasis perhaps in a minor way, is that in relation to the public, the monk, or in relation to the laity the monk, or in relation to the non-Buddhist public, the Buddhist should give a pleasing impression. This is emphasised quite a lot, that when people see you even they should be pleased and happy.

So in this connection it is usually mentioned that you should be of agreeable deportment, kindly speech, neat, tidy, clean even, or dressed, or

attired in whatever way is likely to make a pleasing, favourable impression and conduce to ease of communication. This is what is stressed, a pleasing impression. This is one of the reasons why for Bodhisattvas, garlic and onions are prohibited, because if you have taken lots of garlic as some people do in India, and are breathing garlicky fumes over people, that does not create a pleasing impression. (laughter) Or say, in this country, going into certain society, certain groups, certain social circles, if you are scruffy and unkempt, it does not create a favourable impression. This is not to say that a scruffy unkempt person might not be deeply spiritual at heart. But you are approaching those people and since you are approaching them, you are presumably approaching them in order to communicate the Dharma, you will want them to be receptive, and it will help them to be receptive, it will help you to communicate the Dharma, if the initial impression you present is a pleasing one, rather than a displeasing one. So this has always been emphasised in Buddhism, whether of the Theravada or the Mahayana.

Aryamitra : I think I was thinking of things like the Brahmacarya vow. What sort of effect does this have on the general public, when they know .....

S: I am not sure what effect it has, that would remain to be seen. Some people might be impressed, some people may think that you were somehow deficient, or that you were 'gay', they might think all sorts of things you see? It would depend on how you told them or in what way it came out. I think if you were to emphasise the fact that you were celibate, they would probably think you were rather odd. But if they happened in the course of communication simply to find out that you lived in that particular way, well they might accept you. I can't think that it would make an especially favourable impression, if anything rather the opposite, at least in some cases. But if you were neatly dressed and clean and bright and smiling, well spoken, affable, that would make a positive impression on almost anybody I think. Anybody who was not a cantankerous old so and so. (laughter) In Sri Lanka, in the case of Bhikkhus this is carried to extremes, when they are recruiting young monks, they try to select those who are definitely handsome, because it is well known that a handsome bhikkhu makes a much stronger and more favourable impression on the laity, than a bhikkhu who is not so handsome, or is ugly, or deformed in some way. In fact - this is a separate matter, but deformed or disabled persons are not accepted into the Sangha. Not for that reason, but simply that they should not take refuge in the Sangha because they wanted a means of livelihood, in as much as they were cripples and so on. But, yes, monks do always look for handsome young men to become Bhikkhus because they do have a much stronger effect on the laity. This is a quite interesting piece of psychology, perhaps that the lay people, at least in Buddhist countries are more impressed by handsome monks, upstanding well built monks, than they are by little, not particularly good looking or plain monks. It is the handsome monks that manage to put across the message of the Buddha to a much greater extent. This is what I've been told many a time by my Sinhalese friends, especially my bhikkhu friends.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, what about Bahiya, who was a dwarf?

S: Yes indeed !

Buddhadasa : Was he deformed ?

S: No, being a dwarf apparently was not regarded as a deformity in that context! (laughter), because a dwarf can still do everything.

[End of Tape 5 Tape 6]

As far as I remember the provisions of the Vinaya in this respect, if you had lost an arm you could not be ordained, you could become a Sramanera, but not a Bhikkhu. It is obvious that in India you do come across a lot of people like this. Some people deliberately mutilate themselves for the sake of livelihood, so you do not want the Sangha to become a refuge for such people.

To go back to this question of the sort of impression you produce, I think probably, if it was a question of dealing with the general public, more often than not, a very young person would not make such a favourable impression. Because people might well feel that he was just too young to really know very much about Buddhism, or about the spiritual life, however sincere and so on he might be. So perhaps in dealing with the general public, people who are a little mature should be put forward, rather than the very young Order member, however bright and however good that young Order member may be At the same time, perhaps you should be very careful not to send someone who is too old, who might give the impression that Buddhism is just for the old. You see what I mean.
So you must take into account things of this sort. When you get an invitation from a school or college, or a church group, well, consider what type of person would make the most favourable impression? What type of person would that particular group be likely to be most receptive to, assuming that you've got a choice of who to send. I think it is quite important to bear things of that sort in mind.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, this is where you get the question of obedience arising again. Say you have somebody who is either young or old, acting quite autonomously, in this way, by going out giving public talks and representing the movement, the FWBO, or the Order in whatever way they choose. There is no safeguard to prevent this.

S: Well, there isn't actually, because you cannot take legal action against them. In fact we wouldn't. There is no way of stopping by force, someone from behaving in that sort of way. But I'm envisaging a situation where Order members belonging to the same Centre, the same Chapter are in reasonably good contact, and they can discuss this kind of thing among themselves and decide who is the most suitable person in a completely amicable way, and usually as soon as the particular kind of need is explained, the particular kind of group that has issued the invitation, it may well become quite obvious which Order member ought to go, or it might become obvious that almost anybody could go. It wouldn't matter very much.

Sometimes a particularly capable Order member may be able to surmount apparent difficulties. One must bear that in mind too. It is not a mechanical business of just fitting a suitable Order member into the appropriate situation. Sometimes even a very young Order member by sheer force of personality and actual spiritual maturity, will succeed in getting through people's resistance, and convincing them. That is not impossible, but you must make quite sure that your young Order member is of that kind.

Devamitra : Returning to the theme of asceticism, Kulamitra has a question.

Kulamitra : During your time in India did you, if only for short periods, perhaps only for a few weeks, practise some of the thirteen dhutangas? If so, did you discover their purpose and effectiveness in the spiritual life?

S: I tried to, in a few cases. You may remember I tried to make a rag robe, but did not succeed. I've mentioned this, haven't I, in *The Thousand Petalled Lotus*? I tried to gather up scraps of cloth from the charnel ground, but we found it didn't work, because they were so burned round the edges, that you could not stitch them together. So we rather wondered, how the ancient worthies had in fact managed, and sometimes when begging, we have begged just straight from one house to the next without skipping any, which is one of the dhutangas. But I didn't particularly have it in mind to practise the dhutangas as such. No.

Kulamitra : I wondered if by chance as it were, like with the begging, you had done some, and discovered what its real purpose was, what effect it actually had from a spiritual point of view.

S: I must say that I didn't practise them to that extent, but I can see certain possible advantages, especially nowadays when people are disinclined every often to any kind of asceticism. If you apply this dhutanga of begging at every house regularly and not skipping any, it means not picking and choosing with regard to food. Not skipping the poor houses because you might not get very good food there. It means just not being choosy with regard to your food, just accepting whatever happens to come.

I think one can as it were translate all these more monastic principles or rules into more general terms and relate them more closely to the spiritual life itself. For instance there is the dhutanga of not lying down to sleep, but sitting up. Well, translated into more ordinary practical terms, that is getting up early, or at least, once you have woken up, not just continue to wallow in your bed, just getting straight up, which some people find quite difficult, I believe.

Devamitra : We do actually have another question, on that thirteenth dhutanga with regard to sleeping. In fact there are questions from all three groups on this particular dhutanga! (laughter). So we thought we had better include it in the question. I don't know whether you have already dealt with this one.

S: By all means, let's go into it at greater length! (laughter)

Devamitra : Tejananda will put the question for us.

Tejananda : Yes, in our group we had quite a degree of disagreement on this. One party held that it equivalent to the kind of ascetic practice in which people just hold up one arm for a month. Other people held that there might be some actual genuine reason for that particular practice in that particular form. So we wondered what you had to say about that?

S: Well, perhaps one must remember this. The Buddha seems not to have been very keen on the dhutangas, the Buddha as Buddha. There seems to have been a bit of pressure from some of his more ascetically minded followers who liked the idea of practising the dhutangas, so he sort of permitted them as optional. No monk is required to practice them, but he allowed monks who felt so inclined, to practice them and he didn't after his Enlightenment himself practise them. In fact on one or two occasions, the Buddha almost went out of his way to point out that

some of his disciples were living more strictly or living more ascetic lives than he was living himself. On several occasions he made that point as if to suggest that not too much importance must be attached to those extreme ascetic practices, and the more extremely way of life as represented by the dhutangas.

Now in the case of this particular dhutanga, I don't think it is quite the same as just holding your arm up in the air. But there is no doubt that the main reason why the ascetically inclined, both among the Buddhas' disciples and among, others adopted it just because it was difficult, which is in a way the essence of asceticism. That penance in that sense - in that sense, self mortification in that sense, making things more difficult for yourself, making life difficult for yourself, is inherently meritorious, which was not the Buddhas' point of view.
So I think that was the way that most people looked at the matter. But having said that, it could be, in some cases, that the observance of that particular dhutanga, conduced to a greater degree of mindfulness, perhaps to lighter sleep, perhaps to less sleep, and therefore had that more general value. One could only experiment and say. I personally have never observed this dhutanga or tried to. Though I have in recent times - the last couple of years - I have trained myself to sleep during the day, when necessary, in a sitting position. I can now do this almost at will, not instantly - it takes me a few minutes, but if I am tired though, maybe because I have got up very early, I can just drop off to sleep now for say five to ten minutes, or even fifteen minutes in the afternoon, and then wake refreshed, which I could never do before. I always do it sitting up in my chair, and I find this quite easy.

So one might say one could train oneself to sleep all night in a chair. I have not tried it, in a way I have not seen any point in doing so. Perhaps one could, perhaps some people should experiment. Perhaps I have not bothered to try it out because I don't find it difficult to get up in the morning. As soon as I wake up I'm wide awake, and I feel like getting up. I don't like lying in bed, but not everybody is like that. So perhaps someone could experiment with that particular dhutanga. Maybe Vajraloka is the right place. I'm not suggesting that only Vajraloka (laughter), let other communities have a go too!. Why should Vajraloka have all the glory!?

Kulamitra : Bhante, just generally with these dhutangas, you said just then that you thought on the whole that people adopted them just because they were difficult. But say some of them do seem to have more meaning, or could have meaning, maybe for specific people at certain times. For instance, living in the forest, or living at the foot of a tree reminds me of what you said, I think it was yesterday, about the benefits of being surrounded by organic life, and perhaps .....

S: Yes, because it means living at the foot of a tree for lengthy periods if not for life, in all weathers. I mean it would not be just a case of going and living under a tree for a few days in pleasant summer weather, though even that would be quite good as an experience undoubtedly.

Kulamitra : Even just to stretch that point, perhaps you could say to experience that, in all weathers, may lead to insight into impermanence
S: Or pneumonia! (laughter). It might, but then things are changing all the time. Everywhere you look, if you are being attentive, you can develop insight into impermanence, because everything is changing all the time. It is not only trees and flowers that are changing, even your furniture is changing and your wallpaper is changing, your books are changing, and you yourself are changing and your clothes are changing and wearing out and all the rest of it. But I mean, maybe you would be more dramatically aware of the fact out in the open air. I certainly would not wish to dissuade anyone who wished to try it out.

Vessantara : Bhante, you said that these dhutangas were just adopted because they were difficult, and that making life difficult was held to be inherently meritorious. Earlier, you talked about if you decided say, to be obedient to your teacher for a period of time, that would bring you up against all your subjective preferences and your likes and dislikes, and you would have to let go of that self will. Could these practices, not be a way of bringing yourself up against your self will in the same, or in a similar way?

S: It could be, especially if you were an easy going sort of person, and did not usually like to make things difficult for yourself. It could be, one could only try and see whether that did in fact happen.

Dharmapriya : Bhante, going back to the question of living at the foot of a tree, and you said that would mean in all weathers, does that mean that in India in the rainy season the Bhikkhu would stay living under the tree at all times even in the rains?

S: I think so, I suppose one would have to find a very big tree with dense foliage, unless one decided just not to bother about the rain, but I think that would be rather difficult, even if one were extremely ascetically inclined, because you would certainly fall sick. I do not remember the details, maybe Buddhaghosa has this information I suppose some bhikkhus might have observed dhutangas for a certain length of time. My general impression is that those who took them up usually took them up for life. "Dhutong" Bhikkhus, as they are called in Thailand do actually have umbrellas which are extendable into tents, (laughter) and they shelter under those. Yes, a sort of primitive home made umbrella, but which has cloth extensions, that can be pegged down to the ground to form a tent. In books about Thai Buddhism, one can sometimes see photographs of these things.

Dhammaloka : Bhante, you said that the Buddha did not give much importance to the dhutangas, he sort of permitted them.

S: Yes, it was not that the Buddha himself laid down the dhutangas ever, but certain Bhikkhus approached him, and requested permission to observe them, so he permitted them. He permitted those who wished to observe them, but he did not make them obligatory for anybody, for any Bhikkhu.
Dhammaloka : Yes, a question following on from that regarding our life. Are there any practices you have given as optional, and which are perhaps, even fairly widespread amongst the Order which, you don't find important but which you just give because people sort of insist on getting these practices. This on the one hand, and are there other practices which you would prefer to be practised much more, but which you find people are resistant to actually take on?

S: Well, there are solitary retreats, especially on the part of chairmen (laughter). I have often emphasised solitary retreats haven't I? So I would like to see more people going on those. But as for people coming and asking me, sometimes people ask for practices, though it's not so much the wrong practices, but that they ask prematurely. For instance, very new mitras fairly often try to press me into letting them do a visualisation practice, when clearly, they ought to be working on their mindfulness of breathing and their metta. So it is not that the visualisation practices are practices I don't want to encourage, but it is that people try to press me to allow them to take up something before they are really ready for it. It is more like that. I cannot recollect anybody asking me if they can take up something, some particular practice, that I wasn't at all happy about.

The nearest parallel is when people ask me if I think they should take up, or could take up osteopathy, or homeopathy - that is learning these things, and other as it were marginal things, which can't quite be regarded as spiritual practices, though, in a sense, they have their place or their usefulness. Do you see what I mean?

No one has come to me yet and asked if they might observe a dhutanga. (laughter) I don't think that has happened in the course of the whole history of the FWBO. (Laughter) But yes, coming back to the second part of the question, I would like to see people practising more rigorously those things I definitely have recommended (laughter). Sometimes there is not very much point in suggesting other further practices until people are well on with those. There are quite a number of practices laid down, or prescribed, or recommended already.

Devaraja:Bhante, as I understand it we are not really supposed to teach insight practices such as the six element practice, to people who are not yet ordained, or are not approaching ordination ie mitras who've asked for ordination. I met in Spain, a Spaniard who had visited centres in England and as far as I can understand from what he was saying, it appears that on his first visit to an FWBO Centre, something approximating to a six element practice. I was concerned about this, but I have learned since I have come back that you have talked in Tuscany in terms of practices to do with three or four elements which could be taught more widely.

S: Visualisation practices, that is to say, very simple visualisation practices, not the recollection of the elements. But again sometimes I have been quite pressed by people taking classes to allow them to teach. Sometimes people even press me to say that it is all right to teach the Shakyamuni visualisation to non Order members, or even to beginners. Sometimes there is quite a lot of pressure for me to allow people to teach other practices on retreats and so on. Usually I resist that. The only concession really I have made, and I think it is a bit of a concession, is that a degree of visualisation practice may be introduced at the discretion of Order members. But I have tried to limit it. That's why I've said if people are very keen on visualising, and you think it would be a good thing, let them just visualise a yellow square, possibly on top of that the white disc, possibly on top of that, the red cone.

Devaraja : But as for someone coming along to a Centre for the first time, just being introduced to a practice, even like this simple visualisation, would be completely inappropriate.

S: I think it's quite inappropriate. People should be sorted out, and clearly if it was a class, or an occasion to which a complete newcomer could come, that should not have taken place, quite definitely.

Suvajra : Bhante, you did suggest that for some people who come along to start with, that perhaps if they were very stiff and rigid, perhaps before they started meditating, one could lead them through a quick recollection of four elements to loosen them up.

S: Ah! But that was in a quite different sort of way. That was in a way that I devised myself and had nothing to do with the classical element practices. This would be all right.

Devaraja : What is this practice, I have not come across it?

S: It is such a long time since I taught it, I'll have to stop and think. I devised it myself. Earth, you just kind of feel yourself as heavy, and you sit there and just try to experience your heaviness, your solidity, the fact that the earth is sort of pulling you, and you experience that as fully as you can for a few minutes - the person leading the class guides. Then the next stage is the stage of water, you start feeling a bit sort of loosened up. You can even sway a bit back and forwards, and feel energy unblocking. Then there's the third stage, the stage of fire, you start feeling the energy is rising up, you're feeling in a more lively state. And then air, you feel almost as though you are floating, and you become more aware of your breath, and you can usually stop just there. These were just simple exercises, which I called element practices which I introduced at that time. I only taught them a few times. I think they caught on with a few people, they did seem to help.

One thing I found, that when you are asking people to experience that earth element, so to speak, don't ask them to get into the fact that they are blocked and all that, no! (laughter) Some people started doing that, but that was not what I meant. Just getting experience their sort of heaviness, their solidity, their rootedness, their contact with the earth.

Devaraja : This may have been the practice.

S: That can be employed with discretion, but I have sometimes found that sometimes people leading retreats want to make a tremendous impression, as it were, and bring out the whole bag of tricks. I think that is a temptation to be resisted. Maybe it does not happen now, but some years ago there were some Order Members perhaps not feeling sufficient confidence in the simple, basic method. They just wanted to make an impressive display, and sometimes even people coming along would sometimes ask, "Well, isn't there anything else?," and " We've heard about all these wonderful practices, and couldn't we do a bit of Kundalini this afternoon?" (laughter) There is always that tendency to try to cater to that demand, but I think most people realise now that one shouldn't do that.

Dharmapriya : The only thing I have heard of in the last few years in this direction at all was the use of the Vajrasattva mantra. On the 1981 Tuscany, several of us quizzed you on that, and to the best of my recollection, you said it should not be used outside the Order, because it is a Vajrayana mantra, except at death and at after death ceremonies, such as Parinirvana Day. Yet I cannot think of specific circumstances, but it definitely does crop up again and again on retreats, or at certain classes which are open to mitras if not to regulars.

S: I tend to discourage that. I don't like to, as it were absolutely prohibit, because one doesn't always know the exact circumstances. But I think Order Members should be very sensitive to these things, and not use the Vajrasattva mantra outside these situations. I did mention in Tuscany, unless they're absolutely certain or several of them were certain it would be the right thing to do, under those particular, special circumstances.

Kulamitra : Bhante, it does seem then a bit odd, that it should be publicly for sale in the Puja Book, because it's natural that if people buy the whole Puja Book, they are going to read it ....

S: (breaking in) ... Yes but I think there was a bit of discussion as to what was the purpose of the Puja Book, especially when it was considered to enlarge it - whether it was a manual for Order Members, or whether it was meant for everybody. Perhaps that was not completely resolved.

Perhaps we do need two Puja Books, one containing everything for the Order Member, and a very much simpler one for people coming along, that doesn't have to contain say the ten precepts.

Nagabodhi : I heard recently that you advised an Order Member that the Six Element practice is something that even Order Members should practice only under certain circumstances, for example, not to use it as a daily practice, but perhaps reserved for retreats.

S: Ah! I can't remember. I think I must have said that they should be careful about the circumstances under which they practise it, and that it was most suitably practised under the conditions of a solitary retreat, or a retreat at Vajraloka. Because it is a quite effective, one might even say powerful, practice, and can bring about quite drastic changes which you may not be able to cope with in the course of your day to day life and work. It was of that consideration.

Achala : Do you think there is any danger of having them all written out in the Mitrata Omnibus which is for sale?

S: Well again this raises a very general principle, because everything is for sale nowadays. I have just seen an advertisement in a brochure put out for the Kalachakra Initiation talks by the Dalai Lama, which we never would have allowed even to hear about, about, what to speak of hear of or hear in Tibet in the old days. So everything is published now, everything can be read, but that does not mean to say that we should contribute to that. But nonetheless it's a bit unrealistic in a way just not printing the odd Mantra or two, when apparently quite advanced, and highly esoteric Tantric teachings are freely available to everybody. We are, I'm afraid, functioning in a different sort of world. I really wish things were as they were in the more traditional days.

Achala : What do you think of a mitra building up an association with a particular Bodhisattva, one of the seven last mantras we chant at the end?

S: I prefer to see mitras concentrating on the development of the Mindfulness and Metta. On the other hand one can't lay down absolute rules, and one is on a sort of knife edge here. If you refuse to lay down absolute rules, you possibly open loop holes, which you don't want to do, but if you do lay down absolute rules, well then perhaps you are too rigid, you can limit people and hold them back. So if a mitra for some reason or other, or anybody did quite spontaneously develop a feeling for a particular Bodhisattva, well how can one check that, how can one prevent that or discourage that? One couldn't. But on the other hand, one does not want to give, or seem to give, blanket permission to mitras to take up practices for which they really are not ready, and when they should be concentrating on strengthening of more basic principles. Do you see what I mean? So I would say it is not impossible that a mitra should develop a feeling for a particular Bodhisattva, but I don't think mitras should be encouraged to do that. But if it happens spontaneously, well one just has to accept it, but as a general rule, so to speak, encourage mitras to cultivate more and more, of the Metta and the Mindfulness.

Sometimes mitras are a little bit competitive. They say "Why should the Order Members just do these visualisations, we are also equally able to do them." They do sometimes develop that sort of attitude. It is a slightly grabby attitude in some cases.
Though I think there's less of it now that there was in the FWBO Most mitras I think now are well aware of that distinction, and wouldn't wish to

take up something that it was felt they were not ready for. But supposing a mitra happened to have a very vivid dream of a Bodhisattva which makes a very powerful impression, how can you ask them to ignore that or suppress that? You can't.

Devamitra : To come back to the subject of Asceticism, we have one more question, from Padmavajra this time.

Padmavajra : In the Mangala Sutta, the Buddha says that asceticism (tapa), is one of the greatest blessings. Do you think that early Buddhism, because of the cultural climate in which it existed was predominantly ascetic in character. If so, is this why ascetic practices have become ends in themselves for the Forest Monks, as Michael Carrithers seems to suggest?

S: The word 'tapas', Tapocha Brahmacharyacha, has a very broad meaning. It can mean, not asceticism in the sense that we've been discussing asceticism, but more intensive spiritual practice. It comes from the root meaning, to 'glow' or to 'burn'. So tapas, I think here in the Mangala Sutta, just means more intensive spiritual practice, including perhaps a more strict observance of the precepts and practise of meditation. Though I have translated it in my own verse rendition as asceticism, it is not asceticism in the sense that we've been discussing just now, just more intensive spiritual practice giving rise so to speak to spiritual heat, spiritual glow.

Devamitra : We now move on to a totally new area. Achala has a question on the place of deportment in the FWBO.

Achala : The Visuddhimagga - this is one of the excerpts quoted in the book - in describing the monks with good conduct, mentions that he should have good deportment. Is good physical deportment,something that we should try to promote in the Movement, rather than just alluding to it, when we say that awareness of the body is an aspect of mindfulness. Perhaps we could make a start by stressing deportment in our walking and chanting.

Yes, I think I would certainly like to see certainly more attention given to deportment in the Order, and in the Movement. Perhaps the word 'deportment' itself has acquired slightly unfavourable associations. One speaks of say the teaching of deportment in girls' schools in the old days, and things like that, but it is a good word. It's 'deportment', it's how you carry yourself, and I think that is part of the total impression that you make. But of course you can't give attention to your deportment unless you first of all do practice mindfulness of the body.

During the Convention, I did speak about people correcting their posture in meditation, that is an aspect of deportment. It is also how you carry yourself, and yes, when I used to lead walking and chanting, I often found people doing it in a very slovenly sort of way, and no doubt there is room for improvement there. And even the way that people walk about, and just how they hold themselves on all sorts of occasions, I am sure there is room for a great deal of improvement there in all sorts of ways.

Buddhadasa ; There is a supplementary question to this because on page fifty-seven, it says that a bhikkhu is described as being "In deportment, like a well brought up lady." Do you think this is a worthy ideal for us to follow? Do you think that the bhikkhu way of life should emphasise perhaps 'manliness' more. 'Manliness' is in single inverted commas, such as the virtue of engaging in hard physical work?

S: Well that's a different kind of thing, because hard physical work has some bearing on deportment. But in some cases it can have an unfavourable effect, because it might result in some sort of deformity, or imbalance, if you are doing one particular kind of hard work, you could end up with a stoop or something of that sort. Yes when I emphasised the importance of deportment, I am not suggesting that we automatically follow the type of deportment that seems to be considered appropriate for bhikkhus in the East. One have to consider also the social situation. I have sometimes wondered whether the type of deportment the bhikkhus practice in the East. though genuine and helpful from the point of view of mindfulness is really the ideal one from all points of view. Because, yes, the author does describe it in terms of restriction of movement, keeping movement within a very narrow compass. That may not always be desirable.

Whether or not that is characteristic of well bred ladies, I don't know. We don't find very many well bred ladies these days. But I think possibly there are different kinds of deportment appropriate to the different sexes, and even to different periods of life. Perhaps what is an appropriate deportment for a young man is not an appropriate deportment for an old man. One has to bear that in mind too. Appropriate deportment for a young woman, is not necessarily appropriate for an old woman or an older woman. Though I suppose, in a some ways there are no older women, they are all young, officially anyway, if you see what I mean. (laughter)

But, yes I think one accepts the general principle of deportment, but one still has to consider which particular kind of deportment is appropriate for a certain person in a certain situation. So possibly in the case of a man, a more 'manly', inverted commas, mode of deportment is appropriate though there may be a bit of discussion as to what constitutes 'manly'. Perhaps it doesn't necessarily consist in sticking out your chest like a little cock sparrow, (laughter) or big cock sparrow. But certainly the slovenly should be avoided.

Nagabodhi : Going back to the walking and chanting - Achala's example - sometimes when people walk and chant, they have their hands folded on their chests, some just let them hang loose or clasp them behind their backs. Different people do walk in different ways, there is no formalisation as in say Zen. Do you think there's .....

S: Well when I was teaching this originally, I asked people not to fold their hands, just to let the hands move quite gently and loosely because I think one of the reasons why some people hold their hands is not out of feelings of devotion, but because they just don't know what to do with their hands, they feel uncomfortable with them just swinging at their sides, but they must accept their hands just freely swinging at their sides gently, not swinging them as though they were marching on the parade ground (laughter).

Susiddhi : There is a dilemma in that though Bhante, because when we are walking and chanting, well, we chant a mantra, which we wouldn't think of chanting like that if you were sitting on the cushion.

S: But here you are doing a different practice. It is mainly to help in mindful walking. You have been mindfully sitting, and partly to give you a break from the sitting posture, and partly to give you the experience in going back into ordinary life and movement maintaining your mindfulness, we have the walking and chanting practice. That is the twofold purpose of it. It is a devotional practice only in a very secondary sense, so one emphasises the mindfulness aspect, not the devotional aspect.

Kulamitra : Bhante, since we had touched on the walking and chanting, I have often found with beginners, the Namo Tassa etc. not particularly appropriate, because they don't feel that devotion. And also it tends to drag as a sound, and I have sometimes found it more successful to just use, especially after the Metta Bhavana, the sabbe satta sukki hontu.

S: Ah yes, I think I have used that too yes, yes.

Kulamitra : It does seem to flow better.

S: I might even have introduced it. I don't mind, if people find it more appropriate, let them use it by all means. I have certainly found that it works well on certain occasions.

Kamalasila : When you showed me and suggested the silent walking practice, you definitely suggested that people might have their hands together.

S: Well this is the Zen practice and I think I said that in a way by way of partial concession to the Zen Tradition. And also because I saw very often that people used to sort of swing their arms and that wasn't what was required, but I would rather see people just walking as I originally said in a perfectly natural way, just walking. That's all. But if people do have lots of trouble with their arms, well let them hold them just here (demonstrating), and make any other such little adjustment. But the practice is simply walking and chanting, just walking in a perfectly normal, natural way, which does not mean in a sloppy or slovenly way, with mindfulness, it is as simple as that.

Kamalasila : Do you see the silent walking as having more or less the same function?

S: Oh yes indeed! Yes.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, considering the walking and chanting. What do you think of the use of the other mantras with walking and chanting, because in Auckland the Tara mantra is used for this practice.

S: I am not really happy with too many variations. I introduced the Namo Tassa, because it was so general, but we do not introduce really any practice connected with Bodhisattvas in a general way. There might be something to be said for it if it were just Order Members, especially Order Members doing the Tara practice, but certainly not on general retreats. At the most the Namo Tassa and perhaps preferably the Sabbe Satta Sukki Hontu.

Aryamitra : Bhante, why do we have the two? Sometimes on an Order weekend we have the silence, and at another time its the Namo Tassa. Why?

S: I don't know. It depends upon the leader, doesn't it? I have nothing to do with these things these days. It would seem to be depending on what seemed appropriate to the person in charge. I think that one of the reasons for introducing a mantra was that by chanting the mantra you kept everybody together, because the walking tended to harmonise with the chanting. Whereas if you were only walking you could get out of step and be walking at different speeds, and all that kind of thing. I think the chanting was introduced as far as I remember, as a harmonising element, to help to keep people all together.

Aryamitra : So maybe the chanting would be better on say, beginners retreats?

S: Possibly, I mean again, I don't have anything to do with beginners' retreats these days, one could only experiment and see. If you had a lot of people you would have to find some way of keeping them all in step. I think a recitation of some kind, whether a mantra or not, does help to do that.

Kamalasila : I just wanted to come back to the silent walking. When, again at Vajraloka when we talked about the silent walking, you emphasised the point that it was like continuing a meditation into the room. The way you demonstrated it, you had your hands in dhyana mudra like this (demonstrating), and well, more or less like this.

S: I can't remember whether I had any particular reason for doing that. It might have been that I just thought it better to conform to the Zen usage, perhaps having noticed a number of people doing that anyway. But originally, I did teach it as just walking, and I think one needs really to emphasise that, because one needs to emphasise that one has to continue the practice of mindfulness when you are just going about your ordinary affairs and not engaged in any specific practice or exercise. I think I did myself earlier on, either allow people to walk with their hands together, or say that they could do that, because I noticed that they just found it very difficult to manage their hands, and that just seemed to keep them out of harms way. (laughter) But this was quite a concession from my point of view, you see what I mean?

Kamalasila : Could I ask something else on that? Recently some of the Order Members at Vajraloka - I have not been there during this - have started doing very slow walking, because they find that they can concentrate much more if they do it very slowly, and that seems to be in fashion at the moment. What do you think of that?

S: Well that perhaps is giving too much attention, too much importance to the aspect of just maintaining mindfulness, because the aim of that practice is not to be as mindful as you possibly can because then you might as well sit down and carry on with the mindfulness of what ever other practice you are doing. The whole idea of the walking and chanting, or just walking, is that you learn to make the transition, or you're given some experience of making the transition from a spiritual practice, one perhaps involving mindfulness, back into the ordinary skilful activities of the world, carried out with uninterrupted mindfulness. The same mindfulness virtually that you had developed when you were sitting and being mindful, or sitting and meditating.

So the aim of the walking and chanting is not, at all costs, to maintain as high a level of mindfulness as possible, but to maintain as high a level of mindfulness as is possible compatible with actual physical functioning in the ordinary ways. So if you slow down the walking and slow it

down still more, you are defeating the purpose of the practice.

Kamalasila : So there is no benefit in that?

S: So there is no benefit from that point of view. It may be beneficial from another point of view, but not from that point of view. If you are feeling so much inclined to be mindful as that well, perhaps you should not be doing the walking and chanting practice at all, but just carry on sitting and meditating.

Kamalasila : But what if it's time to stop meditating?

S: Time to stop in what sense?

Kamalasila : Well, say that you have been meditating for fifty minutes?

S: Well that is by prearrangement. What ever you decide to do. But if you decide to do the walking and chanting, well obviously one must do it with a clear understanding of why you do it. So far as I am concerned, the purpose of it is to give you practice in prolonging your mindfulness into those activities of life where you are not actually carrying out any specific spiritual practice or exercise. So you just walk therefore in a completely ordinary and normal way, not in any special way, not particularly slowly, nor particularly fast.

Devaraja : Bhante, it seems to me that perhaps the very, very slow walking, would enable one to have quite a long session of meditation with breaks, so you can actually stretch your legs, but retain the results of the practice, disrupted as little as possible, into another session.

S: In that case you don't need to walk, you can just stand up and stretch yourself in your place. That's why you have to decide beforehand what you really want to do. If you want to carry on uninterruptedly meditating for as long as possible, well just stretch yourself mindfully in your seat, or even stand up when you feel like it. But if you want to develop the practice of prolonging the mindfulness into the affairs of everyday life and the activities of everyday life, then you can do in between periods of seated meditation, the walking and chanting practice, or the just walking and being mindful practice, as I have described it. It is a question of being clear in your mind beforehand, what it is you want to do, what particular effect you want to produce, which particular aspect of the spiritual life you want to develop or cultivate.

I certainly noticed in the old days, that a lot of people wanted the practice of bringing meditation into their ordinary life, because more often than not they would be quite mindful in the shrine room, mindful of the breath and so on, but the minute they got outside the shrine room, they relapsed into their previous extremely unmindful behaviour. So I saw the walking and chanting as a means of helping them to prolong mindfulness into their ordinary everyday lives. It is possible to ask the question whether in fact it does help one to do that, but that is another matter. But by one means or another that is what we have to achieve. Not having highly mindful periods of seated meditation and very unmindful periods of doing other things. We somehow have to make the connection, and prolong the mindfulness into the midst of our ordinary life.

Devaraja : I have noticed that doing very slow walking like that between sessions of meditation, does seem to have its own particular quality. It does seem to be quite intensified.

S: Again it depends what one wants to do. One has to make up one's mind first of all, what is one trying to achieve, and then adopt the necessary means.

Devamitra : As there are now no more questions, are there any other points on which you would like to comment?

S: Just let us look through the chapter, I have just marked one or two passages, but we may have covered them already. (pause) We seem to have covered all the points I have marked. Ah! Yes there is one we haven't, ... two, ... three, ... perhaps four (laughter).

All right yes, we've got a little bit of time left. No one seems to have taken up the term "viveka". I have been thinking for some time that I should say something about viveka. It is a very interesting term. I think that viveka approximates to some extent, to what we have come to speak of as "individuality". That is why I consider it to be of some importance. Viveka is something which the monk practises, and a footnote quoting from Louis Dumont's, *Renunciation In Indian Religions*, says," He, the monk, is in consequence defined by individual concerns, and therefore, in the abstract by his individuality. The layman on the other hand, is defined by his place in a system of relations, the caste system, and the family, and therefore in those terms, has no individuality". In other words the layman, as seen in this tradition, is seen as a group member, and the monk is seen as the individual. And the viveka which he practises or cultivates, is an expression of that individuality. So if we are looking for a term that in a way justifies our use of the expression, individual, or individuality, in the FWBO, well I think Viveka is that term, at least to some extent. " So the third principle is that of Viveka which may be variously translated as isolation, seclusion, or retirement. This refers basically to the monk's retirement from the world, (Kaya-viveka). (That is viveka, or isolation of body) but it is also used metaphorically to refer to his isolation from sense desires,(citta-viveka),in samadhi; and to his isolation from clinging (upadhi-viveka), in panna. Viveka does not feature prominently in the Visuddhimagga.

So the viveka is sort of separateness and it's separateness among other things from the group, and it is that separateness from the group - in the context of this tradition, the laity - which constitutes individuality. So here there's a quite important link I think between our conception of individuality or the individual and the traditional concept of viveka.

Padmavajra: The Pali Text Society's dictionary says it can also mean loneliness.

S: Well yes the individual is lonely, so to speak, in the crowd. All right. There's more that could be said on that but I just wanted to draw attention to it.

Yes, this rather amused me on page 60. "Similarly, inappropriate monasteries", that is for the meditator," include one that is new, where building work is still going on; one that is dilapidated, where the monk will have to see to its repair; or one that is famous, where" - and this is the

amusing part - "there are always people coming who want to pay homage to him, supposing that he is an arhat which inconveniences him" Now I think this is very typical of Buddhism. First of all the sort of sceptical attitude of Buddhism, the lack of credulity. Always people coming who want to pay homage to him, supposing that he is an arhat. Do you see what I mean? Buddhism is quite aware that people, or at least in Buddhist countries, tend to go arahant hunting and are ready to seize upon any promising looking monk as an arahant, and pay homage to him as such. But then it goes on to say with regard to that supposed arahant who is being paid homage by those people, "which inconveniences him". How different the Buddhist attitude is from those people in some traditions or some pseudo-spiritual circles who go out of their way to proclaim the fact that they are - well they don't use the term arahant because that's a comparatively lowly category, but that they're enlightened, that they're Buddhas. Trying to drum up support as it were and attract people's homage. How different is the Buddhist attitude, the traditional Buddhist attitude.

So this in a way rather amused me. *There are always people coming who want to pay homage to him supposing that he is an arahant which inconveniences him.* It is the cool Buddhist response or the cool Buddhist attitude. A very balanced attitude compared with what we so often see, even in some Buddhist circles, though I must say probably non-Theravada Buddhist circles because this is one of the great positive qualities of the Theravada. Its sobriety, one might say.

All right enough about that.

Then there's that amusing bit about the monk relenting and telling the layman that he will accept the offerings out of compassion for them. Well I'm afraid you could apply this perhaps to lots of so-called Mahayana teachers who, out of compassion, might accept all sorts of things! (Laughter)

Yes and the last point. On the last page, the author says, "These", that is to say the dhutangas, "took on the colouring of pan-Indian asceticism, and also appealed to the emotional (and *potentially* pathological) roots of all asceticism." I think that's quite important. It's potentially pathological, even actually pathological aspect of extreme asceticism. Buddhism certainly regards that as one sided at the extreme. Self mortification, self torture. Asceticism in that sense, not in the original sense of the English and in fact Greek word itself which simply means training, and is obviously fully in accordance with Buddhism. Asceticism in that sense.

Anyway these are just some of the little points that I noticed. Anything further? Any loose ends not tied up? There are probably quite a lot of them actually. Perhaps we can't tie them all up this evening.

Suvajra : Do you think we are coming to grips with this text, and do the questions reflect the depth of study that you actually want?

S: I think we won't, or you won't get to grips with it until we start on the next chapter. These three chapters are sort of introductory and preparatory. It is all getting clearer. I think we are getting a bit more to grips with the material, but I don't think that we will really start getting to grips with it until tomorrow, when we start on the Sinhalese monk Pannananda, who is of course, one of the Forest Monks of Sri Lanka, about whom the book is really written. So the three chapters we have done so far have been more or less introductory and preparatory. I think some of

you must be experiencing some difficulty getting into or accustoming your minds to this type of study, or study of this type of material. It is not what you normally, I am quite aware of that. I think that is one of the reasons why it is very good you read them. (Laughter)

Dharmapriya : You mean as a dhutanga! (laughter)

S: Well if it is a dhutanga, I hope only in the purely positive sense and not in the sense of self torture! (laughter) Just a little gentle, very positive asceticism, intellectual asceticism. I think things are getting clearer, because perhaps there was a certain amount of confusion on the author's part in Chapter One. That seems to be disappearing as he comes closer to the more traditional material, the facts of the situation as it were.

Dhammaloka : Bhante, looking back to some of our questions, over the last few days, there have been a few questions concerned with formality, obedience, the Vinaya. In some ways these questions might be linked with the whole complex, perhaps in a broad sense of asceticism. I have wondered sometimes, because you have always seemed to answer these questions, to me it appeared in a very cautious way, not encouraging formalism, not encouraging rules for their own sake, and so on. So I have sometimes wondered, do we tend to ask questions, to ask you for a sort of laying down of the rules in a sense that might suggest that we want to have sort of security - this is what we should do, this is the Vinaya we should follow?

S: Well, yes sometimes I do get the impression that people want me to lay down rules, either to prohibit them from doing certain things, or to allow them to do certain things, it varies. I think there may be an element of wishing for security in it, but I think it isn't wholly that by any means. Because I think sometimes people are genuinely confused, and they want light shed on the situation, because they genuinely want to do the right thing, the skilful thing for quite positive reasons, for quite positive motives. But I think sometimes they ask me to lay down a rule, as a sort of short cut, so that they do not have to think it all through to themselves. I can understand that, because sometimes some issues are very very complicated, and perhaps they have not got the time to think them through.

But I think one has to be very careful not to ask someone to lay down a rule, and tell you what you should or should not do just in order to avoid the comparatively harder work of thinking it through for yourself, and understanding for yourself why you should do it or should not do it.

Perhaps in the case of faith followers, they find that a bit difficult to do and would rather just be told. Perhaps provisionally at least that is all right, but sooner or later, they must have some personal understanding or even realisation of why it is not skilful to do this or why it is skilful to do that and so on. But I often find myself quite pressed by people, to tell them, to lay down a rule, and it isn't altogether negative, though at the same time, I am for obvious reasons, or reasons which I hope are obvious, quite cautious about laying down rules, especially of a very broad and general nature. With children, I think it is generally recognised, you have to lay down quite definite rules. They require those sort of guide lines for the sake of their own emotional security. But in the Order, we are not dealing with children really.

Padmavajra : Do you think that thing about people asking for rules, that it is the same thing as when for example you get in the Life of Milarepa, someone coming up and asking Milarepa to give them a precept?

S: No, I think a precept is more of the nature of a teaching. What we are concerned with now is much more definitely a rule. Though sometimes of course people want you to lay down a rule in the sense of permitting something which they want to do anyway. They have got their doubts a#out it, but want to be able to do it with a clear conscience. This quite often happens. Or they want you to make an exception in their case, recognising their special circumstances. They don't have to do such and such a thing, or it is alright for them to do such and such a thing, sometimes they want a sort of special treatment.

Therefore I prefer what I think is the genuinely Buddhist approach, of trying to get people to understand principles, to clarify principles. Then, encouraging people to see for themselves how those principles are to be applied in their own lives, and that often involves clearing up woolly thinking, or vague or confused thinking. Sometimes when that vague, woolly, or confused thinking is cleared up, it becomes immediately obvious to the person concerned, what, in fact, he or she should do.

So sometimes the best thing that you can do is just help them through discussion, to clarify the situation, clarify the principle involved, or principles involved. Though sometimes even that cannot be done because their situation may be particularly complicated, or at least complex, with a number of different factors having to be taken into consideration, and given due weight, or relative weight, and it isn't always easy to see exactly what is to be done. Especially as it is at times very difficult to empathise with a particular person, in a particular situation. Only they know what it feels like to be in that situation, what the stresses and strains and pulls are. So having understood the general principles clearly, it is only they, who can make the final decision sometimes, as to what they should do. You can't do it for them. On the other hand, you can't let people just be completely adrift, you have got to give some general guidance. At least at the beginning in the case of those who can't perhaps, think things through very clearly as yet, but eventually, that is what they really need to do. There are some sort of minor rules that must be accepted as a matter of courtesy, that you do not talk in the shrine room for instance, that you do not talk in the shrine room whilst people are meditating. In a sense there is a rule, but it is a rule of courtesy so to speak, because you should not disturb other people, or interrupt them.

Some people might even think, and some people even argued this point with me in the old days, that their freedom to talk in the shrine room is really much more important than other people's need not to be disturbed, or interrupted.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, regarding this question of people resolving difficulties in their own lives, I have noticed recently, that you have been encouraging us much more, as spiritual friends, to take aboard other peoples' difficulties and problems, rather than thinking that you are the only one in the Movement who can do this.

S: Well, that is to a great extent the case because my time is limited, and I'd have too many clients as it were. I also think there are quite a lot of things that mitras and perhaps younger less experienced Order Members can in fact sort out just as well, in some cases possibly even better with senior and experienced fellow Order Members, who may perhaps be more familiar with the sort of situation in which they find themselves and so on.

Buddhadasa : So my question is, how can this be encouraged, is there a particular method here? And at the same time, how do we as it were,

prevent people, who genuinely want to see you?

S: Well, very often nowadays, I suggest to people that they talk such and such matter over with such and such Order Member. I say, talk it over with Subhuti, or talk it over with Kovida, and they do that.But I think an Order Member would very quickly realise when he had really gone out of his depth, and when really somebody ought to be referred to me. Or, the issue which has been raised is so fundamental that I need to be asked to consider it, especially if I haven't on some previous occasion made it clear. If it is a new issue. I think most more experienced Order Members can recognise these sort of cases, these sort of situations quite easily in fact.

Kulamitra : Bhante, I have noticed on the other side of things, Order Members have said things which are not very complicated, and it seems that the particular fault has been glaringly obvious, and though they may have had quite a bit of feedback from their friends, but then you have said something to them, and suddenly the penny dropped. It does sometimes seem a bit unnecessary. Perhaps it's not that you have said something new, more that they take it more from you.

S: I think it is partly that they have got more confidence in me than in others, and in a way that is natural up to a point. But I think I can say also two things. I think I am more skilful in putting points across, because I have had more practice, and also I think I don't enter into a sort of argument. Sometimes I think what happens with Order Members, with the best of intentions, they espouse a particular point of view, and identify themselves with it so strongly that, even though it is the right point of view, it becomes difficult for the mitra, (say if it is a mitra), to accept that because an element of sort of competitiveness that has enters into it. Whereas I think I sometimes have the knack of being able to put across my point of view and say what I want as though I don't really care whether they accept it or not. I don't emphasise it or force it, I put it across quite gently, and then they can just accept it, because they do not feel my sort of personality behind it in a forceful sort of way. They don't feel that in accepting it, they have given in to me. I think it very often is that. That the Order Member has put across the right point of view but so vigorously, that the person concerned feels, he would be knuckling under if he agreed or accepted. I think I do not do that, and I think that often is what as it were carries the day.

Kamalasila : Bhante, I wonder if we could aspire to that sort of disinterestedness in order to .....

S: I think it will come with experience and persistence. Also several times or quite a number of times over the last few weeks or few months, after seeing somebody and discussing something I have thought, and sometimes I've said to Subhuti or to Kovida, "It wasn't really necessary for me to see that person, almost any senior Order Member, or more experienced Order Member could have just sorted out that, it was a very minor thing." Perhaps there was not anything to be sorted out really, and I have to devise some way of eliminating these sort of cases as it were, these sort of people more and more unfortunately, because I don't have the time. Subhuti and Kovida and Dharmadhara also nowadays, when people ask to see me do often ask them, "Is it really important?, do you really need to see Bhante, or could you not sort it out with an Order Member" They quite often say this.

So quite a few people are screened out, but some still don't get screened out, and sometimes I am left feeling that I have not really spent my time in the best way. I might have other quite important work to get on with but I've interrupted it I've just had a pleasant chat for half an hour, which

is all very well, but wasn't really necessary. But it is very difficult to know sometimes what to do. Sometimes people are very insistent on seeing me, and the people in the Order Office don't like to seem to be blocking them or getting in the way. So they say to me, "Well, such and such person is very insistent, they say they must see you, it is very important," but actually it turns out to be nothing at all, so what can they do? I think also therefore I do take advantage of opportunities of seeing a number of people at the same time, as on public occasions like when I appear at the LBC from time to time. I am happy to do that, because it means that especially new people who want to see me, and hear me, well, they've got a chance, and maybe there is less likelihood that they will want to come and have a personal interview. So from that point of view, as well as from others, I am quite happy to appear from time to time in that sort of way, and if I sit in the reception room afterwards, well I will just have a quick word with perhaps twenty, or twenty-five people and they are quite happy, and they don't need to ask to see me, and they haven't really got anything to say anyway. So I prefer to arrange a few occasions like that. In the long run it means that less of my time is taken up. This is also partly why I am quite happy to launch my new book, in that way we are planning, because on that occasion, I will be able to say hello to quite a lot of people, whom I don't really have time to see individually, but I am just quite happy to see them there and just exchange a few words with them afterwards, just to say hello, at least. It is also quite important.

Anyway, any final point? Perhaps that is not a bad note on which to conclude then.

Questions and Answers on the Forest Monks of Sri Lanka,

Chapter Four 8th August 1985

Devamitra : Today we have been studying the chapter on the life story of Pannananda, and the three groups between them have produced forty-two questions, which have been cut down to twenty-one.

S: I hope you haven't cut down the most interesting ones!

Devamitra: Well, actually some of them have been absorbed into other questions. Some did get withdrawn as well (Pause), without pressure having been brought! The first question comes from Dhammaloka and it requests basically more information on Pannananda.

Dhammaloka : Pannananda's life seems to have included meditation, practice of the dhutangas and of the four requisites, puja, reading and study, cooperation, communication, perhaps even friendship with teachers, fellow monks and disciples, as well as teaching and preaching the Dharma. All these were regular practices, thus it may have been a rather balanced life. The picture given by Carrithers nevertheless, suggests a predominance of ascetic practices, and some preoccupation with darker sides like hell etc. It is unclear whether this is due to Carrithers' approach, and perhaps wish to prove his thesis of the importance culturally, determines Pannananda's life, or whether he gives a true picture of Pannananda. Do you know more about Pannananda? Are there any hints that Pannananda may have gained insight?

S: I must say, I had not heard about Pannananda at all until I read this book. He certainly is not a generally known character, as say Anagarika Dharmapala is by any means. There are even other Nineteenth Century Sinhalese bhikkhus who are quite well known even today, like Sumangala Mahamonika Thera, and Dhirananda who is mentioned is also quite well known, I had heard about him. And there is Gunananda, of whom I have written in my biographical sketch of Dharmapala. But it's as though Pannananda has not passed into general consciousness. Perhaps I should mention here that it was only in the early fifties that I myself started hearing about the Forest Monks from my Sinhalese bhikkhu friends whom I met in Calcutta, from one of them in particular. He always referred to them as 'tapassi' bhikkhus, and indeed, Carrithers does mention that that it is one of the names by which they were known and are known. Tapassi bhikkhus, or ascetic bhikkhus You might say. As far as I remember, the topic arose in connection with Walpola Rahula, because Walpola Rahula started off his monastic career as a disciple of the tapassis when he was about fourteen.

The way in which the whole question arose was this. We must have been talking about Walpola Rahula, (though I can't remember now why but we must have been talking about him) probably because he was a well known political bhikkhu at that time, or had been, and the Sinhalese Bhikkhus are always very interested in politics. I think the point must have been mentioned that he was still only a samanera, and I had enquired why he was only a samanera, being such a well known monk and quite learned. Then I was told that it was not considered possible for him to receive the higher ordination because in his younger days he had been a disciple of the tapassi bhikkhus, and had been ordained as a samanera apparently - I'm not quite clear about the details. Apparently he'd been ordained as a samanera by them, and had worn therefore, the chevara, not three but two. There is a Vinaya tradition or rule, I think it's a tradition rather than a rule, that if being unordained you wear the chevara, you can

never receive upasampada afterwards. So he had apparently been judged according to that category, but many many years later he did receive the upasampada I know. But certainly that was the reason that was given to me for his not being anything more than a samanera, at that time. So then I of course I naturally asked, "Well, who are these tapassi bhikkhus?" So then I was told by this bhikkhu in particular that they were ascetic monks who went off into the forest, and had had a very disruptive effect on the Sangha. A very small movement and I gathered from him that they were a very small movement, and something of the past, something that had happened way back in the forties and that the movement had more or less died out.

He said that he and many bhikkhus believed that it was the Christians who were behind this, and that the Christians had supported and even bribed these people, the tapassis, to create division within the ranks of the Buddhists.

So this was interesting, and was apparently the view of the tapassis taken by one of the Buddhist clerisy - I think he was a shamanikaya bhikhu, as far as I remember. He died just a couple of years ago, so I saw it from their perspective. First of all it was I gather, a very small but very undisciplined sort of movement. These rather ruffianly characters, going off into the forest, pretending to be bhikkhus when they weren't, and probably subsidised by the Christians, but in any case fortunately they'd died out. This was what I heard at that time. Subsequently I made enquiries among my bhikkhu friends about tapassi bhikkhus in Ceylon, but was never able to find out anything more, and never came across any reference to them in literature until I encountered this book, which gives us of course, a completely different picture.

So it is interesting how that particular friend of mine, who is probably quite representative, who was actually quite a liberally minded person studying science at Calcutta University - it's interesting that he saw the tapassi movement in this way, or gave that particular version of the movement. I remember this very clearly. Also more recently, I read a short biography of Walpola Rahula, which I think was published in connection with some book or article, which said not a word about his connection with the tapassis. Again I cannot absolutely guarantee that my friend's information was correct. I imagine it probably was, but I wouldn't like to commit it to writing because it may be either wrong or based on a big misunderstanding, or something of that sort. But clearly the tapassis were regarded as disruptive, and as a very minor movement. I think that the members of the let's say 'official' Sangha, and those perhaps who wrote books, especially books in English, would probably not be inclined to mention anything about the tapassis, or about people like Pannananda. It is quite interesting that all this is coming to light now. So there was a bit more to your question.

Dhammaloka : Yes, I might reformulate part of it. Did you get the impression that the description of Pannananda was a bit one-sided due to Carrithers' view, to give childhood experiences as determining factors?

S: I can't say that I did get that impression. One does know that childhood experiences can be very important, very influential, and for instance, I, when I wrote the biographical sketch of Dharmapala, (to go back to that) I mentioned the influences to which he was exposed in his early days as a young Sinhalese Buddhist coming from the same community, the Goyigamaka, that Pannananda came from. I dwelt on the piety of his mother and the sort of strongly Buddhist atmosphere of his home which undoubtedly did influence him. So reading the account of Pannananda's life, all that seems to ring true in the sense that they were all sort of standard Buddhist influences, but he was perhaps particularly susceptible to them.

Thousands of young Sinhalese at that time must have been brought up in that way, subject to those sort of influences, but there was only one Pannananda, just as there was only one Dharmapala. So, yes I certainly found no jarring note in that account. Possibly there were one or two bits of sociology, that I tended to pass over a bit quickly, but where he was just describing the life of Pannananda it seemed quite authentic I must say. It rang true to me at least.

Dhammaloka : The last part of the question; are there any hints that Pannananda may have gained insight?

S: I think it is not possible to tell just from Carrithers' account, but one certainly cannot rule out that possibility because he does seem to have led a reasonably balanced spiritual life and to have had great ardour, great intensity, and great dedication and commitment, there is no doubt about that. He was quite a remarkable character. One rather hopes he had been able to develop insight, because if he hadn't after all that effort, it would be rather a shame (laughter).

Devamitra : We have another question concerning Pannananda from Achala.

S: Yes, could we say Pannananda? It is Panna-ananda, just as it is Dhammaloka, not Dhamma-loka. It alters the meaning actually. Dhammaloka with a short a means Dhamma world, and Dhammaloka, is the light of the Dharma. Pannananda is the bliss of wisdom.

Achala : According to the text, Pannananda decided to return to his birthplace, Matara for altruistic reasons. In this respect, he appears in contrast with Nyanatiloka whose motivations are not depicted as being particularly altruistic. Could you please comment generally on whether the spirit of concern for the welfare of others is prevalent among Theravada Buddhist monks, not withstanding their lack of emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal?

S: Yes, in fact I have commented on this more than once in the last few years, in connection with this whole question of Mahayana and Hinayana. I said that in the last resort, as far as I can see, these terms can only be used to designate attitudes. I don't think very strictly speaking that you can even speak of a Hinayana school or a Mahayana school. Really, one can only speak of Mahayana attitudes and Hinayana attitudes, and I mentioned that I thought that sometimes bhikkhus who belonged to the Hinayana, despite their official philosophy of the arahant ideal and self salvation, were often highly altruistic, and almost Mahayanistic in their attitude.
They were very often kind, helpful, concerned for others and so on. They couldn't be regarded as Hinayanistic, certainly in terms of ordinary everyday life, in the classical sense. Similarly, I have found Gelongs and Lamas who were technically members of the Mahayana school, and who perhaps recited the Bodhisattva Vow every day, but who were not by any means remarkable or conspicuous for their altruism, but were in fact quite self centred, even spiritually self centred. So I think one has to look at the attitude of the individual. One cannot regard say all the bhikkhus of Sri Lanka as being Hinayanistic in attitude, and all the gelongs and lamas of Tibet as being Mahayanistic in attitude. An attitude can often be at variance with one's official philosophy, or the school to which one officially belongs. So in that way I am quite sure, I know from my own experience, I have met many bhikkhus, especially from Sri Lanka, who are very warm hearted and kindly, and one could say altruistic, and concerned about other people. Not on a very high spiritual level I must say, but nonetheless, concerned with other people and their welfare in

one way and another.

Padmaraja : Bhante, you use the term "spiritually self centred," this seems to me a contradiction in terms. What exactly do you mean by that?

S: Well, just concerned with your salvation. You may in the case of a spiritually self centred gelong, pay lip service to the Bodhisattva ideal, but actually you are not really motivated by that. You are still thinking of your own spiritual life and your own spiritual development, or perhaps just simply of yourself, not even of your own spiritual development. So we must look at individuals, and the attitudes of individuals, and not expect that they will necessarily conform to the ideals, let us say, or the attitudes, of their particular schools.

Subhuti : You did say that you did not feel it was on a particularly high level. Do you think that's to do with the limitation of the tradition, or would you .....

S: No I think that was because there was a sort of general lack of a higher spiritual tradition in Buddhist circles in Sri Lanka, as far as my personal knowledge goes.

Devamitra : Another question from Dhammaloka.

Dhammaloka : Dhammaloka, ...Dhammaloka speaking (laughter). Carrithers suggests cultural and childhood influence as being the predominant conditioning factors for both Nyanatiloka and Pannananda's lives. Limited though such an approach of biographical study may be, the question does arise whether useful information could be expected from a broad and systematic study of externally given aspirations to spiritual life in the modern West. Would you favour a study of this sort to be undertaken among Members of the Western Buddhist Order? Do you expect certain common biographical patterns, or perhaps even types of life story to be found as prevailing and particularly conducive factors to the eventual commitment of individuals to the spiritual life, and what did you find particularly useful when listening to Order Members life stories?

S: Well, I'll make a general observation or two first, and then we could go through your questions clause by clause. First of all, in connection with the fact that Pannananda returned to his home area and Nyanatiloka did not. Of course, one must bear in mind that Nyanatiloka's home area was not Buddhist, and he could hardly have gone back there and lived as a Buddhist monk at that time. So perhaps whatever yearnings he might have had, and doesn't actually seem to have had many, because he was very happy with his Island Hermitage, he would, necessarily have had to suppress. There is that point.

Then of course, when one is thinking in terms of childhood influences, and taking them into account, that is not a completely Buddhist way of looking at things. This is because the Buddhist would also give due weight to the factor of previous karma. Carrithers does not seem to entertain that possibility at all, though he must be well aware of it. A Buddhist would often regard someone's youthful fascination for the spiritual life, not just as the result of childhood influences, influences of the home, if they were actually present, but as a remanifestation of tendencies brought over from previous existences. Carrithers doesn't consider that possibility at all. Anyway let us go on to your question clause by clause.

Dhammaloka : Could useful information be expected from a broader, systematic study of externally given aspirations to spiritual lives in the modern West?

S: I am not sure what is meant by useful. Useful for what purpose? Useful to whom?

Dhammaloka : I was thinking of for example, taking typical life careers into account in approaching people.

S: It might be. I can't say very definitely, but it might be. it might at least enable one to avoid certain approaches, which it would seem, would not be appropriate, at least perhaps that. I cannot really I think, say more than that at the moment. It might be useful.

Dhammaloka : Would you favour a study of this kind to be undertaken, in the Western Buddhist Order?

S: I think I would. I think I would personally find it interesting. I think perhaps it would help me understand more clearly, at least on a certain level, what sort of Order we had, who we had. It would be interesting if we found that we were appealing to or attracting only a certain type of character. It would perhaps make us more aware of or more alert to our limitations, and therefore put us in a better position to avoid them. So yes, I think I would quite like to see perhaps all Order Members eventually writing their autobiographies, or being interviewed by experienced interviewers, and then a sort of analysis conducted of all these biographical sketches, they might be more than sketches. I don't know whether the task could be entrusted really to someone outside the Order. I think an Order Member would have to acquire the necessary sociological skills and techniques, and then take up that sort of work himself or herself. It certainly would be interesting to me, and perhaps useful to us all.

Dhammaloka : You mention that you expect certain regular patterns or even types of life stories to be found as prevailing and particularly conducive.

S: I would not say that I expected, but that I would not be surprised if that did turn out to be the case. I don't really expect it because I am aware of a certain diversity within the Order. But nonetheless, I am open to the possibility that that diversity may be in certain respects, superficial, and that a deeper analysis, a more systematic analysis, might reveal surprising similarities among Order Members who did not seem to be very similar.

Dhammaloka : The last part of it. What did you find particularly useful in listening to Order Members life stories?

S: I listened to Order Members' life stories some years ago. I haven't listened to them I think in Tuscany for the last two years. I think broadly speaking, what I found most interesting, apart from the incidental interest of certain fascinating episodes, (laughter) was the fact that the life story enabled me to understand the individual Order Member very much better. To see the sort of background out of which he had grown. Also perhaps, what was perhaps most interesting of all, I saw that in a sense, after listening to most of those life stories, maybe all of those life stories, that it was in a manner of speaking, inevitable that that person should have found his way to the spiritual path, to the Dharma, and to the FWBO.

It seemed to be the perfectly natural, logical culmination of his whole life, however bizarre that life might have been at least in part. However remote at least initially, from any kind of spiritual aspiration or interest. It seemed really amazing. It's like, I don't know the technical terms, though in music, you can probably tell me this, where after some quite amazing music, you reach the key, is it, from which you originally started, and you are not expecting that. But when it does come, it seems completely inevitable, it is a little bit like that.

Kulamitra : Bhante, do you think if an Order Member did research and maybe write up biographies of Order Members, that a selection might make an interesting and maybe generally good to have available book?

S: I am sure, Yes, because people are very interested in biography, and yes it's in some ways see the best approach to the spiritual life, from the literary or reading point of view. I think in that way, you can get a better feel for the spiritual life, than you can from reading abstract treatises. Think of the inspiration people get and have got from "*Tibet's great yogi, Milarepa*", it is a wonderful work, or from the life of the Buddha, from the *"Light of Asia"*. Think how many tens of editions that has gone into, I think it is upwards of a hundred editions by this time, at least. I have just been reading incidentally - well I am reading and have not quite finished it - the new version of the Lalitavistara. I'm afraid it's very expensive, but it's a very fine piece of work. It is an English translation of a French translation, but checked against the Tibetan translation, and the Sanskrit text. It reads extremely well. I think from a technical point of view it is a better piece of work than *the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, which was likewise translated from a French translation from the Tibetan in this case. The French translation of the Lalitavistara was made from the Sanskrit text, but it's really quite inspiring. In some ways it's rather extraordinary, because it is a Mahayana version of the Buddha's life, and there is an amazing amount of myth and legend with little nuggets of history here and there. Some passages closely resembling similar passages in the Pali Canon, but it's a most inspiring work, especially all the events leading up to the Buddha's conception. All the events that happen in the Tusita Devaloka beforehand which take up many many chapters. It really is archetypal material of the highest quality, one might say.
The whole thing is well translated, even from a literary point of view it is quite reasonably well done. It is put out by Dharma Publishing, the same people who put out *the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, in two volumes. Beautifully produced. with lots of reproductions of thankas, the same red covers, and gilt edges, and a nice brocade covered box. They really do it in style, and I quite appreciate all this, because it does show a feeling for the material, and a reverence for the scriptures, which is very pleasing to see. So I give them full marks for this. I am glad that I did praise Tarthang Tulku's publications the other day in the course of the Convention, but that is just by way to illustrate just how inspiring biography can be.

On another level, think of Johnson's Lives of the Poets, how interesting they are. Think of Lytton Strachey's biographies, again on another level. But spiritual biographies and autobiographies are very readable and very very inspiring very often. So yes, I am quite sure it would be good to eventually publish a selection at least of biographies of eminent Order Members. (laughter) There are lots of Chinese and Japanese works and dozens and dozens of biographies of eminent monks and also of eminent nuns, and eminent mediation masters, and of eminent Buddhist scholars. It is a very traditional form of Buddhist literature

A Voice : Do you think that we could make more use of biographies in lectures that we give?

S: Perhaps we could pay more attention to the Life of the Buddha. Perhaps we could recount more episodes from the life of the Buddha. We could use material from the life of the Buddha to "point a moral, and adorn a tale," as Samuel Johnson said. I think we need to be more familiar with the Life of the Buddha. People in the movement need to be more familiar with the life of the Buddha. Initially not so much with the legendary material, but with what appear to be the credible historical facts, which most people would be more easily able to relate to. After all, we do not want to present Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, so to speak.

Devamitra : Now we go on to a question from Nagabodhi on 'homily.'

Nagabodhi ; If we are to believe the evidence of Carrither's book, it would seem that homilies, stories and poems can play a crucial role in planting positive, spiritual, Buddhist aspirations into people's minds as from a very early age. Do you think we could be working more in this field ourselves? For example, publishing children's story books as distinct from strictly educational literature, or sending our best story tellers out on school visits.
Could it be argued however, that any attempt to implant ideals and aspirations in this way, no matter how benign they are, would add up to a form of manipulation, or even brain washing, which would militate against the principle of choosing Buddhism on the basis of mature thought and experience?

S: Well, if it is manipulation, manipulation is unavoidable. Are you going to ban stories altogether? I can remember, I don't know whether I have written this in the unpublished chapters of my memoirs, perhaps I have touched on it, but I can remember being very inspired by stories. I certainly wasn't brainwashed. I used to go and get them from the Children's Library section of the Public Library at Tooting Broadway. What I loved was fairy stories. There was a whole series of volumes edited by Andrew Lang, I think it was. The Ruby Fairy Book, and the Diamond Fairy Book and the Golden Fairy Book and the Rainbow Fairy Book, and so on. About ten or twelve of them and I really loved these just as stories. I was not more than eight because it was before I fell ill and was confined to bed. So I can certainly remember being fascinated by stories. I wasn't especially fascinated by Gospel stories which I encountered at school. I did not have anything against them, but I didn't find them especially fascinating. I don't even think I remember any of them, not from that time. But yes, I think children do love stories and are going to demand stories, so you might as well give them good stories which inculcate, general, as it were, human principles, kindness, helpfulness, co-operativeness, consideration for other people and kindness to animals and so on. As well as feeding and nourishing their, for want of a better term in this context, their imaginal faculty to the extent that it is developed.

I have been reading again recently another book by a modern scholar, on the Jataka stories, especially in South East Asia, in Ceylon, and these are another strand of tradition, and they do greatly inspire people. The Jataka tradition runs almost alongside the Visuddhimagga type tradition, supplementing it, and to some extent differing from it, and having a somewhat different emphasis and appealing more to the lay people than to the monks.
So I think yes, it would be a good thing if in the FWBO, we produced more books for children, story books, telling stories from the Buddhist scriptures. I don't think that it is a question of indoctrination, because otherwise every comic that they picking up would be indoctrinating them. Certainly everything that they pick up and read is influencing them. You can't isolate the child from social influences, it is ridiculous even to think of it. So let those influences be as positive as possible. I think we can help in this sort of way. Perhaps we should try to collect together

children's books, Buddhist children's books and comics which have been published, there are actually quite a lot of them now, and just have a look at them first. Perhaps we could distribute some of them more widely, and think perhaps of producing our own, for our own half dozen children (chuckling).

Padmaraja : Shambala have produced, either 'Shambala' or 'Dharma' have produced a very beautiful production of the Life of the Buddha for children, lovely illustrations, a very glossy book. It sells very well also.

S: Oh good !

Aryamitra : Maybe we should have a children's section in the Newsletter (laughter).

S: Well I'm planning to have an adult section! (loud laughter). What I mean is, not enough adults read it, not to speak of children. Might even have a special Bhikkhus' page, when they go out to Eastern readers.

Devamitra : Could we at this point Bhante, descend into hell, do you think?

S: Well, if you think we can get out again! (laughter)

Devamitra : We have three questions on hell which were shelved on previous occasions but hell is a part of the.....

S: Well, why not talk about hell? Again I will reminisce a little bit. (laughter) in a sense! I was not intending to refer to any of my experiences in Kalimpong, or even the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. (laughter) I think I mentioned this in my memoirs. When I was in Ceylon, when I was still in the army, I paid a visit to Kandy, and there I saw these very vividly executed frescoes depicting people in hell, and depicting the tortures of hell in a very realistic manner, and that was the first time I had come up against this presence of hell in Buddhist teaching, and it does seem to play a fairly prominent part in popular Buddhist teaching in all Eastern Buddhist countries. There are even literary descriptions of the tortures of hell and so on.

So I think it isn't really very exceptional that Pannananda should have felt the influence of those sort of conceptions. But they are very present in popular Sinhalese Buddhism, in fact in the popular Buddhism of all Buddhist countries, so having said that, let's have the questions.

Devamitra : The first question comes, there are three altogether, the first one coming from Suvajra.

Suvajra : The first one is quite straight forward perhaps. What emphasis did the Buddha actually give to hell in his teaching, as opposed to what comes across in the Pali Canon?

S: Well you can't get at the Buddha's teaching, except through the Pali Canon and similar works, and we know there that there are various strata.

It would seem to me that an undue emphasis on hell is completely out of harmony with the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha certainly did teach that unskilful actions have painful consequences in this life and after this life. He might even, occasionally have gone into details, but I personally rather doubt this. The Pali Canon in some places does represent him as going into great detail about punishments in hell, but that seems to me quite inconsistent and quite incompatible with the general tenor of his whole teaching.

Because it's one thing to point out that unskilful actions have painful consequences, and it's quite another to dwell upon those painful consequences to such an extent and in so detailed a manner, that you are virtually trying to terrorise people into abstaining from those unskilful actions. That sort of attitude, that sort of procedure, would seem to be quite inconsistent with the Buddha's general attitude. So I do not believe that the Buddha himself, in his own teaching, gave that kind of emphasis to hell. It is interesting that the term which is usually rendered as hell in the Pali Canon is would be upaya, which is simply a state of downfall. It might well be a state of suffering, but I think the minute you start emphasising the sufferings that will befall someone if they behave in a certain way, you are beginning to terrorise them. It is moral terrorism and that is quite inconsistent with the whole attitude of the Buddha's teaching, with the principle of autonomy, self responsibility, awareness, self reliance, and so on.

Devamitra : However there do seem to be a number of texts in which there are very lengthy descriptions of hell. Not just Theravada texts, I have come across lengthy descriptions of hell, in the Mahavastu and also in the *Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*.

S: Yes. I would say that is not in accordance with the best Buddhist teaching, but you see there is a social problem, there is the whole problem of social control. How are you going to control masses of people? People who don't have any developed ethical sense, but who are afraid of pain and suffering, not only in this life but in future lives.

There is no doubt that in most societies, these sort of sanctions have been invoked as a means of keeping people on the right lines. Sometimes of course not even for keeping them on the right lines, but keeping them on the lines that their ecclesiastical superiors thought they ought to be going on. I think it would be much better to leave those sort of sanctions to the law, and not use religion, not use religious concepts in such a way to bolster up the law and maintain social order, not use them in such a way that the very purpose of those concepts, the very purpose of the spiritual life itself, is negated.

[End of side one side two]

Padmavajra : Would it be possible to separate out religion from society. Wouldn't we have to use religion? Aren't they so interconnected, that you would have to use that as a sort of sanction?

S: I don't think so, because in a modern secular society you get along without these theological sanctions for morality. Society is not obviously in a worse state than it was in the days when people were terrorised by the concept of hell. People do very often need to be held in check but I think they can be held in check just by the secular law, the law of the secular state rather than bringing in the concept of hell and dwelling upon that in order to reinforce or underwrite or even replace the secular law. For instance in Russia, people are terrorised, but they are not terrorised

by theology, they are terrorised by the Soviet Secret Police. So it's better that people should be terrorised by the law, than that they should be terrorised by means of concepts belonging properly to the spiritual life.

If they have to be terrorised, if it is a necessity of social order, let them be terrorised by non-religious means. I hope though that it is possible in some way to appeal to people's reason, so that it is not necessary to terrorise them in any way. But there is no doubt that there are some people, a minority in society, who only desist from anti-social behaviour, out of fear of punishment. I do not think there should be any theological counterpart, or let us say Buddhalogical counterpart, of the criminal law and its sanctions. You cannot import the ideology of the criminal law into your moral life, or your conception of ethics.

This is not to say again that unskilful actions will not have painful consequences under the law of karma. They will. But you cannot in the interests of the spiritual life, dwell on the painful consequences to such an extent that you are virtually trying to terrorise people into being good. People who are terrorised into being good are not really good, not in the Buddhist sense. But there is an element of that terrorism I think, in at least some forms of popular Buddhism.

Devamitra : Bhante, I can understand, I can accept what you say, but I still find it difficult to understand why such full descriptions of the conditions of hell should be found for example in *the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava.*

S: Well, you might explain it in purely social terms. The Tibetans were a very wild and barbaric people when Buddhism was introduced. They were a very war-like people, and perhaps they were a very immoral people, very unethical people, very violent people, and perhaps, I'm only speculating, they had to be restrained in this kind of way. Once they had developed faith in the law of karma, and believed in that, and rebirth, well that was a means of keeping them in order, by painting these very vivid pictures.

Another possibility is that, I'm afraid, and we tread on rather delicate ground here, but of course it has been suggested, that where people are observing enforced celibacy, it can have the effect of making them slightly sadistic. It could be, I am only putting this forward as a possibility. a possible explanation, that some of the celibate monks, not the happily and spontaneously celibate monks, who were responsible for some of these writings, were giving vent possibly to somewhat sadistic feelings. I think one can't rule that out completely. One knows that that sort of thing has happened within the Christian context, perhaps it did sometimes happen within the Buddhist context, even though broadly speaking, the Buddhist attitude towards sex and celibacy is rather difficult from the Christian one.

Kulamitra : Bhante, I think that passage that Devamitra describes
in *the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, he actually goes into quite a lot of detail about the painful nature of all the realms including, for instance, quite a graphic description of how uncomfortable it is to be a human child in the womb, and to come out and experience the world and so forth. Although it is there I think the overall chapter has a slightly different feeling.

S: Yes. One has to see it in context. If you also have a description of the painfulness of other realms of existence, then the emphasis, obviously, isn't the same. But nevertheless, even then, if you are dwelling almost with relish upon the sufferings that sentient beings undergo, it does

become a trifle suspect. For instance, when I wrote my poem on the death of Mahadhammavira, I could have gone into greater details with regard to his death. But I just did not want to do that. And I am quite sure that if someone had continued the poem in that sort of way, and given a lot of details about the manner of Mahadhammavira's death, I think it could not have been with a completely wholesome or skilful attitude, or motivation.

So I think that any dwelling on human suffering, even for ostensibly ethical or altruistic or humanitarian purposes is rather suspect. I am very suspicious of some of these TV programmes, which in the interests of awakening your compassion allegedly, show you dreadful pictures of starving people and so on. I am afraid I suspect their motives deeply, I distrust their motives I should say.

Devamitra : Bhante, in this connection, what do you feel about the representations of the hell realms on the Wheel of Life, because there are some pretty horrendous representations there.

S: That is true. Very often the detail is so small, you don't really notice it. I must say personally, I am not very happy with them. I think if I was myself an artist, and depicting or producing a wheel of life, I would try to almost soften them or play them down. Perhaps these things aren't really suitable for visual representation. Perhaps it's enough really that one just says, or just writes that well, if you have behaved unskilfully, you will suffer. You will suffer after death in all sorts of dreadful ways, and leave it at that. I don't think it is something to be dwelt upon.

I don't know how the artist would get around it, in the case of the wheel of life. Perhaps you would just represent the Yamaraja there judging people, and people before him, but not anybody actually having the sentences carried out, having their heads cut off, and all the other horrible things. Perhaps I am over sensitive, or something of that sort, but I am very, very distrustful of any attempt as it were to bully people into being ethical. Or as I said terrorise them into being ethical. I think there should be just a plain statement of the facts. Well some people might argue against that, that well if you depict people being impaled in hell, and all that kind of thing, you are just stating the facts. Though this raises the whole question of the sufferings of hell, assuming that there is a hell in the Buddhist sense, and that there is suffering there, is it really of that kind?

Sometimes it's really quite ridiculous because, even in some Buddhist texts that if someone is disrespectful to a Bhikkhu, and he's boiled in oil for hundreds of aeons. This is totally disproportionate, and maybe you do want to encourage people to respect bhikkhus. But to do it in that sort of way, is going beyond the bounds, almost of sanity. Though this is what one sometimes finds.

Padmaraja : Surely Bhante, hell is beyond the bounds of sanity. And maybe that is a very correct description of what hell is like.

S: But how do you represent something that is beyond the bounds of sanity? How do you represent it in pictorial form?

Dharmapriya : Do you not think that quite apart from the aspect of terrorism that say, being in a position where you have to look at such pictures, and hear such stories, leads to negative mental states? I am just thinking of being in Bruges and going to the galleries of the late medieval

paintings, most of which seemed to be concerned with hell, and coming out thoroughly well just depressed, not energetic etc.

S: Well I know, speaking personally, when I visit art galleries in Italy, usually when you come onto these seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the martyrdoms multiply and they become more gory, I just don't bother to look at those particular paintings. They are probably quite good from an artistic point of view, in some respects. But I think the overall emotional effect is quite deplorable, including some of the crucifixions. It is quite interesting to see the vulgarisation of the crucifixion. The early Christian crucifixions, or depiction of the crucifixions, are not objectionable in that respect. They are quite dignified. You just have a figure extended on a cross, with perhaps just a tiny drop of blood, and no more. But two, three, four, five, six hundred years later, they are just gory monstrosities that look as though they come straight out of the butchers' shop, and they don't seem to have, or they seem to represent a very peculiar, almost pathological state of mind, or approach to the religious life, if even it is that.

Padmavajra : Would in that description of *the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*. I think there is a little aphorism that goes something like, "Hell is the Lama of all the Buddhas." Is that something which should be rejected in view of what you have been saying?

S: Hell in what sense? Hell is the Lama. Suffering is a teacher. But I think there are some forms of suffering, which are so intense, that they cannot possibly be educative. They don't have any educative value at all. They just annihilate. The suffering is so intense that the very faculties that are supposed to be educated, are crippled and destroyed. There are some people perhaps who are as it were refined or ennobled by suffering, but I think even that is suffering to a comparatively moderate degree. I think as regards most people, suffering just brutalises and makes them insensitive, or even destroys them.

Kamalasila : Bhante, we are saying that people terrorised into being good are not really good, but what was it that happened to Pannananda when he was affected by the idea of hell? What was it that was happening to him?

S: I suppose he realised the consequences of unskilful action, and wished not to risk the possibility of going to hell, I imagine. We don't know the degree to which he was exposed to this, we are not told that, we are not told how strongly he was affected, or how strongly he was influenced, and clearly there were other factors. There was a positive fascination with the spiritual life. But if you think of someone, a well known character like Samuel Johnson, he was afraid of hell his whole life, and look at the effect it had on him, it had quite a pitiable effect. You could almost say it ruined his life, and he learned of these things on his mother's knee. His mother apparently was a grim Calvinistic kind of women.

Padmavajra : Bhante it is striking that later, when he used his skill as an orator, the only quote we have is his description of the repulsiveness of the body.

S: Whose?

Padmavajra : Pannananda's.

S: Yes, yes.

Padmavajra : It is quite striking that that is the only one quoted. We don't know if there were any more, and how it shook people.

S: Well, as I think the author mentioned, as in the case of people in America, who gathered around these camp fire revivalist meetings in the West, they enjoyed a sort of frisson, a sort of titillation. They enjoyed being a bit scared, but perhaps didn't take it all that seriously in the long run. People like Samuel Johnson, perhaps people like Pannananda, to a lesser extent, took it very seriously indeed. If you want a really good classic hell-fire sermon, there is one in James Joyce's *"Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"* given by a Catholic Priest. Probably the sort of thing that Abhaya used to have to sit through sometimes (laughter).

Padmaraja : Bhante, would you say something about the Bodhisattva. What does the Bodhisattva do in hell? How does he function?

S: Well, I suppose this is a question about the interpretation of symbols. Does one think literally in terms of a Bodhisattva descending into hell, into another realm? What is that trying to convey? I think what it is really talking about, whether in another world, or in this world, is a Bodhisattva, or a committed Buddhist let us say, willingness to try to function in the most difficult situation, and with the most unpromising people. We have enough difficult situations and unpromising people in this life itself! (laughter). We do come in contact with them from time to time, so I think the myth, if it is that, of the Bodhisattvas' descent into hell is the sort of paradigmatic form of that particular willingness. It represents the most extreme sort of situation which the Bodhisattvas' compassion could possibly encounter. It represents his willingness to do his best even under those untoward circumstances.

I expect everybody, every Order Member practically has probably at times found himself in a very very difficult position having to deal with very distraught people, people who are suffering, people who have undergone a terrible bereavement, or people on the brink of insanity, or something of that sort/ Well then you are dealing to some extent with someone who is in hell. It calls up all your resources of tact and compassion, and so on. Because sometimes, if you are not careful, you can even start getting exasperated with that person. It's as though they are being so foolish and so stupid, but you have to resist such feelings. So you may have to descend into hell at any time, you may have to deal with people undergoing very difficult, very dreadful, very terrible experiences.

I mentioned Dr, Johnson, he used to deal with situations of this sort in a remarkably sensitive manner. There was that dreadful situation when he had to write a letter to a man who was going to be hanged the following day, for forgery, whom he had tried unsuccessfully to procure a pardon for. His letter survives, and it is an absolute masterpiece of tact and honesty and compassion and kindly feeling. It is really quite remarkable, and it h#d quite a strong effect on its recipient. Dr. Dodds, who had unfortunately forged a nobleman's signature for a cheque. That was a capital offence at that time, and the King apparently, had not been allowed by the Government to pardon someone who had previously been guilty of that offence, so he felt he could not in consistency, pardon Mr. Dodds, despite the very moving appeals that Dr. Johnson wrote on Dodds' behalf. So Johnson had the task of writing this letter saying that our appeals have been unsuccessful, and you are going to be hanged tomorrow. But he discharged that duty remarkably well. Its almost impossible to imagine anybody else of that time succeeding in the way that

Johnson did.

So you could say that on that occasion, Johnson had to descend into hell, and he does seem to have a touch of the Bodhisattva spirit, despite all his own personal religious difficulties, and his rather narrow Christian orthodoxy. It was as though his heart was bigger than the religion to which he belonged. He didn't on that occasion have a Christian attitude. He might think, if he was asked or might say if he was asked, that he did have a Christian attitude. In a sense, perhaps he did, but he certainly transcended the Christianity of his day in that letter. Even from a literary point of view, it's a masterpiece, and also from the point of view of psychology and spiritual insight. He didn't shrink from what he had to tell Dr. Dodds, at the same time he did, in a quite robust way administer definite comfort, but also with great delicacy and feeling. I think hardly anybody else could have pulled that off. I can't think of anybody at the time who would have pulled it off. I can think of very few people on any age who could have pulled off that sort of thing and written a letter under those circumstances, which was so suitable and so appropriate to the occasion, and so helpful. So in a way that's what one means by the Bodhisattva descending into hell. He's even able to function in those circumstances. someone might come to see you, maybe a woman who has just lost her child, what do you say to her? You can't talk about impermanence, you cannot, not all at once. You could not say, "Well, if you are lucky, you might have another baby." It just doesn't mean anything, and you somehow have got to deal with the situation, and really empathise with that person. So to feel as they do, you've got to as it were descend to their level, while at the same time, paradoxically, not losing contact with your own sources of inspiration and so on. So that's the sort of thing that is really I think signified by this myth or symbol of the descent into hell. That puts it in the most extreme form.

Devamitra : We did actually have one more question on Hell. Vessantara is going to put it.

Vessantara : This is about the effects of the Christian view of heaven and hell, the sort of popular Christian view. I raise it I suppose, because, a lot of people are affected by it and it would be good to be able to make sense of it, and understand it. I suppose I thought firstly in terms of a Christian 'Wheel of Life' would essentially be a very large heaven section, a very large hell section, and a sort of human antechamber between the two, deciding which way you were going to go.

S: And a purgatory in the limbo region presumably?

Vessantara : And a purgatory in the limbo region, yes. What I suppose I am interested in are the psychological implications of living with that world view. I have drawn out two possible ones and would like you to comment on them, and perhaps suggest any others. The two which occurred to me were a Christian living with that world view, is playing for very high stakes.....

S: This was Pascal's view wasn't it? Yes the wager.

Vessantara : So there is a lot of anxiety involved or created by that world view. Secondly, I would assume there would be an urge to play safe in a way. Avoidance of experience. What I thought was that actually for a Christian, the best thing that could happen to you, would be, to be baptised, and then drowned in the font. (laughter). That would seem to be the logical implication of the teaching.

S: You would certainly be safe!

Vessantara : You would be completely safe, whereas the more you go on into experience, the more you run the risk of.....

S: I am not sure though that a baptised infant dying in that way would experience the beatific vision. (laughter) But anyway, Abhaya should know the answer to this one.

Abhaya : I would have thought so, I don't know.

S: I think theologians differ about the degree to which people after death experience the beatific vision. Some believe that there are degrees of experience of it, others that there are not. But I seem to remember reading somewhere that unbaptised infants, of course, go to limbo, but that is not official doctrine. But baptised infants, yes, go to heaven, but if their faculties have not been developed, do not fully enjoy the beatific vision, so there is a deprivation, but even then that is better than risking going to hell.

Though personally, I mention this as it just occurs to me, though I suspect we are not really through the questions, but it does occur to me that a lot of people, I am sure this was the case in the Middle Ages, brought up with particular world view, would be in a quite dreadful mental state. I would say a state of desperation, because on the one hand, there would be a fear of hell, and on the other there would be their awareness that they were quite unable to avoid committing sins which led to hell. I think this would engender a mood in many people of desperation and of despair almost. In some of course, it would bring about a very extreme reliance upon Priests, on the confessional, and a great deal of anxiety, and we know that that was the case. Anyway, let's continue with Vessantara's question.

Vessantara : I think most of the rest has been covered. I really wanted to know whether you'd agree with that psychological analysis, or whether you could see other implications, psychological implications, or anything of that kind?

S: In some ways I don't really like to dwell on the subject, if you see what I mean. But it could not be a healthy one. It would be interesting, to go back to what we were talking about a little while ago, in the case of the biographies of those Order Members who were brought up with the belief in hell in the Christian sense. It would be interesting if these particular biographies could be analyzed, and if one was to try to see whether one could come to any general conclusions, in the case of those particular people, as to the effects that that particular element in their upbringing had had. I personally don't remember this at all. I don't remember hearing about hell either at school, or from my parents, or later on, even in Sunday School. I must have heard about it I should think, in Sunday School, but if I did, it was water off a duck's back! (laughter) I don't remember when I became aware of it. I think it was quite a bit later when perhaps I had already abandoned Christianity anyway. Perhaps I was one of the lucky ones. On the other hand something of it might have seeped through without my being aware, without it being especially associated with Christian doctrine. Anyway, that is sufficient by way of answer?

Devamitra : Next is Suvajra.

S: Where do we move now, purgatory?

Suvajra : No this is still on hell. What we have been saying then is that Carrithers is wrong in his first or second chapter, where he said that a clear conception of the positive state, and why there is a hell state. He seems to say that the perception of enlightenment inevitably implies .....

S: No, I think he was speaking within the homiletic context. That was how it was presented in crude popular terms, for the benefit of ordinary people.

Suvajra : But is this not the case outside of these perimeters, that one would imply the other?

S: Well, more implies less. Say the possibility of greater pleasure implies the possibility of less pleasure, the possibility of less suffering, implies the possibility of greater suffering. It just depends how far you carry that and the extent to which you embellish it or dwell upon it.

Dharmapriya : It is clear, at least in Christianity, that there is a link between extreme asceticism, self-mortification, and fear of hell. Do you think there is any such link in popular Buddhism, or let's say in some of these phenomena we've been talking about in Sri Lanka between certain tendencies towards self-mortification, possibly getting as far as pathological, and the fear of hell? The idea of purity?

S: It would seem to be expected, because you might think, well, better a little suffering now, than a lot of suffering later on. That would almost be common sense if you had that sort of belief. So I think, yes there must be a connection.

Dharmapriya : That would then suggest that popular Buddhism, instead of being about attaining enlightenment, is about escaping hell in future lives.

S: Ah!, Carrithers is only dealing with certain elements of popular Buddhism. He leaves out entirely the Jatakas and the Paramitas, which are well known and quite popular with the lay people in Theravada countries. I think he is only dealing with one particular aspect of popular Buddhism.

Devamitra : Shall we move off the subject of hell, and on to an equally unpleasant subject, that is caste? A question is raised from Devaraja.

Devaraja : This arose out of the issue that members of the Siyam , could only be known a particular caste.

S: That is still the case I'm afraid.

Devaraja : I believe that Sri Lanka was a cultural dependency
of India. Does therefore the existence of Hindu style caste restriction in Sri Lanka indicate that the taking on of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, was part of a general and quite indiscriminate taking on of Indian culture? If so, was the fact that Buddhism was part of this packet of Indian culture a

mere historical accident? Would this account for Sinhalese monks being mainly guardians and transmitters of culture and clerisy? Could you also comment on Buddhism in other countries, that were culturally dependent on India such as Thailand and Tibet?

S: Well, I have mentioned before that countries like Sri Lanka didn't really have any culture before the coming of Buddhism. So they not only took their religion so to speak, from India, to a great extent they took their culture, their higher culture from India. This was the case with Thailand to some extent. Thailand of course, took a great deal of higher culture from China. It was the case with Tibet. It was the case with Japan, except that in the case of Japan, Indian Buddhism came via China, so a lot of Chinese culture also went from India to Japan. The only country which did have a developed culture prior to the advent of Buddhism, was as I have often mentioned, China. That is why there is definite parallel perhaps between introduction of Buddhism into China, and the introduction of Buddhism into the West, where also there is a highly developed culture already existing.

In the case of the introduction of caste into Sri Lanka, the story that is told, and I believe this is historical, was that the king of those days, (I forget exactly how far back one goes, I think it is probably, though this will have to be checked, towards the end of the eighteenth century) the king of Kandy, was either a Hindu, or strongly under the influence of Hinduism through his Hindu wives. One day he saluted a bhikkhu, and he afterwards was informed that that bhikkhu belonged to a very low caste, and he was very annoyed that he, being a high caste man, had saluted a low caste man, and he thereupon promulgated an ordinance to the effect that the bhikkhus were not to ordain people from lower castes, and that has been adhered to ever since, in the case of the Siyama-Nikaya, which was the only Nikaya then existing. And as this author makes clear, some of the lower caste Buddhists wanted that their sons should have access to the Sangha, so they established an independent tradition of ordination, and independent 'nikayas' eventually. That is to say the Amarapura and then the Ramanna.

Devaraja : So the institution of caste does go back to very early times, or it grew much later. Was that in the eighteenth century, or was this referring to development of the Sri Lankan.....

S: It would seem that this particular development, the restriction of the Siyama nikaya to a particular caste, goes back not very far, only a couple of hundred years. Then of course the Siyama Nikaya itself goes back only a couple of hundred years. Before that the Sangha in Ceylon was in complete chaos and the succession of bhikkhu ordination had been interrupted, or at least brought very seriously into doubt. But it is interesting of course that the bhikkhus did not make any stand against the king, and that even now when there is absolutely no reason why they should restrict themselves in this way, they continue to do so. There might have been the odd exception in very recent times, but if so it is very, very recent. My own fairly recent information is that the Siyama Nikaya still does not admit people of lower caste. Europeans, by the way, are almost always admitted into the Amarapura nikaya. I don't know whether it's because the Siyam nikaya people won't have them, but as a matter of fact, they seem always to join the Amarapura-nikaya. The famous monk Narada, belonged to the Amarapura nikaya, and I know from what I have heard from some of my Ceylon bhikkhu friends that bhikkhus of the Siyama-nikaya often scoffed at him, as a low caste bhikkhu, which seems extraordinary, and I know that when I got involved in the ex-untouchable conversion movement, some of my Sinhalese bhikkhu friends weren't happy with the conversion of the ex-untouchables, and they said, "We don't want all these low caste people coming into the fold of Buddhism." They actually said that to me!

A Voice : That is ridiculous!

S: It is isn't it? So one can't be surprised if I am sometimes a little critical of the way things are in the East, in certain areas. They have strayed away from the Buddha's teaching in certain very plain and obvious ways in some cases.

Subhuti : Was caste an aspect of Indian culture that came with Buddhism to Ceylon?

S: This I do not know, I could not say. I have would have to look that up. I don't even know if that has been studied. But certainly, the present day situation is as I have described it. It goes back a couple of hundred years.

Dharmapriya : Carrithers makes a suggestion without drawing it out that in the Amarapura Nikaya, some of the lineages are actually caste oriented or at least community oriented, do you know more about that?

S: I don't I'm afraid, except these odd remarks that I've heard from my Sinhalese Bhikkhus friends. But it seems quite natural and in a way understandable because one does know from one's study of comparative religion that very often, splinter movements are based ultimately not on religious differences, but on social and economic differences. This has often happened in the history of Christianity, especially in the early days of Christianity when there was a fragmentation into different sects and churches and so on. For instance, in Poland say today - this is a rather broader example - the Catholic Church is the vehicle for a lot of opposition to the communist regime. That gives the Catholic Church a certain sort of factitious strength. It is the only available strong organisation through which you can express your opposition to the communist regime. It is quite possible that if there were a change of government in Poland, a lot of support would be withdrawn from the Church, because people who have formerly used it as a means of expressing their dissent, no longer need it to do so.

Sometimes you find an ethnic minority maintains its ethnic identity through a separate form say of Christianity, or by maintaining a separate form of Christianity, a minority form. So this is a quite common pattern, and therefore it is not at all surprising that the lower caste people in Ceylon, who were excluded from the siyama- nikaya, should have set about going to Burma where as far as I know these distinctions didn't exist, getting ordained and returning to Sri Lanka, establishing their own 'nikaya' into which their own caste people could be ordained. So then therefore you get a split within the Sangha, so to speak, along caste lines, which are certainly not in accordance with the Buddha's intentions.

Devamitra : Since we are on the subject of nikaya, Buddhadasa in fact has a question about nikaya.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, could the Western Buddhist Order be regarded as a Nikaya? And, do you have any principles in mind regarding ordination, linking to the nikaya system to safeguard the integrity of the Order?

S: I think that the Western Buddhist Order could be regarded as nikaya in principle, except that it differs from the Theravada nikayas in several important respects. First of all it is not strictly monastic, or not exclusively monastic, there is no requirement for celibacy for everybody, and also it includes both men and women. But in many ways it does resemble a nikaya". Of course it's a nikaya which has arisen, one might say, by

way of a sort of protest against existing corruptions in the Buddhist world. In the same way that some of these other nikayas originally arose. One could look at it in that way. For instance, I felt that the Going for Refuge, was not sufficiently emphasised in existing Buddhist groups.

Devamitra : Bhante, you said that one of the differences was that the Western Buddhist Order includes both men and women. Does this mean that traditionally women would belong to separate nikayas within that tradition?

S: Well, of course in Sri Lanka, as in the Theravada world generally, the Bhikkhuni ordination tradition died out. There were no bhikkhunis and therefore no bhikkhuni Sangha, and therefore the question of nikayas didn't arise. What the original position was when there were bhikkhunis I just don't know.

[End of tape seven tape eight]

The Nikayas are not found in the Vinaya, One might say in some respects that the nikayas are a healthy development, because it enables different groups of people with different approaches to the Buddhist spiritual life to organise themselves and run their own affairs. There is hardly ever any actual conflict between different nikayas. Sometimes there is a conflict of interest and a bit of manoeuvring, but there is certainly no general ill will, even though perhaps they do sometimes make jokes about one another, but it doesn't usually go much further than that. Or there may be a bit of polemics, but nothing like what we've had in the West in connection with differences between the churches.

Subhuti : They are not sects.

S: They are not sects. I mean their doctrinal standards are exactly the same. They have the same general beliefs and practices. It's only unfortunate that as in this case the line of division is along lines which really represent a betrayal of Buddhism, when you have nikayas based upon caste. If for instance, you had a nikaya which was predominantly ascetic, or predominantly meditative, or devoted to study, well that would be in a sense, acceptable, because nikayas usually live and let live. They have got their own supporters and their own monasteries and so on. It is just that they do not sit together that is the main difference as I explained the other day for Sanghakammas, for official acts of the Sangha, they do not constitute one Sangha in that sense. But S.Dutt in his book on early Buddhist monarchism has made the point that Sanghabeda, division of the Sangha, is in some ways a healthy phenomenon, and actually provided for by the Vinaya, that if a certain group of monks cannot see eye to eye, and if it's a large group then they can just divide into two groups along the lines of division, and each group can function separately and independently. They are observing the same Vinaya, following the same monastic rule, practising the same teaching, but they live and function separately.

Of course in the case of the monks who followed the Mahayana, or what became the Mahayana, it went beyond that because there was this instance of the ten points. Whether salt could be stored up for the next day and all that sort of thing, where there was a difference about interpretation of the Vinaya rules, so that goes a little bit beyond the kind of difference you get between the Theravada Nikayas today. There are some differences but very minor ones. For instance, the siyama nikaya bhikkhus all carry ordinary black umbrellas. The Ramanna nikaya people carry Burmese parasols. Or possibly, I have got them mixed up. I have rather lost touch with these things. Anyway, one of the other

nikayas, either the Ramanna or the Amarapura, carry palm leaf umbrellas, very big palm leaves which are just dried and you've got a big stalk which you can then just hold over you. You sometimes see ascetics bearing these palm leaves in Ancient Indian Buddhist frescoes. The other nikaya of course has the Burmese parasol. So there are these differences. Of course the Siyam nikaya people do not cover both shoulders when they go out. The two other nikayas, the bhikkhus of the two nikayas, they cover both shoulders when they go out. There are these quite minor differences.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, with the second half of the question, do you have in mind any principles regarding ordination similar to that found in the nikaya system, to safeguard the integrity of the Order?

S: I'm not sure what you mean by "principles regarding ordination". We already have our procedure, and at present of course, all ordinations are actually conferred by me. The moment the only development that could take place is that I gradually hand over that responsibility to other people. So clearly one would have to lay down certain principles governing that.

Buddhadasa : That is what I was thinking.

S: You see, and that is something about which I'm still thinking. But, yes clearly attention has to be given to that. So in a sense yes, the Western Buddhist Order could be viewed as a nikaya, except that of course it is not a nikaya in the exclusively monastic sense.

Kamalasila : Bhante, I have a supplementary question to the ordination question. I hadn't formulated it until now. It is to do with the succession of ordination in the WBO. At the moment, we have a certain sort of status as regards the rest of the Buddhist world, as upasikas, and I believe this is because you are a Bhikkhu. And I believe you have said that if possible you would rather not tamper with that official status, so to speak, to the extent that it is official. How do you feel about losing that link after your death?

S: I think that link, or the link in that particular form will have to be lost. It might even be lost before my death, that is a matter of decision. But there is a sort of analogy one might say, in the case of the community of the say Shin, let us say 'ministers' for want of a better term. Shin Man Shonin, the founder of the Jodo Shin School, did say, I noticed on one occasion that, "we are neither monks nor laymen." Actually, they did not exactly keep to that. What I've called the ministers did sort of function as married priests as it were. They did in fact become much more like lay people.

I think that won't happen in our case. At least there's no reason why it should. If it does happen it will be entirely due to people's personal weakness. So I think that what will eventually happen, is that the FWBO, or the Western Buddhist Order is eventually given recognition as a quite distinctive body, neither monk nor lay, and we will not be treated just as upasikas. I think we shall have to make that point wherever necessary. We don't insist on being treated as bhikkhus, or you won't insist on being treated as bhikkhus, but neither will you allow yourselves to be treated as upasikas, but as something quite distinct. And there will be a sort of precedent in the case of groups like the Shin Shu people.

Padmaraja : Bhante, who would confer that status upon us?

S: Well, there's no means of conferring it officially. It's not an official status, it is just something that is understood. Who confers their status on say, the existing nikayas? In the case of the nikayas in Ceylon, in as much as they have no intercommunion, as the Christian churches would say, they do not sit together for their Sangha acts, they do not recognise each other. Technically they do not recognise each other as bhikkhus. That is the technical position. Otherwise if they did, they would all sit together. There is mutual technical, non recognition, but there is a sort of social recognition. If they met someone in yellow robes of another nikaya, they wouldn't insist in treating them as a layman, they would treat them as a monk in the ordinary social way. They would address them as a monk, and be polite to them as one monk to another. But when it came to actually sitting together for Sangakammas they would not agree. So there is a technical non recognition, or say 'de jure' non recognition, and 'de facto' recognition in certain limited respects.

Subhuti : I discussed this a bit with Alayagavanga(?), and he said that in fact the bhikkhus from the different nikayas do sit together for Sanghakammas, and that some ordinations are conferred outside the nikaya tradition.

S: Ah! But then that gives rise to another nikaya, because the majority of the bhikkhus of the original nikayas would not recognise that.

Subhuti : Yes, he talked about ordination with a chapter and without a chapter. But in India, I believe that quite often the ordinations are conferred by .....

S: Yes my own was a case in point, but I know that if I went to certain Buddhist countries, I would have to be re-ordained, before they would accept me into their nikayas. This has happened with several English bhikkhus who have gone to the East. They have had to be re-ordained if they have wanted to enter a particular monastery, because the ordination they already had was not officially recognised. In Thailand for instance, the Dhamma Uttika people and the Mahanikaya people don't mutually recognise each other. This reminds me of an instance when Dharmapala was ordained in Sarnath, as a bhikkhu, where all the bhikkhus present belonged to the Siyama nikaya. The bhikkhus under whose auspices the ordination was performed, belonged to the Siyama nikaya, he was a Goyigama by caste I remember, there was one bhikkhu present who belonged to the Rammana nikaya whom I knew subsequently, his name was Sasanasiri, and he had to go off to Sarnath for the day because otherwise his presence would have invalidated the proceedings. And again you remember in the case of my ordination that Kusabhakara who was present had to sit outside the sema, and only Theravada bhikkhus sat inside the sema. So maybe several of them belonged to different nikayas, but they drew the line at recognising a Sarvastivadin bhikkhu. And even then, the ordination was considered to be held under the auspices of a particular nikaya, the nikaya to which the upajaya belonged, and I was afterwards taken aside by him and told to which nikaya I belonged, and told that I should feel very pleased that I had the good luck to be ordained into that particular nikaya, which he said was a very old nikaya.

A voice : Which nikaya was that bhante?

S: That was called the Suttama nikaya, which is one of the eleven or so Burmese nikayas. I think it corresponds to the Maha nikaya in Sri Lanka, and it is the unreformed nikaya. (laughter) That was quite interesting. But I don't want people to think, as I mentioned I think in the

course of the Convention, that there is a great unitary Sangha in the East, to which all bhikkhus belong, and that there is a question of whether they recognise us, or in what way they recognise us, if at all. That is not the situation at all. There is a large number of Sanghas, or if you like, nikayas for practical purposes, both affiliated to the Hinayana and the Mahayana, and even in a sense the Vajrayana, and there is no technical mutual recognition.

Devamitra : Now going to the next question which is on a similar theme, it comes from Vessantara, and concerns lineage.

Vessantara : Yes, in a seminar, part of which, you may remember was reprinted in one of the newsletters, you criticise the view that lineage was useful as a guarantee of authenticity in practice. I wonder how far you thought that lineage could have a use as a psychological support for practice.

S: Well the concept of lineage can certainly be a psychological support. Whether it ought to be, or whether it could be the wrong sort of psychological support is another question. One frequently finds people saying in connection with Tibetan initiations or initiations into certain lines, "Oh I have been initiated into a very powerful lineage." I think that is entirely the wrong way of looking at it. Clearly people are deriving much more than straight forward psychological support from that kind of concept. Sometimes it is a quite unhealthy, even competitive sort of attitude, the idea that they belong to a very powerful lineage gives almost a sort of ego boost, almost like belonging to a very noble or aristocratic family, or like having gone to a well known public school, things like that. You belong to a very 'powerful lineage', so that isn't so good.

No doubt there can be such a thing as a positive and skilful reflection on the fact that you are connected with a certain tradition, and you ought to respect that tradition by your own practice and your own conduct and so on. That can be quite healthy and supportive in a really positive way. That you after all represent Buddhism, you represent the Buddha, you represent the Western Buddhist Order, and you don't want to give any of them a bad name.

Devamitra : We have another question from Vessantara, this time concerning the Diss model.

Vessantara : It seems that we have some Order Members operating at a Centre, taking Croydon for example, where Order Members are very involved with the co-operative and actually setting up the conditions to support say a Centre. We have other models, say more like the Diss one, where largely Order Members have gone, and the group is functioning in a way more like a laity. Basically as I understand it, people in Diss are providing support for the Centre, they have set up conditions, and basically Order Members go more into the situation to teach. In a way operating more in the sort of traditional relation of the Sangha to the laity.

S: Only in a way, because the people in Diss, do not support any Order Members, though they do support Mangala, though that is perhaps exceptional, because he is doing sort of more social-cum-missionary work. But at the same time, one is no doubt encouraging people in Diss to take the next step if they wish. The fact that many of them are mitras indicates that. In fact one person there is considered to be ready for ordination, so that element of upward mobility is there. So in a way, you get that to some extent with the traditional laity, because in theory at least they could become samaneras and monks. So maybe there is a certain general resemblance, but I don't think that it goes very deep just

because of the difference of approach of the FWBO, or of the Western Buddhist Order, and therefore all the people who come into contact with it. We wouldn't insist that those people for instance changed their lifestyle, say, on becoming ordained. The lifestyle may not change at all, especially if it was already reasonably skilful anyway. Whereas when someone from a layman was becomes a samanera, and then a bhikkhu, it's a radical change of lifestyle, but we distinguish between lifestyle and commitment, or lifestyle and going for refuge.

Vessantara : How far can you envisage us operating more in that way and less in the centre based way?

S: I see us as operating in all sorts of ways, maybe there will be lots of other ways too. I think it's too early for us to be able to say which way is best, or whether any particular way ought to be standard. I am quite happy, for the moment at least, for there to be all these different ways of functioning and operating. The more ways the better, because presumably you would come into contact with more and more people in that way. We might eventually discover there was an optimum way, a way that did ensure that you came in contact with the largest number of people and made the maximum use of existing resources. I don't think we can yet be sure we have found that way. So our approach has to be much more experimental. I certainly wouldn't like us at present, to adhere to a rigid pattern of city centres, with their associated co-ops and communities.

Devamitra : We now have a question from Susiddhi concerning local influence of centres.

Susiddhi : Each Centre in the movement is having a growing influence on other local Buddhist groups, and on the local population. Would you like to give Order Members, especially those who are Chairmen of Centres, guidelines on how to handle skilfully these two aspects of our growing local influence?

S: Obviously I have not got much personal experience, I can lay down a few general guidelines. I think it is quite good for us to have contact with people involved in local Government, at the very lowest level, or let us say at the lower levels. For instance, I saw recently, I think it was in minutes or somewhere, that Kulamitra had attended the inauguration of the Mayor of the London Borough of Hackney.

Kulamitra : Tower Hamlets.

S: Tower Hamlets! Sorry, Tower Hamlets, and the Mayor was very pleased that Kulamitra, and I think somebody else also, had been present on the occasion of his inauguration. This is all good public relations you see, with people who are in a position to help you if they want to. And we know that this particular person, Paul Beasley, has been very well disposed to us in the past, and has perhaps in a sense helped us. So I think it is good to maintain those friendly relations. Friendly relations are good for their own sake anyway, and I think that if you are to function successfully in any area, you need really a certain amount of local goodwill, and to a great extent that does depend upon your cultivating friendly relations at least with some of the leading people, or influential people in the neighbourhood. That can be very useful, besides creating a more pleasant atmosphere for you to live and function in, and guarding against possible misunderstandings. Perhaps there is something to be said for the Chairman of the local FWBO Centre being a sort of public figure almost, and going along to public functions and all that sort of thing, being present on public occasions. But you do have to be careful that you do it with great awareness and aren't just functioning in a sort of formal, ecclesiastical manner, representing your group, your particular interest, or your particular lobby. Do you see what I mean? Make use of it as an

occasion to cultivate genuine friendliness with people.

This is one way. Perhaps there should be contact with other people, ordinary people in a more ordinary, a more neighbourly sort of way. I sometimes feel that it's a pity that in the Bethnal Green area we don't have more contact with local people, or do a bit more for local people, even if it is just visiting old people in their homes or something of this sort. I think we need to give some thought to that aspect of things. It is an extension of our work on the one hand, and it does create sympathy and goodwill.

With regard to other Buddhist groups, it's very difficult to say. If they are willing to be friendly with us, and sometimes they are, well let's be friendly with them. But I think we have to be very cautious about co-operating for joint activities, because this may well represent a diminution, or dilution of the principles for which we stand. In case of doubt, or even if you are not in doubt, or think you are not in doubt, please refer to me or to Subhuti, because we are handling these sorts of things all the time, and we know pretty well what's going on, not only in Britain, but in other parts of the world too. We know the state of play. We know the pitfalls, we know what can be done. For instance to give an example, you might receive an invitation from a local group to share their Wesak Day celebration. You might in all honesty, think that is a good thing to do, but when you arrive you may find that they have several bhikkhus, and all the bhikkhus are seated up on the platform, and you are expected to take a position as a humble upasaka, and they conduct everything, well, you cannot accept that sort of situation. So you have to be very cautious you are not put in that sort of situation, and find out in advance exactly what is going to happen.

Susiddhi : There is another aspect to it. What we call the Ambedkar Society tends to be political.....

S: Oh yes indeed! More than tend in fact.

Susiddhi ; ..... And we were not to get involved in that sort of thing, because that would be reported back to India.

S: Right. Well, sometimes, we just do not want to get involved in that particular way of doing things. I was invited to Plaistow in East London some years ago, and they had invited along the local Labour Party representative, it was a Wesak celebration. They gave them the opportunity of appealing for votes from their platform. So we don't really want to be associated with that sort of thing. It would be better if we want to have contact with these people, to have contact with them personally, individually. Invite them to our Centre, make them as welcome as we can. If they do have some purely religious function, and they invite us, well, consider going along. But not if they mix religion and politics, and make it clear that it is not our policy to do that. We would be happy to attend if it was some purely religious occasion. You really have to sort this out with them beforehand, and sometimes they are just desperate to get you along, and will say or promise anything. They are I am sorry to say, completely unscrupulous sometimes. I have had ample experience of this, both in this country and especially in India. They will swear to anything to get you along.

Devamitra : Another question from Vessantara, on how to deal with popular myths as regards the FWBO.

Vessantara : Sometimes persistent views, or wrong views about the FWBO are circulated on the outer fringes of the FWBO, and outside. To the

extent that you can generalise, how far should we ignore these, and how far should we go in order to refute them?

S: I think that probably in some cases, they are quite difficult to deal with rationally. Because I think very often in the case of a myth, people want to believe for one reason or another. So I think one shouldn't take any sort of public notice. One shouldn't refer to them in the course of a Centre meeting, or try to refute them in that way. But deal with them, if you deal with them at all, on a purely personal one to one basis. If you find someone expressing one of these myths, or apparently influenced by it, then just make a point of getting together with them, and sort of going into it and clearing it up. I think one can sometimes do that. Of course again in the case of some people that may not be possible. They may be determined to believe certain things about the FWBO, or the FWBO's attitudes. We should clear up where we can, gently and cautiously, but I think in the long run, we shall only be able to clear up on a much grander scale, when we become much stronger, with a much more definite identity. It is much more difficult for people to propagate myths that obviously don't apply. When Subhuti's book has got into even wider circulation, and in fact there are more and more books about the FWBO, and books produced by the FWBO, it will become very difficult to say at least certain things about us.

Let me just add to this, that we should be very careful not to strengthen the myth by fighting it, or be counterproductive by denying it so vehemently that people feel that there must be something in it.

Devamitra : Going from that kind of myth to a different kind of myth, Buddhadasa has a question.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, within the chapter we have been studying, stress is given to a theory that the Forest Monks are living out a social and personal myth. Or more essentially, a story, derived from their own cultural heritage. You have spoken about 'gestalt' and how in that context, the spiritual life may be regarded as living out of a myth too. Can we therefore now distinguish between two levels or two dimensions of myth, for example, a higher and lower myth; a worldly, and spiritual myth; or even a conditioned, and transcendental myth, and could one augment the other?

S: Well perhaps. I was expecting you to give examples. One can only say perhaps, very likely. Could you give examples?

Buddhadasa : Not off the top of my head, I don't think so.

S: One example of a sort of worldly myth might be, if you were as a young boy you read the life of Nelson, and were very inspired by that, and you wanted to go to sea and become a sailor and rise high in the Navy, and perhaps you did! That would be living out a myth of a more mundane character, but it might even have spiritual overtones in a way. But if you were to be fired with enthusiasm by the life of the Buddha, and were to start trying to follow in his footsteps in a quite literal manner, doing the things that the Buddha had done, and going through the experiences, living through the experiences that the Buddha had, then you would be living out a myth of a different nature, living out a more spiritual myth. How you would live out a transcendental myth, I am not so sure.

Buddhadasa : I was thinking here of the work of a Bodhisattva. I think you mentioned earlier today that the Bodhisattva is prepared to descend

into hell.

S: Yes, (pause). Also in a way, one could say that the Order itself is living out a transcendental myth, to the extent that it thinks of itself embodying the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara. In a way, that is the living out of a transcendental myth on the part of the whole Order isn't it?, especially if that is really felt and acted upon.

Padmaraja : Creating a Pure Land.

S: Creating a Pure Land, yes that too, yes.

Buddhadasa : Part of my question was concerned with the fact that Carrithers seems to be knocking the influence of the cultural and social heritage of these people, the influence of it that is.

S: Well, what does he really think motivates people? And is myth that motivates people, it is a very fundamental way of perceiving the universe, or interpreting one's experience. I don't think one can rule it out by any means. What is the myth that he is living out as a scholar, as a sociologist, as an anthropologist. Is he living out a myth? If he isn't, I imagine his life is really quite impoverished.

Kulamitra : Bhante, when you were speaking the other night, you questioned someone as to what they meant by 'myth' in their question. It seemed to transpire that you refer to it where there is actually a story as precedent, as it were. So perhaps merely by doing certain things if there is no story to refer to, one can't have a myth. There does seem to be some confusion in Carrithers' use of the word. Sometimes also I feel that in the movement, we confuse myth, with something just a bit emotionally appealing.

S: Yes, confuse myth with legend.

Kulamitra : Well, not even that. I was thinking that a lot of people seem to have picked this word 'personal myth,' and very few of whom really seem to understand it. I don't feel I understand what you mean. It's as though people would pick up a book, on say, Irish Legends, and say, "Oh I'm just getting into my personal myth."

S: Oh dear! It looks as though I devoted part at least of a talk in Tuscany to the "Imaginal Faculty," perhaps I will have to do the same sort of thing for the "Personal Myth." Let's see. Yes, people do pick up these catch words, and use them rather freely and loosely, often without really understanding what they mean. In other words they are living out a myth of being up to date! (laughter) a personal myth of being up to date. That is so in a way, isn't it. They like to think of themselves as being up to date with all the latest developments within the movement, and trying to keep abreast. Which is good in a way, and maybe one has to start that way. But this is not enough, one has to start learning the meaning of the language that you've acquired.

Devamitra : We move on to the subject of meditation. Sona has a question on the walking meditation.

Sona : On page 77, it says, "Much of the meditation is done whilst walking back and forth." What do you think is meant here by meditating whilst walking? And, is it possible to meditate whilst walking using a samatha practice, at least up to neighbourhood concentration or first dhyana, or would it only be contemplation of Vipassana type meditations. If it is possible to meditate whilst walking, would it not be of value to develop such a practice to use with people who find sitting for long periods difficult?

S: Let's go through that clause by clause.

Sona : What do you think is meant here by meditating whilst walking?

S: I imagine what is meant is the practice of Satipatthana, that is to say one is mindful of the actual walking process, and perhaps of other bodily processes that are going on. One has attained a certain degree of concentration not exceeding that of neighbourhood concentration, because if you go beyond that, it is difficult to carry on walking. And that one is trying on that basis to develop insight, perhaps in connection with reflection on the painful, impermanent and soulless nature of the body, the feelings, the mental process itself and so on. You can certainly do this walking up and down. I imagine this is what is being referred to. Anyway let's go on to the rest of the questions.

Sona : Is it possible to meditate whilst walking, using a Samatha practice?

S: I'm not quite sure what one means by a Samatha practice. I mean almost any practice will carry you into neighbourhood concentration, and you can use any Samatha practice which does that when you are walking and meditating. You can recite a mantra while walking up and down mindfully, and no doubt you would gain neighbourhood or access concentration, and would be able to recite your mantra and reflect on the meaning of that. Perhaps as a way of developing insight. It is very doubtful if you would be able to elaborate visualisation exercises whilst walking up and down. So then?

Sona : If it is possible to meditate whilst walking, would it not be of value to develop such a practice which would be helpful for people who find sitting for long periods difficult?

S: Not only that. Even if one doesn't find sitting for long periods difficult, sometimes it is quite pleasant to walk up and down and meditate. I did quite a lot of this in Kalimpong, especially after I had my own hermitage, Triyana Vardhana Vihara which had a nice long verandah. I often walked up and down there meditating especially during the rainy season. It is a very pleasant kind of practice, it's more suited to the development of insight, than it is for deepening of samatha experience for obvious reasons, but it has a very definite place, and I think we could very likely make more use of it. Perhaps this could be looked into, because beginners especially, new people especially, can't sit and meditate for long periods. It is good to break up the day. Perhaps you can't just fill in with work periods indefinitely. So I think that mindful walking and perhaps modest Satipattana practice would be very useful and very helpful.

Aryamitra : Bhante, the walking that you did, was it the very slow walking?

S: No, just a stroll, just my normal sort of stroll usually reciting a mantra to myself.

Devamitra : So now we come to a question from Kamalasila on the monastic code.

Kamalasila : A very simple question. Where can we find the monastic code?

S: The Vinayapitaka translated as the Book of the Discipline by I.B. Horner, in the Order library - six volumes!

Kamalasila : Where in the Vinayapitaka?

S: Well it is all the monastic code, the whole of it broadly speaking. If by monastic code in the narrower sense, you mean the Pratimoksa?

Kamalasila : Yes that is what I mean.

S: It has not come down to us independently, but it is embedded in a very early, very primitive commentary, and you will find that at the beginning of the Vinaya Pitaka, the beginning of the Book of the Discipline. There are some modern books, I think that we have some Thai publications which do give it to you sort of tabulated. I forget what the titles of those booklets are but they also are there.

Devamitra : Now from Kulamitra, a question on the spiritual value of the 'pirit'.

Kulamitra : If any! (pause) So the question is can 'pirit' which he says is apotropaic verses to prevent evil, be of any spiritual benefit, even in Sinhalese culture.

S: I think that it can. The pirit ceremony is usually performed very beautifully, and it can be quite inspiring. Because Sinhalese bhikkhus, whatever their other shortcomings may be, are very good chanters. They've got all sorts of different ways of chanting, and sometimes the chanting is very melodious. If you understand a bit of Pali of course, it's even better, but their chanting is very good, and they enjoy chanting. They do it very well indeed. Sometimes the whole association of chanting is even quite uplifting, in an ordinary popular sort of way, and lay people especially get a lot out of it. I think monks do, though they are usually performing it rather than just listening to it. They often do it all night in relays, and they enjoy this, as I know from the conversations I've had with them. And very often on important occasions a special little bamboo pavilion is constructed, and beautifully decorated, and sometimes there are pots of water which are being consecrated and are kept inside, and the monks sit inside this little pavilion, and they chant sometimes all night. Not that the same monks but every two hours they would be relieved, because to chant for more than two hours is quite a strain on the throat, especially some of the ways in which they chant which are very difficult and complicated. Sometimes you find monks spitting blood into the spittoon because they have strained their throats, so they relieve each other every two hours. Sometimes this is carried on for a whole week or even three weeks.

It is definitely an occasion for the village people, and definitely a devotional atmosphere is created. I have been told very seriously by bhikkhus I have known that if, say a week after the 'pirit' a big 'pirit' of this kind, you go to the spot and listen carefully, you can hear the 'pirit'. They have assured me most solemnly that this is the case, there