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

is a sort of subtle echo of it still persisting.

Kulamitra : Is what's chanted just Buddhist texts.

S: Oh yes! Sometimes, non Canonical texts, just verses of praise to the Buddha, but usually it is actual Suttas, especially those Suttas which are considered to have a particular effect as regards magical protection. This happens in all Buddhist countries in one way or another. Tibetan monks are often invited to lay people's houses to read the scriptures, and their chanting is much less musical than that of the Sinhalese Bhikkhus, it is much more like a sort of regular 'sing-song'. But the Sinhalese bhikkhus have got different ways of chanting and even different melodies, or semi melodies to which they chant. It is much more stylish than the Tibetan chanting.

It's the same with the Chinese and Japanese, in all these countries, in all forms of Buddhism, you find a sort of 'pirit' a chanting of the scriptures or reading of the scriptures, in the houses of the lay people for the sake of blessings.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Sinhalese bhikkhus have a lot of fun chanting, I have seen a bit of this. They often chant very, very fast and they keep all together, and there is always a leader. They almost always chant by heart, they scorn to use a book!

The old monk is usually leading, and when they come to the end of the text, he gives the lead to the next one, and the others think "what Sutta's this?" and you can see them thinking, then they think "Ah that's the one," and they join in, they know it! Sometimes you find that some bhikkhus know it and some don't. Sometimes the old monk is left chanting all by himself, and then he's very pleased! (laughter) He has beaten them, he has beaten all the lads, and he is chanting all by himself! And in the end he takes pity on them and comes back to a fairly well known one that they can all join in, and then they are really happy because they can join in that one. You see all these sort of little games going on, and they all enjoy it very, very much. So there is a very pleasant atmosphere, it may not always be highly spiritual, but there is a quite pleasant joyful atmosphere, and lay people are often greatly inspired by this.

And as I said they keep it up all night, and offerings are made to the monks at the end, and the holy water is sprinkled all the way round and so on. It does help keep up the interest of the lay people in the religion.

Kulamitra : Do you think that people actually take in the meaning of the words?

S: Oh no! I think usually they pay no attention whatever to the meaning of the words, they don't even think about it, no.

Kulamitra : This is why I used the word 'spiritual', I can imagine it having a pleasant and even psychologically beneficial effect, but is it really spiritual.

S: Devotional, but if by spiritual one understands to be included an understanding of the teaching, well no it does not enhance that. Though of course in conjunction with 'pirit' they may well have expositions of Jataka stories and things like that. The bhikkhus in many of the Theravada countries have developed all sorts of techniques of telling Jataka stories. In Thailand for instance, they have two bhikkhus, one seated on one side of the altar, and one on the other, I've mentioned that before, and they tell the story between them. One is saying "and what happened next, and, what did the Buddha do then," or, "what did the Bodhisattva do then." The other elaborates on it and they make it more interesting in that way, and some bhikkhus have a sort of talent for a bit of clowning, and that comes in and the lay people enjoy that too. But nonetheless, some lesson is taught regarding the paramita which that particular Jataka story illustrates. So in that way teaching is put across.

But it is not the Visuddhimagga type teaching. It is definitely the more inspirational, quasi-Mahayana type teaching almost, because the Jatakas are involved, the paramitas, the Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva ideal, what the Buddha did for us. The suffering that the Buddha underwent in previous lives, so that he could gain enlightenment, so that he could preach the Dharma for everybody's benefit.

There is a definitely Mahayanistic flavour when it comes to the exposition of the Jataka stories, even in Theravada countries. It is that type of Buddhism which appeals quite strongly to the lay followers, to those who take their Buddhism more seriously. Not the so much Visuddhimagga type Buddhism. There are those two strands, running more or less parallel, not perhaps touching very much.

Padmavajra : Do you think that we could employ more of those techniques?

S: I think we could, but with caution. I mean supposing that Kulamitra decided that he was going to recite some Sutras in the shrine room, and hand out red ribbons to everybody at the end, and sprinkle them with holy water, you'd get people flocking. You would! (Laughter) Yes, but I am not so sure that we should do it quite in that way. Our more, as it were, popular devotional practices should be much more integrated, with the teaching and our overall spiritual approach than is usual in Buddhist countries in the East.

You notice how people enjoy name giving ceremonies very often. They are quite happy to come along to these things in many cases.

Padmavajra: I was thinking that instead of lectures being the main way of communicating the Dharma, maybe we could have two people up, and they could do something between them.

S: You can experiment.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Padmaraja. We have just been talking about the Jatakas, and it comes from the Jataka quoted in the text.

Padmaraja : It is not so much moving on, it is moving back as well, also descending back into hell. On page 74, there is a reference to a Jataka story, that had a very strong influence on Pannananda. I will just read the extract. *"It describes a birth of the Buddha previous to his*

enlightenment, in which he was the heir to the King of Benares. While still an infant in arms, he realised the pains of hell that awaited him if he were to inherit the kingdom, and be forced to mete out justice to criminals." I believe that somewhere, in the Ten Pillars I think, you have said it can be a expedient to function in the power mode, if it is subordinate to the love mode. Even so, can there still be harmful karmic consequences?

S: I think there can be, though I am answering in very general terms. I think it is unfortunate that one is, so to speak, obliged to function sometimes in accordance with the power mode. But I think that, let's say, the karmic consequences are not as positive, as when you function in accordance with the love mode. If your exercise of the power mode has definitely subordinated your exercise of the love mode, then that is a strongly mitigating circumstance. I think the karmic consequences of functioning in accordance with the power mode in that way, would not be the same as they would be if you were functioning in accordance with the power mode simply, so to speak, for the sake of functioning in accordance with the power mode. But the point made by this Jataka story is quite interesting, because as compared with that, in quite as few Suttas it is stated that the Dharmaraja, the Chakravatiraja, does so to speak enforce almost the observance of the Ten Precepts, and does punish those who infringe them. In those Suttas, so far as I remember, nothing is said about the untoward consequences, in the case of the Dharmaraja, of such enforcement. Perhaps there is a slight difference in point of view between these two kinds of texts.

It does suggest though that even that exercise of the power mode, or even when you exercise the power mode in subordination to the love mode, you must exercise it with extreme caution.

Devamitra : Dharmapriya now has a question of the death of Pannananda.

Dharmapriya: This is based on the quote at the end of the Chapter. I will just read that part in my question. It begins : *"It seems that three days before his death, his Reverence Pannananda, saw a dream, this is the dream: 'A certain person with a splendid beautiful body came through the sky in a gold chariot. Leaving the chariot in the sky, he came down to earth, came before his Reverence, bowed, and said, "So that's enough time for your Reverence here, please come." Then he got back in his chariot and left."*

Would it possibly be fair to understand this as a Deva visitor, promising Pannananda a Deva rebirth? Could you comment on this perhaps as any indication of Pannananda's attainments, or in any other way?

S: The fact that a Deva appears in this way doesn't necessarily mean that Pannananda was going to be reborn in heaven as distinct from say his having attained the path of the Stream Entrant and so on. Supposing a Deva had said, "I shall come in three days and take you to heaven", well, that is another matter, but he merely appears, and Devas appear on all sorts of occasions in connection with the life of the Buddha. So I don't think one could say that because the Deva appeared in this way, it showed that Pannananda was going to be reborn in heaven, and in that sense has not attained insight. On the other hand it doesn't demonstrate that he had attained insight, but it cannot be regarded as demonstrating that he hadn't.

Devamitra : A question on the significance of dreams once more, from Achala.

Achala : Carrithers quotes Leon Hudson's theory concerning two distinct types of dreams. One, those made up of primary visual experience; two, the narrative of the dream into a coherent story.
Presumably the first, the primary visual experience, is of an emotional as well as visual nature, and provides the raw material for the narratives of the second part of the dream. Do you think this theory is realistic, and is the predisposition for translating our experience into narratives, both in the dream and waking states, as powerful a force in the moulding of our lives as the author suggests?

S: I hadn't come across this particular explanation of dreams. I must say I didn't feel completely happy with it. I think it is too unidimensional. I have mentioned before that sometimes when one wakes up, one remembers ones dream, and one sees that one could describe one's dream in two or three completely different ways, and they would all be true, even though in a sense they are self-contradictory, they are all true. But his sort of theory of dream or the theory of dream which he uses, seems to suggest that there is only one sort of interpretation possible, just one dream taking place in one sort of space time, which an be represented as one linear narrative. I think that does not do justice to the multidimensional nature of the dream experience. So for that reason I am not too happy about his use of that particular theory. I don't see that it is really very helpful. I think that we do tend to make narratives out of our experience, but I think there are two kinds of narrative: one is the purely sequential, with one thing happening after another, the other is the more causative, with one thing happening after another because of another, because of the thing that happened before. You see what I mean? m If you say, I went for a walk and I saw an oak tree, and then I walked a little further and I saw a dog; well that is sequential narrative. But if you say that I went for a walk and I met a man and we had a conversation, and because of what he said, I then decided to go to Norwich, well that is causative, and it is more of a story. It is a story perhaps because it's distinct from a narrative, if one can use that terminology.

But I think neither probably do full justice to the dream experience. So I am not happy with the way in which he introduces these little bits and pieces of psychological and sociological theory into his book. I don't think they are of any help at all, I think he would have done better to have left them out. If we do write him up an account of at least some part of our discussions, perhaps this point should be made.

Devamitra : This is the last question, and is related to the previous question. It comes from Abhaya.

Abhaya : I think you may well have answered this, but in the next paragraph, or just after the dreams, he says : on page 86 : *"The key, he goes on to write, is that this narrative disposition is not merely passive but active, in so far as it enables human beings to make sense of experience, it also enables them to guide themselves, to choose policies, to decide on their next move."* I wonder if you would like to comment on that ?

S: Well obviously, we're all the time trying to make sense of our experience. I think one way is by reducing it to some kind of narrative. Perhaps even to the story as I have said, to make it more intelligible, assimilable, and maybe we sometimes edit the story for our own benefit, possibly unconsciously. So I think what he says in a general way is correct, though the way in which earlier on he linked that with a particular dream theory, I feel wasn't so satisfactory. We tend to dramatise don't we? That is another form of interpretation. We like to make our experience more interesting perhaps, more impressive than it actually was, especially when we are narrating it to another person. I think we can very quickly edit things in our own mind too. We can can edit out things that we are not too happy with, and we can edit in things that we would have liked to have been there. Sometimes in recounting a discussion with another person, sometimes you will be careful to see that you got the better

of the discussion, you got the better of the other person in that discussion, whereas actually the other person may not have been under that impression at all. Or perhaps the third person who might have been present was not under that impression at all.

You might edit your reckoning in such a way as to present yourself with a clear victory. But we are doing this all the time in all sorts of ways. We are interpreting our experience, editing our experience, making it meaningful to ourselves in a certain way, not necessarily positive, not necessarily skilful.

Abhaya : Do you think that there is any truth in the epigraph, he quotes John McClaren says, " It seems to me that story telling comes partly from an urge to make an organised narrative out of chaos."

S: Yes I think that this is true. It's one way of organising the chaos.

Abhaya : Do you feel that this is what is happening all the time, that one is making an organisation out of chaos?

S: I won't say that that is only what is happening all the time, but I think that is one of the things that is happening at least much of the time. For instance supposing you write a report of the Centre activities for the last year, you don't just put down isolated facts. You try to make sense of it, you try to make a sort of logical sequence of it, you try to make a story of it. In a sense that may falsify it because it may in a way give a wrong impression, or distribute the emphasis wrongly. But you can't really help doing that, and sometimes the way in which you cast the story tells a lot about you, and therefore tells a lot about what you were doing in connection with that whole series of events, and in that way indirectly cast quite a good light on the events themselves. Do you see what I mean?

Abhaya : But without writing it down? Without writing it down, you couldn't ( ) life is in a way like the living out of a story, which as you say we are constantly editing. Then it is just a constant sort of embroidering.

S: Yes, of course when you edit you may not be living out the same story as when you actually performed those actions. It does get a little complicated. But I think you can hardly make sense of anything without a bit of editing. As I said, when you write the annual report of the Centre, you'll try to make it meaningful, you'll try to make it make sense, you won't just present your audience, or your reader with just disconnected facts. You will present facts yes, but they will be embedded in a particular interpretation, a particular slant, a particular way of looking at that material. You will leave certain things out. You cannot but do that, especially if you have to compress the whole report into two pages. You cannot but write a story basing yourself upon that particular material. And different people might write quite different stories. I think perhaps we are not always fully aware of the amount of subjective interpretation in what we think of as something quite objective, or objective presentation of the facts.

But sometimes of course, that interpretation can give a truer feeling of what happened, than a listing of disparate facts. (Pause) I am quite conscious of this in writing my memoirs. I'm trying to put everything in, but of course I can't put absolutely everything in, I don't remember it for one thing. But I am trying to not consciously slant things. I can't help doing it to some extent, but I am trying not to do it deliberately.

Otherwise I could write quite a romantic account of my experiences in Kalimpong, and leaving out all the more mundane things, and just concentrate on all the great Lamas that I met, and meditations that I did, and leave out everything else, but it would present a completely in a sense false picture. Not completely false but so highly selective as to be misleading. For instance I remember reading a book written by somebody I had known. This was someone who met Lama Govinda in India, and spent some time in Calcutta, and then he wrote this book, what was it called? He was a German, Rickart I think his name was. He became a member of the Aryamaitreya Mandala for a while. Anyway I knew him when he was staying at the MahaBodhi Society headquarters and I knew how he was living and all that and I knew that he was earning money by teaching English which was all right. But he left all these sort of things out of his book, and he just wrote an account of this wonderful Lama he met in Kalimpong, who was clearly modelled on Lama Govinda, but he presented him as a Tibetan, and he had met Lama Govinda in Almorrah, though he located the scene in Kalimpong, which was probably more interesting.

Then he had all the accounts of all these psychic happenings in various Chinese Temples in Calcutta and all that sort of thing and he left out everything mundane. There was a bit of description of the Mahabodhi Society, but how he maintained himself and all that sort of thing was all just not mentioned at all. So it was a very highly selective account of his life. Govinda's "*Way of the White Clouds*" is highly selective, but that is as it were more for artistic reasons, you can see. A tremendous amount is left out. You can imagine that without even knowing it. There are so many things that he doesn't tell. He doesn't tell how he met Li Gotami, there are just two or three lines about his marriage with Li Gotami. About how he came into contact with her and what happened, he doesn't say anything at all, but there is quite a lot that he could have written. (Laughter) One would have liked to know a great deal more about his early life, and his life in Italy, and all the interesting people he met in Capri. One would liked to have heard something about the Brewsters and possibly what they'd told him about their contact with D.H.Lawrence and so on and forth. But all that has been left out, because he wanted to write a certain kind of book, based on his experiences, but not on all of them, on some of them. With a special connection with the whole theme of rebirth, in which he was especially interested.

So it is very difficult not to do that for one reason or another. We are selecting,interpreting, rearranging, editing, all the time. It is part of the way in which we cope with life, cope, if you like, with the chaos of existence. I think that we need to be aware that we are doing it.

Dhammaloka : Bhante, What sort of criteria do you use in writing your autobiography, what criteria of selection and editing?

S: I try to put down everything that I remember, but especially those things which cannot be known otherwise than by my writing about them myself. For instance I don't say much about my literary activities because everybody can read what I have written. I don't say much about the views that I have expressed in writing say in the Survey, I have not come to that yet, but I'm not going to give a resume of the Survey or anything like that. But I am going to perhaps write about the people that I met down in Bangalore when I was delivering the lectures on which the Survey was based, and so on. Because unless I write about those things presumably no one will know about them, nobody else could write about them. So I tend to write about personal things, personal encounters, personal impressions, which couldn't be known about from any other source. But not to dwell upon those things which people can read about by reading my writings on Buddhism. So in a way I am being selective.

Kulamitra : Bhante, presumably you are being selective, naturally in that your memory is selective, although it seems very good. You don't have to include, when you had a week of dull weather and nothing happened.

S: Yes, I don't always remember sequences, so I have in a way to, not exactly disguise it, but not commit myself to a particular sequence when I am not in fact sure, when I don't remember which thing happened first and which thing happened second.

Kulamitra : Presumably one only really remembers what was meaningful to one at the time?

S: Yes indeed. It could be that I have forgotten quite a lot, but I think probably not actually, because I think I have a fairly good memory. It's possible I'm deluding myself. Some more recent things I certainly have forgotten. For instance there are certain things that Dharmarakshita remembers about our tours of Maharashtra years and years ago, which I had forgotten, just little incidents. He certainly does remember things which I don't. Perhaps it didn't make much of an impression on me. Also if you have a number of experiences of the same kind, you don't remember them all separately, they all tend to merge. I don't remember individually every lecture I have given. I remember certain lectures, but for particular reasons, sometimes purely personal reasons, having nothing to do with the actual nature or content of the lecture.

I can remember the occasion for instance, on which I was introduced as having once upon a time been a Pope. I remember that! I can't remember what I talked about in that particular lecture, but I remember that it was in Bombay and there was a very big crowd of people, several thousands, and I was introduced in this way. That made the lecture a bit interesting for me, made the occasion a bit interesting, so I can remember those things. Whereas somebody else listening, might have been greatly struck by some little story I told, and remember that, and not remember the Pope business at all.
Do you see what I mean, but vividly remember, but vividly remember, as I know does sometimes happen,a story that I told on that particular occasion. Sometimes you don't remember things because they didn't seem important at the time. Only in retrospect you realise that they were in fact important, but then you can't remember actually what happened. (Laughter)

I mean there are many things which I cannot remember, such as my first meeting with certain people, with whom afterwards I became very closely associated and very good friends. But I've no idea when we first met or how the friendship started. In a few cases I can, for instance I can remember Abhaya and Val arriving for their first retreat and as it were looking round the door, I have quite a clear picture of that, you and Val arriving. But that doesn't apply to many other people, to very few in fact in the FWBO. I very rarely now can remember my actual first meeting with them.

I remember my first meeting with Virabhadra. I remember Kularatna bringing him up and introducing him, I remember that, but there are not many like that.

Kulamitra : I think people are often not aware of the relativity of memory in that way. They can be a bit insulted if one doesn't remember something which they found very meaningful, maybe they found their first meeting with you very meaningful, but you don't remember the first meeting with them! (Laughter)

S: I might not even remember them! (laughter) Because nowadays, so many people are involved. This is one of the reasons I would like Mitras

to fill in that form, and add their photograph, because that does help me actually. Sometimes I know the face and I know the name, but I am unable to put the two together.

I get a letter from someone whose name I know well but the face does not spring to mind. It would help if I had a photograph that I could refer to.

But yes, I think we should try to be more aware of the extent to which we do edit our own experience, when describing it or recounting it. I do know that different people telling their life stories, tell them in different ways on different occasions, depending on how they feel or the greater understanding that they've achieved of themselves, or even on the different audience. Certainly little stories they know will go down well with a one audience but not with another. No doubt all the different versions of the life story have a certain family resemblance let us say, even if they don't coincide in all respects.

Dharmapriya : Is there not the classic remark that the art of autobiography is to decide what you are going to leave out?

S: Well yes, the emphasis being on the art. I did once quote the saying - I forget who it is attributed to - that when you sit down to write your autobiography, the first thing that you become conscious of, is the things that you are not going to say.

Devamitra : Bhante, would you say that is true of yourself?

S: I can't think of anything that I wasn't going to say, I don't think so. I think there are a few things I haven't said which might be quite hurtful to other people. I think, yes, I was conscious that I wouldn't be telling about those things. But there are not many of those, but there are a few. On the whole I have tended not to spare other people, but only up to a point, there are certain things that perhaps one couldn't say. To that extent one does give perhaps a wrong impression of those people if one happens to mention them at all. Anyway perhaps we'd better leave it there.

[End of Tape Eight Tape Nine]

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka
Questions and Answers on Chapter Five

9th August 1985

Devamitra : We thought at this point Bhante, before we go on to Chapter 5, whether there are any points that you would like to go over from Chapter 4?

S: There might be, but I think that most of the points I thought I might mention did actually get covered. Let's see. (Pause) Ah yes, there is one little point here, page 71. *"The flourishing State that Buddhism attained in the 19th Century is partially attributable to these new developments,*

and partially to the Pax Brittanica, which brought peace and settled social conditions to an Island which had been plagued with war and religious oppression for three hundred years" This is not the picture one usually gets from Buddhist writers. In fact it isn't even the picture you get to some extent from the opening of my biographical sketch of Dharmapala. I think though that the two accounts don't necessarily contradict each other, because on the on hand, yes there was consolidation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, at least on a certain level, as compared with the previous centuries, but on the other, at the same time, the Christian Missionaries were making in-roads into the mass of the Buddhist population and seriously weakening the authority of the Sangha. It did to some extent act as a challenge.

There is also Pannananda's practice of offering flowers, oil lamps, and light before the Buddha image throughout his life apparently as a result of his early training, in great contradistinction to Nyanatiloka and the European monks at the Island Hermitage. He arranged a flower pond to be built, at both Batuvita and Gerinda, and offered hundreds of blue lotuses every day. His biographers are pleased to record too that he was loath to kill even tiny ants as a boy. So perhaps is wasn't just a question of parental training, but possibly some innate tendency or even samskaras carried over from previous lives.

Yes this is very interesting, top of page 75. (new paragraph) He met with difficulty on both fronts. In begging from house to house he found that the people did not have a very clear idea of what they were to do, since village monks did not customarily beg. Hence he either got no food. or else a bowl full of kurakkan (a millet like grain), a drier meal than which it is hard to imagine.

So it seems extraordinary that in a Theravada country, the lay people should not know how to give food to the begging monks. This suggested that the Siyama Nikaya monks had got out of the habit of begging for so long that those traditions had died out, which really does seem extraordinary doesn't it? One usually thinks of the Theravada countries of South East Asia, especially of Sri Lanka as being very very well versed in all these sorts of manners and customs and practices. This was exactly the sort of situation that Buddharakshita and I found in India, where we started trying to beg in the Buddhist way. But then in India, one expected that sort of difficulty, one would not have expected it in Sri Lanka in the last century.

There are one or two technical points but I don't think we need bother about those. Yes that is the lot.

Devamitra : We have now twelve questions arising out of the 5th Chapter. The first of these comes from Ratnavira, on the function of the Jataka Stories.

Ratnavira : This question falls into two parts. The first is very simply; what are the origins of the Jataka Stories, especially the non canonical ones. For example Carrithers suggests some sort of direct relationship with Aesop's Fables, and it does not come out very clearly in the text what the origins are, and the non canonical ones in particular. The second part of the question is; the use of the Jataka Tales has been very limited as yet in the FWBO, particularly say in comparison to what we find in Sinhalese Buddhism. Maybe we could consider them for example as suitable material for inclusion in children's story books, we were talking about that a little bit yesterday. So do you think that we could aim to use them more widely in the movement generally?

S: All right, let's take the questions one at a time. Read the first one again.

Ratnavira : What are the origins of the Jataka Stories, particularly the non canonical ones?

S: Well actually I imagined that everybody knew what the origins of the Jataka Stories were, I am sure I have explained it more than once, and of course I have explained it in *The Eternal Legacy*. But it has been explained a long time before me in great detail by Rhys Davids, I think it was Buddhist India, which is a reasonably well known book. I'll summarise the main points. In the case of the non canonical Jatakas, that is to say those which do not occur in the Canon itself in the Tipitika, as stories told by the Buddha. In the case of the non canonical stories, their origins are quite clearly in Indian folklore and legend. That folklore, that mass of legend has certain features in common with similar stories in other ancient literatures, and there are certain parallels, analogies, and possibly there are a few examples of what has been called the transmigration of Fables. Some of Aesop's Fables are clearly of Indian origin, and have their parallels in the Jataka Stories. So one has this vast floating mass of legend, and of folk tales one might say. And the early Buddhists seem to have laid hold of this floating mass for homiletic purposes. So many many of these stories were transformed into Jataka Stories by a very simple process. That is to say, each story was provided with an introduction explaining how the Buddha came to tell a certain story. Then came the story with its moral point, and then the Buddha, in the conclusion, identifies usually the leading character in the story with himself, and some of the subordinate characters with his various disciples.

In that way the fable or the story or the legend is transformed into a Jataka Story. These Jataka Stories in the Jataka Book, the five hundred and fifty Jataka Book are non canonical, as I've said in the sense that they are not part and parcel of the Tipitika itself. The verses are regarded as belonging to the Tipitika, each story contains some verses making a particular point or spoken by the different characters in the story, so the verses are regarded as belonging to the Canon, but not the stories themselves.

Then of course, each of the Jataka stories illustrates, sometimes in a slightly forced manner, one or another of the paramitas, not the six or the ten paramitas, with which we are more familiar, deriving from the Mahayana tradition, but a separate list of ten Theravada paramitas. The Jataka stories were made very extensive use of in all Buddhist countries to illustrate and inculcate the practice of the different paramitas to which they were dedicated. These Jataka stories were especially the favourites of the laity. Because first of all they were interesting and attractive stories, some of them are really quite remarkable as literature, especially the longer ones. Some of the longer Jatakas coming towards the end of the collection are of the length of novelettes, the length of some of D.H. Lawrence's long short stories. So they are quite substantial works and sometimes of some importance as literature even. Certainly very very interesting. The laity was fond of this literature because, don't forget that these stories illustrated the Buddha's career as a Bodhisattva when he was bent on gaining supreme enlightenment, so that the laity while being inspired by the stories, did not feel under any obligation to actually follow that path themselves in a sense. At the same time the fact that the Jatakas stories belong to or illustrate the Bodhisattva path means that they've no particular connection with the Arahant path. The Arahant path is the concern of the monks. So the laity, by a curious paradox became more involved with the Bodhisattva and Buddha path. But they could become safely involved with that and allow themselves to be inspired by it, because the consummation of that path was put off to umpteen million aeons in the future. This is more or less the subject matter of another quite interesting book that I have been reading recently on the Jataka Stories in South East Asia especially, and it's quite clear that alongside the as it were orthodox, monastic, Visuddhimagga type spirituality,

there was also this current of Jataka inspired, more popular, more devotional, more emotional type spirituality, which was naturally of greater interest to the lay people. Though of course at the same time it was usually the monks that recounted the Jataka Stories for the benefit of the lay people, and perhaps the monks, in some cases at least, couldn't help being influenced by the stories themselves.

So the Jataka stories do occupy an immensely important place in the popular, or semi popular Buddhism of South East Asia, and indeed in many other parts of the Buddhist world. So that answers the first question I hope. For further information, please see my new book when it does come out. So the second question?

Ratnavira : This purely concerns the use of the Jataka Stories in the FWBO. Did you think that we could consciously aim to use them?

S: Well, I don't think that we can consciously aim, we can at least read them, for a start. I think that if people will only get around to reading them, they'll find them really fascinating, and find it difficult to put them down. In that way they will get into circulation. People are only slowly making their way round Buddhist literature, especially Buddhist Canonical literature. But I am quite sure that once people get hold of these Jataka Stories, - perhaps they have been put off by the rather formidable bulk, three fat volumes, or six or seven volumes, depending on the edition, but I'm sure once they start reading them, or some of them, you can after all freely dip into them whenever you please, I'm sure some will get into circulation, just as some of the Suttas of the Majjhima-Nikaya got into circulation, whereas only a few years ago people would not have thought of reading the Majjhima-Nikaya. I think it's only a question of time. And certainly some of the ethical and spiritual lessons taught are very very inspiring, it is a quite noble kind of literature. On the other hand, it is very close to real life. It can be very earthy, it can be quite humorous, it can be quite satirical, it can even be quite romantic. There is something for everybody, one might say, and there's always the connection, at least there's a thread of connection with the spiritual life, via the practise of the ten paramitas, or one or another of them.

In some ways it is surprising that the Jataka stories aren't more popular. Perhaps people in some ways, in slightly the wrong sense, are a bit too serious minded.

Devamitra : This point might very well link up with our next question which comes from Susiddhi.

Susiddhi : Is there any difference between a fisherman telling a tall story about "The one that got away," and a Jataka storyteller saying the King had sixteen thousand wives? Aren't they both using exaggeration to try to produce an effect. I think they are, and the incredible parts of the stories stick in my throat, and so stop me from tasting the whole story. (pause, loud laughter)

S: Well, I have never personally been bothered by sixteen thousand of anything, whether it's sixteen thousand wives, or whatever, it just means he has a lot of wives, after all he was a King. He might even literally have had sixteen thousand. We know that the Emperors of China had three thousand concubines. It was considered consonant with their position that they had so many. I don't think we should let Indian tendencies to exaggeration, multiplication, and so on upset us, well, we can always just remove the noughts, and make it more credible to ourselves, or read them as fairy tales if we like. We can enjoy fairy tales and appreciate their meaning, without having to take the details literally.

In the case of the fisherman's "Tall Story," he is just trying to impress you by his exaggeration. In the case of the Jataka Story, the Buddha, if it is the Buddha, is trying to impress on your mind certain ethical principles in a way that will be acceptable to people who don't perhaps care for purely abstract, analytical discussions. So I think one should read the Jataka Stories just like you might read a short story by D.H. Lawrence, just read it as literature. And if you can illicit a moral from it, do so. But in a way you won't need to illicit it because it has a certain impression on you, it influences you in a certain way. On account of the very nature of the Jataka Story, that cannot but be an ethical way.

I think that if you just concentrate on the story as a story, and make sure that you enjoy it, I think the ethical lesson will sink in of its own accord. Just as for instance, you go and see a Shakespeare play, you enjoy it, but some residue is left, some deeper meaning is there which you feel, which you experience and which remains with you. I think the main thing is you must enjoy the Jataka Stories, and not allow yourself to be bothered by these exaggerations and flights of fancy. That's the Indian style, that's the Indian mode. Well, in a way it's the mode of many traditional storytellers. Of course not all the Jataka Stories contain these exaggerations. One might even make a special selection for the use of sober minded citizens! (laughter)

Susiddhi : If there are some parts of the story. which are to be discarded, that leaves the reader to discard any other parts which he doesn't quite .....

S: But why do you have to discard any part of a story? You could look on the story as a work of art. Not a question of the parts or the details, but the overall message, or the overall meaning of the story, or in fact any other work of literature. I think that perhaps it is a question of understanding the particular medium, or not medium - the particular conventions of a particular literary form. Otherwise one might say, "well I can't possibly enjoy Shakespeare because in real life people don't talk in blank verse." It is true, but that is one of the conventions of that particular form of literature, that they do talk in blank verse. So it's a sort of convention of the type of story represented by the Jataka, that Kings do have sixteen thousand wives, and all that sort of thing. Perhaps we should ask Abhaya to make a few remarks about conventions in different forms of literature. Would you not see it like that, wouldn't you see those sort of details in say a Jataka Story in the light of literary conventions, and that therefore we should accept and get used to the conventions without allowing them to bother us.

Devamitra : The next question concerns the nature of Sinhalese civilisation and comes from Tejananda.

Tejananda : This concerns a quote from the first paragraph in the Chapter. In our group we could not quite agree about what it actually meant, so I'd like to ask you to comment. The sentence in question is. There is no civilisation more unitary and archaic than the Buddhist Sinhalese, and the very soul and substance of that unity are the Jatakas. So firstly could you explain what you think this means, and secondly, is that so?

S: I must say that when I read this, I felt that it was rather overstated, but perhaps there is no harm in that, just to emphasise the point. There is no civilisation more unitary. Here I took "unitary," to mean that the whole civilisation is pervaded by and dominated by certain leading ideas. In this connection, one might refer to Marco Pallis' "*Peaks and Lamas*". One might remember that the later editions have an extra chapter called the "Presiding Idea." And according to Marco Pallis, the Presiding Idea, of Tibetan Buddhism, of Tibetan civilisation and culture, is the idea of the Bodhisattva. So that could be described as, not just as the presiding idea, but as contributing to, or even constituting the unitary nature of

Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan civilisation and culture. Do you see what I mean? So to say that there is no civilisation more unitary than the Buddhist Sinhalese, means that the whole of that civilisation is bound together by certain leading ideas, beliefs, customs, practices, principles, from the influence of which no aspect of that civilisation is free. And also "archaic," in the sense that that particular civilisation, characterised by that kind of unity, is very ancient. That that type of civilisation has persisted a very long time, possibly, the author might be thinking, from the time of the introduction of Buddhism itself, which is well over two-thousand years, and that is a very long time indeed. I rather doubt whether the Buddhist Sinhalese civilisation is so unitary, or archaic, because one knows, and I presume that the author knows, from the history of Ceylon, and the history of Buddhism in Ceylon, that both the culture and the religion have had their ups and downs. Especially during the medieval period, when they had so many invasions from India, invasions by Tamil Kings and chiefs, and when the continuity of even political life was very very seriously disrupted, or completely broke down for quite lengthy periods. So this is why I consider the sentence as rather overstating the case. Though one can certainly agree that the Buddhist Sinhalese civilisation does bear a quite unitary character, at least until modern times, when it was to some extent disrupted by the influence of Christianity and modern industrialised, secularised western civilisation. And also very archaic, in the sense that yes, it does have a very long and reasonably continuous history. At least it has been predominantly Buddhist and at times exclusively Buddhist, for two thousand years. In Britain there is no such religious continuity. There was a violent disruption when Christianity was introduced. Continuity with the old Pagan traditions was almost completely lost, so we don't have a continuous religious tradition of that sort and therefore, British civilisation and culture, if you can use that expression does not have such a highly unitary and archaic nature as the Sinhalese.

So I'd simply say in a few words the sentence rather overstates the case. But none the less, there it does contain a good deal of truth.

Devamitra : Moving on to a different area, Kamalasila has a question on modesty.

Kamalasila: My question is really about the illustration on page 91. I just wondered if you could say something about the attitude of 'modesty', inverted commas, behind the holding of the fan before the speakers face?

S: I don't think that it is altogether modesty, I think there are two distinct ideas behind it, which are quite explicitly formulated or recognised by Sinhalese monks, or Theravada monks. The first is that the Theravada generally, in keeping with its rather sober style, usually prefers not to indulge in any sort of emotional appeal, any sort of rhetoric. Though there are notable exceptions, especially when you get talking about hell, or even telling Jataka Stories. The idea is that the monks delivery of his discourse should be very calm and even. This is the ideal, this represents the best sort of practice as it were. There shouldn't be any kind of emotional appeal, and in fact the monk would speak in a rather impersonal manner. His own personality should be subdued, and he should be just a mouthpiece of the Dhamma. And to indicate that fact that he is only an impersonal voice, the fan is held before the face. In other words, it is a suggestion that his hearers, his listeners, concentrate on what he is saying, concentrate on the Dhamma, not on him. You see they don't pay any attention to his expression, or whether he is looking at them or not, or whether there is a little twitch on one side of his face, or whether his eye brows aren't completely even. They should just ignore him and concentrate on what he is saying, concentrate on the Dhamma. So one can understand the sense of that, that is one explanation, or one reason that is often given. No doubt one can say quite a lot about that particular approach to the Dharma. We don't read that the Buddha concealed his face behind a fan in that way.

Then on the other hand there may be women in the audience, and it is considered desirable for the Bhikkhu, especially when he is teaching the Dhamma, not to risk being distracted by them. So he conceals them from his gaze, by holding the fan in front of his face, in front of his eyes. So one might say that the modesty, if any, of this action applies more to that second case or that second reason.

As I said there is much that could be said on both sides of the question, with regard to the impersonal voice issuing from behind the fan. One can appreciate the positive element in that. But at the same time, one might be left wondering, whether personal communication from a spiritual point of view is not a good thing, and is not in fact highly desirable. Admittedly, yes, you don't want the preacher of the Dhamma to engage in oratorical tricks, or to draw attention to himself. But perhaps even if you are looking at people, even if you do have eye contact with them, if you yourself as a speaker, are genuinely immersed in the Dhamma, I think you will not draw attention to yourself, as distinct to drawing attention to the Dhamma. But these are the two explanations of the fact that the fan is kept before the monk's face. There may be others, but these are the two that I have certainly heard of, the two explanations that I have been given.

Suvajra : Can you say anything about what effects communicating in that impersonal way might have had upon monks that you may have seen?

S: I think to communicate in that way, you would need to have a very intense concentration on the Dhamma. Because usually your concentration arises out of your communication, because you are speaking to a particular person or persons, and you rivet your attention on them. Because you are addressing them there is a certain continuity, there is a certain concentration. But I think if you don't have an audience you are as it were speaking into thin air, and if you are not very highly concentrated by nature, on the Dhamma, your mind could wander or you would develop just a very low level of concentration, and perhaps that would mean that the concentration of your audience wandered. Though I must say that from all that I've seen and heard I think very often it doesn't do that in the case of devout Buddhist audiences. They do listen to this impersonal voice, perhaps they develop that capacity or have been trained in that way, they do listen and pay attention. But it's possible that an even greater degree of attention could be gained, if the speaker did actually have more contact, more eye contact as it were, with his audience.

Kulamitra : Our own experience here seems to indicate that this wouldn't be very helpful. For instance, if someone were giving what may be a very good talk technically, but he's too immersed in their material, or absorbed in their notes, it doesn't usually have the impact it might have done on the audience.

S: Because you can even in a way, question this notion of impersonal truth. Because you are not pronouncing a scientific formula, which has no relation to your particular personality, or anybody's personality. You are giving expression to a spiritual principle which finds expression only in terms of human life. And in a way, your communication of yourself, is part of your communication of the Dharma. Your communication of yourself to the extent that that self has absorbed the Dharma, and is permeated by it. So the Buddha, to take the prime example, when he preached, to use that term, did not just communicate an abstract, conceptual Dhamma, he communicated himself, he communicated the content of him own spiritual realisation. And in an infinitely lesser degree, this is what anybody does who tries to communicate the Dhamma. So it is as though this particular mode of communication, would be suitable only if what the person was communicating had no relation whatever to his own experience.

Though in a way one does appreciate the principle. One should avoid drawing attention to the personality of the speaker in the narrower sense. But nonetheless the individual's own individuality is an essential part of the communication itself.

Dharmapriya : I noticed today and yesterday, three things which struck me as being related. This incident, the picture of the fan in front of the face and very tight legs did look a bit like the well behaved lady. The fact that even the life of Pannananda, when he practised the dhutangas, two of them he described as rag robes, basically the laity he left to follow the path, so he didn't have contact with them though he got his robes, he got out of contact. Then the alms food was put in a special building where he didn't have contact with the laity as well. It looked very practical from the point of view of getting on with your meditation, but it did seem to, in many ways, sever the links with society perhaps to an unhealthy degree. I wondered if that was a true picture, and whether you thought there was possibly any danger in concentrating on our meditation where we could perhaps sever links in an unhealthy way with the outside world?

S: But what does one mean by severing links in an unhealthy way, because if you are engaged in meditation, presumably in the long run, you are in contact with a higher reality which even transcends the distinction between self and others. So if you sever your links with society, other people, for the sake of that kind of realisation, it cannot possibly be unhealthy. I think probably the unhealthiness comes in when you sever your links with society, and then remain merely in isolation without developing any kind of higher spiritual experience, or any contact with the transcendental. I think that in order to deepen one's experience of meditation, ones needs to sever ones links with people from time to time, as by way of a solitary retreat. Though it's very doubtful whether that is desirable as a permanent way of life, unless perhaps you dwell permanently in very much higher levels of reality which transcend the personal altogether. Even then, out of compassion, you would have some contact with what appeared to be other people.

Kulamitra : It just occurs to me that perhaps this withdrawing of oneself completely, and the tendency that presumably the fan and so on is meant to oppose, the sort of over-abundance of your own personality obscuring the Dharma, are extremes, and that perhaps the principle of communication is genuinely the middle way which transcends the two, because in our Movement you will try and avoid both those extremes.

S: It also occurs to me that perhaps here there is a tie up, a link, with the idea of purity, because the monk keeps himself pure by isolating himself. On ceremonial occasions, white cloths are spread out for the monk to walk upon - this is mentioned in the next chapter. It is said in a Sinhalese expression, I don't know what it is in Sinhalese, but in English it is, "Walking in purity."
If for instance a monk is invited for dana, sometimes the householder will unroll a roll of white cloth so that from the car, let us say - he usually arrives by car these days - right up to the house, the monk is walking on this white cloth, he is walking in purity. So this represents his separation form the world, that he is on some other plane, some other level. So perhaps this absence or this lack of contact is connected with that whole complex of ideas too, revolving around the notion of purity. Isolation spells purity, or contributes to purity,"You preserve yourself unspotted from the world," in St. Paul's phrase. But again one must be very careful not to reject what is positive in that. There is a lot in the world that we really need to withdraw from, a lot that we need to have no contact with, and as little to do with as possible. But that is not an end in itself.

Sometimes we do need isolation, just to be able to breathe freely and not feel the influence of other people impinging on us all the time, just to experience ourselves more fully and clearly, and to concentrate and meditate. But this is for a certain definite purpose, to put us in contact with a higher degree or higher level of reality, which as I have said, ultimately transcends the distinction between self and other.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Ratnavira, on the subject of tapas.

Ratnavira : From page 99. onwards, Carrithers discusses this term 'tapas', and he talks about it particularly in terms of tormenting, suffering, and penitence. Do you think that Carrithers actually fills out the meaning of the term sufficiently?

S: I thought he did that quite well along the lines that I have done in brief, on a number of occasions in seminars. I thought his treatment of that was quite adequate, quite sufficient.

Devamitra : So moving on somewhat rapidly to Achala, we come to the mechanism of karma.

[End of side one Side two]

Achala : It relates in part to something that we were discussing last night. In the Temiya Jataka, Prince Temiya is depicted as being fearful of becoming a King on account of the fact that he may create bad karma by having to administer punishments to maintain the social order. Last night you commented that the use of the power mode, even in subordination to the love mode, would tend to create bad karma. Thus presumably, Prince Temiya's fears have some justification. However, since it is possible to feel loving kindness, when exercising the power mode, surely bad karma won't necessarily result, because it is the mental state behind the act which determines its skilfullness. So had Prince Temiya accepted the Kingship, and maintained vigilance with respect to his motives for administering punishment, he need not have worried. Is this correct?

S: The Theravada generally, especially I think in the Abhidharma, does not admit the possibility, of for instance taking life, except with an unskilful mental state. It doesn't accept as a psychological possibility, that you could for instance take life while retaining a fully skilful or if you like mettaful, mental state. So from the Theravada point of view, it would be said that in the case of such a Dharmaraja, inflicting punishment in order to maintain the social order, there would be a mixed mental state.
Yes, there would be a skilful element, inasmuch as he was seeking to maintain the social order, but at the same time there would be mixed with that, an unskilful element, inasmuch as he was inflicting pain and suffering, even though for in a sense, a good purpose. And that his karmic consequence, the Vipaka, would be mixed just as the volition itself, the karma itself, was mixed. He would no doubt reap the reward, so to speak of his skilful mental state, but at the same time he would have to suffer the consequences of his unskilful mental state. They would look at it like that.

In the Mahayana, sometimes they envisage the possibility of the Bodhisattva for instance, committing actions which apparently are unskilful, but nevertheless with a completely skilful consciousness say out of compassion. Some Mahayana Suttas do support that position, but that idea is

quite vigorously rejected by the Theravada. Again one can see that there is much to be said on both sides of the question, it isn't an easy one to determine. So perhaps one can't really say more than that. I would say as it were on purely practical grounds, that it's quite dangerous to think that you can as it were perform any action, with any state of mind. The Theravada would maintain that there is a certain almost necessary connection certain actions, and certain mental states. That is probably a safer practical guide, even supposing one does admit that a real Bodhisattva probably would be able to transcend all that. But inasmuch as one isn't a real Bodhisattva, one is much safer to say the least adopting the Theravada principle or Theravada way of looking at things here.

Achala : I have heard of one monk living in Sydney, a Theravada monk, who had a rat problem. He felt that the only way he could handle it, would be to get the laymen to kill the rats. But presumably the monk would get the bad karma, as much as the laymen?

S: Yes, I don't see how you can evade that if you give the order. This would be actually, according to the Theravada, I think he has not understood his own teaching, as it were. Because in the case of vegetarianism, what are the Theravada objections to vegetarianism? The Theravada position is that the bhikkhu can take meat which is 'Tricoti pari suddhi', that is to say, pure in three respects. He mustn't kill the animal himself, he mustn't give an order for it to be killed, nor must he allow it to be killed especially for him. So point number two, that he must not give the order to kill clearly means that to give an order to kill, is unskilful, just like killing yourself. So if the monk gives the lay people the order to kill the rats, he is still responsible, and still incurs the unskilful karma, he might just as well, one might say kill them himself. So if the Theravada bhikkhu thinks that he can escape responsibility in that way he has not actually understood the Theravada teaching.

Devaraja : Surely he would incur bad karma further, by the fact that he got somebody else to perform an unskilful action on his order?

S: You could even put it that way, yes. The Mahayana might look at it that way. Also one might say, again from a Theravada point of view, that there was an extra unskilful karma generated due to his micchaditthi! (laughter) Because according to Theravada teaching, micchditthis generate very powerful unskilful karma, and produce very weighty karmic consequences.

Nagabodhi : Bhante, a few years ago during the seminar on *The Buddha* by Trevor Ling, you suggested that perhaps the laws of a kingdom, or of a state, should in some way act as a reflection of the laws of karma. I have never felt clear on this, as to whether you were suggesting that this would simply act as a deterrent, or whether the punishment meted out by such a law would amount to expiation of the negative karma, or as to whether the laws would act as a warning of even worse terrors awaiting people who commit unskilful deeds?

S: Well, there are several things which could be said here. Say those points again one by one.

Nagabodhi : Firstly, whether it was merely a suggestion that such laws would therefore be effective deterrents?

S: No, what was the first point that you made?

Nagabodhi : The point you made was that the laws of a state or a kingdom should act as some sort of reflection.

S: Yes, the question arises, well what does one mean by a reflection? Because whatever happens in a state, one might say, well it is part of the karmic order, though perhaps in a more complex way than is at first apparent. But the law of karma one might say is based on or exemplifies an ethical principle. So I think I was simply making the point that, like the law of karma, the law of the land, the law of the kingdom, should have an ethical basis.

In a secondary sense of course, the execution of the law like everything else, can be seen as a working out of the law of karma. But I think it is quite dangerous to adopt the view that the law absolutely coincides with karma because that would suggest that law was invariably in accordance with the moral order, was invariably just, which is obviously not the case. For instance this was the position of the late Christmas Humphreys. He saw the lawyer as the sort of agent of karma, the agent of the moral law. In a very indirect and complex way he might be, but he could be an agent of the law in a quite negative sense as well as in a positive sense.
So I think perhaps one should confine oneself to saying that the law of the land should do its best to reflect the moral order as for instance exemplified by or crystallised in the law of karma. So the more truly moral, the more truly ethical the law is, the more truly will it approximate to and even reflect the law of karma.

Perhaps there is a distinction to be made because it is not that the law reflects the law of karma except to the limited extent that all happenings in life do, but the law <u>should</u> reflect the law of karma, in the sense that it should exemplify the working out of a purely ethical principle.

<u>Nagabodhi :</u> Maybe I am dumb, but I would like you to break that down a little. What would be the mechanics of it reflecting that ethical principle, looking more at the intentions behind people's actions before passing judgement or....? is that the area you are thinking of, or in terms of severity of punishment?

S: Well one can say that from this point of view laws are of two kinds. There are laws that are intended to enforce ethical principles and laws which enforce no ethical principles at all, that are passed for instance merely for the advantage of the government, or merely for the advantage or benefit of certain powerful forces, elements, groups, classes, in society. These would not be reflecting the law of karma, they would not have any ethical basis. For instance, all those laws which prohibit the taking of life, these do have an ethical basis. But, to take an example which is very prominent at the moment, some of the laws of the state of South Africa, don't have an ethical basis. They have a basis purely in the interests of a certain group of people that hold power in that state. What were the other points?

<u>Nagabodhi :</u> Well, I wanted clarification as to whether you saw that such a legal system would act in some way as an expiation of past karma in itself. But I think that you have already answered that by saying that the legal institutions would not be seen as agents of karma.

S: Certainly not directly, though it may be possible to view them from a certain point of view, or to a limited extent as agents of karma. Though that is not to say that the persons executing those laws, could personally take any credit for that. It would not imply that their mental state was necessarily a positive or skilful one. There was a verse to this effect in the Bible, "Woe to him to whom the offence is due, but woe to him by

whom cometh the offence." It makes that very point.

Nagabodhi : The other point was whether you would see such a system of laws as acting to warn people, to keep people aware of the .....

S: It could be seen in that way, but that would assume that the law itself was firmly and unambiguously based on ethical principles. Otherwise the law could be seen as warning people off, or causing them to see things as unethical, certain modes of behaviour as unethical which were not in fact unethical at all, in terms of the law of karma.

Kulamitra : Even if the state's law should reflect so well, in the general moral order, one still seems to have a problem in that some individuals, will have to carry out sentences. From what we have heard so far, they are unlikely to escape themselves, negative karmic effects of so doing.

S: Well one might even go further than that, one might have to say that the whole of that society shares in those effects. There is a sort of as it were group responsibility, because those particular agents, those officers, are appointed so to speak, with the consent of the whole community, the whole social order. Sometimes perhaps appointed directly by them. So they don't simply have a personal responsibility, they have a sort of representative responsibility. Ultimately, the whole community, the whole society is responsible, and no individual, no person belonging to that society can evade his or her share of that responsibility.

This sort of question has been muted in connection with the happenings under the Nazi regime in Germany. This question I think has been discussed quite extensively in that connection. There is such a thing as general collective, moral responsibility.

Kulamitra : But then unless one had such an ideal society that there was no need for law and punishment, the benefit one gains from living in a protected situation, seems to be invariably accompanied by negative karmic effects. Is that true?

S: I think it is true. Therefore I think it is incumbent upon one to make the greatest possible use of the opportunities you do have to maximise the skilful element in yourself and in your society. This is exactly the same point with regard to life itself. You live at the expense of other lives. So you have so to speak the right to do that only if you are making the best possible use of your life, of the opportunities you have for the benefit of all. If one speaks in terms of expiation, well that is the only way in which you can expiate the sin of your existence! Of course sometimes the individual can dissociate himself from the actions of his society at least to an extent. But I think in practice it is very very difficult - almost impossible - perhaps really impossible, to dissociate yourself from the unskilful actions of your society completely.

Supposing you are able to do that, well probably you will be dissociating yourself from that society completely, therefore dissociating yourself from its skilful actions too. That might be a greater loss than the other is gain in certain circumstances at least.

Devaraja : Just a point about people being collectively responsible in Nazi Germany. I think that depends on the process of the group that came into power actually did come to power in a fair and just means.

S: I think even that is debatable as a matter of fact, debatable at least. But all right, if you might say if they came into power by fair and just means, then the greater responsibility rests on that particular society, because they willingly, and apparently knowingly, put those people in power.

Subhuti : Does not this argument begin to extend itself, because where does your society end. Do you not in a way become responsible for the deeds of the whole world, or in a sense the whole universe?

S: Well I think yes, and this is perhaps the very essence of the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Bodhisattva does not see his own salvation as separable from the salvation of the whole universe, he sees his responsibility as extending as far as that. You see. So really the person trying to follow the Arahant path is really in a quite impossible position.

Subhuti : It sounds like we are all in impossible positions! (laughter)

S: You have to go on doing your best in each and every situation whether great or small, knowing that you will never be able to bring about a perfect state of affairs, certainly not within the foreseeable future. But you do your best, because having achieved a certain insight or understanding you cannot do anything else. Now of course in a sense this contradicts, or appears to contradict, some other things that I have said. For instance I have mentioned - I have mentioned it many many times, I am sure of you all must have heard it - when I was in India, those incidents about the time of the Suez crisis. Indian friends would keep asking me why I had invaded Suez. Well of course I hadn't, as an individual (laughter). But I still was in a sense British. All right suppose I had a British passport and I was taking advantage of that fact, and I was under the official protection of the United Kingdom High Commissioner. So I was not entirely disassociated, even though as an individual, I had had nothing to do with that. So even if I was to a greater extent morally in the clear, I should not really have been surprised that other people saw things differently, and saw me in terms of simply a member of that particular group.

Nagabodhi: Sometimes Bhante, when I was in India people would say, "You used to rule us." And I would joke and say, "Well I was born in 1948, so I never ruled you."

S: Yes, and they weren't even born at that time either!

Nagabodhi : Yes, but I was brought up in a country which was living on the accumulated prosperity of the colonial heritage. So I realised that I did share a portion of guilt, or whatever was to be shared for that time.

S: So one might even say that there are degrees of responsibility, degrees of group responsibility. You are responsible to the extent that you identify with the group, and not responsible to the extent that you don't. Perhaps mentally, you can not identify to a very high degree indeed. No doubt not everybody is equally responsible. Not everybody in Germany was equally responsible. There were very greatly varying degrees of responsibility. Probably no citizen, except those who actually openly opposed the Nazi system, the Nazi regime, could escape at least some, however slight, share of responsibility for whatever that regime perpetrated.

Kulamitra: Still it seems if you are persistent with the logic of what you have been saying so far, merely to enjoy, is to be responsible.

S: Yes indeed! For instance it is no use just drawing your dividends, and saying, "Well I am not responsible for conditions in the factories, which are earning me those dividends." You are responsible, and you could at least raise your voice, or withdraw your investment.

Kulamitra : To pursue this a bit further. This suggests to me that there is no way through the problem just by cutting back. It is only by the creation of the positive. You can never withdraw sufficiently, in that case not to accumulate .....

S: Yes you've got to counter attack in a positive way. For instance in this question of investment. This has come up in connection with investment in South Africa, and we have all heard the arguments on both sides. Can you find a completely clean Company? If you could it would be so small, it wouldn't be worth investing in! (Laughter) So you have to find the cleanest, or the least dirty Company, and if you are drawing dividends, then make the best possible use of them for the benefit of all. But you cannot take your stand on some completely clean, some completely immaculate little island in a midst of the ocean of corruption. You cannot in fact 'walk in purity', you cannot, not in complete purity, socially speaking.

Kulamitra : So this seems to lead towards the whole view of what is negative in a way being the material which has to be transformed into the positive, which cannot be ignored or put aside.

S: Yes, you can't simply isolate yourself. Perhaps you could to some extent in the past, when there were beautiful forests, with trees loaded with fruit that you only had to pluck, and a beautiful warm climate and nice snug caves. But even a spiritually minded person can't find those sort of refuges any more. So as I have said on previous occasions, you've no choice but to transform society, to the greatest extent that you can. At least to make things better than they are, and trust that others will continue that effort.

Perhaps there are moments when you feel completely free from it all, but perhaps not more than moments. So therefore the Bodhisattva Ideal seems completely realistic, doesn't it, as well as possessing greater metaphysical depths.

Devamitra : Moving on to a completely different subject, Aryamitra has a question about the intervention of Devas.

Aryamitra : Carrithers is recalling a Jataka, and he mentions Chandra Devi and the rest of the harem, mild as they seem, they take these vows and, he says nevertheless produce enough heat to discomfort Sakra, who is compelled to get off his seat and do something about it, and he goes on to say, " The gods help those who are strenuously and visibly good" and I wondered if you could say something about the force of prayer, and the intervention of Devas, on the spiritual aspirant.

S: I am rather reminded of the Christian saying,"God helps those who help themselves." It does sound a bit like that, doesn't it, except that here it is gods with a small 'g'. I suppose one can only say this; the traditional Buddhist, in fact Indian, view is that moral effort sets in motion certain

forces which in a way disturb, or perhaps one should say better, correct and restore the balance of the universe, and which produce quite tangible effects. One can also look at it in another way, and look at this sort of incident in more psychological terms, in terms of depth psychology, even in Jungian terms. You make an effort, you make a conscious effort, you make an effort on the level of the conscious mind. But that has all sorts of reverberations in the depths, and the response comes from the depths. And that response that comes from the depths could be regarded as being symbolised so to speak by the figures of the Devas. For instance you know that people have dreams, everybody has dreams, and those dreams are often reverberations of what you have been doing during the day. But if you have been meditating during the day or if you've been engaged in puja, the reverberations will often be of that kind. Or you may even dream of goddess like figures, or Devas, or muses, or something of that sort. So perhaps one can look at the intervention of the Devas in those sort of terms. In any case one is not perhaps to take it too literally, because it is a story, you are not being given a lesson in cosmology or anything like that. But I think it is possible to interpret in terms of depth psychology.

Aryamitra : It's just that something did happen to me, and I wasn't actually going to tell the story but Nagabodhi and the group were hedging to say it, but some time ago, when I was working on the press, at Aryatara, I remember I had to take a guillotine blade to be sharpened and it was in the City in London and I didn't know the address of the place or rather I had the address but I couldn't find it. I was very rushed, and I had to take a Yoga Class that evening, we were in a Transit van, and it didn't have printing or anything marked on it. We pulled up at these lights, and somebody in a car opened his window and said, "Are you looking for the blade sharpeners?" So we said " Yes," and he said, "Follow me!" We then wound our way through all these alley ways in the City, and when we got there we were both quite surprised when he said "Funny old world isn't it" and he just drove away. (lots of laughter)

S: Well you are assuming or people are assuming perhaps it was a Deva, but since it was you, it could have been Mara. (laughter). But I heard a story a bit like that, I have told it before, and it concerns Vajrabodhi and Bodhisri. Vajrabodhi told me that he and Bodhisri went on holiday in Lapland, this is years and years ago, and of course there is no one in Lapland who has any contact with Buddhism or anything like that. But anyway they found themselves sitting in some tavern in some out of the way corner of Lapland one evening. They were just having a drink and chatting, they weren't talking about Buddhism or anything like that. People around them were dancing and drinking, and getting a bit drunk, as they sometimes do in Lapland (laughter). There was one particular man who was especially boisterous and getting really quite drunk he was dancing around. But at one point he came up to their table, thrust his face into Vajrabodhi's and he said "Om Mani Padme Hum." (laughter) He then burst out laughing and walked away. (Laughter) So what do you make of that? These sort of things do happen, it is very difficult to know how to explain it. Sometimes perhaps there is a rational explanation, but I am sure that at least in a few cases there isn't. So what can one say? Perhaps there are Devas, even in the quite literal sense after all, and perhaps they do intervene even sometimes, quite literally just for the fun of it.

Aryamitra : Perhaps it is something to do with a shared psyche or something like that.

S: Yes, yes, because think of animals and how they communicate over distances and all that sort of thing. I am quite sure that the whole human race exists in, well ( ) has a term called 'noesphere'. I think that's too ambitious in a way, but the whole human race does exist I think in a sort of single as it were telepathic medium. I think that thoughts and ideas are flying back and forth all the time. We don't always

realise it. It is largely an sort of unconscious process, but I think that we are all on a sort of wavelength or band in that sort of way and are picking up all sorts of signals all the time from all over the place, but especially from other human beings.

Dhammaloka : Bhante, when you started to answer this question you said that moral effort sets in motion forces that balance the universe, what did you mean by balance of the universe?

S: Well I started by expounding the traditional Buddhist belief, saying that moral action sets in motion forces which disturb the balance, but then I as it were corrected myself. I then asked how can moral forces disturb the balance. They have in fact the other effect. They help restore an imbalance which already exists, so that one gets a more balanced or as it were more harmonious universe. Or at least a better balance between the good and the bad so to speak. One could say all this is symbolised in the conflict between the devas and the asuras. When you perform an ethical action, you strengthen the side of the devas. But in a relative universe it would seem that the negative unskilful forces cannot be altogether eliminated, you have to transcend the dichotomy altogether.

Buddhadasa : This brings out a question from a letter I have just received. Could you say something very briefly about the origin of evil and negative forces within the universe?

S: Well according to the Buddha, the greatest evil is ignorance and ignorance has no origin. Like the samsara itself it's primordial. It's always there. You cannot perceive its absolute first beginning, because how can the mind perceive the beginning of evil, how can the mind perceive the beginning of ignorance? Because it's that very distinction, or difference between the subject and the object, which constitutes ignorance. So long as there is a mind there perceiving ignorance, ignorance will continue to exist. The mind, the ordinary mind, can never perceive the beginning of ignorance because it carries ignorance with it wherever it goes. This is the as it were standard Buddhist view, so again, you have to transcend that dualistic, dichotomising mind to find - well you don't find the origin of evil, because when you reach that higher level, you don't even think in terms of evil, you don't see evil.

Nagabodhi : Does that mean that before you are enlightened, there is no beginning or end to evil and ignorance, but once you are enlightened evil and ignorance had never been?

S: Yes, yes exactly, you don't solve the problem, the problem merely ceases to exist.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Padmavajra, and concerns the ten paramitas.

Padmavajra : And the ten paramis too. Could you say something about the list of the ten paramis. Would you agree with Carrithers when he says that the list, does not have the compelling internal consistency which other numbered lists have and that it a mnemonic list for the use of preachers?

S: I don't quite see how it's quite mnemonic, but we will let that pass. There are several lists of paramitas, in the sense of qualities or virtues to

be practised by the Bodhisattva, the would be Buddha. We have the well known six or ten paramitas of the Sanskrit Mahayana literature. We have a list of ten, again as far as I remember in the *Mahavastu*. I am not quite sure of that, I can remember the ten bhumis, I'm not quite sure whether there are ten paramitas to correspond to the ten bhumis. But then certainly we have in the Pali Canonical literature, late Canonical literature, so to speak, a list of ten paramitas, or paramis which are quite different, or very different from the list with which we are more familiar. They seem to have been put together in a very rough and ready sort of fashion, and they don't seem to exhibit any sort of progression, they don't seem to have any structure.

Whereas the six, or the ten with which we are more familiar, do at least have at least a sort of rudimentary structure. They do seem to be progressive. It isn't known to the best of my knowledge, how the list of ten, the Theravada list, arose. We can see fairly clearly how at least the first six out of the more familiar ten paramitas did develop. I have gone into this in *the Survey*.

Devamitra : Moving on to another area, Buddhadasa has a question about 'soulmates'.

Buddhadasa : I was asked to ask this question, somewhat against my better judgment. Yashodara is mentioned as the woman, who had been the Buddhas wife over aeons. Accepting that the concept of a soulmate, is usually, if not always, a rationalisation for the latest girlfriend, is there in fact any truth behind the Buddha's relationship with Yashodara, that it had endured for aeons, or is it apocryphal? And can any such principle be seen to apply within the area of spiritual friendship?

S: So far as the historical sources are concerned, we do not even know whether the Buddha had a relationship with Yashodara at all. We don't even know if he had a wife called Yashodara, if we are going to be very strict. The oldest canonical sources refer to a woman called Rahulamata, the mother of Rahula. Later sources describe her as Yashodara, some call her Gopa, and I believe there are some which call her Binba. According to again some scholars, these are three different names for one woman. According to others there are three women or those three names meaning that possibly the Buddha had three wives. So historically the evidence is very scanty for a relationship with Yashodara in this life, what to speak of the previous ones. But no doubt the Mahayana mainly did develop these very romantic stories about the Buddha and Yashodara, and a lot of poetry went into these stories. The idea that they had been soulmates down the aeons were certainly developed. There is a passage in the Pali Canon where an aged husband and wife approach the Buddha and say that they would like to be reborn together and be husband and wife in the future and they enquire how that is possible, how they can be sure that they would be reborn together, and again be husband and wife. The Buddha says that if their thoughts, words and deeds are in accord in this life they will be reborn associated with each other in a future life. So that is the key principle, that so long as the chain of births and deaths continues, if you are in close accord, if you are really sort of soulmates with somebody else, assuming that rebirth continues, there seems to be no reason why you should not be reborn together, as it were, and be associated with each other again. The principle, or the idea, certainly doesn't seem inconsistent with Buddhist thought or Buddhist philosophy. Again one must be careful as you say, not to indulge a romantic rationalisations and all that sort of thing. You might feel very close to her, but that doesn't mean that she was Cleopatra in a previous life, and you were Julius Caesar (laughter) Or even Mark Antony!

Kulamitra : Didn't Christmas Humphreys reckon he and his wife.....

[End of Tape Nine Tape Ten]

S: But the same Christmas Humphreys did tell me rather scoffingly, that he knew at least six or seven ladies in theosophical circles, who had been Cleopatra in previous lives, or in their previous life I should say.

Buddhadasa : I can't recall the exact reference, I couldn't find it, but I remember reading in the Life of Milarepa, that Marpa's wife, Dagmema, was absorbed into Marpa. Could you comment on that please.

S: I don't remember the incident though you're probably right. She must have been very absorbed in him during her lifetime. No doubt, it being a tantric relationship it all occurred on a much higher level! (Laughter) But again it raises this question of separate human individuality. Whether one person can as it were be absorbed in another. I think it is possible. I think though it has to be mutual, inasmuch as two individuals both transcend the dichotomy between self and other, they can be spoken of as being absorbed in each other. But then again, they could also be spoken of as being absorbed in each and every other being in the universe. Though clearly there is a difference between realising your non-duality with someone who also realises his non-duality with you, or with anybody.

Buddhadasa : So the word absorbed could be a sort of metaphor of a higher spiritual truth?

S: Perhaps it could. One would have even to see what the Tibetan word was in the original. But perhaps we aren't to think of personality or even individuality in the way that we usually do, even think of consciousness in the way that we usually do. Perhaps one consciousness can grow out of another, or be absorbed back into another. Maybe consciousnesses can divide and proliferate and so on. According to Buddhist texts they certainly can. Perhaps we mustn't think so much in terms of this stable unitary consciousness. Perhaps that's all part of sakaya drsti.

Padmavajra : Is that the sort of thinking behind this view that Khentse Rinpoche incarnated in five ways?

S: I am not sure that one could say it's behind it, but it is certainly associated with it or reflects it to some extent. But again there's no stable unitary consciousness in the way that we usually think of consciousness. There is your consciousness, my consciousness, and so on.

But to come back to Buddhadasa's original point, I am quite sure that it is possible for people to be reborn in one another's company. The research that has been done on rebirth, the empirical research, suggests that most people are reborn, if not in the same family, then in the same tribe, or the same village. They stick close to their home base. So I suppose the likelihood is that they will be born again associated with people who have also been reborn along with them from the previous situation in many cases. I mean, most people would want to be reborn in familiar surroundings, so it seems quite logical.

Devamitra : The next question is from Susiddhi on the Sinhalese approach.

Susiddhi : Has the Sinhalese Sangha overemphasised the pain and renunciation aspects of the spiritual life at the expense of the joyful and

beautiful aspects in their sermons. If so what effects has this had on the Sangha, the laity, and relations between the two?

S: Right let's take that bit by bit, let's have the first clause first.

Susiddhi : Has the Sinhalese Sangha overemphasised the pain and renunciation aspect of the spiritual life at the expense of the expense of the joyful and beautiful aspects in their sermons?

S: I doubt if they have on the whole. Perhaps some of the more serious minded ascetic monks have overemphasised that painful aspect. I doubt very much if the Sinhalese Sangha on the whole has done that. I think they would tend to dwell much more on say the fruits of generosity rather than on the pains and sufferings that might accrue to you or would accrue to you from breaking the precepts and so on. That does seem to be the overriding emphasis in the case of sermons addressed to the laity. The fruits of generosity, especially in the form of dana offered to the bhikkhus. They sometimes waxed really eloquent on that particular theme. One can understand why. So what is the second part of the question?

Susiddhi : At the expense of the joyful and beautiful aspects?

S: I don't think so. Even though there isn't that emphasis on pain and suffering, I don't think the joyful and beautiful aspects of the spiritual life are really stressed in the purely spiritual sense of those terms. I think in the case of sermons or discourses addressed to the laity, the appeal is very much to the desire of the lay people for a happy prosperous life and a good rebirth.
The emphasis isn't really on anything very noble or sublime or elevated, and not on beauty and joy in a more refined spiritual sense, because to do that you'd have to bring in perhaps meditation, and that is I think hardly ever brought in so far as the lay person is concerned. It is a little bit now, but that's a relatively modern development. So the rest of the question?

Susiddhi : What effects has this had on the Sangha, the laity and the relations between the two?

S: I think the whole relationship between the monks and the lay people is dominated by the dana nexus, as one might say. The monks are usually very much concerned - I'm talking about ordinary monks, the average monks - to keep up the faith of the laity, to keep up their faith in the bhikkhus and to encourage them to support the bhikkhus and give them dana and respect them and so on. A lot of their teaching, a lot of their sermons are sort of tailored to this end. There are exceptions obviously, but this represents the general approach, the general standard.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Nagabodhi, on motivation.

Nagabodhi : The impression we gain from Carrithers' book is that Forest Monks are motivated either by cultural programming, or by the fear of hell and suffering, or by seeing themselves as heros in the stories they tell themselves. This seems a little bleak. Has Carrithers failed penetrate the more positive and individual elements in his subjects' spiritual aspirations, or do you think it possible that such elements simply do not exist?

S: I think that he does mention such elements, but he doesn't make anything of them. He certainly doesn't emphasise them. He mentions for instance the fact that Pannananda wouldn't even hurt ants, but he just makes that statement, he doesn't make anything of it. So I think there are touches like that here and there, which transcend as it were the sociological context, but he doesn't take them up or develop them, or attempt to go more deeply into them. I am sure that at least the best of these Forest Monks weren't simply the product of economic circumstances, or cultural conditioning or childhood training or anything of that sort. I am sure that the best of them did have a streak of individuality which can't be explained in those terms. I think that is clear from Carrithers' account itself. I certainly get that feeling. Well, I've read the whole book before. I certainly get that impression in the case of the best of the Forest Monks. Carrithers does record certain facts, certain incidents which suggest an element of individuality, but as I mentioned he doesn't seem to make very much of that. Perhaps his whole approach is slightly heavily sociological. Though again he does himself preface the first Chapter with that quotation from Marx, to which he doesn't quite live up. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." So he doesn't perhaps give sufficient weight to the fact that men make their own history. Especially men like some of the Forest Monks certainly were.

Nagabodhi : This does bring to mind Ian Oliver's book about Buddhism in Britain, and his comments on the FWBO, which made us seem to be a bunch of hearty co-op founders, whereas the Samye Ling people, who had the beautiful incense in the shrine room, the spiritual vibrations. He also failed to really take note of the more individual, creative .....

S: I am not even sure if he visited our Centres, many of them or any of them.

Susiddhi : Yes he did, he came to Heruka.

S: Did he, well then he must have been almost blind! That was a very hasty unsatisfactory job, very superficial. It was 'remaindered' in the end wasn't it? Yes, I think I bought one of the remaindered copies, just for the record as it were, actually for the women's retreat Centre as we already had a copy.

It is all historical material. Perhaps in the not too far distant future, someone will have the interesting task of writing a little account of the various reports on the FWBO, or descriptions of the FWBO, that have appeared in print over the years. There are actually quite a few, we have probably forgotten several of them. There was one that was appeared in a book I think published in America?, a general book about spiritual groups, we were fairly honourably mentioned there. That was way back, almost in the Archway days.

Subhuti: There was Johnny Sinjon's book.

S: Ah yes, I was not thinking of that, but there is that one too.

Nagabodhi: "The Pilgrims Guide"?

S: Yes, or something of that kind. And there of course various articles in newspapers and magazines and so on. Perhaps someone in a few years time, maybe as part of our twentieth anniversary celebrations, will write a review of all these notices and accounts of the FWBO. Not perhaps omitting the various reviews of Subhuti's Book, and Subhuti's response to those reviews.

Nagabodhi : This is coming off the top of my head Bhante, it perhaps suggests, and maybe this is being over fair to the Forest Monks, I don't know, that the more completely the spiritual life is being lived, the harder it is for an outsider to understand what is spiritual about it.

S: I was thinking, I had a little fantasy as it were, that the FWBO could well take a leaf out of the Forest Monks' book, in a modified way. Supposing we had a country retreat Centre, we probably couldn't have it in this country, say in Sweden or Canada, where you had several hundred acres. You could have little hermitages here and there. You could have a sort of dining hall, to which people were called by bell, once or twice a day, because that would save them having to bother with cooking and all that. That could then be a form of solitary retreat, it wouldn't be a permanent way of life, but it would be perhaps a very good way of spending a month's solitary retreat.

There could be say conventions, that those who were looking after the serving of food, would be asked not to speak to the solitary retreaters or engage them in conversation, but just place their food before them, or just leave it for them, and just clear up afterwards without troubling them. One could incorporate that sort of pattern into our overall structure, without its less positive features. Someone could possibly live in that sort of way for a year or two even. It could be a sort of almost alternative of Vajraloka, but it perhaps would have to be dependent on a retreat Centre. It could be a reservation with several hundred acres set aside, where no one else was allowed to walk or wander. But you would have your regular retreat Centre or other set up, where there were cooks, and where the shopping was done and all that sort of thing, so that people on solitary retreat didn't have to bother.
So as I say in that way we could incorporate that sort of pattern in a modified way and minus its apparently negative features, into our own structure. It wouldn't be impossible because it does seem a very good way of living for short periods. Even for longer periods for those who were really spiritually qualified, who could make the best possible use of that sort of opportunity, not lapsing into a one sided solipsistically individualistic state.

Sona : One of our Friends in Sweden actually suggested this scheme after visiting Sri Lanka, and seeing some of the Forest Monks. We considered the possibility, and it seems very feasible.

S: The only thing against such a set up in a place like Canada or Sweden, is presumably that of climate. But even if it was possible to use those facilities only during the summer months, they would certainly be worth having.

Sona : We found that it would be possible at certain times in winter.

Dharmapriya : Going back to Nagabodhi's point about the difficulty of recognising spirituality in some people outside the system, just reminded me of something which one Order Member whose name we won't mention on tape in this context - add it afterwards if necessary. He suspected

that it's actually very easy to recognise the spiritual, but very difficult to recognise the transcendental. He made the comment that he knew quite a lot of people involved in the Christian tradition, and the Buddhists who came into contact with them, experienced very strong feelings of metta from them, feelings that they had had dhyanic experiences. He also commented that coming into contact with certain people such as Kalu Rinpoche and in fact with you, Bhante, he hadn't picked anything like that up. He felt that it was probably because he was incapable of feeling or recognising the transcendental or anything like that. I wondered if you would like to comment on that? (laughter)

S: Well the Buddha himself said that it was difficult to recognise an Arahant, to take the question in that form. He was asked by a certain King, how to recognise an Arahant. The Buddha said, "How is it possible for you, living the worldly life that you do, to recognise an Arahant?" I don't think that you can recognise, certainly transcendental attainments, from any outward sign or characteristic. Because one could say that the signs or characteristics of transcendental attainment, to a very considerable extent, do not differ from the signs or characteristics of spiritual attainments. For instance, someone might be very kind and very forbearing, but as regards outward manifestation, how could you distinguish between the kindness and forbearance that was the expression of say a dhyanic state, and the kindness and compassion, that was the expression of a transcendental state. Because the situation in which you were in might permit only a manifestation to a limited degree. Supposing you ask someone who is well versed in the dhyanas to give you some money, he might at once give it you, as an act of kindness. If you ask a person of a transcendental attainment the same thing, and he gave you the same money in the same way. The external manifestation is the same because the situation doesn't permit more than a certain degree of such manifestation, and in both cases the degree was fully met.

I think the only way in which one could perceive, it wouldn't be a quality or characteristic, was when wisdom entered into it, actual insight in an exchange. But then you would have to have the wisdom to recognise that, or if you had a certain degree of wisdom, at least sufficient to recognise that here was a greater degree of wisdom than your own. Otherwise, I think it is, one might say, literally impossible for someone who is not enlightened in any degree, really to recognise that somebody else is. If you are very sensitive and very receptive, you might just have the sort feeling or awareness, especially if you have a lot of contact with this person, that here is something that is beyond you, that transcends you, that you cannot quite grasp or pin down.

That other person is always one step ahead, otherwise it's very very difficult, as the Buddha himself made clear. So a new person, or an absolute outsider can't come along and say, how do you know that such and such a person has got such and such characteristics, or such and such attainments. Even if you yourself know or are convinced, you can't possibly tell them how they are to recognise such a person, or convince them that such and such a person is of that kind. This is why for instance in the Tibetan tradition, every disciple, every pupil has his own feelings about his own guru, he regards his own guru as the Buddha, but he doesn't expect that to be officially recognised by everybody else. That is his own attitude in the context of his own spiritual practice. (Pause)

So it is inevitable therefore that there will be misunderstandings on the part of people approaching the FWBO. Even if there aren't any transcendental attainments within the FWBO, assuming for the sake of argument that perhaps there aren't, well even if there's something highly spiritual, even spiritual to a modest degree, it couldn't be recognised by someone outside in the sense of being out of sympathy with those things, it wouldn't be possible. It's like playing music to a deaf man, or showing a picture to someone who is blind. They just do not possess the necessary organ of perception.

So it is inevitable that the FWBO will not be understood, and that accounts of it that do appear, other than those written by Order Members, will be travesties. Sometimes those written by Order Members will not be understood by those who are out of sympathy with what the FWBO represents. We've had proof of that already.

Devamitra : Now on to our last question, it comes from Achala, on moral heroism.

Achala : Carrithers suggests in that the Teramiya Jataka fosters a type of heroism that is largely passive, and that it is this type of passive moral heroism suffuses Sinhalese literature. Presumably this is to be contrasted with the active more creative variety of heroism where initiatives are taken. Do you think that the more active type of heroism is lacking in Sinhalese Buddhism, and if so, how did this one sided emphasis come about?

S: I am not sure about all this. I can't really say from personal knowledge that Sinhalese literature is pervaded by passive heroism. The author produces no evidence to support that. Even this very concept of passive heroism, is perhaps a little questionable. It is rather interesting that in the Jataka story itself, as I think Carrithers notices, there is a tremendous change or transformation in the Bodhisattva after he does get to the forest. It's as though he isn't really passive in the strict sense of the term, even prior to that. It's more like an accumulation of energy which eventually bursts forth when the circumstances are right. Can one refer to that as passivity, it is only superficially passivity. So I tend to rather query his whole way of looking at things in this respect. I didn't find this passage particularly impressive or convincing.

There is in a sense a passive, not exactly heroism but there is such a thing as forbearance, and no doubt that requires very positive qualities, and, yes in a sense, even heroic qualities. But I don't think that the heroism itself is passive. You can be a hero under circumstances in which you appear to be on the receiving end, but not inwardly so. Inwardly your attitude is a highly positive and even dynamic one, and that manifests when circumstances permit. I don't think that heroism itself can ever be described as passive, so I don't think that strictly speaking there can be such a thing as passive heroism. If one can use that expression at all, it's perhaps to be understood as being - I'm not sure whether it's paradoxical, but some other figure of speech that Abhaya can probably name for us! (laughter)

It is almost like a spring is stretched, is it passive? You release it, then it seems to be dynamic, but when it is just taut, not in motion, can it be described as passive, is that quite the appropriate word? So that's is how I feel about this notion of passive heroism as used to describe Temiya's conduct during the time that he was a prince in the palace, and just not responding.

Kulamitra : Do you think that although he is not right about the Buddhist tradition, that lay Buddhists themselves have misunderstood say Ksanti? For instance I know we contacted some Vietnamese Buddhists who were being harassed in this country, and their representative who spoke English, spoke of how they would never think doing anything about it. They would always just accept it with forbearance, which seemed to be more passivity than a creative forbearance.

S: Well the Vietnamese themselves, in Vietnam, never gave one the impression of being particularly passive people. But when you're in a very small minority and you don't know the situation, you don't know how you are going to be treated, you are careful to keep your nose very clean

indeed. I know the Tibetan refugees in India, in Kalimpong, behaved in exactly the same sort of way, they didn't know how the government of India was going to treat them. They didn't know whether it was going to turn them out, or send them back into Tibet, they were very very careful not to offend, and just suffered any imposition that was put upon them. They never dared to complain. If anybody asked them whether they were all right, whether they were happy, "Oh yes of course, perfectly all right, perfectly happy, very grateful to the government of India." Not a word of criticism, but it was mainly fear. I suspect that that may be the explanation of the behaviour of these Vietnamese.

Because after a few years the Tibetans learned that they were as it were relatively safe, relatively secure, and they started raising their voices and even sometimes complaining, but that took time. The initial reaction, especially as they were often in a state of shock, was just be played very, very safe, and run no risk of offending whatever powers that they were in contact with. Don't forget that they did live under an autocratic system in Tibet. Vietnamese over here perhaps have their own experience of governmental power in their own country. So until they learn the ropes, and are reassured and start believing that Britain is at least comparatively democratic country where you can speak out without incurring the wrath of the authorities and be whipped into prison, they will be very, very careful, and err on the side of caution. I think that is probably the explanation, I do not think that it is anything to do with passive heroism, or their Buddhist attitudes. Because as I say both North and South Vietnam have over the years showed themselves to be very, very active indeed in all sorts of respects. They didn't just passively endure by any means, except when there was no alternative. Whenever they could they took the offensive.

Is that all?

Devamitra : That's the end of the questions. There is one point which I would like to raise with you on behalf of all of us. That is that we decided in our groups to do two Chapters tomorrow, provided that you yourself are agreeable.

S: That means I've got to do two Chapters! (laughter) Yes, both mention theyyasamvasa. This is the term that was used by my bhikkhu friends when they speak about reasons why Rahula could not be ordained, well not receive his higher ordination from the hands of the orthodox Sangha. Carrithers gives from that poem about the parting of the Buddha from Yashodara. Yes I have actually made my point, though I didn't tie it up with this particular passage. He says with regards to this passage from the poem :
The difficulty and inherent loss of renunciation are there, of course, but the renunciation is very nearly erotic: and in any case here peasant family values coexist happily with the perspective of asceticism. Not quite the perspective of asceticism, but the perspective of the eventual very distant attainment of buddhahood. So on the one hand the poem affirms the peasant family values, and the strength of the tie between husband and wife, and, yes the Buddha is leaving home, but you won't have to do that, in this life, you might have to do it after hundreds and thousands of lives. So on the one hand you can revel in the depiction of the love relation between Siddartha, and Yashodara, and admire the Bodhisattva Ideal but not to such an extent that you are expected to do anything about it.

Dharmapriya : We actually discussed this to a certain extent in our group, and especially the sentence following, we were rather in two minds. Some of us felt that it was a rather perverse way of describing the degeneration of the universal religion and the ethnic religion.

S : Yes, this resounding harmony between the two value systems is the crown and culmination of Buddhism's evolution from a way of life and

thinking for world renouncers, into the religion of a peasant people. I think it has got it rather wrong there, because it assumes that Buddhism to begin with was just a way of life and thinking for world renouncers, and that even in its present degenerate form, it is just a religion of a peasant people. I think that is probably a gross understatement, because even in Buddhism at its most ethnic, there are elements which are genuinely dharmic and genuinely spiritual, which are accessible to those who are genuinely interested in that aspect of things.

Kulamitra : A poem like that presumably forms some sort of bridge between the higher spiritual ideas, and those more ordinary human values. But isn't it a bridge which can be crossed both ways so that Buddhism can degenerate as well as pulling people out?

S: Yes indeed, I personally see it not so much as a question of ordinary human values, or social values, so much in terms of emotion. That it is important that the spiritual ideal, even at its loftiest does not lose contact with people's actual emotions. Because it's only by contacting their actual emotions, their positive emotions especially, that they'll be able to generate sufficient energy to realise the ideal.

So in a way this sort of poem is positive, because on the one hand it does indicate the very highest ideal and on the other, it is open very definitely to ordinary human, positive emotions. So actually there is no harmony between the two. They are not brought together, they exist side by side in this sort of poem, but they can be brought together. At least you have the two of them as it were. The human emotions can be brought into harmony with the spiritual ideal, by refining them and bringing them to higher and higher levels of refinement. So I wouldn't say there is a harmony between two value systems at all here - it's a juxtaposition of two value systems, and a lying side by side of ordinary human emotions in a quite positive form, and a highly spiritual, even transcendental ideal. The two are not in fact brought together.
There can be a sort of sliding back and forth in the way you suggest, but only if the transcendental ideal is brought down quite a few notches, and sort of sentimentalised. If the transcendental ideal was there as a real possibility, I don't think you could slip back and forth in that kind of way.

Dharmapriya : It reminds me to a certain extent, I believe of the Gandharvas love song in Sakka's Quest. Would you say that there is a similar rationale behind that beautiful poem in Sakka's quest which you talk about?

S: In a way except that of course the metaphor comes in, the Arahant's longing for the Truth as he longs for his beloved. So the two are brought a little bit more closely together there, one might say to that extent. I was thinking of the pseudo-Tantra which is prevalent now in some quarters in the west, where you have for instance Yab-Yum Buddha images, and male and female Buddha figures locked in sexual embrace, and you bring that down from its as it were transcendental level, and almost sentimentalise and find it very easy to slip back and forth, between that vulgarised and sentimentalised version of the Yab-Yum figures, and your own current relationship. But nonetheless that Yab-Yum symbolism does represent a very lofty transcendental plane. If that was really understood or represented, or embodied to some extent, people couldn't slip back and forth in that sort of way.

Kulamitra : Do you think that there is no final way around this danger, because in order to speak to unenlightened humanity, you have to at least touch the level that they are at. In doing so there's always the danger that at some future time that recension of Dharma is lowered to the level it's touched?

S: Yes indeed. Well, as you know, people used to be fond of asking me such questions as, "If we do this," or, "If we don't do that, isn't there the danger that...." Well there's only one answer to that - that from a spiritual point of view, there is danger in everything! You may be personally safe if you have reached the point of no return, but no particular Buddhist practice, no particular Buddhist institution, no particular Buddhist philosophy, is exempt from the possibility, the danger of degeneration, misuse and so on. You cannot devise the perfect organisation, the perfect constitution, which cannot possibly degenerate under any circumstances. Not unless you provide to run that, or to live that in of course isolation, a body of people who are at least stream entrants. So yes, there is danger in everything, but you just have to try to minimise the dangers or be aware of them, and don't take any unnecessary risks, or make situations more dangerous than they need be.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Kulamitra: Presumably that theoretical body of stream entrants are the very people who would not need this continually perfect organisation because they would continually recast it themselves?

S: Yes, they would continually recreate whatever organisation they needed. But they might have to set up a structure, as the Buddha himself and his disciples originally did. A structure which functioned perfectly so long as they were around, because they were functioning perfectly. But the moment the structure started incorporating people who were less realised, less enlightened than they were, or perhaps not realised or enlightened at all, then of course dangers crept in. Those very same structures, or what were formally the same structures, became dangerous, at least potentially.

Kulamitra : Just pursuing as it were the logic of that way of thinking. We have a structure here in the movement, which within certain limits, our own limits perhaps, works well and which you have to a large extent have created. Would it be fair to say, that within a single generation, we will have to be the sort of people, that are able to work that structure without the possibility of degeneration. for it to carry on into the future?

S: Well, yes I suppose that is the case. That necessity will be repeated with each new generation. Each fresh generation will have the responsibility of certainly transmitting the spirit, and possibly the original form, the original structure, and making only such changes as are really necessary according to circumstances. But on all accounts keeping the spirit. For instance, some of you may remember, it was reported I believe in *Shabda*, that after I had my spell in Cornwall, I met a few Order Members in the New Forest for a few days. Ananda was one of those who asked questions and his question was; "In the event of your (that is Bhante's) death, may we change anything?" I said that you can change anything except the three refuges! So at that time, my intention was to emphasise the importance of the three refuges. But if one takes the three refuges as representing the spirit of the movement, well, according to necessity you can change anything else. You can decide that you won't have weekly Chapter meetings, you will have Chapter meetings every ten days, or on full moon days, or new moon days. You can change all those sort of details. Or that you won't have city centres, you will function entirely from rural communities, you could make those sort of changes, and still remain faithful to the spirit of the movement. You could dispense with Chairmen absit omen, you could even dispense with Councils, dispense with FWBOs, under changing circumstances, perhaps even dispense with Co-ops, and still remain faithful to the spirit. But it is conceivable that you carefully maintain your Centres, your communities, your co-ops, and the spirit goes out of everything.
So therefore I said you can change everything except the three refuges. I didn't even include the ten precepts, because in a sense even they are

applications, and to that extent secondary and not primary.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, you partly answered what I was going to ask. But do you think that the Buddha did enough in fact to establish a sound structure for the early Sangha. He did seem to leave things in a little disarray when he died?

S: Disarray?

Buddhadasa : Well there was a bit of a panic, one has the impression that Mahakassapa had to do some pretty snappy footwork to ensure that things didn't fall completely apart ?

S: I am not sure of that.

Buddhadasa : I would certainly be happy to have my impression rectified.

S: He certainly called what came to be known as the First Council, for the recitation of the teaching. But in some ways we know so little about what actually happened. It is very difficult to be sure, or to generalise. I think the Buddha seems to have laid down a very sound structure, even though all the details of it don't go back to him. The general organisational principles were very clear, very sound. There was no authoritarian centralisation for instance. There was full participation of all those involved. I think that the main principles were quite clear, even many of the details. The scriptures themselves represent those who are Arahants as not being mentally or emotionally disturbed by the Buddha's passing away. So if one takes it that Kassapa was an Arahant, he could not have panicked or anything of that sort, by the very nature of things.

Padmavajra : The story of Mahakassapa wanting to know the major distinction between major and minor precepts ...

S: Was that Mahakassapa or Ananda?

Padmavajra : Well, he initially asked.

S: He asked Ananda, yes.

Padmavajra : Yes, he asked what the Buddha considered the major and the minor precepts. I don't know if that is what Buddhadasa had in mind, but is that actually anything to do with the structure and organisation of the Sangha, or is it something doing something rather late?

S: I would say that on the face of it it looks quite ridiculous, that someone who was an Arahant should not be able to see what was major and what was minor in the way of precepts. It seems to me, and here of course I'm on speculative ground, that that particular incident is probably not historical, and grew up subsequently, when the Sangha, some time later, wanted to authenticate the whole body of the Vinaya. I rather suspect that the significance of the story, or the episode is that, because really it's quite inconceivable that an Arahant shouldn't know the difference. Of

course there are some bhikkhus who maintain that Kassapa used that opportunity, or used that particular method himself to ensure that the whole of the Vinaya, both the major and the minor precepts did receive the recognition of the Sangha collectively.

Padmavajra : It's doubtful, isn't it, that a lot of the Vinaya was actually even formulated in the Buddha's day, and Mahakassapa was a contemporary.

S: Yes I find it difficult to accept that particular episode as genuinely historical. It seems almost to have been manufactured, to use that term, which is rather a strong one, to make a certain point or to authenticate a certain point of view at a somewhat later date. But clearly one's intuition in this respect, doesn't command any scholarly authority. One would actually have to prove it in one way or another.

Nagabodhi : Bhante do you never feel that, in a way, the Buddha's disciples ask him questions for the sake of the microphone. In that sometimes we might sometimes ask you questions about which we might feel fairly clear, but we feel it is important to have you speaking on record. Do you think that the disciples might have entered into that sort of dialogue with the Buddha for the sake of other disciples who were around him?

S: Well sometimes that is the case, I am sure that did sometimes happen. But I rather doubt whether Kassapa really entered into that dialogue with Ananda for that particular purpose. It seems to reflect a somewhat later view of that whole body of material that we call the Vinaya. Perhaps it awaits further investigation, but my initial as it were responses are some scepticism as regards taking the story at its face value. (Pause) Also there is the statement nonetheless that the Buddha did say that the monks could alter the minor rules if they wished. So even if you don't know what the minor rules are, and therefore have to observe them all to make sure, that's just your foolishness so to speak; the principle is clear that the Buddha himself made a distinction between major and minor, if you take this episode as historical, and that he clearly indicated that the minor provisions were so unimportant that they could be changed if the bhikkhus wanted to. So that suggests a quite as it were liberal attitude on the Buddha's part in principle, even though his immediate followers apparently were not apparently able to identify which were the major and which were the minor rules, which really seems extraordinary. Surely you would not have had to ask the Buddha that, because if you had to ask the Buddha which were the major rules and which were the minor, well what had you learned from the Buddha? And you are supposed to be an Arahant! Ananda himself was supposed to be a stream entrant. Even a stream entrant, one would have thought, could have seen which were the major and which were the minor. You can't argue that there aren't any major and aren't any minor because they are all equally important, because the Buddha had himself made that distinction, according to that particular text, according to that particular passage.

Padmavajra : This is a bit of a spin off from the point. Do you think that the Theravada basically have a 'down' attitude on Ananda for some reason or other, because I seem to remember that there is also a record that after the Buddha's death, Mahakassapa accused Ananda of imitating the Buddha. Do you think that there is some 'down' for some reason on Ananda?

S: It does seem as though almost that might be the case. There is a book by Levi called, "*Buddhism as a mystery religion*" - he goes into all this. He follows I think to some extent, the theory of a Polish scholar called something like Preslufski (?). According to him, that whole episode and indeed ordination into the Sangha itself, is a sort of mystery religion type initiation ceremony. In the course of which the candidate is subjected to various trials, and Ananda's sufferings so to speak at the hands of Mahakassapa, are to be understood as sort of initiatic trials. And those trials,

and Ananda's joining the Council after the Buddha's death are to be regarded as paradigmatic of the trials undergone by the initiate before his acceptance into the mystery community. So there are these sort of theories. The book is in the Order library, in fact there are two copies. It is quite an interesting book, though one isn't altogether convinced, but clearly there is something that is in need of explanation. And it does seem as though Mahakassapa, looking at it from an exoteric point of view, had a bit of a downer on Ananda. It is clear that Ananda seems, after the Buddha's death, to have functioned in much the same way that the Buddha himself did, and to have enjoyed extraordinary esteem. There seems no doubt about that. I sometimes wonder whether Ananda was not the first Mahayanist, and that Mahakassapa was the first Theravadin, (laughter) or the first Hinayanist. Certainly they were very different in style and temperament.

Dharmapriya : Being speculative then, perhaps going back to this Sutta passage that shows Arahants behaving in a not very wise way in their asking of questions, could one see that perhaps as a Mahayana text being slid in, showing the Mahayana view of Arahants?

S: No I think that is very highly speculative (laughter). I think any limitations that are exposed, are exposed quite unconsciously.

Anything more?, or is everyone going to have an early cocoa tonight?

Anyway we do seem to be getting into things, and I think especially when we come to that chapter that was mentioned; The Total Reform and Unification of the Sangha, some very important issues will emerge. Some have emerged already in fact. How far are we through, five Chapters now isn't it ? We are getting on quite well.

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka:

Questions and Answers on Chapters 6 and 7

10th August 1985

Devamitra : We have twenty-one questions on the next two Chapters of the book. That is on Asceticism in the Village Temple, and Asceticism in the Streets. The first question is regarding the phenomena of 'self ordination', and comes from Dhammaloka.

Dhammaloka : In the controversy between the 'tapasayas' and the traditional monks, following from the self ordination of Subodhananda, the argument has been made that when a Buddha is teaching and the Sangha still exists, there is no need for the tapasa ordination since one can join the Sangha itself. Would you please comment on this. Is 'self ordination' a denial of the Sangha, and under what circumstances would it be appropriate?

S: In the traditional, or 'orthodox' Theravada Sangha, self ordination is not recognised. Broadly speaking, in Buddhism itself, self ordination is not recognised, it is very much the exception rather than the rule. Under certain circumstances, the Bodhisattva, or would be Bodhisattva is allowed to ordain himself, I believe this would be in circumstances where no other Bodhisattva exists within say a thousand miles. So self ordination by Bodhisattvas is permitted as part of the Mahayana discipline. In the Theravada though it is really totally unknown. So in renouncing his Sayima nikaya ordination and ordaining himself, Subodhananda, was taking a very revolutionary step, a very courageous step. Within his particular cultural and religious milieu, quite an unprecedented step.

It is interesting that this question has come first, as I was going to say something about it, if no one brought this matter up. It is difficult for us to understand, how revolutionary his act was in his particular cultural context. This act does suggest that he was a man with some of the

characteristics of a true individual, that he could break with his socio-religious group to that extent. It was almost unimaginable, for someone to give up his orthodox Sayima Nikaya ordination, and ordain himself. It is quite outside Buddhist tradition, custom, and practice, but as it transpired afterwards, there were in fact precedents, although not exactly in the scriptures.

In the Jataka stories, or at least in one of them, Sumedha as the Buddha was in that particular reincarnation, or previous birth, did become a Tapasa bhikkhu, even though the Sangha of that Buddha was in existence at that time. The Jataka stories are not strictly Canonical, only the verses are, but the stories are accepted as in effect Canonical by Buddhists in Sri Lanka. So there is a sort of precedent which no one can deny. So the second part of the question?

Dhammaloka : Yes, is the self ordination a denial of Sangha?

S: Well it is a denial of Sangha in a certain sense, self ordination is in a way a contradiction in terms. I think also one must remember a point which I think is made in the text. The point made is that Sumedha became Pravrajyata, he went forth, he ordained himself to the extent that he went forth under his own auspices, but there was no question of an Upasampada. There was no ordination in the sense of acceptance into a Sangha, how can you ordain yourself as a member of a Sangha? - it is a contradiction in terms! But you can Go Forth under your own auspices as in fact the Buddha himself did.

So it is not so much that self ordination negates the idea of Sangha, because there is always the possibility with your meeting up with others similarly ordained. One could then have contact and communication with them which amounts to Sangha. If however there is a Sangha of sorts, and you ordain yourself, then you are not recognising that Sangha for one reason or another. Usually in Buddhism, the whole idea of ordination is inseparable from a pupillary succession, a lineage and so on, so the idea of self ordination, is really quite anomalous, certainly within the Hinayana, except for that precedent which was afterwards cited. So you are asking under what circumstances is it justified?

Dhammaloka : Yes.

S: I can think of one circumstance, and to some extent it applies to this case. When you are convinced that the bhikkhus that make up the existing Sangha, are not really bhikkhus at all, there is no question of genuinely taking ordination from them, because not really being bhikkhus, there are not able to give it. This does raise all sorts of interesting questions which perhaps we can't go into now.

So Subodhananda seems to have been convinced that inasmuch as the bhikkhus were not really bhikkhus, he had no alternative but to ordain himself if he was to be ordained at all. This is a quite logical point of view. So it was not that he negated the Sangha, he did not recognise that those monks did in fact constitute a Sangha. He explicitly said I believe, that those monks were no better than lay people.

So I think that one is only justified in going it alone, if there is nobody in whose company you can Go Forth, and practise the Dharma. This does still leave unresolved the story of Sumedha, the story of the Buddha in a previous life, though that story can be said not to bear too much weight, because it is strictly speaking, non Canonical.

Dhammaloka : It was mentioned that Subodhananda could have joined the Ramanna nikaya, which was still existing.

S: Yes but this is the author's supposition. Where did they get their ordination from? They got it from Burma, but what was the state of the Sangha in Burma? The validity of their ordination depends on the validity of the Burmese monks' status, and the validity of their ordination, how could you be sure of that? Subodhananda might have felt that things were no better in Burma, than they were in Sri Lanka, we do not know, but if that were the case, there would have been no more point in his getting his ordination from there, as getting it in Sri Lanka. I think in a way, the Theravada attitude towards ordination is self defeating, I have given a great deal of thought to this and this is the conclusion I have come to. You cannot be absolutely sure that any ordination is technically correct and valid. You cannot really be sure because if you attach importance to

ordination in this sense of correctness and validity, there are probably no bhikkhus in the Buddhist world at all. So in effect, self ordination is the only ordination that is possible.

It requires only one bhikkhu who is unconfessed of a serious offence to be present at someone's ordination, and that ordination is invalidated. So suppose no one knows about that bhikkhu's unconfessed offence, they do not know that they are not ordained, and then they, in turn, participate in any ordination, that ordination too is invalidated automatically. This is if you take your stand on technicalities, as the Theravadins do.
This is clear from that whole wretched business about the 'plank' we read about yesterday, so insistence over technicalities in this way is really self defeating. They do periodically - the Sangha tries to purify itself by expelling bad monks and getting people reordained, but who is to re-ordain them? You would have no confidence in the people you are taking your ordination from by the nature of the situation, you could not have the sort of confidence that is technically required. So I think that the whole of the Theravada conception of Vinaya and validity of ordination collapses here.

So if anybody presses me on the subject, I will say that I am personally convinced that nowhere in the Buddhist world is there a completely valid ordination existing today. Even if there were we could not know it, we could never be completely sure that our own ordination was completely valid. I know myself of instances where bhikkhus whom I know have not confessed certain offenses, and have taken part in ordinations. So technically speaking, I know that the persons ordained under those circumstances, cannot claim to be bhikkhus at all. This was one of the points made by Subodhananda. So really the whole position of the bhikkhus is undermined, and, as I have mentioned, most of the Nikayas do not recognise one another, when it comes to technicalities as bhikkhus. They will not perform Sangha kammas together. So this means that really, in the spiritual life, one cannot take one's stand on technicalities. If someone genuinely goes forth, genuinely undertakes certain precepts, and genuinely considers himself to be ordained, then he is ordained regardless of whatever technical imperfections there may be due to the back-slidings of those participating in the ceremony. Most Theravada bhikkhus would find this most shocking! Just as the Sayima Nikaya bhikkhus did find Subodhananda's statements quite shocking, but I don't think they would be able to refute it. This is quite an important question isn't it? I think though you are not justified in going it alone where a genuine spiritual community exists with or without the technicalities. Sometimes we do come across people like that in connection with the FWBO, they are in contact with the FWBO but they do not want to become a mitra. They do not think in terms of eventual ordination, they want to go it alone, they want to maintain an independent position.

Devamitra : Still on the subject of self ordination, Suvajra has a question relating to bhikkshunis.

Suvajra : I believe I am correct in saying that Theravada bhikkshuni lineage has died out?

S: This is recognised as having died out. There are no bhikkshunis in existence to the best of my knowledge claiming to have uninterrupted bhikkshuni ordination lineage.

Suvajra : So what about the question of self ordination with regard to bhikkshunis. Do you think that it would be possible for women who wanted to take up the bkikkshuni practice in Theravada countries?

S: Well sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose! (Laughter) Oh dear I have slipped into egalitarianism, but you see what I mean? Presumably a woman could declare herself to be a self ordained bhikkshuni in the same way that a man can declare himself to be a self ordained bhikkhu. But no bhikkshuni has ventured as far as doing that. What women seem to want in this respect is actual ordination in the bhikkshuni lineage, and to be recognised as belonging to the lineage. This seems to be important in the case of those women in both east and west, who want to become bhikkshunis. They are not satisfied to be bhikkshunis - they want to be recognised as bhikkhunis in the most orthodox way and accepted into the orthodox bhikkshuni Sangha.

Suvajra : Do you see any way forward then for these women both in the east and west?

S: Quite a few women have taken bhikkshuni ordination in I think Taiwan and Korea, where that lineage does persist. The great question is whether someone who belongs to Tibetan Buddhism, or to Theravada Buddhism, can take that ordination and remain affiliated to Tibetan or Theravada Buddhism, and there is some discussion about that. The daughter in law of a friend of mine, an Australian, - after being a Tibetan 'nun' to begin with, went to Korea I believe, took the bhikkshuni ordination, returned to Dharamsala, and found her ordination not recognised by the Tibetans, including apparently, the Dalai Lama. She was deeply disappointed, as she had taken the ordination with the intention of coming back and introducing it in the Tibetan Buddhist circles, and being recognised. So her ordination was not recognised, and she eventually disrobed and returned home. So it is not an easy matter to stitch one ordination lineage onto another tradition. But it would seem that once an ordination lineage has been disrupted it cannot be restored, except by a Buddha in another dispensation, that is the general view.

Buddhists in Ceylon, have been heard to say that an Arahant can restore the bhikkshuni lineage, but since there are no Arahants it cannot be restored, though this is something that I only have heard, and not seen in print. What the grounds are for an Arahant being able to restore the bhikkshuni lineage I am unable to say, no one was able to explain that to me. It is a very vexed matter at present in Buddhist circles, especially female Buddhist circles, as many of the women who want to become bhikkshunis are influenced by feminist ideology, at least in some cases to some extent.

Devamitra : Still on the subject of ordination, Kulamitra has a question on the subject of youthful ordination.

Kulamitra : Yes, Carrithers says on page 105. that : "that primeval tie of loyalty and obedience which characterises the relationship between the elder monk and the pupil taken in childhood or adolescence." Can this stunt the individuality of the younger man, and restrict the development of his own ideas and feelings. And is it best for us to avoid taking on young men, until they have established a certain independence of mind?

S: Can we take that bit by bit?

Kulamitra : Yes, Carrithers says on p.105 that, "a primeval tie of loyalty and obedience," ...

S: Ah, let's stop there. I was not very happy with this word primeval, it is distinctly out of place. What would one have said instead? Simply

early, yes?

A Voice : Human?

S: No, no it simply means that it goes back a long way in the lives of those individuals concerned, primeval just in that sense I would imagine. So anyway carry on.

Kulamitra : So this "tie of loyalty and obedience, characterises the relationship between the elder monk and the pupil taken in childhood and adolescence,"

S: Yes that relationship, call it what you will, does characterise those people.

Kulamitra : Can this stunt the individuality of the younger man, and restrict the development of his own ideas and feelings?

S: I must say that I have known many bhikkhus who have grown up within this system, and I have never had the slightest impression that their individuality had been stunted. I think that very occasionally you might meet a very overbearing elder bhikkhu, who did have that sort of influence, but I have not actually met an instance of that sort. It seems that where this sort of relationship was started very early on in life, based on a loyalty to an older monk, it had only positive results.
I would not say that in the cases I have in mind that it has highly spiritual results, because the whole tradition was not particularly spiritual, that is the tradition to which they belonged in modern times. Though certainly from a human point of view, I would say that it was a distinctly positive and healthy relationship with very, very beneficial effects. Certainly the younger man was not subservient, he was usually very pleased to defer to his elder, but certainly not afraid to differ from him, or arguing with him. The whole ethos of Buddhism, even though diluted on this quite low level, has a very powerful effect. That was one of the best things that I could see in recent Theravada Buddhism of relatively corrupt form. But the human relations within the Sangha, though not particularly spiritual, from a simply human point of view, are really quite excellent quite definitely.

One finds the same thing in Tibet, there is a very great mutual devotion between the older teacher and his younger pupil who usually comes to the teacher very very young indeed. Geshe Rabten brings this out quite beautifully doesn't he?, in his autobiography, the very strong feeling of the teachers for their pupils, and the pupils for their teachers. I think this is a general characteristic of Buddhist monastic life. I'm afraid it perhaps overturns all our ideas about the need for independence, and developing your individuality, all these sort of vulgarised, popular debased vulgarised ideas on the subject, it just overturns them.

Kulamitra : Then there was this question of its relevance to us. Is it best for us to avoid taking on any young men until they have established a certain independence of mind?

S: Well, I don't think we can automatically follow that eastern model. Those young men were in a sense given by their parents, or even gave

themselves. They were very happy to take up that sort of life, and until recently there would have been no conflicting influences. A young man joining an FWBO men's community however would be subject to all sorts of other influences, certainly in this country. There would be the TV for example, and his school friends, because you would have to continue to send him to school unless you had a school of your own. So I don't think that the situation would be parallel. If there was a young man who was not susceptible to outside influences, and definitely wanted to join a community at a very early age, as a boy, it could only do good if this were possible. Though I think you would be unlikely to find youngsters of this sort, because there all these conflicting pulls and influences dragging him in the opposite direction. So I don't think that we can automatically follow that model, however desirable it may be. I think that we ought to take a very close look at the youngster himself. Obviously his parents' permission would be necessary.

Devamitra : We did have another question on this theme, though possibly it has been answered.

Buddhadasa : Yes, I think it has been answered, though I was wondering whether the Buddha had said anything on this himself?

S: Well he did permit youngsters of seven or eight to be ordained as sramaneras. So he must have accepted the validity of that particular system. We even hear of seven and eight year old arahants! But I think if you had very young children in men's communities, you might even be accused of brainwashing them, so you would have to step very carefully.

Devamitra : Dhammaloka now has a question on the spiritual value of the two movements in the Chapter.

Dhammaloka : This is a long question (Laughter). Do you get the impression that the movement of Tapasa Himi had more to offer than the enthusiastic protest against a degenerate Sangha. Did they have a positive vision of change? Or were they mainly a melting pot of dissatisfied, rebellious young people?
To some extent the FWBO amy be regarded as an outcome of the hippy movement and youth rebellion of the sixties and early seventies, and as one of many expressions of alternative subcultures today. Are there relics of these movements still influential on our thinking and acting to an extent that you find dangerous for the movement, and what are these? And, do you see any positive impulses or even visions being expressed in contemporary forms of juvenile sub-culture, such as punks, skinheads, 'poppers' or others (Laughter). To what extent should Order Members adapt to such ways of outlook as a means to making contact with such people?

S: Well it is a whole series of questions isn't it? We will have to break it down obviously, the first clause?

Dhammaloka : Do you get the impression that the movement Tappasa Himi had more to offer than the enthusiastic protest against a degenerate Sangha?

S: They seem not to have had a positive vision, not really anything more to offer than a protest. I think that Carrithers does make that point, that he did not even have an elementary knowledge of Buddhism. He could not give a Dharma talk, or discourse on the Dharma, he had no power of organisation. So even though he seems interesting and colourful, he seems to have had very little to offer. So his movement did not last. So I do

take Carrithers' evaluation of that movement as substantially accurate.

Dhammaloka : So to some extent the FWBO may be regarded as an outcome of the "hippy" movement, and youth rebellion of the sixties and seventies?

S: Yes, I would say sixties rather than seventies, because we did recruit some people from the hippy movement to some extent. Some people were certainly not recruited from the hippy movement, far from it, some people in fact were not happy that we were attracting some people from the hippy movement. One of our very early Order Members, who partly for this very reason, resigned, was convinced that we had been taken over by the hippies! Though when I went through all the people who were attending classes one by one, and asked him, "Do you think so and so is a hippy?" he had to say no, and did so in every case except one, that particular person being from America anyway. Certainly a lot of our earlier members were influenced by hippy ideology, for want of a better term, and this did show itself to some extent. A lot of people at that time took drugs, they did not like to do things in a very organised or regular way. They were a bit sloppy and unreliable, though that shouldn't be exaggerated. It is difficult to say, perhaps I was too much involved in it to be able to say.

So though we did recruit a few people from the hippy movement, many of whom did not stay with us, and though many of our early members were, to some extent, influenced by the hippy movement to some extent, I don't think that we can say that the FWBO had its roots in the hippy movement, or that it was a product of it. I think that we can say that the FWBO was able to take advantage of a situation, one aspect of which was the hippy movement, I think this would be a fair statement. But we have changed quite a lot since those times, and I think that now these hippy influences or vestiges, are quite peripheral to the movement. Anyway this brings us to another clause, so let's have that.

Dhammaloka : Yes, would you see any of these influences as dangerous still now?

S: I tend to think that a lot of the pseudo-individualism that one still sees here and there in the FWBO, has its origins in the hippy movement. A lot of the intellectual vagueness and imprecision, and extreme emotional subjectivity that one sometimes encounters, these things I think do have their ultimate roots in the hippy movement. I regard these things as quite dangerous tendencies, though quite minor tendencies within the FWBO. I wouldn't mind hearing what one or two other people have to say about the FWBO's connection with the hippy movement, those who can remember back that far. Those who were in contact with the movement in those days, could give their own impressions because I am giving my own opinions and impressions which may be quite subjective, and I would be quite happy for mine to be balanced against those of other people, or a more balanced outside view altogether. There may have been things that I did not notice, that were going on, there might even be things nowadays that I am not aware are going on! One never knows.

Aryamitra : I'm just thinking ....

S: (interrupting) That's not a hippy because a hippy would not have bothered you see (Laughter).

Aryamitra : I think that 'hippy' has got a very wide meaning, and certainly a lot of people coming along to the FWBO, did take drugs, or had

done, and a number had been to some extent associated with the hippy movement. But the number of really qualified hippies, though very few.

S: " Heads?" (Laughter)

Aryamitra : But there were a lot of people who were into the drug scene, in the early days.

S: Yes, beads and bangles were frequently to be seen at meditation classes. But I think on the whole those sorts of people did not tend to stay with us, they came and went, in droves. (Laughter) Some though did of course turn over a completely new leaf!

Aryamitra : I do remember one certain Alex Kennedy, with hair down here, and tight trousers and big boots on, a big moustache, (Laughter)

S: Yes though he was not a real hippy, because he had a regular full time job.

Aryamitra : Ah yes, he was an intellectual.

Dharmapriya: I believe that is called a Week-end hippy! (Laughter)

S: W-e-e-k, or w-e-a-k? (Laughter) But you have in fact said more or less what I have said.

Subhuti : I think a lot of us didn't realise it wasn't the hippy movement. (Laughter)

Nagabodhi : I came along in 1970, and I don't know what I had missed. There was lots of long hair, bangles, and lots of drugs still. But I identified more with the 70s phenomenon, called the "me" generation. It was a hangover from the hippies in that there was the long hair, but it wasn't anything like a serious radical pseudo-political philosophy. It was much more to do with personal psychology and therapy, and exploring drug experiences, which was a later development than "flower power" and changing the world through peace and love. I had missed out on that part.

S: Well there is still one Order Member who still signs his letters when he does write, *peace and love*, so and so! (laughter)

Nagabodhi : I think there were very few real hippies in England, if anywhere.

S: Well there was the phenomenon known as the Hampstead Hippy. We used to see those from a distance, they were people who had private means, but who wore all the hippy gear, usually in quite a fashionable way.

Devaraja : Devaraja speaking ... (Laughter)... There was another one, they were called "haute couture" hippies. (Laughter)

S: Though Devaraja couldn't have been a Hampstead hippy of the type that I have described, because he also in those days was holding down a regular job.

Devaraja : Right.

Nagabodhi : I am just wondering if the hippy movement in England at least, was emblematic in the way that Carrithers talks about the Forest Monks. Because the long hair and so on were emblems of some myth that never really did happen.

S: But going a step further than that, I believe I have mentioned this before, the Buddha recruited some of his disciples from similar circles it would seem. I mean one is not going to recruit people from the depths of conventional society. There is a floating population of alienated, detached, unattached, or non attached people, or thrown out people. Very often the first recruits of a new religious or spiritual movement, are drawn from those sorts of people, or at least from their ranks.

So in a way it is not surprising that even though we have recruited from people influenced by hippy or post hippy ideology, that does not mean that we belong to, or are a product of that ideology, or movements based on that ideology. So has anyone any further comments?

OK perhaps we can pass on then, that is if we have answered all your questions.

Dhammaloka : Yes there is a third part that which we have been leading to. Do you see any positive impulses or even visions, being expressed in contemporary forms of juvenile sub-cultures, like punks, skinheads, and poppers and others? To what extent should Order Members adapt to such ways of outlook as a means of making contact with such people?

S: I do not really know very much about punks and so on, I sometimes just see them in the distance, they have even reached Norwich, there are a few there. But I do not understand their psychology, I understand that it is some sort of rebellion, but I do not know how deep that goes, or whether or not, at heart they are deeply conventional.

Certainly Order Members should do all they can to go out to people and contact them on their own ground. I do know that one or two Chairmen make the time to hang around in coffee bars and sometimes with excellent results. I don't think that any Order Member has gone so far as to have a punk hair cut or anything like that. But who knows, perhaps you could have a special punk wig? (laughter)

I think we have to play it by ear, the principle is that you go half way at least toward meeting people. Do not be put off by externals. I believe around the Glasgow Centre, there swept a wave of punk ideology, punk influence, or at least punk haute couture. I believe that one or two Order Members do regard themselves as ex-punks, or honorary punks. So I think that we should not be put off by externals. Even though I personally am not happy with some of these externals, we should try to see through them, to the basic sincerity, honesty, and desperation perhaps, which in some cases is there. Are there similar phenomena in Germany?

Dhammaloka : Oh yes, perhaps not in the same large scale as in England, but generally yes. To me it often seems that some of these young people, are quite courageous because they do take quite a lot of attacks from society. So I often wonder that even though they go astray, there must be something quite strong in them.

S: Yes, as in the case of Subhodananda, and to perhaps a lesser extent in Himi. Himi does seem to have been a little bit crazy almost in the technical sense or in the medical sense.

Anyway, is that all your questions?

Devaraja : Just as a footnote to that Bhante, it seems a northern European phenomenon, this thing of extreme views, I have not seen it in southern Europe.

S: Yes, I don't remember seeing any punks in Rome for instance.

Devamitra : Sticking with youthfulness, a question from Kamalasila, on whether or not these movements were simply youthful enthusiasm.

Kamalasila : Tapasa Himi's movement attracted mainly young people, why do you think this was? And do you think there were positive elements in this youthful idealism that the FWBO could appeal to?

S: I really don't know, I don't think that Carrithers gives us enough information for us to be able to make any judgement of that kind. He said that young people were attracted by Himi but he does not really tell us why. He does not tell us what happened to them afterwards, after they had drifted away from his movement. So we do not have enough information to be able to form an opinion on that point, which is a pity. But what was the second part of your question?

Kamalasila : What were the positive elements of this youthful idealism that the FWBO could appeal to, do you think there were positive elements to this?

S: Well I suppose in the case of the youngsters who followed Tapasa Himi, there must have been something positive, a streak of idealism perhaps. One assumes that there was but again we do not really know because of this lack of information. It is a bit tantalising, a bit disappointing, as we do not know the real nature of it, or why it took that particular form. Why did they not join a political party for instance.

I think that this requires further study, I think that it would be premature to come to any conclusion. Though we are ourselves a young movement, we have quite a lot of young people, in fact amongst the Buddhist groups, I think that perhaps we are distinguished by our youthfulness in respect of membership. Are we not?, I hope that is not ceasing to be the case, but I wonder why.

Can anyone say why they think that in the case of the FWBO, we have attracted young people successfully? Because this might give us a clue to

Tapasa Himi's success in this respect, though his success was not long lasting, perhaps for obvious reasons.

Kulamitra : Perhaps Bhante, our movement is quite demanding, which could be off putting to older people who find it more difficult to give up their old habits and change. Maybe we are very inspiring to young people, who feel very strongly the need to go beyond restricting conventions.

End of side one side two]

S: Yes.

Buddhadasa : ..... it is that we are not associated in any way with the establishment, and this ties in within the movement as well.

S: Ah, yes, that's true.

Devaraja : I think that a major factor is that we offer very few facilities for people who are married, and have family responsibilities.

S: Yes, I think that we can look at it in that way too.

Devaraja : I think it is much easier for an unmarried person to fully involve themselves in our activities.

S: Yes so perhaps it is not so much that we do attract younger people rather than older people, but we tend to screen out older people. Maybe this is worth considering.

Sona : I think that younger men, particularly men in their late twenties and thirties, dynamic young men. Certainly when I was young, and I met young men in their early thirties, and creating a really new way of life, and were dynamic and had some energy, it was very attractive just to be with such people.

S: We are also attracting a lot of women, including young women now, so there must be a similar reason why that is so. I notice that the Padmaloka Retreat Community is attracting more and more young men, even a few older men too. Anyway I don't think that we need discuss all these points, though they are all points that could be well borne in mind by people running Centres, Communities and so on.

We should do this so that we are able attract the most promising people and keep them. Also we should make sure that we do not exclude certain categories of people for whom we could cater and find a place.

Devamitra : There was another question along a similar line from Tejananda, on Subodhananda.

Tejananda : Yes this is quite similar. With regard to Subodhananda's movement if it is appropriate to call it a movement, could the FWBO not be

seen in a sense as a reform movement in a similar sort of way?

Also following on from the question a couple of nights ago about the status of ordination in the WBO or into the WBO, if in the future it were not conferred by you; would this not be analogous to self ordination, in that it would be an ordination outside a traditional framework? If so does this have any practical implications beyond those that you outlined the other night?

S: OK let's go through those clause by clause.

Tejananda : With regard especially to Subodhananda's break-away movement, could the FWBO be seen as a reform movement in a similar sort of way?

S: I think that we are not a reform movement in quite that sort of way. I think that Subodhananda's movement was a reform movement only in a quite secondary sense because he declared that the orthodox monks were in fact bad monks and not monks at all. There was no question of reforming them, he declared them to be not monks. It was not that they were a little bit bad and they could be made better and be real monks. He declared them to be not monks at all really. So it was a root and branch sort of reform, he did not really prune the exuberance of the tree or the rank or lush growth of the tree, he uprooted the tree altogether, and wanted to throw it away! So that is not really quite reform, it is reforming something out of existence. But in a way, in effect it was a reform, even though it was not technically or theoretically a reform. In effect it was because his movement had repercussions on the orthodox monks. Perhaps in fact they did start pulling their socks up metaphorically speaking to some extent. But he did not really succeed in establishing an alternative. His movement dwindled and petered out didn't it?

So I think in the case of the FWBO our message from the beginning has not been one of criticism and antagonism. We have always stressed, or I have always stressed at least, the positive aspects of the FWBO and what it stands for, that is to say we give Primacy to Going For Refuge and all that follows from that. I think if we are or have been, or are going to be, a reform movement, it is only quite indirectly, mainly by way of example. We have not certainly gone out of our way to criticise other Buddhist groups, though we have made our own views known, and sometimes those views are considered, or have been considered, quite extreme.

I remember in the very early days of the FWBO, one of the early Order Members who afterwards resigned, the same one that had been upset about us being overtaken by the hippies was quite disappointed that after we had started the FWBO that I myself did not launch an all out attack on *The Buddhist Society* (at least a verbal one) But I saw quite clearly that we should not waste our energies in that way. Yes we did have serious differences with them, and perhaps there would be a time to make those differences known. But I felt that at the very beginning, the first thing that we had to do was to establish ourselves and strengthen our position before we even thought of criticising any other Buddhist group. So we have certainly not been a reform movement from the beginning in the way that Subodhananda's was and I think that has been one of our great strengths. I am pleased that we didn't or at least I didn't try to get things started on the basis of criticising other groups. This particular Order Member was especially keen that I criticise Christmas Humphreys publicly, and was very disappointed and even annoyed when I didn't, and disillusioned in a sense when I didn't. But I never criticised him publicly at all I don't think even by word, not beyond a joke, I confined myself to that, though I had very serious grievances against him. It seemed to me the wrong thing to do, a foolish thing to do, quite apart from being

very unbuddhistic.

But yes, we have quite serious criticisms to make, and I think now we begin to be in a position to make them, and some people at least are prepared to listen to us now. Whereas, where were we then, we were just half a dozen or a dozen people meeting under my guidance in a little basement somewhere in central London. Who was going to take any notice of us then? It would have been foolish to have dissipated our energies in that sort of negative way. So I do not see us as primarily a reform movement at all, a protestant movement or anything of that sort, we are an entirely positive movement, and we are a reform movement only by implication in a very secondary sort of way. I think that we shall have a greater and greater influence on some other Buddhist groups and movements in the west, possibly even in the east. I can see signs of that beginning to happen already.

Any further points?

Tejananda : Yes. Also following on from the question a couple of nights ago about status of ordination into the WBO, given that if in the future this was not conferred by you. Would this not be analogous to self ordination in that it would be an ordination outside any traditional framework. And if so, does this have any practical implications beyond those that you outlined the other night?

[IRRETRIEVABLE GAP IN TRANSCRIPTION OF APPROXIMATELY ONE PAGE]

{Note from Silabhadra at the Transcriptions Unit - *Both the orginal master reels and cassettes recorded at the time of this seminar have been closely scrutinised, but the quality of the recording is such that hardly anything can be salvaged of this part of the seminar. What follows (in italics and smaller print) are the words that I have been able to pick out, which may aid the reader a little with the continuation of this seminar* - 15/12/1992.}

S: It isn't really outside the traditional framework because the ..... is the Going for Refuge .....and this was originally.

So in that respect ..... I would say it simplified it, pared it down ..... I think.....

Tejananda; *I was thinking more about the technicality of the ordination being the upasaka ordination at the moment.*

S: *Well it isn't an upasaka ordination ..... I thought I'd made that clear ..... It might be regarded as an upasaka ordination by ..... but it in fact is not ..... nor is it to be regarded by others as an upasaka ordination as distinct from a bhikkhu ordination. The ten precepts represent the highest common factor of all the Pratimoksa ..... The Ten Pillars ..... emphasises what development.....*

Certainly with regard to..... but as we..... it became more and more obvious, especially in view of the way that the Order was developing that ..... neither the bhikkhu ordination or the upasaka ordination ..... what is common to ..... all the bhikkhu ordinations within the Hinayana that is to say ..... and of course .... a bhikkhu's ordination in that particular sense ..... but they apply .....

So I would not ..... in the sense of an upasaka bhikkhu ..... Dhammachari in the sense of people who are prepared to practise the Dharma and for whom the practise of the Dharma is a consequence of their Going for Refuge .....

[END OF DIFFICULT TRANSCRIPTION]

S: So in that respect we are a bit akin to the Sangha of the Jodo Shin Shu school as they perhaps originally were, in as much as himself declared that they were neither monks nor lay people. Do you see what I mean? So if Buddhists outside the FWBO regard us as Upasakas they must be corrected. i believe that Subhuti has gone into this in Buddhism For Today too, it is as well that we should be clear about this point.

Devaraja : But in the puja book it shows our precepts as upasaka and upasika.

S: Yes, but that shall be edited, there are quite a few things that are incorrect, yes we should bring all these things into line now. I mean in the very beginning I used to talk of the Order as a Third Order, on the analogy of the third Order of St. Francis. Now I don't do that, because that was alright to give some people an idea about the order in those days, but it is no longer really applicable, we have moved as it were beyond that. If you belong to a Third Order, it assumes that there is second Order, first Order, just as if you were an Upasaka, it assumes that there are bhikkhus. But we observe those precepts which are fundamental to all Buddhist lifestyles. Within the Order people can observe all the bhikkhu precepts in effect if they want to, no one is prevented from doing that. I mean some do observe in a measure the brahmacharya for a longer or a

shorter period, we might even have people practising the dhutangas. Perhaps some do for all I know.

Suvajra : In England when you first started using the word Dharmachari, you stressed that Dharmachari was a style , not an Ordination. So this is a definite change now from using it in that particular way?

S: Yes, there is not traditionally a Dharmachari ordination, but I think now we would be justified in speaking of a Dharmachari ordination recognising that it is not a traditional ordination. Definitely the Dhammapada speaks itself of Dharmacharis and seems to equate the dharmachari with the full practitioner of the dharma.

Suvajra : But not of either style, bhikkhu or lay.

S: No not of either style, no, it is almost as though that particular verse of the Dhammapada antidotes the distinction between the bhikkhu and the upasaka at least in their very rigid forms. There were bhikkhus and upasakas from the beginning, in the sense that some people took refuge in the Buddha and continued to live as householders, and others who continued to wander, or even who left household life, and started wandering. And anyway the wanderers found it easier to bond themselves together into a Sangha, but even so there was not that degree of distinction between what came to be called upasaka and what came to be called bhikkhu as obtained at a later period.

For instance in Buddhist countries today, no layman would think of addressing a bhikkhu by his personal name, it would be considered impolite, or impertinent. But in the Pali Canon you find householders regularly addressing Ananda just as Ananda, and Sariputra just as Sariputra, not as Bhante, no, they are just Ananda and Sariputra, or whoever else they happened to be. This would be regarded as quite shocking in Buddhist countries today. In some Buddhist countries there are special honorifics for monks. That was quite unknown in the Buddha's day, and lay people always prostrate themselves before bhikkhus, but that did not seem to be the custom then. Lay people did not always prostrate themselves even before the Buddha, and he said nothing about it. But usually it is almost the first thing that bhikkhus want to teach you if you are a layman, it is your duty to bow down before the bhikkhu, and they feel very uneasy if that particular courtesy is omitted. But the Buddha said absolutely nothing about this, and didn't bother to correct people who merely saluted him with folded hands, or merely sat down without any salutation at all when they came into his presence. So all this suggests that there was much less sense of difference as between bhikkhu followers and upasaka followers, than afterwards came to be the case. So in a way in that respect, our movement is almost a reform movement in the sense that we are trying to get back to the original fundamentals in certain respects and stress certain things that are of central importance, which have not been stressed in recent times.

I think we need to make the position very clear to Buddhists outside our own movement without seeking to arrogate anything to ourselves, not allow ourselves to be relegated in the case of Order Members to the position of the humble or lowly upasaka gazing adoringly up at bhikkhus in the sense of people who happen to have been given ordination and be wearing yellow robes.

I think one or two of you have had the experience of meeting bhikkhus and have treated them in a straight forward and friendly way, and have found that they almost did not know how to take that. I think that is a very bad sign indeed really.

Subhuti : Yes in my experience you have got to be very careful not to get trapped into discussing things in a technical way, because our position is pretty weak technically as it were. You have got to go back really to principles, basic principles.

S: Yes you have got to have a thorough discussion and really sort things out which you very often can't do on the spot. You have to follow a middle way between not seeming to be impolite, though that might be difficult to avoid sometimes and not being overbearing or anything of that sort. But at the same time being quite clear about your own position and not allowing yourself to be forced into a position that you do not really accept.

Padmavajra : This bit about the relationship between the monks and lay in the Pali Canon, there is something you touched on in one of the study leaders' courses that you said something to the effect that the Buddhas first sixty arahant disciples that he sent forth, they were lay people or householders, they weren't monks certainly.

S: No they certainly weren't, they seem not to have been monks, perhaps one should not put it more strongly than that. They seem not to have been monks in the later sense as it were. I think Mrs. Rhys Davids in one of her books has gone into this.

Kulamitra : Given what we have just said that most of us can call you Bhante, should that be found in the .....

S: I don't really know, I suppose we have just got used to it. in a way I am sort of half way between, I don't fully belong to the old dispensation, and I do not fully belong to the new dispensation. So in a way I'm in a more difficult position than those who follow the old dispensation and those who follow the new dispensation, because those who follow the new dispensation being part of the Order, or art of the FWBO are in the fortunate position of having got things right from the very beginning, where as I had to work things out for myself from a sort of bridge. That's why so many walk on me I suppose (Laughter). You see what I mean?

But I don't think this is anything that is going to be resolved by me at all, because I cannot undo my own history, so I think it is always the case with the intermediate person. So therefore I sometimes mentally compare myself to Luther, not that I am temperamentally akin to Luther I think in any way, but he was also in this sort of uncomfortable position of being a sort of bridge. He was in many ways still a Catholic, even though he broke away from the Church, at the same time he started the Lutheran wing of the Protestant Movement, but at the same time, inasmuch as he had started it, he was not fully a product, well he was not a product obviously. So he was in this sort of intermediate position, and this is in a sense what I am in, and this is quite unavoidable. And when I go back to India, I often function more in that old fashioned sort of way, as though I still belonged to the old dispensation. But sometimes of course I have to hover uneasily between the two, there is no alternative, that is just my karma, good, bad or indifferent. But Order Members are not in that position at all, and I am quite happy that they aren't and can't be. They are in a position to make their position very clear.

In some ways my position is ambiguous, especially so in fact in the eyes of Buddhists outside our movement. And I quite understand that I can't blame them for regarding my position as ambiguous, because I started off as something they could recognise, and I seem to have changed into

something they can't quite recognise. Do you see what I mean? So that is part of my history.

Aryamitra : Bhante I was going to say earlier on that when bhikkhus expect the lay to bow down, it is not only habit, but not maybe being able to deal with an individual out of their own individuality.

S: I think in many cases this is so, though I must say that in the cases of bhikkhus that I have encountered in the east they vary very much in this respect. Because certainly some bhikkhus that I have met are quite easily able to relate to people in a quite direct, human, man to man sort of way. But others seem quite unable to do that and can only operate from the position of being a bhikkhu in relation to you as a layman, and becoming in some cases distinctly uneasy if you do not treat them in the formal way that they consider due to a bhikkhu. But others just don't bother, they are very often young bhikkhus who go to college and are accustomed to students, not necessarily Buddhists and they get used to it. And in the end they quite like to relate to people in a more straightforward way. There were some who came to see me, who were capable of relating to Subhuti or Dharmadhara in that kind of way, but others perhaps would not be. I think it is being in a very difficult position, psychologically and spiritually if you can only relate to people as a bhikkhu and take your stand on that in a definite sort of way.

Dharmapriya : As Kulamitra got you started on the question of your old dispensation or ordination, I actually have been wondering because having taken the Upasampada ordination, you have taken two hundred and twenty-seven precepts which I assume you can't really fulfil in the lifestyle you have now, and I have wondered if you have ever thought of deliberately as it were, casting off the robe because of this contrast between what you can practise and the precepts you originally took.

S: Well obviously this idea has crossed my mind from time to time, but there are one or two complicating factors, or rather simplifying factors. I also took form Dhardo Rimpoche the Bodhisattva Ordination, and the Mahayana tradition is that if you take the Bodhisattva Ordination and have already the bhikkhu ordination, or any other Hinayana ordination, the Bodhisattva Ordination can modify the Hinayana ordination so that you are not obliged to continue observing the Hinayana precepts in the Hinayana spirit. You are able, as it were, to even in a sense 'break' (Mr. Chen used to insist that it should be translated as transcend) the Hinayana precepts in the interest of the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva Vow. So in a sense that is a sort of fall back position. This is how I see it personally. Do you see what I mean?

In other words I really take more seriously the Bodhisattva ordination, and where the two clash, the Bodhisattva ordination in its own way, from the point of view of the Mahayana, invalidates the Hinayana ordination. But this would not be accepted or recognised by a Hinayanist, by a Theravadin, one has to accept that too. Also of course, even in Tibet, in practice, usually, those who have the monastic ordination, have observed it reasonably strictly even though they have the Bodhisattva ordination, and even though in principle they are free to transcend Hinayana precepts without as it were losing their ordination.

But even so I have sometimes thought it would be a simple matter if I made a fresh start, but then again there is the whole matter of functioning in India, perhaps creating misunderstandings greater than already exist outside the FWBO. So I tend to think that on the whole, I should just allow myself to remain in this uncomfortable position, perhaps it is good for me (Laughter).

Devamitra : Before we move on I would just like to mention that it is half past eight, and we have got through about a third of the questions on my list. Nagabodhi.

Nagabodhi : This is a supplementary, you said on your fallback position and the Bodhisattva vow, do you think you have a fallback position simply in Hinayana terms? Because I have heard it said that you have said that a bhikkhu would have to work very hard even to get you on a technicality because of your understanding of the Pali Canon, according to your understanding of the Pali Canon. Those rules of the Vinaya, that technically you might be breaking, in fact you are not. Would you .....

S: I think I would, I think my fallback position would be even more fundamental, which is the one I sort of touched on earlier, that there wasn't a valid bhikkhu ordination anywhere in fact, in the Buddhist world, and that we are talking about unrealities (Laughter) Yes, this is actually my view.

Dharmapriya : I'm sorry to be asking another supplementary, but it seems to me on those two questions you have talked in a sense about the technical invalidity of all bhikkhu ordinations. What about the Bodhisattva ordination however.

S: Ah ! There is a great difference because the Mahayana depends upon the spirit and not the letter. So in the case of a Bodhisattva ordination, there can be no question about invalidation because of non-observance of certain technicalities. The very nature of the Bodhisattva ordination precludes that possibility.

Devamitra : I have tried to suggest that we move on to a completely different subject, at least partly different. Kulamitra has a question on similarities between the movements in these chapters I believe.

Kulamitra : A slightly long question, a statement prefacing the question. The activity and attitude of the Tapasaya seems similar to that of the Protestant reformers of the Christian church, from the monks of the late middle ages to the Puritans and ranters of the English Civil War. There is a common emphasis on an energetic and enthusiastic, direct communication throughbroadsheets and preaching. This seems to have a wide impact disproportionate to the number of people involved. So the question is; could we take our cue from this, redirect our resources to the communication of ideas on a larger scale?

S: Well I have been encouraging this is why I am encouraging Order Members to write more. We might emulate the Ranters and others in their literary activities, in their broadsheets and so on. But we certainly should not emulate them in their lack of organisation and lack of follow up, where they slipped up badly, as did Tapasa Himi and his followers. But yes I am very much in favour of us spreading our ideas much more widely, broadcast, even perhaps before very long, making our ideas about ourselves as an Order and making very clear some of the points which I have been making to Buddhists in Eastern Buddhist countries, who are beginning in some instances to become aware of our existence, and create a correct impression of ourselves from the very beginning. I think we are in a sufficiently strong position to be able to do that. I think we can be taken seriously.

Devamitra : Nagabodhi has a question on asceticism.

Nagabodhi : It is actually quite connected with this area. The practice of conspicuous asceticism seems to have played a crucial role in winning the Tapassi monks favour with the laity in Sri Lanka. Here in England the Chithurst Forest monks have very quickly managed to capture the imagination of the British public, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist with their own brand of emblematic asceticism. Would you like to comment on this apparent universal appeal of robe and bowl? Do you think we could be doing any more than we are to communicate the radical challenges and inherent demands of our approach to the spiritual path, in a way that might rouse more public interest and sympathy towards our Movement?

S: I think we probably could, but I'm really not sure what form that should take. Perhaps we should be a bit more experimental, cautiously experimental, not recklessly or rashly experimental. For instance, the Hare Krishna, to go outside the Buddhist movement, have attracted a good deal of attention and are identifiable but have they really established themselves, or are they really exerting any influence, I rather doubt it. For instance the people who were running 'Process', in the days when we were starting up, they had very distinctive costume, they didn't last very long. So I wonder really how useful all these things are in the long term.

But perhaps we should be trying to project a much more definite image of ourselves, I think by the very nature of the FWBO, that is difficult, because we are a very many sided Movement, and we are growing more and more many sided. How do we project an image that suggests that we emphasise the Going For Refuge, and the observance of precepts, and we are very clear about meditation, that we believe in communication, and place a great emphasis on spiritual friendship, and we like to enlist the cooperation of the arts to the greatest extent that we can, that we are international, that we believe in vegetarianism. How do we communicate all this in one image, as it were?

The other movements that I have mentioned, the Hare Krishna people, the Chithurst Monks, they have a much narrower scope. And the Japanese Nichiren people, they have a much narrower scope, they blow just one trumpet, whereas we are a whole orchestra. So it is much more difficult to make a strong, as it were, unified impression. But nonetheless, perhaps we should try at least to communicate some of our major aspects in a more dramatic even, sort of way, a more immediately recognisable and identifiable sort of way.

Subhuti : Also I would question the assumptions behind your statements. I think that if Chithurst has captured the imagination it is simply because they are colourful for the media, and I think they have also attracted a lot of opposition, a lot of people are quite hostile to them.

S: Do you mean local people, or generally?

Subhuti : I think generally, I find people's opinions are very much divided. A lot of people know about them, some think that they are just silly, some are quite attracted to that asceticism. I think the other thing about them is that they are very vigorous. They get around and onto platforms, which I think we could emulate.

S: Yes.

Nagabodhi : On the first part of my question, your comment on their success, I take those points, but nevertheless, they have had a Television documentary made about them, they have had colour supplement features devoted to them, and I suspect for all their other work, it is the emblematic nature of their asceticism. They have the robe and bowl, I think it is not just colour because I think such major elements of press coverage of other equally colourful groups, it seems to have a universal appeal.

S: Well, years and years ago, it must have been twelve or fifteen years ago, there was a colour supplement feature on Samye Ling. But there was just that one, and we have hardly heard anything since in that sort of way. You can't go on doing that sort of thing, I think it dies out after a while. While it is news, but I think it can very quickly cease to be news. I would say that the public would not take the Chithurst monks as emblematic of asceticism. I think they would just take them as emblematic, because they are very easily identifiable, and recognisable, and it is very easy for the media to latch onto that or for people to latch onto that, ditto the Japanese.
But we are very much more difficult to latch onto, perhaps what you are saying is that we should make ourselves easier to latch onto, and perhaps that is correct. But it will not be very easy to do that, because as I said, we are so many sided. I mean the narrower you are, the more easily are you recognisable. For instance, if we were simply the Buddhists who believed in co-ops, or the Buddhists who believed in vegetarianism, or we were the vegetarian Buddhists, then it would be much easier for us to have a recognisable identity, like the scientific Buddhists you see, this is a very readily recognisable identity.

The same with the Zen people, they are just in favour of meditation, or that is how the public thinks of them. The Nichiren people, they just wear funny white bonnets and chant (Namye Ro Rengye Ko), that is how they are recognised, but how do you recognise the FWBO? Because you might get one Order Member who is deeply into the arts and poetry, and another who is really into meditation, and another who is really into study, and another who sweats his guts out in a co-op, others are doing combinations of these things, others are on solitary retreat, others are going off to India and America, (I was almost going to say Iceland). So we are a very many sided group, but I believe we are beginning to come into the awareness of some people outside the FWBO, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. We are beginning to be recognised as some sort of phenomenon that has to be taken account of, or taken into consideration. But it is not easy for people to get us into perspective, and get an all round view of us, though Subhuti's book has helped in that way. But even Subhuti's book is far from reducing the FWBO to an easily recognisable formula, or a particular emblem.

Devaraja : It was reported back to me, by someone who was at Chithurst, that Sumedho had said that of all criticisms that had been made of the FWBO, WBO, and you, you had done something, you had created a Sangha.

S: That is only half the story, Sumedho did say this and that is actually a quite genuine report, that there were only two people who had succeeded in founding Sanghas, one was Hugh Kennet, and the other was Sangharakshita. And he said that one had to admit that they had succeeded in doing that, which no one else had succeeded in doing. This in a way was quite a handsome recognition.

Nagabodhi : Could I just ask you where he said that, in what context?

S: He has apparently said it to other monks, a monk was present who repeated it to me.

Padmaraja : What did Ananadamagala say to you and me Subhuti? He said that Sangharakshita had brought Buddhism to the west, do you remember that bit? And he obviously meant it.

S: Yes well, we do have a few admirers, though Anandamangala is a bit of a lone wolf in that respect. He has his own sort of group around him, but he certainly has not been able to set up a Sangha. He probably couldn't under those particular conditions. But he certainly does appreciate what we have been able to do. There are a few others like that.

[End of Tape 11 Tape 12]

Devamitra : The next question comes from Kamalasila, it concerns the subject of expulsion.

Kamalasila : Oh, I thought I wasn't going to be asking that! I haven't got it today, sorry.

Devamitra : Then, we have a question from Sona on criminals.

Sona : Since some of the Tapasas were criminals, what position should we take if we discover that a mitra or a friend had committed a serious criminal offence which had not been discovered by the authorities?

S: I believe in the case of the Tapasas they were allegedly criminals in some cases, I don't think it was ever proved, but anyway that is a separate point. I must say I haven't considered this, what should we do if we find that there is someone amongst us with an undisclosed crime. But the first thing that would occur to me would be that if that person had not disclosed the fact that he or she had committed that crime, at least to me prior to ordination, I think it might even be considered as invalidating the ordination itself, inasmuch as they had not been completely open on a matter of some importance, not only for them personally, but in fact to the whole Order and the whole movement. So I think that the position of that person, the standing of that person as an Order Member would need to be seriously considered. But actual steps we should take, I must say I haven't really thought. I think it would depend very much on the nature of the offence. But if it was not only an offence against the law, a criminal offence, but also involved a serious breach of the precepts, perhaps that person should be persuaded, one, to resign form the Order, and two, to give themselves up to the authorities. This answer is so to speak just off the top of my head. No doubt I would need to consider it further, but I think this would have to be the position.

Devaraja : I hope you don't come across Order Members with criminal offenses but I mean there is not actually any way in this country that would .... I mean surely that puts us in a very difficult position, or dangerous position if we know of the offence of somebody - an undisclosed crime and we know of it, then we become accomplices after the .....

S: After them in certain cases, so this why I say in the first place, this is my tentative judgment, that we should ask that person to resign, and

then give himself up to the authorities. I don't know what is - I would have to look into the legal position -if someone discloses a crime to you. Supposing someone discloses a crime to a Catholic priest in confession, where does that Catholic priest stand in law? Because according to Canon law he is not permitted to divulge anything that is revealed in the confessional. Where does he stand in relation to the criminal law of the State. Perhaps it varies from one State to another.

Subhuti : It depends on the crime.

S: We would have to look into things like that. We might be able to plead the sort of excuse perhaps that the Catholic Priest presumably would plead. I believe, though I am not sure, I'm only semi guessing that at least in some circumstances the Catholic Priest will probably insist that the man confessed the crime before he granted absolution. But certainly that wouldn't have been the case in the past, because priests even encouraged sometimes, people to commit murders for the sake of the Church and would happily absolve them afterwards without even repentance or surrender to the civil authorities.

So we would need to look into this a little more before we could arrive at a completely definitive conclusion. But I think the main thing is that the person who had been ordained under those circumstances would from the point of view of the Order have committed a serious offence in allowing himself to be ordained or seeking ordination without making a disclosure of the fact that he'd committed a criminal offence, assuming he realised that it was in fact a criminal offence.

Devamitra : Devaraja, you did have a question around a similar theme, or has it been answered?

Devaraja : Yes, I did have one along a similar theme, yes, there is that, and there is another question further to that. He talks about monks by stealth' including animals disguised as a monk, what does this mean? Have you ever encountered anything that vaguely resembles this? (Laughter)

S: I don't know, it might be animals magically transformed into human beings, but remaining basically animals, I suppose this was a sort of folk belief. I can't recollect any instance in my experience, which is fairly extensive, but it doesn't include this sort of thing, not to my knowledge. For instance nagas getting ordination under false pretences, clearly having assumed the human form. (Laughter)

Devamitra : The next question concerns a photograph and comes from Kamalasila.

Kamalasila : Yes the set of Photographs in the study, and in the ninth photograph we see a picture of two monks meditating.

S: Yes, Jinavamsa furthest from camera and pupil meditating at afternoon worship.

Kamalasila : Yes, what do you think of their meditation postures? (Laughter)

S: Not very good, especially Jinavamsa. I don't think he is sitting cross legged, I think he is sitting sideways, because it says at afternoon worship, and that is the posture for worship, the sitting sideways. He is probably just sitting quietly and perhaps telling beads, perhaps not meditation in the full technical sense. He looks quite composed, even concentrated, but clearly his posture is not a yogic posture. You see what I mean by sitting sideways, you know the posture I mean, I think I am correct in saying that. The other monk seems to be sitting on his knees, which is a sort of semi.... well I'm not sure about that. He has clearly got his hands together and has he got a rosary? He has got his hands held together in some kind of way. But clearly meditating after afternoon worship. They've been chanting, and perhaps there are just a few minutes of silence and recollection at the end. They do seem to be reasonably absorbed, one can't help noticing that. But I would imagine their postures were not suited for longer periods of meditation.

Suvajra : Theravada monks wouldn't have beads would they?

S: Burmese monks do carry beads. I think Sinhalese monks don't to the best of my recollection, but I have certainly met Burmese monks that carried and used beads.

Suvajra : For what purpose would they use the beads?

S: Well, for telling not mantras of course, in the Vajrayanic sense, but reciting the "Iti pi so" perhaps so many times, or the "Namo Tassa", and so on. Or sometimes the different parts of the body, those are recited mantra like.

Devamitra : Suvajra has a question on walking meditation.

Suvajra: This question arises from the central paragraph on page 121, where it says, " For Tapasa Himi this meditative preoccupation was something rather unorthodox: he said that he walked 'measuring his steps'. His pupil Sobhita was even more unorthodox, for he 'went everywhere *counting* his steps'.

S: Yes, I can't help wondering, when I read this I couldn't help wondering, the thought crossed my mind, whether it might be a slightly neurotic trait. You remember Dr. Johnson did this, and his biographers regarded that in his case as being a neurotic trait, probably connected with feelings of guilt and so on. So this idea or this thought did cross my mind and it obviously requires further investigation. But it seems to me more of that kind of thing, not exactly a sort of meditative practice or observance.

Suvajra : I also wanted to know if you would say something about the other form of walking practice which you quite often see Theravada monks doing, where they lift and tread in a very very, slow manner.

S: It is not only that they do it slowly, this is when they practise Satipatanna according to the Vipassana School tradition, where they break up the continuity of movement into a number of discrete stages. I don't personally think that this has a very positive effect. I think that if it is carried on for a long time it has quite a disturbing effect, just a sort of stop-go, stop-go, kind of thing. You know "I am about to lift up my hand,

I have lifted my hand, now I will move my hand forward," or, "It is the fire element that is responsible for moving it forward". This sort of interruption of the continuity of the flow of energy so to speak, I think has a deeply disturbing effect. I mean, one is to cultivate mindfulness at the same time that you are moving, not chop your movement up into these discrete bits, and in that way interrupt the flow of the movement. So I think that this type of practice of mindfulness is not desirable. How are we getting on by the way?

Devamitra : We have got an hour left with six questions. The next question comes from Kulamitra, on the Tapasaya and meditation.

Kulamitra : Could you comment on the passage on page 122. The Tapasayo meditation was not genuine in letter or spirit. Could determination and persistence lead one to the spirit of meditation without the letter of Canonical law?

S: Where is the passage?

Kulamitra : Toward the bottom of page 122.

S: I think it would be very surprising if in a traditional Buddhist context, someone who was spiritually determined shouldn't eventually have come into contact with some form of meditation practice, and taken it up. That would be my short reply to that question, as though the inherent momentum of one's determination, assuming it to be a spiritual determination would eventually carry one, in some way or other, formally or informally in the direction of meditation.

Devamitra : Ratnapriya has a question on karma.

Ratnapriya : With regard to the plea that Subodhananda's mother made on page 108, a: what is the traditional belief in Sinhalese Buddhism, as to the effect of one's action on the fate of one's relatives, and, b: what basis does this have in reality?

S: It does seem to be a very deeply held belief in Theravada Buddhist circles. I don't know whether it's the same in Burma and Thailand and other Theravada countries, but certainly in Sinhalese Buddhist circles it seems to be a very deeply held belief that if a member of the family, especially if a son becomes a monk, this reflects very great merit on the family especially the parents and perhaps most of all on the mother. And very great merit accrues to as a result of the fact that their son has gone forth as a bhikkhu. And some pious Sinhalese Buddhist parents sometimes offer or dedicate a son to the Sangha as a means of gaining merit for themselves and ensuring that they will go to heaven.

I did in fact meet a Sinhalese bhikkhu in Calcutta once who expressed himself on this subject very, very strongly. He wasn't a bhikkhu very willingly, and he expressed himself very bitterly to me once, saying, "Here are these parents of mine, they are enjoying all worldly pleasures and what have they done with me? They have put me into the Sangha to earn merit for them, so that they can go on enjoying life. I have to suffer as a bhikkhu to earn merit for
them ." He expressed himself exactly in these terms, perhaps even more strongly. Then I remember another particular bhikkhu - again a Sinhalese bhikkhu in Calcutta - who was caught out in a misdemeanour, and another bhikkhu who was an enemy of his wrote off about this to

Sri Lanka, and this bhikkhu was terrified that his mother would come to hear about it. He wasn't terrified that his teachers would come to hear about it or the general public. But that his mother should come to hear about it, who had dedicated him to the Sangha, to earn merit for herself, that she might hear about it was a thought he just couldn't bear to face. This was his only real worry, not that he even had committed the misdemeanour, no he wasn't worried about that, but that his mother should come to know about it, and therefore feel that her expectations of merit had been undermined by him in that way. He was terrified that the news of his misdemeanour should come to her ears. He told me about it, he confided in me, and I knew exactly what had happened and so on. He said how terrified he was that the news should come to his mother's ears. He would have given anything, made any sacrifice almost to ensure that that didn't happen.

So these feelings go very, very strong and are very, very deep. What basis they have in fact, which is the second part of the question, I can't really be so sure. No doubt there is a certain solidarity between parents and children, but is there moral solidarity, karmic solidarity to that extent? I rather doubt that, I doubt whether there is any basis really for that belief, in Buddhism. If you as a parent had brought your children up so well, so ethically and given them such a good upbringing, that quite spontaneously they wish to be good Buddhists, I'm sure merit redounds to you. But it is not a question of merit automatically redounding to you if you can just get your son into the Sangha and into bhikkhus' robes by hook or by crook. If anything demerit would decrue to you if you forced your son to enter the Sangha against his own real wishes. But these are the sort of things that one finds in Theravada, certainly in Sri Lanka. I am very familiar with these sort of ideas and feelings, or at least I was in those days.

Vessantara : Bhante, this belief appears not only in the Theravada, but also Milarepa is represented when he is sitting on the bones of his mother meditating, as becoming aware that he can actually affect his parents future destiny through his meditation.

S: I think that might be rather different because he after all was practising Vajrayana meditation. And in the Vajrayana there are all sorts of beliefs that in some kind of esoteric fashion, you can help the departed, including your own departed parents. I think perhaps that comes into a different category.

Vessantara: What would be the essential difference between the two?

S: Well in the case of the Theravadin, there seems to be a sort of, as I said, solidarity, almost in a group sense between parents and children. But in the case of Milarepa and the Vajrayana tradition, it's more like one individual by virtue of his superior spiritual attainment, helping another individual, whether or not that is in fact the case. So there would seem to be a difference. In the case of the Sri Lanka Theravadins it's as though parents and children share the same karma, which is perhaps an overstatement of the position.

Nagabodhi : Bhante, what is therefore the value of the punyanamodana ceremony or other such transference of merit ceremonies that we practice in India, and which presumably we will be practising here, do they have any value for the deceased?

S: I am very doubtful whether merit can literally be transferred. But on the other hand, as it were, telepathically, one mind can affect another,

and perhaps thoughts of metta, powerfully generated, can reach and affect other people. I have tried this myself, in a way, in India especially, that if I was on bad terms with someone, or had a bit of a misunderstanding, I tried doing the metta bhavana, and I would notice on a number of occasions the next time I met them, their attitude toward me was markedly more positive. I am quite sure we can work more on this level than perhaps we sometimes think we do. And of course there is no difference really between influencing the living in this way through your thoughts of metta, and influencing the dead. So I would not think in terms of literally transferring merit to the departed so much as giving them a helping hand and giving them emotional support through your mettaful attitude towards them. I think this can certainly be done.

Nagabodhi : Could I pursue, this is staying in India rather than on the subject of death. I was frequently told, often when I ate with you with families in India, as we left not to thank them too much. Purna would advise me against being too demonstrative, because I would be taking away their merit by thanking them too much on an ordinary social level. Is there any truth or value in that?

S: This is a general Indian feeling, or custom, that you do not thank your host and so on. But speaking in terms of general Indian belief it has nothing to do with merit. What I was told, or how it was explained to me was that if you thank your host, you are suggesting, even though indirectly, that he is expecting some return from you, even by way of thanks for his hospitality. So it means you are not regarding his gift as a free gift, you are almost suggesting that he is doing it for the sake of some return. So this is why thanks are not considered appropriate, this is I think the usual Indian belief. What you were told might be an as it were neo-Buddhist version of that.

Aryamitra : Bhante, getting back to the original question, that if you do a deed your parents or mother would suffer or benefit likewise, couldn't you argue.....

S: This is more in the case of the bhikkhu, in respect of his bhikkhu status and so on.

Aryamitra : I was going to say that couldn't you argue that if there is such a thing as shared karma, in the sense that you may meet up again in another life, it means that you are going to meet up with somebody of less merit if you like. So in that way would you be affecting the other person. Is that too complicated?

S: I don't think I understand the question.

Aryamitra : Supposing the bhikkhu did a demeritorious deed, and after their death, if you think of shared karma, families meeting up again, it means that the mother would meet up with somebody of a lower, of a more unskilful mental state, because he has produced a more unskilful mental state in himself, or is that a bit too far fetched?

S: I can't really quite get the point of the question here.

Aryamitra : Well, you were saying that it wouldn't, the bhikkhu wouldn't affect..... The original question was, if the bhikkhu had done some deed where he said that he was going to go to hell, he would take his own mother with him. Would you say no, that wouldn't happen

necessarily?

S: No, they would each follow their separate karmas.

Aryamitra : What about shared karma, like they're reborn together, at least the mother would have to recontact somebody who is in an unskilful mental state, so in a way .....

S: It still isn't clear, I think you are assuming that they continue to have a shared karma, but that is not necessarily the case. Because in that next life, that bad bhikkhu might have not a good mother as he had in his previous life, but a bad mother, a completely different mother, whereas his previous mother would be reborn in a quite separate sphere, perhaps a higher sphere in accordance with her own good deeds. Their paths would have diverged and they would have ceased to be sharing the same karma to any extent one might say.

Aryamitra : So shared karma has to be with people on the same level of skilful or unskilful?

S: Oh yes, by very definition as it were.

Aryamitra : I thought it had something to do also with people you are in contact with for a long time.

S: Yes, but you are in contact with them through generating the same kind of karma, by the similarity of your volitions of body, speech and mind. But if thereafter your actions diverge, well your karmas would diverge, and you would go separate ways, and not meet up again. That would be the case with the bhikkhu and his mother as you mentioned.

Devamitra : Moving on, or rather back to the subject of asceticism, Nagabodhi has a second question.

Nagabodhi : I just wonder Bhante, if you would like to comment on a short phrase that occurs on page 104. Asceticism and reform are merely an idiom, through which dissent and segmentation are expressed in the Sangha.

S: I would quarrel with the word merely. I think it sometimes is the case and it often is a factor. I touched on this some evenings ago didn't I? When I mentioned the fact that sometimes schismatic churches were not really based on actual theological difference, but sometimes the ecclesiastical split was used to express an ethnic or political difference. Do you see what I mean? So I think that certainly, where does it come, yes, In this broader perspective asceticism and reform are *merely* an idiom. I think this is a gross overstatement, and whether the perspective is really broader, I think is quite questionable. It would seem to be narrower to me if anything. But certainly there would be an element of that, I think, a greater or lesser element of dissent and segmentation being an idiom through which dissent and segmentation expressed themselves. I think that is pretty obvious in a way isn't it, that an ostensibly religious movement may be the expression of something which is basically the expression of say an economic or political movement, at least to some extent. But that you can always reduce asceticism and reform to dissent and segmentation in a social and political sense I think is extremely doubtful, particularly in this case. This is an over sociological approach

which is narrower in fact and not broader, almost a form of reductionism, but I don't think you can explain even such a pitiable movement as the Tapasa Himis, purely in terms of dissent and segmentation in that sense. Surely there was some little admixture of religious feeling and even perhaps spiritual aspiration in some cases.

Nagabodhi : Yet they do seem to have been highly reactive in nature in some ways, they seem to be quite keen on confrontation and stirring up the public. You can sort of see why he made that suggestion.

S: Yes, well one functions perhaps in the ways that are open to one. I think it is very difficult for the relatively educated, cultured, articulate person to understand the frustrations of those who are not educated, not cultured, not articulate. They can sometimes only express themselves through opposition, abuse and various modes of uncultured behaviour. Perhaps there is some element of that in the case of say the punks. It's all right for us to say, well "why don't they write a letter to the Times?" Well that is not an idiom of which they are master. (laughter) So why didn't Himi's followers express themselves in a more gentlemanly, more articulate, more cultured fashion. Well they couldn't, they weren't gentlemen, they weren't articulate. They expressed themselves in the only way that they could. I mean they could not remain bottled up.

Devamitra : Devamitra attempting to speak. (Laughter) A question from Aryamitra about cemetery meditation.

Aryamitra : Oh just a short one. Is the tradition of yogis living and meditating in cemeteries pre-Buddhist or is it specifically a Buddhist.....?

S: I am not sure if I have grounds for saying that it is a definitely pre-Buddhist practice. I strongly suspect though, and there may well be evidence for that, but I am not personally acquainted with it. I would just be surprised if there was not in fact evidence, it is a very widespread Indian practice among Hindus as well as among Buddhists. So I imagine it is pre Buddhistic, or at least has precedence in Hinduism so to speak before Buddhism. Hindu tantrics especially frequent cemeteries and cremation grounds, for much the same reason as Buddhist tantrics and ascetics do.

Devamitra : From cemeteries we move on to bones, and the Roman relics.

Dhammaloka : There are two actually. Is there any positive value in worshipping relics? I suspect that there is an inbuilt tendency in any reverence paid towards a thing or a place, so that this object of reverence itself, will gradually become more and more important, where the values it stands for may be lost from sight. Do you agree with this, and if yes, what consequences can be drawn?

S: Well there will always be a danger, I spoke of dangers a few evenings ago. It is dangerous to worship bones, if in fact it is the bone that one worships as distinct from what it represents. But there is no spiritual practise without such danger. Any spiritual practice becomes an end in itself if you are not careful, if you are not mindful. I must say that I can't personally get very enthusiastic about the worship of bones. I can understand it in a way, I can even sympathise with it, but I find it difficult, I've always found it difficult to work up myself any great devotional feelings for bones. (laughter) Even if they are allegedly those of the Buddha and I have visited the tooth temple in Kandy. It is very doubtful whether that tooth is an authentic tooth of the Buddha, very doubtful indeed, to say the least!

I can understand being moved or stirred by visiting a place where some great man or holy man has lived and perhaps seeing things that were associated with his life. I have been to Dr. Johnson's birthplace in Lichfield and, yes, one can certainly on a quite different level have a very strong feeling paying a visit to Buddhagaya, paying a visit to Rajgriha, or to Kusinara, and being very strongly reminded of the Buddha's life, and thinking, well the Buddha actually lived here and he moved about in this very area, he trod this very ground. That can help to make the Buddha much more real to you. I do feel quite inspired in that sort of way, but I don't think I feel particularly inspired or moved simply by bone fragments. I have written about this in my memoirs, and this is one of the things at least that I haven't suppressed so to speak. I have written about my feelings as I took part in expositions of the sacred relics of the Buddha and Sariputra and Moggolyana in Gantok, in Sikkhim, in Kalimpong, and in Darjeeling, I have analyzed and discussed my own feelings quite frankly and I was quite moved by the devotion of the people who came and worshipped the relics, but I was quite unable to share that devotion for the relics. I didn't feel that way myself toward the relics though I felt deep sympathy for them, in as much as they were so devoted in that particular way. But that wasn't my way so to speak, I have written about this.

Kulamitra : Could we see this as an example of the rational and the emotional sort of drifting apart from each other. I'm thinking in particular in the Christian tradition, where there was a lot of this sort of thing. But then if one realised that the number of true pieces of the cross were enough to build a small cathedral, if you had a strong rational mind and knew that, it would undermine your emotional belief in that church.

S: But, not necessarily, because it was held by theologians and I believe it was the teaching of the church, that genuine relics had the power miraculously to multiply themselves. (laughter)

Dharmapriya : Is that the Church, or the Church bank? (laughter)

S: What's the difference? (laughter)

Kulamitra : But nevertheless, if there is a danger, is it not that one - that you can't bring your head and heart together on these sort of matters?

S: I am not saying that I think it is inconsistent with reason to worship relics. In a way I think it is consistent that you should be deeply moved by something that had once formed part of a living body of someone you deeply reverence. I am merely saying that I don't or can't feel that way myself. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it is necessarily inconsistent with reason, though under certain circumstances, in connection with certain people, it might well be so. I mean if you go to (Ridle Mount) you can actually see Wordsworth's ink pot. A poet might be deeply moved by the sight of Wordsworth's ink pot, or even the sight of Wordsworth's spectacles which I believe are also there. So why not Wordsworth's tooth, or even Wordsworth's false teeth if they happen to be there! (laughter) It's all in principle the same thing, it is all association. Do you see what I mean? It's an association of something as it were spiritual with something that is material. I mean I happen not to be moved by bones particularly, or teeth particularly, I might be moved by an ink well, or by the house in which somebody lived, or the scenery by which they were surrounded. So I am not saying that it is necessarily irrational, or necessarily inconsistent with rationality to be deeply moved or stirred by a fragment of bone. But perhaps one does have to be careful, or some people have to be careful.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, is there any record as to what might have happened, or legend, to the Buddha's begging bowl?

S: I believe there is some account, I think it is in Yuan Chuan, certainly one of the Chinese pilgrims, that it was kept at Peshawar, which is now in I think it's either Pakistan or Afghanistan Peshawar?

_____: Pakistan.

S: Pakistan yes, I think it was called Pushpapura at that time, I think that Peshawar if I am not mistaken is a corruption of Pushpapura, but no trace. I think in my own case, certainly remembering certain Christian relics, arms and legs and jaw bones, and so on, I was put off by the somewhat unaesthetic appearance of it all. For me perhaps - I'm speculating a bit here - devotion has an association with beauty and with appreciation of the beauty of something, perhaps the spiritual beauty of something. Here's a dirty old toe bone or toe nail wrapped up in a rag (Laughter). It may be enclosed in crystal and gold, but the thing itself is actually quite ugly and I can't therefore personally work up much in the way of feelings of devotion for that particular object.
Oh dear, I hope I'm not being too heretical! (laughter) If I may add something, I think that Buddhists in this respect are much more aesthetic than the Christians. The Buddhists at least only worship, if that is the word, apart from the tooth relic, tiny little fragments of bones, whereas the Christians have got whole corpses, sometimes half decayed, and whole legs, and pieces of arms and ears noses and all sorts of other unmentionables. There is quite a difference between Buddhist relics usually and Christian relics. Christian relics are really in most cases quite nauseating! I am quite glad that most of them have been discredited. But there are lots that haven't been. At least those that have been relegated to the sacrestry in any number of Italian churches and cathedrals, you can see them mouldering inside their crystal and their gold, or at least their glass and brass. Sometimes they are almost like glass fronted cabinets with dozens and dozens of bits and pieces behind them, all duly labelled.

That's why I thought it was quite an amusing episode towards the end of that novel *The Leopard*, where the priest comes from the pontifical, I think palaeotological department of the Vatican. (laughter) and he examines this precious collection of relics which these three old ladies have inherited from a very ancient family, they are the last survivors of the ancient family. And out of about ninety odd, he rejects nearly ninety, and six are declared genuine, all the rest were just rubbish he brings them out in a great basket and says you might as well just throw them away. I must confess, I got quite a certain amount of enjoyment or at least pleasure out of reading this particular section. They really do deserve to be just thrown away. They don't, at least in my case, inspire any very positive sentiments or any real devotion.

Devamitra : The last question comes from Kamalasila, it concerns Himi in India.

Kamalasila : On page 135, during an interview on his later career, Tapasa HImi implies that he played a part in the movement of conversion of five-hundred-thousand untouchables. He is also mentioned as possibly having been bailed out financially by a monk - no name mentioned - at the Mahabodhi Society. Do you recall anyone answering his description? (laughter)

S: I don't actually. It is quite possible that he did convert ex-untouchables, Tamil ex-untouchables, because a number of them were converted to

Buddhism at various times, and not always under the auspices of Ambedkar's movement, because they weren't Mahars anyway. Yes, he could have been bailed out by Mahabodhi Society bhikkhus. They were doing that sort of thing from time to time. I remember when two monks coming from Thailand, I think it was, were arrested by the customs authorities because they were smuggling gold, and the Mahabodhi Society kindly bailed them out and arranged for them not to be prosecuted and sent them back to wherever they came from.

So yes, the Mahabodhi Society bhikkhus were very good at dealing with those sort of situations, it is quite possible that they did bail out HImi. Not that they had much sympathy for him as a Tapasi no doubt, but after all he would have been Ceylonese and wearing some sort of Buddhist robes, and they wouldn't have wanted to give the Hindus a bad impression. It is quite possible. But certainly I don't remember hearing about Himi or any other such colourful character. It could perhaps be investigated. Probably the people who might have helped him or bailed him out are all dead now. I can imagine Sangharatana doing it, certainly. It might have been a bhikkhu in the Madras centre of the Mahabodhi Society, he may not have got up to northern India at all, I don't know. Pity we don't have further information.

Devamitra : Do you have any other points that you might like to add, that we might not have covered?

S: I don't think so. I did want to emphasise, which I have already done in fact, the striking nature of Subodhananda's self ordination, that it was an act of, to some extent, an individual inasmuch as it was so unprecedented and revolutionary in his environment.

There is a slight parallel with the FWBO or the Western Buddhist Order rather at the end of the Chapter on asceticism in the village temple. In any case, their contribution did not lie in their practice of a rigorously ascetic way of life (beyond a firm adherence to the ten precepts that is). Their ten precepts were of course those of the Sammanera, but though they regarded themselves as monks, it is significant that they just observed ten simple precepts. (Pause) Yes here we are, Anandasiri's remarks are very interesting (118) "Anandasiri was perfectly frank with him" (that is Himi); "and said that he was questioning the validity of his own ordination, and that he had deep doubts about the legitimacy of the village Sangha as the inheritors of the Buddha's legacy". Similar doubts to mine, one might say. (Pause) Yes that was it.

Devaraja : I just had one question to ask Bhante. Why were eunuchs not allowed to be accepted into the Sangha?

S: There are several words for eunuch as far as I remember. The usual one is napumsaka, which means one who is not a man or not a proper man. It seems to have been a general Indian belief that if a human being was of indeterminate sex, and especially if he was an imperfect male, if there was any genital deficiency, this would be associated with a lack as it were of drive. A lack I suppose of virility in the broadest sense, and therefore one lacking in that respect would not be capable of the exertion that would be expected of a monk.

The belief was not perhaps very scientifically based, but that does seem to have been the position. Judging by the Pali texts, especially the Vinaya texts, the ancient Indians in the Buddha's day were quite confused on the subject. They didn't really distinguish between eunuchs and hermaphrodites and so on. They seemed to lump them all together. But someone who was imperfectly a male human being, whether as it were physically or psychologically, or both, was not considered fit for the strenuous spiritual life of the bhikkhu, as though he just wouldn't possess

the necessary drive. Eunuchs in the strict sense, I don't know if there is any reference to that, would have been of course castrated males. But it is not clear from the context whether eunuch in the sense of napumsaka, meant a castrated male, they were sometimes employed in king's palaces right down to quite recent times. So it's well known that usually the castration of a male animal, results in a loss of vigour, and drive in certain respects. This is why certain animals are castrated for draft purposes.

Well, that's it? Right you are then. We have got through quite a good few questions.