

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

Questions and Answers on:

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka, Chapter 8

11th August 1985

Devamitra : This morning we have been studying the chapter which gives an account of Ratnapala's life story. We have a total of twenty-two questions altogether. The first question comes from Padmavajra, and concerns the use of the word 'egalitarian'.

Padmavajra : This is just a quote really that I would like you to comment on if you could. Occurring at the bottom of page 139, and continuing to page 140. And on these pages we are introduced to first principle of the Sangha's constitution, and I quote now : "The archaic, egalitarian principle enshrined in Buddhist doctrine and particularly in the rules of discipline, the Vinaya". Would you care to comment on this?

S: I think what the author has in mind when he speaks of an egalitarian principle in the Sangha's constitution, is the fact that every individual monk belonging to a particular 'avasa' is the technical term, a particular parish one might say, has the right and the duty to participate in all proceedings of the Sangha of that avasa. And its proceedings are not complete without him. There are very elaborate provisions covering this. I think this is what the author has in mind here.

Devamitra : The second question comes from Dharmapriya concerning the denial of kalyana mitrata.

Dharmapriya : On pages 140 and 141, Carrithers expounds his third principle comprising the Sangha's constitution. In these paragraphs he emphasises that the village monks are effectively part of the village society, rather than of a wider Sangha. There would seem to be no possibilities for kalyana mitrata in such a situation. So would you agree with this assessment, and, secondly would you also agree that one of Ratnapala's main achievements was the rediscovery of kalyana mitrata?

S: Yes that would seem to be so, and that is the note struck at the very end of the chapter isn't it, where he says: "Not for him any restoration of the glories of Sinhalese history, or any hesitation over resurrecting the original significance of the texts: he went straight for the main thing, primeval Sangha life, the small society of good and wise friends, kalyanamitta, seeking their spiritual weal together". So though he may not have done so consciously, he was in a sense rebelling or protesting against that particular aspect of the village Sangha set up, which amounted virtually to a denial of kalyana mitrata within the Sangha. One might say that the village bhikkhu ended up almost like a Catholic priest, just living alone in his Presbytery and dealing with his parishioners, and with absolutely minimal contact with fellow priests. Except of course in the case of the Catholic priest, at least he has got his Diocesan Bishop over him. In the case of the village bhikkhus, there was even less supervision from above than that, and I think I have mentioned before when we have been discussing the fact that a number of Catholic priests are giving up the robes, as Buddhists would say, one of the reasons that they often give is just loneliness. They meet lots of people, they have got perhaps a busy parish life, they are constantly having to deal with their parishioners, but they've got no one that they can look upon as a real friend with whom they can talk frankly, exchange ideas and so on. I'm not quite sure how isolated priests manage in connection with confessions,

presumably there is some arrangement but also perhaps the priest to whom you confess does not necessarily become your personal friend. So I think this aspect of the particular movement described in this chapter, is very important and very significant. It's as though chapter by chapter, we are getting closer and closer to some of the basic concerns of the Western Buddhist Order, and this of course is certainly one of them.

But it has been commented upon by a bhikkhu with whom we are in contact, who has some contact with Chithurst, that there they don't have a Sangha in the sense that we have an Order. Though they have a common discipline, and they are in personal contact to some extent, they don't really have a shared spiritual life.

Devamitra : Another question concerning Sangha, this time from Buddhadasa, on the Sangha as an exemplar.

Buddhadasa : Yes, Bhante, on page 142, I was very interested in Carrithers comments that: "the Sangha is self referring and autonomous, and the question is, rather, what role society plays in fostering Sangha". Also: "The view of the monk as a passive exemplar is to be regarded as a development following the naturalisation of the Sangha in a Buddhist society";

Given that one of the greatest dangers facing the Sangha is to start fulfilling the expectations of society, do you think we should do more to encourage an attitude of positive non justification toward society. Do we in fact owe society anything at all, even an explanation?

S: Well yes and no, I have I think years ago, dwelt upon this. I think I discussed it then in terms of the monastic life, that the monastic life was its own justification, the spiritual life was its own justification. This is of course only half of the story. I think the danger consists in the fact that the spiritual community, or church, or whatever you like to call it, is expected to justify its existence in, so to speak, secular terms. It's as though the spiritual community is regarded as existing for the sake of, let us say, the group. In a sense it does exist for the sake of the group, but only to the extent that it exists for the sake of helping members of the group to become members of the spiritual community. Its purpose is not to serve the group on the group's own terms. I think that is the danger, and sometimes I think it's not easy to prevent oneself sliding from the one to the other. This is a very obvious danger. Though one is expected in modern times very often to justify one's existence as a spiritually committed individual, or as a spiritual community in terms of social work and social welfare projects, considered as ends in themselves. And many religious minded people, of all religions and dominations seem to fall into this particular trap, very often because their own spiritual lives have lost meaning and purpose, and they are looking around for some kind of meaning, some kind of purpose, and they find it in social work. Not social work as an expression of spiritual commitment, but social work considered for its own sake, considered almost as an ultimate good.

Dhammaloka : A supplementary question. When you say the purpose of the spiritual community is not to serve members of the society on its own terms, but to help the members to join the spiritual community. would that include, this can be accepted only when the highest value, the highest general value in the society was the spiritual community, otherwise there is a necessary conflict?

S: Yes, in traditional societies this is usually recognised, at least theoretically, and it can be appealed to, but perhaps for the first time in history, we have secular societies that did not on the whole recognise that man exists for the sake of some higher spiritual purpose. And therefore there is this constant pressure to justify one's existence, and the existence of one's spiritual community in purely secular terms. So it is almost as

though part of one's work is to try to extract almost from society at large, a recognition of the spiritual principle, a recognition of the fact that man does have a spiritual objective, a spiritual goal. And that the pursuit of that spiritual objective or that spiritual goal can be supremely worthwhile and does not require further justification in purely secular terms.

Dhammaloka : Another supplementary.

S: Just before you ask that question. One can see from the account which Carrithers gives of the village bhikkhu, that he has become subordinated almost entirely to secular needs and group requirements. His whole life is spent really in servicing the group. There seems to be no spiritual element there at all, certainly not explicitly present.

Dhammaloka : Would you say that modern society, particularly through some developments in modern science, heading to the sort of encouragement in the direction that man has a spiritual objective, it seems that some science comes up to the sort of natural end of at least mechanistic religions. So could a development in that sense be expected from there?

S: I think here and there, in as it were more cultivated circles. But I think the mass of people, would expect the religious person to justify himself and justify his life on their terms. I think they would not only definitely expect that, but bring pressure to bear upon one to act in accordance with their ideas.

Nagabodhi : If compassion is one element of the ultimate spiritual ideal, is it not to some extent fair to expect of the spiritually committed that their spiritual development will result in compassionate activity, which could be measured through their impact on society?

S: Yes but not as it were to provide material goods for the sake of providing material goods, not that the spiritual community can't render material help, or help on all sorts of levels, But it does that not because it regards that sort of help as an end in itself, but as a means to something further, or as providing a base for something further. Supposing you were with people who were hungry people, who were starving, well however much you wanted to preach the Dharma to them and though you regarded that as the best thing that you could do for them, in the meantime you would provide them with food. But you would provide them with food, not so that they could engage in unskilful activities, but in order that hopefully they would be ready to listen to the Dharma.

Nagabodhi : Could I push on a little bit further? Taking into account what you said about the other night, about the infinitely expanding field of responsibility. One may alleviate immediate suffering in one's own province of activity, but in the modern world where one is aware of all the other provinces that exist, again could one not be expected to try and fulfil at least that primary stage of alleviating immediate suffering?

S: Well, one might say who is this impersonal 'one'? If one follows that line of argument to its logical conclusion, we should all be trying to raise funds to relieve famine in Ethiopia or something of that sort. But I think that at least some people need to devote themselves almost exclusively to the propagation of spiritual principles and the inculcation of a spiritual way of life, because that is so entirely lacking in large sections of the population of the world today. At the same time there are new large sections of the population in the west who are living in

affluence who are in danger of forgetting any higher principle at all. So I think in the circumstances, it is a good thing that at least some people, even though recognising the need to function on the level of famine relief and so on, nonetheless do concentrate their efforts on bringing home to people spiritual truths, because that is in the long run the most important thing. There are quite a lot of other people looking after the material needs of society.

Devamitra : Moving on to another area, Padmavajra has a question on pupillary succession.

Padmavajra : On page 140 "Though monks do form small groups organised by pupillary succession, effective control within such a group, does not usually survive the death of the eldest". Would you care to comment on this sentence? Is there something here our own pupillary succession could learn from?

S: "Though monks do form small groups organised by pupillary succession," What does one mean by that? A small group organised by pupillary succession?

Padmavajra : Is this not the idea of nikaya which you mentioned?

S: No I think it's on a much smaller scale than that. For instance you might say a certain bhikkhu, a certain elder bhikkhu, has a number of disciples, perhaps whom he has educated or whom he has trained, whose higher ordinations he has arranged, or perhaps participated in, perhaps resided at. So let's say he has a group of ten or twelve disciples, so they form a small group. So during his lifetime, all is well, they are all his pupils, they are all his disciples. So the fact that he is their teacher holds them all together, they all look up to him, they all defer to him. Perhaps he has a disciple who is regarded as the chief disciple, who inherits the temple, this is very often what happens, the chief or senior disciple inherits the temple from his teacher. But on the death of the teacher there is the danger that that little group may break up because it's been held together by him. Well it may survive for instance his death, and if he has a senior disciple who is a capable person, that person will manage to hold the group together. But supposing he dies, and also in the meantime he might well have ordained his disciples, disciples of his own. So then he would be on the one hand, the seniormost surviving disciple, and the other disciples might look up to him. But he would also have his own disciples who looked up to him in a different kind of way, and the two groups might not coalesce, and might coexist rather uneasily. And after his death, the death of that senior disciple who had his own pupils separately, subsequently, the two groups might drift apart, there might even be quarrels and disputes. So I think this is the sort of thing that Carrithers has in mind.

"Though monks do form small groups organised by pupillary succession, effective control within such a group, does not usually survive the death of the eldest". I think this is what he is getting at. But there was a further question wasn't there?

Padmavajra : Would you care to comment on this sentence? Is there something here our own pupillary succession can learn from?

S: I think what is to be learned is the fact that some kind of structure is needed. It's as though you just can't hope that the chief disciple of the chief disciple will be able to carry on automatically and keep things together. It doesn't seem to work like that in the context of this egalitarian

Sangha. Egalitarian in the sense that I've defined.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Aryamitra on inherent decay in the Sangha.

Aryamitra : It's on the first page, second paragraph, Carrithers states that; "the process of decay, which the reformers criticise, can be shown to be inherent in Buddhism". I wondered if it can and whether he does actually show that, other than it being like Buddha said one day the teaching will die out, other than that.

S: Yes, I think what he has in mind is the actual organisation or non-organisation of the Sangha. Because it's as though there was provision in the Vinaya for the functioning of the small independent units, the local Sanghas within their respective avasas. But there was no provision for the overall functioning of the Sangha after the Buddha's death. the Buddha appointed no leader, no head of the Sangha.

After the Buddha's death of course, energetic monks did sometimes with a great deal of effort, bring monks from a number of places all together, and they then took joint decisions, decisions affecting the whole of the Sangha. But that was something exceptional, and it seems to me that this is perhaps one of the reasons why the Buddha emphasised the importance of the bhikkhus meeting together repeatedly and in large numbers. Do you see what I mean? There is a sort of parallel with the Western Buddhist Order, though no doubt we will undergo further evolution one might say, because we have got chapters of the Order haven't we, and those chapters meet regularly. So they can conduct their business and conduct their affairs quite independently, but we haven't as yet fully evolved a sort of machinery of consultation and decision making within the Order as a whole. We've got a few 'ad hoc' arrangements, for instance we sound out the Chairmen, not as it were in their capacity as Chairmen but as senior and responsible Order Members. Sometimes we circularise the chapters to elicit their views on particular topics, we did this in connection with the arrangements for the Convention. Do you see what I mean? So there isn't yet any sort of regular structure at the level of the Order as a whole. That has not yet been evolved. So in the case of the Sangha in the Buddha's day, I think one of the reasons for the Buddha emphasising the importance of the monks getting together regularly in large numbers, was so that monks belonging to different avasas, could get to know one another, and share a greater sense of the unity and solidarity of the Sangha, and perhaps have an opportunity of coming to decisions which affected the Sangha as a whole as distinct from the Sangha identified with a particular avasa.

But unless you have an overall structure, there is a danger that this chapter will go in this direction, and that chapter will go in that direction. Do you see and this chapter will decide that they are all going to wear red robes, that chapter will decide they are all going to wear blue robes, that chapter will decide they will do their Order Metta on Saturday, another chapter decides they will do it on Sunday, or Wednesday afternoon. Do you see what I mean? So a sort of overall structure for want of a better term, or constitution is needed to hold the whole thing together.

We haven't yet evolved that though perhaps we are in process of doing that. In our case it isn't so difficult as it was in the Buddha's day, because communication is so much more easy. But this is one of the reasons why national Order Days and Weekends and so on are important for us, as these regular and largely attended meetings were important for the Sangha in the Buddha's own day. So that people would have more face to face contact and develop a stronger sense of the wider, the broader Sangha. Otherwise you have the feeling of dealing with some impersonal entity, some institution in the pejorative sense of the term.

Devamitra : Abhaya had a question on a similar theme.

Abhaya : I think you have more or less answered my question, but I just wondered whether the Ceylonese monks, the Sinhalese monks actually, or the Theravada in general, ever did have large meetings of the Sangha corresponding to our National Order Weekends. Did they ever recognise the importance of this? There is no evidence of it in the text.

S: I don't remember any such thing. But of course in some Buddhist countries they did evolve a unitary Sangha, a system of Sangha organisation and Sangha government as it were. In many countries a Sangharaja, a king of the Sangha arose, usually appointed by the secular monarch. And in some countries, as for instance in Thailand, that is still very much the system. The Sangharaja is really appointed by the government and there are arrangements for appointing bhikkhus corresponding to sort of bishops, and archdeacons and so on, with administrative responsibility for smaller and smaller areas. That system has been evolved, but actually it has no basis in the Vinaya. This is not to say that it is therefore wrong, because this would be to bind oneself to the letter of the Vinaya in the sort of way that we have been criticising in the case of the Theravadins. But nonetheless, I don't think it is a very happy state of affairs when the secular authority appoints the Sangharaja and so on, just as say in Britain the bishops are appointed in effect by the government in power.

So there is an element of compromise with secular authority. It is interesting in this connection that the British government in Burma, is often criticised by Buddhist historians for not appointing a (Tathanabayn) as he was called, a head of the Sangha as the Burmese kings had done. And it's sometimes said that owing to the non-appointment of the head of the Sangha, the Sangha decayed. But apparently, I was reading in a book recently that during the British rule in Burma, certain persons raised the matter in the Courts, or even in a sense brought a case against the British Government in Burma to compel them to appoint a head of the Sangha. But eventually it was decided that it could not be done and the British Government refused on the grounds that no such office was mentioned in the Vinaya of the Buddhists themselves. (laughter).

It was on strictly legal grounds which was quite correct, and this could not be denied. But nonetheless, it does seem that without some sort of organisational structure, discipline becomes lax etc. etc. But nonetheless the organisational structure is no absolute guarantee that things will not become lax, because who will control the controllers? I mean the Catholic Church has always been very highly organised and well controlled, usually from the top. But that has not prevented corruption from creeping in by any means.

But it does seem that it's not enough to have these autonomous chapters functioning almost independently albeit following a common rule. There seems to be some kind of structure that will ensure their co-operation for larger ends.

So perhaps we can understand that in the light of these present instances. No doubt we have to evolve something of that sort. I mean the usual democratic model is the representative model, that is to say each chapter for instance sends one or two representatives to a central assembly, and they decide everything and the individual chapters they accept that, follow it and act upon it. But I am not completely convinced that the representative model is an ideal one. I think further thought needs to go into the matter. But at present, we are usually taking, well I'm asking for suggestions, ideas, recommendations, by a sort of referendum. This is what is happening at present.

Devamitra : Another question concerning Sangha, from Aryamitra.

S: Ah yes! Could I say something more? The Buddha disclaimed being the head of the Sangha, or he denied that he led the Sangha but that in a sense can't be taken literally because the Buddha's word was law for all the bhikkhus, and the bhikkhus are frequently represented in the Pali Canon as saying in effect, "the Buddha is our authority." And we find the Buddha invariably laying down the Vinaya rules. He never asked the opinion of the bhikkhus, nothing was ever put to a vote, he didn't even have referenda. The Buddha just laid down Vinaya rules as he thought best, he was the supreme authority. So during the Buddha's lifetime, the Sangha was held together by the Buddha, but after the Buddha, in the absence of a recognised successor of the Buddha, there was really nothing to hold the Sangha together, except the larger regular meetings, the individual initiative of active bhikkhus calling meetings, and later on the acts of kings who wanted to be able to deal with one or more elderly or senior bhikkhus instead of with the whole motley mass of the Sangha, and who therefore appointed heads or rajas of the Sangha. This seems to have been very roughly the pattern.

Subhuti : Was there an attempt to replace the Buddha's authority as it were with the authority, is that what the councils amounted to?

S: No. On the whole the word 'council' is a very misleading term, they were Sanghitis for the recitation of the traditions. Sometimes of course on very rare occasions, they do seem to have considered disciplinary matters, as in the case of the Council of Vaisali. But they were certainly not councils in the sense of the Councils of the Christian Church devoted to the exhaustive thrashing out of doctrinal issues and coming to definite conclusions on them which were then binding for the whole church. There is nothing like that in Buddhist history.

But you see Carrithers does later on in the chapter put his finger on the real point. The autonomy of the individual had to be guaranteed. But at the same time harmony of action, on the part of all these autonomous individuals had to be guaranteed, and it is not very easy to ensure the one without detriment to the other. It's very easy to get people working together, it's very easy to ensure harmony, through a highly authoritarian regime, a highly authoritarian structure, but that would be against the principle of individual autonomy.

So at the same time it is quite easy to ensure individual autonomy by not having any sort of structure, but then you can't achieve cooperation and harmony. So you've got to do justice to both of these. You've got to do justice to individual autonomy, and to co-operativeness, the co-operation between these autonomous individuals, harmony between these autonomous individuals, you have got to try to keep to a middle path.

So we can see in the case of the Western Buddhist Order, there are some individuals who will stress autonomy at the expense of co-operation and harmony, and others perhaps who will stress co-operation and harmony at the expense of autonomy. I think the mass of Order Members remain roughly in the middle, but there are a few who go to extremes in either direction. You can see that. But it's not an easy balance to keep.

So the question is how to provide a structure which will safeguard individual autonomy, whilst ensuring co-operation and harmony. We are just very slowly and gradually working our way, I hope, towards some such structure. At present there are I think some people in the Order who feel that too much 'power' (single inverted commas), rests with the Chairmen, both collectively and individually. Even though the office of Chairman is not one which has any significance at all within the Order as such, but nonetheless, in effect it does have significance and influence at least

within the Order as such.

With the present state of affairs that is inevitable, but perhaps in the long run it isn't desirable.

Padmavajra : Supplementary to that, would you therefore like to see people who are presently Chairmen resigning that position and functioning more and purely as senior and responsible Order Members?

S: But then that raises the question well how would they function as senior and responsible Order Members? Would they just be the power behind the throne, just telling the Chairmen what to do? It is not so easy to resolve this question. You still need a Chairman wouldn't you, who by virtue of his position would become more and more influential. One of the things I have done recently is to set up these Chapters, in a way that is a sort of, in a sense, counterbalance to the Chairmen. In some ways it's a rather weak one but it still has to be developed. The Chapters are the organs of the Order as such. The Chairmen's meeting should not have to function as an organ of the Order. The Chairmen at present are disproportionately prominent, so it behoves all Chairmen in any matter effecting the Order as such to be very humble and self effacing especially when within the particular Chapter to which you belong. Because you may well exercise influence or even be able to bring pressure to bear simply by virtue of his office as Chairman and that is not at all desirable. No doubt it will be sometimes difficult to separate the two. It was said a few years ago that people on ceasing to be Chairmen experience what was called Chairmen's withdrawal symptoms. That was quite interesting. Anyway, perhaps we had better move on.

Devamitra : A question from Aryamitra on Sangha and property.

Aryamitra : On page 141, Carrithers states that monks began to share the views of landowners because they also owned land, and suggested that the monks became domesticated because they were no longer truly homeless, ie. they shared the same opinions as the laity because they shared the same situation. Is this true, and is it a danger for us?

S: I think this is roughly true, this is what one finds in Ceylon, in Sri Lanka, political divisions among the bhikkhus. It's well known that many bhikkhus are politically active in Ceylon, and have been since Independence. One would have thought that if they were going to be active in politics at all, they would have formed a bhikkhus' party which pressed for things like preservation of the environment and so on and so forth. But no, not at all. They seem to have joined existing political parties, and you might say to put it very roughly, very crudely, that the rich monks - those with lots of property under their control - joined what we would call the conservative party, and the poor monks, those who are dependent mainly on alms, joined the labour party or socialist party or even sometimes the communists, and supported them. So that sometimes in elections, bhikkhus were supporting rival candidates, and that certainly didn't conduce to the harmony of the Sangha. Anyway there was a further question.

Aryamitra : Well the fact that they share the views of the land owners led me to suggest that the monks became domesticated because they were no longer truly homeless.

S: I don't think it was just because they were no longer truly homeless, but they were no longer leading a spiritual life, they were no longer

cultivating spiritual friendship. There was no longer any intense spiritual aspiration. According to the Vinaya which in theory they observed, property is owned by the Sangha collectively, not by any individual monk, but in Sri Lanka that has long since become a dead letter at least in practice. Property is to all intents and purposes owned by the individual monk, and is literally inherited by whoever he designates. Usually it is his chief disciple or favourite disciple. And the Siyama Nikaya monks of course are now in the position to dispose of enormous properties, unless there have been any recent reforms. There may have been.

I had a long discussion once with a friend about this, he was a Sinhalese bhikkhu in Calcutta, but he felt that the fact that bhikkhus owned property was a good thing because he said it made them independent of the laity and therefore able to take an independent line. I could see the sense of that, but on the other hand, one can also see the dangers. He said those bhikkhus who were poor bhikkhus and didn't have property were entirely dependent for their support on the laity, had to go along very often with the wishes of the laity, and were much more afraid of offending them, than were the property owning bhikkhus. So he thought that it was almost necessary for bhikkhus to own property and control and manage property to safeguard their own independence of action. One can agree perhaps to some extent in principle, but very often that freedom of action would be abused by bhikkhus in Sri Lanka.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Aryamitra :because we do own property.

S: But in our case it's the FWBOs that own it usually, but the FWBOs are controlled by Order Members. So you could say that we are in the position laid down by the Vinaya that in effect property belongs to the Order collectively. It is as it were held by the Order, that is to say the Council members of a particular FWBO, in trust for the purposes of the FWBO. So that is quite close to the original Sangha position.

Aryamitra : I know what he means by well, to a slight degree about sharing the same views, because I know since I got the property in Leeds, I found that I was much more conscious of the surroundings and the property that maybe wasn't kept up in the area or litter and things like this. I became in a way a bit more conservative.

S: Well a bit more environmentally minded. Probably you would not want the sort of people moving into your street that lowered the value of your property. (laughter)

Kulamitra : Bhante, although what you said about ownership of property by the FWBO is broadly speaking true, there have been some exceptions, where an Order Member who had some personal money, invested it in property which he allowed the FWBO to use. Do you think then that that is not the best arrangement?

S: I think it is not the best arrangement, I think the other arrangement, which is more usual and more standard is very much to be preferred. Because in a way, there might be a situation in which an individual Order Member has to hang on to a particular property and keep it in his own name. But that suggests either that there are no other Order Members who can share the responsibility with him, or that there are other Order

Members, but that he does not trust them. That of course is quite a serious state of affairs.

Devamitra : We have another question from Aryamitra, which I think may already have been answered, but it concerns the difficulty of establishing anarchic movements.

Aryamitra : I think it has but I will just state it, just to see if there is anything else. On page 143, Carrithers claims, "It is not easy to found an organisation on the anarchic principle..... that each is autonomous and responsible for his own purity." What about us?

S: Well it is exactly what I said, it isn't easy, though of course we would phrase it perhaps a little differently. The autonomy is not so much for the sake of self purification in the narrow sense, but for the sake of self development, in co-operation with others who are committed to their own self development. Because we don't have quite such a spiritually individualistic perspective as the Theravadin does. Because we see co-operation with other people, spiritual fellowship with others as essential for our 'own' (single inverted commas) development. But nonetheless, there is the difficulty of reconciling the claims of individual autonomy and large scale co-operation, of those autonomous individuals. Maybe three or four can co-operate on a purely unorganised informal basis, perhaps even five or six or seven or eight. But you can't have hundreds and thousands co-operating in a purely spontaneous way. That will result in anarchy, it is not easy to reconcile these conflicting claims, claims that appear to be conflicting at least.

Devamitra : We have a related question from Dhammaloka.

Dhammaloka : I think this may have been answered previously. The question is what methods have been made in Theravada history to centralise the Sangha authority. Are there other methods than those you mention from the cast of the government?

S: The standard method seems to have been for the secular authority to appoint a head of the Order, and even to oversee the Order, at least from a social point of view, to ensure that the Sangha was respectable from a social point of view. They didn't harbour anti-social elements for instance, didn't harbour criminals, and in Theravada countries especially, Buddhist kings always seem to have reserved the right to themselves to purge the Sangha of undesirables as they thought fit. There is no provision in the Vinaya for this at all, but there was nothing that the Sangha could do about it because the king was all powerful usually.

So there are many stories of kings ejecting bhikkhus from the Order, sometimes a particular bhikkhu would have the ear of the king and would suggest that certain bhikkhus should be ejected from the Order and clearly there would be room there for abuse of that influence.

Dhammaloka : A supplementary. Have there been any efforts from the Sangha, from the monks themselves in that direction of centralising of authority?

S: I can't recall any, but then I can't claim to have made a special study of this. Certainly the position would have been very different in say China, in Tibet, in Japan and so on where there were other complicating factors. In Tibet of course the Sangha was unified in as much as the head of the Sangha, the de facto head, was also head of the state administration. In some ways that would seem to be the best solution. And also

at every level of secular administration there were two officials appointed - a lay official and a monk official - the monk official supposedly looking after the interests of the Dharma within that particular area of governmental activity. The system seems to have worked reasonably well. In the Middle Ages in Europe of course there was a great conflict between Pope and Emperor, whether Pope would control Emperor, or Emperor would control Pope. Sometimes a king controlled the Pope, as when the King of France controlled the whole series of Avignonese Popes during their self exile from Rome. It was the king who told the Cardinals who to elect.

Devamitra : A Question from Nagabodhi on the comparative size of the FWBO to the Forest Monk movement.

Nagabodhi : There is a footnote on the first page of Chapter 8. "According to the department of Cultural Affairs Census of 1971, there were about six hundred forest monks, as opposed to more than twenty-thousand village monks". The question is; It is tempting to regard the community of forest monks as tiny and statistically insignificant in Sri Lanka, what to speak of the world. The Western Buddhist Order, perhaps soon to be renamed the World Buddhist Order, presently comprises no more than some two hundred and fifty souls. Our aspirations are mighty and earth shaking, but taking a historically and statistically wider view of things, we are still tiny and perhaps still quite insignificant. How confident do you now feel that our Movement will endure and go on to make a significant impact on the world?

S: Of course there is the assumption that there will be a world. That is, I'm afraid, something of which we cannot be completely sure. Though my own personal confidence is that there will be a world, but I can offer no rational proof of that, or rational justification even of that. With regard to the Department of Cultural Affairs Census of 1971, I believe there has been quite a change since. I think there are very, very few forest monks now in comparison with the number that there were then, and I believe, I can't remember where I saw the figure, but I believe that there are twelve thousand bhikkhus altogether now in Sri Lanka not more. I can't remember where I saw that figure, I think it was a reliable source, but I would have to check it. It would seem in a way understandable that there should have been decline due to modern secular pressures and all that kind of thing.

The Western Buddhist Order isn't increasing at a very remarkable rate, but it is increasing, and standards are being raised all the time. We are becoming better known and a little bit more influential, and I see no reason why this process shouldn't continue indefinitely. I may not live to see very extensive developments, but I am sure some of you will, in fact most of you will I think. Actually in the course of, how many years now? - eighteen years, we have achieved quite a lot one might say, and it hasn't been just a superficial success, it just hasn't been a lot of publicity, and not really much happening spiritually speaking. We have brought into existence, I think a very viable sort of movement, a very viable sort of organisation, a very viable Order, and one can only look to that to increase.

But I think that we still need to perfect our structure. I don't think it has yet been perfected by any means especially the structure of the Order. I think probably the structure of the individual FWBOs is more or less as it should be, but more thought still needs to be given to the structure of the Order. This whole question of the devolution of responsibility for Ordinations, because obviously I shan't be able to continue doing this indefinitely.

Kulamitra : Bhante, I would actually dispute what you said that probably the structure of our FWBO Centres is more or less complete. Because

in my experience in East London was very much that, though we have a structure which may be sufficient for a small Centre, for what for us is at the moment is a reasonably large Centre, we have not yet worked out all the ramifications of that structure. I think if we don't do that we will be limited to very small situations because it is not entirely satisfactory.

S: I'd have two things to say to that; the first being that I'm very doubtful whether we should have larger FWBO Centres, because you must know from your own experience how difficult it is to hold everything together even at present. I mean the whole complex, the Centre itself, the supporting co-ops and the supporting communities. So I would rather tend to think in terms of multiplying the number of Centres, even for instance having a Centre in every borough in London, rather than having one great big Centre which was responsible for the whole city as it were.

Again, when I say the structure of individual FWBO is more or less perfect, I mean perfect in respect of that type of structure. I don't rule out the possibility of our having organisations set up within the framework of the law, through which Order Members work, of an entirely different type, and functioning alongside the present FWBOs. I don't rule out that possibility at all. I doubt very much whether the line of development will be, or even should be of having bigger and bigger FWBOs. Though of course we still have the problem if it is a problem, of ensuring co-operation and unity of action among all those FWBOs, all those autonomous FWBOs. That is of course why originally we set up this Chairmen's meeting or whatever it's called now. Just so as to ensure that Chairmen could discuss common problems and difficulties and thrash out matters of common interest, and make sure that they were roughly on the same lines and were co-operating in those areas where co-operation was called for.

But a time might come when there are so many of these autonomous FWBOs, hundreds and hundreds, you just couldn't all get together in the way that you get together now. So some other supplementary structure will have to be thought of. It's becoming a little difficult even now. It's a quite different situation when you have say eight Chairmen meeting together, and when you have say twenty-two Chairmen meeting together or what ever it is. Supposing, well there are other Centres outside Britain, you might have Chairmen who don't speak English, all right, how are you all going to come together and communicate, clearly there is some sort of structure, some sort of organisation required. There are ways I think, of ensuring a greater or better mix of the Order, that is perhaps more Order Members could actually travel from Centre to Centre, community to community and Chapter to chapter. Maybe a greater use of video material, so that you see what the members of the other Chapters in other parts of the world just look like. That would surely bring them much closer to you.

Kulamitra : Just to get a little bit more precision. Do you think that the LBC complex might actually already be a little bit too large or a bit too multifarious?

S: No I don't think so. I know some people have suggested that but in a sense by organisational standards it is not all that big. So I would say no. I mean how could one split it up, one can't reduce the size of the Centre. I think the limiting factor is the size of the facilities, the number of people with whom you can physically deal. You may well come to a point where you find existing facilities are too small for the people wanting to use them. We haven't reached that point yet. So then you either have to decide to enlarge yourself physically, which means enlarging the whole structure, or as it were, dividing. That is to say another Centre is set up which could as it were drain off some of the extra people. That might be desirable.

Kulamitra : But there has been some tendency for movement wide things, like say for instance Aid For India, or Windhorse Trading to gravitate towards the LBC as the main London Centre. Do you think it would be better if those things were spread around a bit?

S: It might well be the case, I know there is a general tendency in Britain for everything to gravitate towards London, London sucks everything in. This has certain advantages, but I think there are disadvantages too. I personally would like to see our centre of gravity shifting a little away from London, up into the Midlands, say to Birmingham or to Manchester. I would like to encourage some of our activities to move up there. Not just have Centres opening up there, local Centres, but some of our broader based activities actually basing themselves, or having their headquarters there. Not having them all as it were gathered down in London.

Devamitra : Moving on to completely new territory, the next question comes from Dharmapriya, and concerns the literary knowledge of the village monk.

Dharmapriya : Carrithers refers to the village monks as, "a class of landed literary specialists in society". He gives no evidence for the literary attainments, and on the very next page, he mentions that "the pattimokkas almost wholly unknown to many village monks". If such a basic Vinaya Text is unknown, does this not suggest that the literary and scholarly attainments of these village monks are rather insignificant?

S: I think from all that I have been able to gather, the level varies considerably, because one mustn't forget that there exist also what are called (pirivenas) or sort of monastic colleges, and most monks go to these monastic colleges which are of varying quality, for varying periods. Two of these (pirivenas), I think the biggest and most famous in modern times were raised to the rank of universities. I think at one time, several other were, but then that was revoked when there was a change of government. So you had until recently a situation where the bhikkhus were certainly the most literate section of the community. I am a bit out of date, because I have not been in touch, regular contact, with Ceylonese bhikkhus for about twenty years. But I do know that a surprisingly high percentage of authors of all kinds were bhikkhus. Journalists were more often than not bhikkhus. There were many bhikkhus I knew in Calcutta who were correspondents for daily newspapers, this was very common.

So I think that even though they might not have known their pattimokka, they were often quite literary people. Traditionally it was the bhikkhus who upheld the standards of Sinhalese literature. It is no accident that the greatest classical Sinhalese poet, Sirirahula was a bhikkhu. And it's the bhikkhus who have written the histories and written the epics and retold the Jataka stories, and in modern times have produced all sorts of other literary works. So there is a very strong literary emphasis and literary bent in the Sangha. Though among these people there are some who know the Vinaya very well. But no doubt at the very lowest level, where you get a very small village with a very small and very poor temple, the bhikkhu in charge, the parish bhikkhu as it were, is not likely to be very highly literate. Though he may well be the most literate member of his community. But of course, as I say, I am quite out of date in my information and I think probably the balance has rather changed now as more and more lay people have got education. Though many bhikkhus of course have got secular education now too.

So I think that on the whole probably you will still find, as far as I know, that the bhikkhu Sangha in Sri Lanka is still a very highly literate Sangha, even though not perhaps particularly spiritual. Oh yes also bhikkhus always spoke the best Sinhalese, classical Sinhalese, the Sinhalese

as spoken by the bhikkhus and the most highly educated lay people, that is highly educated in their own language, was called Temple Sinhalese, or Vihara Sinhalese. So the bhikkhus as a group were definitely the clerisy, as the priests and monks were in the Middle Ages in Europe. They have lost that to some extent due to the introduction of modern western education. But they still are a highly literate group, but again there were levels, with some being very well versed in Pali and Sinhalese literature and even in Sanskrit literature, and others right at the bottom of the scale, just not knowing very much at all.

But even the highly literate bhikkhus, even those knowing the Vinaya, on the whole would not unfortunately and strangely keep up the practice of regular recitation together of the pattimokka. I found on the whole that Sinhalese bhikkhus did not observe this - those that I knew, certainly those in India didn't - and never referred to it. Whereas the Thais for instance do observe it quite strictly.

Devamitra : Another literary question, this time from Nagabodhi.

Nagabodhi : Carrithers suggests that the art of autobiography writing is more of a Christian soul searching activity than a Buddhist one. But surely the art of autobiography is an extension of self awareness and even kalyana mitrata. As an active autobiographer could you comment on this?

S: Well I can't help thinking of *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa*, which is a sort of autobiography. It isn't really Milarepa's own dictation to Rechung. We know now that it was probably composed a couple of hundred years later, in the form of an autobiography, but the form is known. You see what I mean? But there isn't I think perhaps the soul searching that there is in the west because in a way the whole approach is different. But certainly Chinese and Japanese monks have told the story of their spiritual quest, but I must say I find it rather difficult to imagine a Buddhist Saint Augustine, or a Buddhist Rousseau. Perhaps Rousseau is not a fair comparison because he comes within the secular period, but yes, there is Saint Augustine. Who else is there?

Abhaya : John of the Cross.

S: Autobiography ?

Abhaya : Well he wrote a

S: Saint Teresa wrote an autobiography, but again she is almost a Renaissance figure. No, who was that, Abelard wrote an autobiography, medieval figure.

Suvajra : St. Julia of Norwich.

S: Not quite an autobiography, an account of her own spiritual experiences. Some of the Muslim writers wrote autobiographies, Al-Ghazali

wrote an autobiography. They weren't all that frequent though until modern times. But yes, the second part of your question what was that?

Nagabodhi : Well, surely the art of autobiography owes something to the Buddhist practice of self awareness and also kalyana mitrata in that its a communication and perhaps a teaching as well. I would have thought that on both those counts, it is hard to understand why there hasn't been a fuller tradition of autobiography.

S: Well you could say that the Buddha gave his life story, because there's the Aryapariyesana sutta, there is an excellent precedent if one needs a precedent. Perhaps he doesn't go into the sort of thing that people would be interested in hearing about nowadays, but he does recount the essentials of his life story up to the time of his enlightenment.

Nagabodhi : But do you regard your own essay in autobiography as essentially a teaching practice, or do you think it is a result of the fusion between your Buddhist experience and your western background that has drawn you towards autobiography.

S: I think probably it is the result of some such fusion. I think of it now as having some importance inasmuch as I have started the FWBO. Because naturally people will be interested to know the sort of factors, the sort of influences, that led to my taking that step. Perhaps it will help them to understand their own position, and certainly help them to understand the broader context within which the FWBO was started. Incidentally perhaps they would know more about me because as I think I mentioned, I especially tried to write about those things which only I know about, they couldn't be known unless I revealed them so to speak. But also of course, I have in mind further volumes, whether I will be able to write them I don't know, it is mainly a question of time. But the further volumes I hope to write will have a rather different character. I must say I find it quite difficult, if not impossible, to write spiritual autobiography, because in the sense of a sort of sequential account, chronological account of one's spiritual experiences, it is much easier to write about ones more mundane experiences. What I have always found is that one's spiritual experiences go on such a different level and very often there is no connection between what is going on on the ordinary mundane level. They just don't touch. There might be a number of things going on, on a number of as it were non-mundane levels at the same time, not always in harmony as it were, not always going in the same direction or exploring the same dimension. So how can one reduce that to a sequential linear narration? It seems quite impossible.

One can of course bring in broader trends or particular feelings or even quasi-spiritual experiences, but to give a connected account of ones spiritual life, I would find wholly impossible. I think it has a sort of multidimensionality which cannot be reduced to that sort of structure, that sort of framework, which is a pity in a way. Perhaps it is significant that there are so few spiritual autobiographies, and that those are often produced by Christians. You can produce an autobiography based on your spiritual struggles and conflicts and doubts and fears and feelings of guilt. But I wouldn't really regard that as a spiritual autobiography in the sense in which I am using the term. I think a spiritual autobiography, if it was possible at all, would pertain to a quite different level. Sometimes there are sort of echoes or reflections on as it were lower levels, of things that are happening on higher levels and what is happening on higher levels is as it were to be inferred from what is happening on the lower levels.

There is a verse of Omar Khayam's which I was reading the other day, I wonder if I can remember it. It set me thinking a bit along these sorts of

lines, it goes something like that, it is a four line quatrain:

"You ask what is the meaning of this pattern. It is a pattern that arose from the oceans depths". - No I can't reconstruct it, I'll probably give it to you tomorrow, I'll look it up. But it is a pattern which having arisen from the oceans depths, returns to the depths of that same ocean. So I think the emphasis is on the word pattern. There is a pattern there in the ocean's depths, but the pattern doesn't fully emerge from the ocean's depths, you see only a part of the pattern, you have to infer the rest. Well in a way Browning says the same sort of thing he says: *"On earth the broken arc, in heaven the perfect round."* So on earth you only see the broken arc, and the ordinary autobiography, or the autobiography I am writing gives only the broken arc, not the perfect round. I think that is quite beyond that sort of structure.

Nagabodhi : But not both sides of the circle?

S: No (Laughter) that's only possible in the case of a coin, perhaps that is not without its significance. (laughter)

Padmaraja : Bhante, do you think you ever will write a spiritual autobiography?

S: Well in the sense which I have described I think it is impossible. But I hope to write further volumes in the series of a different type, which perhaps in some ways go a little deeper, but not to the extent of being spiritual autobiographies in the sense which I have been attaching to that term.

Vessantara: What would be their difference?

S: Well just to give you a very rough idea. It's more or less all worked out in my mind. The present volume takes me up to the end of '56, the Buddha Jayanti year when all sorts of things happened for me. I met the Dalai Lama, I established the Triyana Vardhana Vihara, I had my first mass contact with the ex-untouchables, those very important things. Yes in that year also I had a closer contact with Dhardo Rimpoche and came to know him much better than I had known him before.

Then volume two, well volume three it will be actually, will be (if I write it), my second seven years in Kalimpong, I am based then at the Triyana Vardhana Vihara and there will be two major themes. One, my contact with Tibetan Lamas and my experience of Tibetan Buddhism, and my contact with and work among the ex-untouchables. So the next volume, the third volume in the series will be devoted to that.

Then the fourth volume will be the actual circumstances which led up to the establishment of the FWBO, covering my couple of years at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. But that won't be a straight forward narration, week by week, I gave this lecture and gave that lecture, I visited Birmingham, I visited Glasgow. No it is going to be done on a quite different basis, which I won't say anything about at the moment. I hope I can do it all, but it is quite a big project and there are other things to be done also, so I don't really know. I shall consider myself fortunate at the moment if I can finish the present volume, which I have only about a third completed.

Anyway we are getting a bit off the track aren't we?

Devamitra : Padmaraja wants to ask one last supplementary question.

Padmaraja : If you were to work with say a secretary, dictating?

S: I'm afraid I avoid dictation, no. I find writing very, very difficult and I need to be by myself and to concentrate, and I constantly revise. I mean some people know that every few days I have a huge waste paper basket full of rejected versions, and rough drafts and so on. I can often write and re-write six, seven, eight times, that is quite usual. I advance very, very slowly. I know that sometimes I work quite hard the whole day, and I produce my five-hundred words. So I don't find it easy to write to my own satisfaction. There is no question of my making use of a secretary, and dictating and getting it all down on tape, for me that's quite out of the question. Form is content for me, I just see form and content as coinciding. It is not just a question of communicating certain facts, it is the way the facts are communicated. I have to feel my way back to the situation, by writing about and recapturing as best I can my feelings then. That isn't always easy because I am going back thirty odd years. Also improving my actual writing all the time I hope, I'm not sure about that. I just hope (laughter). It is not an easy matter to judge oneself.

Devamitra : Before proceeding with the next question, can I just remind you all please, if you do have any supplementary questions at all to refer to me so that we don't get scattered in the discussion. The next question comes from Kamalasila and concerns the parajikas.

Kamalasila : Yes, on page 144, we read that the punishment for intended sexual intercourse and theft, is permanent expulsion from the Sangha. Why such a severe punishment? Why isn't it sufficient for the guilty party just to acknowledge his fault?

S: Yes, well this is the very question that was raised by the Mahayana. The Mahayana did not believe that there was any such thing as permanent expulsion from the Sangha. The Mahayana did believe that even parajika offenses could, so to speak, be repented of and atoned for. This is quite apart from the consideration I mentioned some days ago, about transcending Hinayana precepts through the, or by means of the Bodhisattva Vow. The Mahayana is not speaking about transcending, (to use that term, which is Mr. Chen's term) in this connection, but actual breaking unskillfully.

The Mahayana did believe, and this view is reflected in a number of early Mahayana Sutras, that any breach of the Vinaya could be in fact repented and atoned for. There were various procedures or ceremonies for this, mainly consisting of actual confession to the Buddhas. And in Tibetan Buddhism there is of course an elaborate practice of confession to the thirty-five Buddhas of confession, burning of incense and chanting of sacred texts, and so on. The grand master Chi-I, he refers to this is Dhyana for Beginners.

This has always been the Mahayana attitude, because in a way it does seem strange. It appears to go back to the Buddha himself. It would seem to be not only severe, but even harsh. If it does go back to the Buddha, there must have been a reason for it, but I must confess I can't myself hit upon a reason for it, and it is significant that the Mahayana soon made that point, that even breaches of fundamental precepts can be atoned for.

Subhuti : Does that mean that the Sarvastivada Vinaya did not have parajikas ... ?

S: Oh no, the Sarvastivada Vinaya definitely did, all the Vinayas did yes. But when I speak of the Mahayana as such, it is not the Mahayana as incorporating the Sarvastivada tradition on its own terms as it were.

Devamitra : We have a supplementary question I believe from Sona on the parajikas.

Sona : Why are the parajikas in the order they are, taking human life is third, not first? Secondly, why is false speech not considered a serious offence?

S: I think, from the best of my recollection the parajikas are enumerated in the order in which they occurred. That is to say the Order in which the Buddha had to lay down those particular rules regarding parajikas in as much as a certain bhikkhu had behaved in a certain way. To the best of my knowledge that is the reason.

Why wrong speech was not made a parajika, I just don't know, to the best of my knowledge there is no discussion of that point anywhere in Buddhist literature. Perhaps it is a subtler matter and more difficult to ascertain, I don't know. But certainly it is a very serious matter, it does concern actual overt behaviour, and according to the Vinaya, one is not accountable for states of mind as such by themselves, the Vinaya is concerned with your behaviour. Though under certain circumstances as linked with intention. If you have an angry thought that does not come within the scope of the Vinaya, but if you act upon that angry thought obviously it does under certain circumstances. But why wrong speech should have been excluded it is difficult to say. I can't think of any explanation.

Suvajra : It is even surprising that they not here in the second list of the sanghadisesas. So what importance is speech given in that?

S: Well in terms of the ten, the dasasilas, it's give very great importance indeed. And there are

[End of Tape 13 Tape 14]

S: (contd) a Sutta addressed to Rahula, the Rauhulaovada Sutta, where the Buddha makes specific mention of lying and says that the bhikkhu, the one who lies is overthrown. But nonetheless, there is no provision for that in the Vinaya. Perhaps this does suggest that the Vinaya was codified in fact after the Buddha's time. That is a speculation but there is that possibility.

Tejananda : With regard to the rules, the breaking of which leads to rustication (**S:** Sanghadisesa), a bit later on in the chapter, Sumana is described as accepting, well admitting, his fault and being rusticated, but there is a mention somewhere there that during one retreat a bhikkhu who had been rusticated was nevertheless in association with the Sangha. So what exactly did rustication mean?

S: It meant suspension from participation in official acts of the Sangha and forfeiture of ones seniority and behaving in matters of courtesy as though one was junior rather than senior. For instance, even if you had been ordained as a bhikkhu long before a certain other bhikkhu, during rustication you would have to behave toward him as though you were his junior, that is to say you bowing down to him instead of him bowing

down to you on certain appropriate occasions. And you would not take part in any sanghakammas, and you would not take part in an ordination ceremony for instance. So there was no harshness about it, no actual punishment. You were suspended from the exercise of certain responsibilities or even duties, and you adopted ceremonially, so to speak, a junior position. But you certainly weren't humiliated or flogged or anything of that sort.

Tejananda : Even in the case of Sumana, although he was expelled from the bhikkhu sangha he was still able to be a novice, so he wasn't altogether pushed out.

S: Yes he was still able to be a novice. Which again, as a novice of course, not being a bhikkhu at all, he would not take part in sanghakammas and so on. But on the other hand his influence could be considerable. He could say perhaps, "I don't think such and such a person should be ordained," and the ordained monks could very well accept his advice, even though technically he was not entitled to say anything. I knew several monks who were technically sammaneras for one reason or another, but who were well respected and whose words carried some weight with many bhikkhus.

Devamitra : Another question from Kamalasila this time on the Sanghadisesas.

Kamalasila : On page 146, we read that the procedure of Sanghadisesa was used for monks who would not be admonished for a transgression.

S: That it would not be in the sense of who refused to be.

Kamalasila : Who refused to be, yes. It seems to me that it could become important for us to have some procedure for dealing with Order Members who will not acknowledge a fault. Do you think that is true?

S: I think this is so, yes. It's unfortunate of course that Order Members should commit faults at all and still more unfortunate that having committed that they don't acknowledge. That can't always be ignored, but I think one has to be very very careful how one goes about that. Because I have noticed sometimes in the past occasionally, that certain people get almost made scapegoats. That other Order Members who are very prone to find fault with them, sometimes on very flimsy ground, so one doesn't want to give any pretext for that sort of thing. I think one has to be very careful about resorting to any sort of procedure to deal with somebody's faults. There are all sorts of other ways perhaps to deal with the situation initially, by perhaps thinking, well, if we had behaved better, perhaps that person would have behaved better. Do you see what I mean? Let me try to set a better example, or let me try to be very friendly with that person, so that he may open up with me spontaneously, then I can say what I think, rather than dragging that person in front of a Chapter meeting and accusing him of something in a quasi judicial sort of way. I think that usually that does not work.

It's all right perhaps if you have the King behind you enforcing the decisions of the Sangha, but we don't have that. So we have to be very, very careful that we do function really entirely in accordance with the love mode. I think perhaps in those sorts of circumstances, it would be better for a certain individual to take upon themselves the responsibility of establishing better contact with that Order Member if he would permit them

and winning his confidence so that he naturally, if he didn't actually confess that, at least he would be willing to discuss it and would be open to having his faults pointed out.

Kamalasila : I suppose I wondered in a way, should we pursue things like that more than we do?

S: Well, yes I think we should, but I think we have to be very careful how we go about it, and not tackle it in what I called this quasi-judicial sort of way. Otherwise you could end up having a trial, with one Order Member accusing him, and another defending him, and a judge in the end passing sentence. Perhaps have a jury of Order Members which would be really in a way quite tragic. So there could be some better way of dealing with such a situation but yes, if an Order Member commits a serious fault and is either unable to see it as a fault, or refuses to admit it, or won't discuss it, something must be done about it. But what is to be done about it is another question.

I think people have to be very, very careful to make sure that they are acting with accordance with the love mode and they are not consumed by righteous indignation, not as it were getting at that particular person, not scapegoating him and so on and so forth. Otherwise the original situation can be made worse, and more faults can be committed by more people.

Dhammaloka : Could one regard the mere existence of such a rule as that as a sign of decay of the Sangha?

S: Oh yes indeed! I think the Buddha did so regard. There is a passage in the Pali Canon itself which has remained there by some kind of miracle, where the Buddha is actually represented as saying, (I am paraphrasing): "At the beginning of my ministry there were many arahants and few rules, but now there are many rules and few arahants." So yes, when rules are laid down, there is the beginning of decay.

Devamitra : Kamalasila does actually have a second question in a similar vein.

Kamalasila : Well, I could ask it, I don't think it is a very good question. I just wondered whether our version of sanghadisesa might not be compulsory attendance of Order Meetings, rather than the opposite? (laughter)

S: Ah, but then what does one mean by compulsory?

Kamalasila : Yes, well I know, it's not very good. (laughter)

S: No, the question is OK, but that word perhaps is rather unfortunate, because it suggests invoking the power mode which is not what one intends naturally. One should encourage Order Members to attend, if they don't attend Chapter Meetings, or Order Meetings. Win their confidence and talk to them about it, find some way of persuading them to go. Not say, "Well you ought to go, and if you don't you are going to be punished, or penalised." Again that is not the way. Perhaps one needs to exercise a lot of patience and forbearance.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, you have partly answered the question that I am going to ask, but it does have other factors to it as well. The sanghadisesa

ceremony in this chapter appears to be a perversion of the original sanghadisesa ceremony in the Vinaya. In this case the twenty monks are called together by Ratnapala because he wished to atone for his sins. In the Vinaya twenty monks were called together to decide if in fact a monk was in breach of a sanghadisesa rule. Have you any comments to make about this, on what appears to be a desire for self inflicted punishment.

In the sorry event that an Order Member in future may require censuring, do you see a period of expulsion from chapter meetings as being a reasonable and effective censure? In the case of severe censure, would another chapter be asked to help to decide the case The large number of monks, twenty, would seem to be significant here, double that required for an ordination.

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

Buddhadasa : In the sanghadisesa ceremony in this chapter, there appears to be a perversion of the original sanghadisesa ceremony of the Vinaya. In this case the twenty monks are called together by Ratnapala, because he wished to atone for his sins.

S: Yes, that is clear enough.

Buddhadasa : In the Vinaya twenty monks were called together to decide if the monk was in fact in breach of a sanghadisesa rule. Have you any comments to make about this, and what appears to be a desire for self inflicted punishment?

S: Well there may have been a desire on Ratnapala's part for self inflicted punishment. But I think he didn't call the twenty monks together to decide whether he had committed a sanghadisesa offence. I get the impression I think, it was very clear in his own mind that he had in fact committed it and therefore needed to be rusticated and rehabilitated officially by the Sangha after his confession. Details are not given and this is significant because, again according to the Vinaya, a monk is not permitted to disclose his fault to anyone who is not a monk. So he would not have committed that to writing and it would not be therefore accessible to the author. Do you see what I mean?

No doubt there was a slightly let us say, masochistic element in Ratnapala. But perhaps it is not necessary for us to look too closely at that. But go on to the other clauses.

Buddhadasa : In the sorry event that an Order Member in the future may require censuring, do you see a period of expulsion from chapter meetings as being a reasonable and effective censuring?

S: But, "requires censuring". Perhaps we are proceeding a little too quickly, because we have started off on the possibility that an Order Member might commit a fault. Clearly something needs to be done about that but as I said I think it is important that one should operate in dealing with that fault in the other Order Member in accordance with the love mode and not the power mode. Censure would seem to be quite an extreme procedure.

If it's generally known, generally accepted that what that particular person has done is in fact a fault, if perhaps in his heart of hearts he knows it himself, what is the purpose of the censure? This seems to smack of again a quasi-judicial proceeding, so I think my own personal inclination,

or tendency would be to try to avoid approaching the matter in that particular way.

I think if in the course of discussion it was clarified and generally admitted, including by the person concerned, including him, that a fault had been committed, that would be enough. Does one really require a proclamation that so and so has committed such and such a fault and this particular chapter is very displeased with him, does one really require that?

For instance, it may sometimes be necessary to make the matter clear say to other chapters because well, in extreme cases there may be misunderstanding. They may not realise that this particular person, this particular Order Member has in fact committed a fault. But I think one should be very careful and try to keep the matter within the particular chapter and deal with it within the particular chapter.

Buddhadasa : But Bhante, what about in the case where, and I have heard of such cases, where you have a particularly disruptive Order Member who makes the possibility of an effective chapter meeting almost non viable?

S: Well in the first place you have to be quite patient with that person, because the alternative is that you ask him not to attend, and that is a really very serious matter, and could lead to a permanent breach. But only the individual chapter could decide whether they wished to take that alternative. But they should realise the seriousness of that step. Then they have to weigh up whether they think it a lesser evil to put up with the disruptiveness of that Order Member for a few weeks or a few months more until it can be dealt with positively and sorted out, or whether they want to actually create, virtually, a breach between themselves and him or her. There is also the question that sometimes people don't get on, by virtue of almost a chemical reaction. And it may well be that without in a sense any fault, one particular person just does not get on sufficiently well with the others, but it might not then be a question of as it were expelling him or suspending him, but explaining the situation and suggesting that he find another chapter that he can join, where his particular chemistry will be more in keeping with the chemistry of those other Order Members, do you see what I mean?

Because people who are quite good in themselves, sometimes just don't manage to get on together. They may have different ways of operating or just a different sort of personal chemistry. So I think those kinds of considerations should be looked at too. There was a little bit more wasn't there?

Buddhadasa : Yes. In the case of severe censure, would another chapter be able to help to decide a difficult case? The large number of monks (twenty) would seem to be significant here, double that required for an ordination.

S: Well there are provisions in the Vinaya for settling disputes I don't remember all the details, but they could be consulted. There are six or seven ways of settling disputes. For instance by the appointment of a sub-committee to look into the matter. If there were two parties within a chapter, by representatives of each party getting together and sorting it out and so on and so forth.

And sometimes, in certain cases, there is a general agreement just to drop the whole matter because it is understood that discussion would only make it worse. There is an expression of that in Pali, I forget what it is called, 'covering over as with grass', just agreeing to drop the matter, because you are just making it worse by continuing to discuss it. The rights and wrongs have become so obscured and so muddled that you feel that probably they will never be sorted out, and it is better just to drop the whole business. That is one possibility.

Perhaps someone should make a study of these sort of things, because though within the context of the monastic order, many of the provisions involve general principles which are quite applicable to the Western Buddhist Order. Not all those rules may have been laid down by the Buddha, but they are certainly the outcome of experience on the part of that particular Sangha in the early days of Buddhism. And after all the Sangha broadly speaking has survived for these two thousand five hundred years, so there must have been a certain strength in its structure as originally laid down, whether by the Buddha or by later disciples.

Devaraja : I find it very shocking that there was decay within the Buddha's own lifetime, and that in the early days there were many arahants and few rules , and later many rules and few arahants. But it is not just a case of say, it's actually a decrease in the number of arahants rather than an expansion of the Sangha, and therefore proportionately less, I mean are there reasons for this?

S: Well it isn't surprising, think of the force of the gravitational pull! The Buddha himself cannot oblige anyone to tread the spiritual path. He can influence, he can exhort, he can set an example, but even the Buddha can't compel anybody. It must be - the following of the spiritual path must be - the result of each individual's personal decision. We might say it is no less shocking actually that all members of the Western Buddhist Order don't gain enlightenment within two or three years. That is no less shocking! You see what I mean. Because it's exactly the same thing.

So then that means one asks oneself, well why haven't I gained enlightenment? I have been, perhaps, an Order Member for five years, ten years, even longer. Why haven't I gained enlightenment? Why is it so, it is really very shocking! (Laughter)

Devaraja : But, when it first started, there were many arahants and few rules, there were actually many arahants, but he is saying now later in his lifetime there are few arahants.

S: Well, sometimes Buddhists explain this by invoking the law of karma; that there were those who on account of their previous personal preparation, were born around the time of the Buddha and in association with the Buddha, and their contact with the Buddha enabled them to as it were, put almost the finishing touches to their spiritual development within a very short period. Sometimes that explanation was given.

Devaraja : So later in life he was sort of mopping up the kind of less ...

S: Those who had less connection with him, one could even say that. But I think one has to be aware of perhaps an unconscious assumption that one has, that because the Buddha was around, people were bound to get enlightened as though they did not have any choice. But we know that there were people even immediately after the Buddha's enlightenment, like Upaka, who refused to allow themselves to be influenced by the Buddha, or could not even see that he was enlightened, even though he was fresh so to speak from his enlightenment. So in a sense it is shocking, and in a sense it is understandable.

Abhaya : Bhante I was interested in what you said about chemistry, because I was trying to reconcile what you said in the question and answer

session about rifts between Order Members, where you were suggesting that that's one very serious fault within the Order. But like here you are suggesting that when there is a rift, trying to separate those Order Members into different chapters so that side steps the issue.

S: Ah yes, well there are rifts and rifts. Sometimes, I think the sort of instance I was referring to, was not when there was an actual rift, but where there was just an inability to work together or to feel very strongly for one another. Well then under those circumstances it might be better to suggest that the other person joins another chapter. Not of course that that is the end of the matter, perhaps I should have expanded or enlarged upon that.

Because you are both still within the Order, you are both still within the Order. So perhaps when the person who has left the first chapter and joins the second has been happily within that chapter for some time, perhaps he could then see what the situation actually was. Perhaps he can then establish a more positive contact with the person originally he couldn't get on with. Because eventually one has to transcend questions of personal chemistry even.

But I was thinking that, it may be counter productive in certain situations almost to try to force certain people to get on well, when they can't, they just need a rest from each other at least for the time being. You've just got to separate them for a while otherwise you are in danger of making things worse and worse. That's the sort of situation I am envisaging.

Devamitra : Moving on to another area, Achala has a question concerning sexual repression in Sinhalese society.

Achala : I have heard it said that western society has numerous sexual hang ups, attributable to the effects of Christian attitudes. However, Carrithers says that hysteria from sexual repression is a relatively common phenomenon in Sri Lankan society. This statement coupled with the story of Ratnapala's preoccupation with sexual guilt, implies that Sri Lankan Buddhism has also given rise to problems in this area. Is this in fact the case? And if so, is there any essential difference between the problems of sexual repression arising from the Christian fear of God, and the Sri Lankan Buddhists' fear that sexual misconduct will land one in the hell realms?

S: He does cite an article by Gananath Obeyesekere, "*The Idiom of Demonic Possession, A Case Study*" is that the one?

Achala: Page 147.

S: Yes that's the one, but that's his only reference. He doesn't cite really any evidence for the prevalence of hysteria based in this way in Sri Lanka. So it's very difficult to know how seriously to take that statement. My impression has always been that Sri Lankan society was rather free in this respect. But that was only an impression, certainly not based on any systematic study or detailed knowledge. What was the further question?

Achala: If this is in fact the case, is there any essential difference between the problems of sexual repression arising from the Christian fear of God, and the Sri Lankan Buddhists' fear that sexual misconduct will land one in the hell realms?

S: But there was something before that about Ratnapala.

Achala : Ah yes; This statement coupled with the story of Ratnapala's preoccupation with sexual guilt implies that Sri Lankan Buddhism has also given rise to problems in this area.

S: There is guilt and guilt. There is let's say, healthy guilt, non-neurotic guilt, and neurotic guilt. I mean he had actually, let us say, broken a rule, when he became a bhikkhu he had in effect undertaken to observe those rules, but he had broken a particular rule. So it would seem quite reasonable in a way that he should feel guilty on account of having broken that rule, that would be a rational guilt, not an irrational guilt. There is the possibility that he overdid it, but perhaps that's a matter of opinion, it is very difficult to be sure.

But I think that we must not assume that all guilt is irrational guilt, and it's always bad to feel guilty. I think that is a modern tendency perhaps even in the FWBO. But I think that isn't the case, because if you have broken what is in fact an ethical principle, or an ethical rule, you should feel rational guilt on that account, and want to make it all right, to make up for what you've done and reinstate yourself at least in your own esteem.

I personally think he probably was a little preoccupied in a slightly unhealthy way with that particular thing. But no doubt he was subject to some extent to the influences of his cultural environment. Whether Buddhism or Buddhist culture has been responsible for the sort of neuroses you get in Christianity, I think it is quite difficult to say. I think it is unlikely. I think very often Buddhists go to the opposite extreme, as for instance the Thais seem to do. Think of all those brothels in Bangkok - it's the brothel capital of the East, so one gathers, so one hears. Apparently, well one does not want to go into details, but the ladies involved are all devout Buddhists in the ordinary lay Theravadin sense, practically all of them at least, those that aren't Christians, or good Catholics! (laughter) So I think we just don't know enough about the Buddhist world in this respect to be able really to generalise, but in the case of Ratnapala there is probably a combination of genuine concern for the fact that he had not lived up to the vows that he'd taken, genuine regret, rational guilt, plus perhaps a certain neurotic element. Because if after all, you have committed that particular offence, is it really such a serious matter, so serious that you have to suffer in hell for millions of millions of years? That would seem to be disproportionate, well completely disproportionate.

Kulamitra: Bhante, reading the passage it does seem to me that the problem really came out of the fact that within the Buddhist Theravada tradition, it's not really easy to think of a way of seriously practising Buddhism, which doesn't involve celibacy immediately. So that if one is not initially up to celibacy this creates that sort of conflict. Would you agree with that?

S: Yes, I think that is so yes. I think in fact in practice that in some quarters in the Theravada Sangha, they have made a sort of practical adaptation or accommodation, but it is not as it were officially acknowledged. Of course Ratnapala was not in a position to recognise that, by virtue of his, as it were, rather puritanical approach, and also the basic structure of, as it were, official Theravada.

Kulamitra : Sorry I don't understand, what is this adaptation? Is it laxity of the rules?

S: Yes, in principle in many Buddhist countries the rules in this respect have been relaxed. But I think it hasn't usually been done in an honest

open way saying that, well, for those who are beginners in the spiritual life, complete celibacy cannot be demanded. Therefore together with the genuine spiritual effort, we will permit at least a certain measure of sexual indulgence. That has never been the sort of declared or stated policy, but actually it has very often been the practice. But I think, inasmuch as it hasn't been declared and stated, there has been a sort of undermining element at the same time at least in the case of certain individuals. Again it is not easy to generalise because the situation in this respect differs from one Buddhist country to another. For instance in Sri Lanka, it is considered very disgraceful to disrobe. In Burma and Thailand it isn't. So I have heard of extreme cases where bhikkhus in Burma finding it very difficult to observe celibacy, so they disrobe for the weekend, quite officially. They disrobe and they go off and enjoy themselves, and come back and get re-ordained. (laughter) Because ordination and re-ordination is very easy in Theravada countries and especially in the case of sammaneras, because bhikkhus can only get re-ordained up to seven times, but sammaneras can give up the robes and be ordained again indefinitely.

So technically they are on the right side of the Vinaya, but spiritually it's a rather confusing situation, because they don't think in terms of living a spiritual life. They think in terms of being a monk or not being a monk, observing a certain rule or not observing a certain rule, regardless of the bearing of the observance or nonobservance on your spiritual development.

So I think the whole thing needs to be brought out much more into the open. I mean I don't know whether one even ought to say this, as my words are being taped, but I'll risk it; that I was once told by a Sinhalese bhikkhu that he believed that not more than five per cent of the Sinhalese bhikkhu Sangha was genuinely celibate. I mean in the sense of having been consistently celibate throughout the whole of their monastic life.

Therefore, this is one of the reasons why at the very beginning, when we started the FWBO, celibacy was not made compulsory. We have Kamesu micchachara, but not that, because I felt as a result of what I had observed in the East and as a result of my own reflections, that this could not be required of someone from the beginning, even if that person was sincerely committed to the spiritual life. So the requirement of celibacy could not be tied to commitment to leading a spiritual life, but on the other hand, and I think this has been made clear in recent years, perhaps even recent months, sexuality should over the years, gradually be phased out as it were. Do you see what I mean? It will probably take quite a long time but I think that process should be going on. I mean I am speaking in the case of people who are say twenty-five or over, if it is in the case of a youngster of sixteen or seventeen, you can't expect them to start phasing it out before it's really even begun. I'm afraid you have to accept that, but from about twenty-five I think one should think in terms of gradually phasing out the whole business, so that by the time you are about forty you are virtually celibate, and no longer bothered by that particular issue. (laughter)

But to ask a youngster who is spiritually committed and sincere, on account of that commitment and sincerity, to at once start being fully celibate, and almost making him feel bad when he can't be, I think this is quite unreasonable and not in accordance with the basic principles of the spiritual life.

Kulamitra : Bhante, as we are reading through the book, so many of the problems that come up, or faults in the Sangha that come up, seem to lead back to this confusion of the monastic life with the spiritual life.....

S: Yes, the formal monastic life.

Kulamitra : ... and the precepts with the 'going for refuge'.

S: Yes, because there is hardly a mention of 'going for refuge' is there. Though sometimes, 'going forth' conveys something of that meaning of 'going for refuge', because what do you go forth for the sake of, well you could say, enlightenment ultimately. So going forth conveys something of what we understand by going for refuge, but by no means fully. The going for refuge is the basic, the central formula which makes the whole process, the whole business infinitely clearer.

Devamitra : Achala has a third question.

Achala : I don't know if this is a popular one it's about hell. The fear of hell appears to frequently plague Sri Lankan Buddhists. The text gives the impression that the response to this fear on the parts of the individuals concerned is to be frightened into practising morality more strictly. There is no.....

S: Let me just comment on that because I just remember something which I might otherwise forget. It's from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Apparently Johnson visited Paris in company with the Thrales, and he visited with I think Mrs. Thrale, a nunnery, and he spoke to the Mother Superior through the grating, and he said, "You are not here because of the love of virtue, you are here because of the fear of vice." And the Mother Superior said, "I shall remember that all my life." So this was in effect what Johnson was saying. It is not enough to be motivated by the fear of vice or the fear of anything, there has got to be the love of virtue, there's got to be the love of enlightenment, or the positive commitment. Otherwise it isn't really sufficient. So perhaps one does see that negative motivation, which in a spiritual sense is not a real motivation at all, far too much at least in some forms of Theravada Buddhism.

Achala : There is no indication that this discomfort, with help, could be alleviated by developing wisdom, by trying to really see the nature of what it is that they are scared of, and having seen this no longer being fearful of it. For example, after waking up from a terrible nightmare, it is possible to see the relative reality of the hellish conditions in the dream, and that there was never actually anything to be afraid of. Do you think that reflections of this sort could effectively be used as a means of breaking through this particular demon? In this connection I believe I remember reading that Shin Ran, the founder of the Shin school of Buddhism said that even if he was reborn in the Avici Hell, he did not mind.

S: Yes that is a completely different attitude from a much more transcendental point of view. One is also reminded of the Vajrasattva practice, because that is a purification practice. You recite the mantra, you do the visualisation, but in the end you realise that having done all that, not neglecting all that but having done all that, you realise that the sin, so to speak, itself is empty. You transcend the very notion of sin, but you find nothing of that in the Theravada I'm afraid.

So they have their strong points but they certainly have their limitations. One can appreciate Ratnapala's sincerity, and what he actually did despite tremendous difficulties, but the sort of framework within which he had to live his spiritual life, doesn't seem to have been very supportive

or very helpful. A touch of the Mahayana I think, just a touch, would have improved the situation considerably.

Devamitra : From hell we move on to 'filth', Devaraja (laughter).

S: How many more questions are there by the way?

Devamitra : After Devaraja there are another three, with a supplementary possibly from Abhaya or one of those.

Devaraja : Assuming that the translator has translated the text correctly, on page 143, Carrithers quotes from the Cullavagga, and one of the terms is; "inherently filthy". This seems unBuddhistic. Please could you comment on it? **[End of Side One Side Two]**

S: Yes "inherently filthy," does seem rather strong. I would have to check the Pali text because on the face of it, it certainly does seem that no one, even the worse sinner could be "inherently filthy." Again there is a passage in the Anguttara Nikaya where the Buddha is represented as saying that the mind is intrinsically pure. So, as I said, one would have to check the original Pali, but on the face of it, it does seem quite unBuddhistic. It might be connected with this notion, regardless of whether it goes back to the Buddha or not, of it being not possible to receive someone back into the Order under certain circumstances.

Subhuti : Yes there is a passage in the Udana which obviously is the same as this, it's translated by Woodward as, "a rubbish heap of filth within."

S: Well yes, but this is quite different from, "intrinsically". Because within means in the mind, and obviously within the mind there are different levels, different layers. But "intrinsically" really that is almost a metaphysical term isn't it? As when you say people are intrinsically enlightened, or intrinsically Buddhas, well to say that they are intrinsically, or inherently filthy, that is quite a different thing. So I think one can safely say that at the very least that expression in English regardless of what the Pali original says, just cannot be taken literally. It seems to go against the whole spirit of Buddhism.

Devamitra : I'm afraid we move on to excrement.

S: We are doing very well this evening! (laughter)

Dharmapriya : In this chapter as in some previous ones, excremental imagery crops up again and again. Shantideva too, uses such imagery in describing hell. Both Ceylon and India are infested with caste and at least in India, the lower the caste the more it has to do with filth and dirty jobs. At the very bottom, the lowest untouchables remove excrement. Do you believe that such a sickeningly intense use of excremental imagery is linked to the caste nature of these societies?

S: I would say it was probably the other way around, that the caste nature of the societies was linked to that particular attitude towards excrement. In a way one can understand it, in a way it's natural because if one isn't careful in this respect, if one doesn't observe certain hygienic

measures, well then one risks disease. So the early Indians were very aware of this, but unfortunately they transferred the whole responsibility for the matter to a separate lower caste of people who became the dirty ones, the defiled ones whom others proceeded to separate themselves from. So I think it is the impulse to cleanliness and purity, and the wish to separate oneself from everything to do with excrement and so on, that led or was one of the factors contributing to the caste system rather than the other way around. So this is why for instance Mahatma Gandhi himself undertook to clean the latrines and encouraged his followers to do this, recognising that unless you accepted responsibility for the disposal of your own excrement there was going to be a class of people who had to do that particular work for you as well as for themselves, and who would then be treated as untouchables on that account, adding insult to injury. You are not only given the dirty work of society to do, but you are punished for doing it, as well as being compelled to do it. It seems absolutely outrageous, but the only solution really, apart from modern sanitary developments, is for people to take responsibility for the disposing of their own waste. But the fact that excrement features in hell I think only represents the fact that excrement was regarded as something extremely unpleasant, and that to be brought into direct contact with it was a terrible thing, a dire punishment, and that is why it features in hell. It was a painful thing to come into contact with just like fire.

Devamitra : Moving on to a completely different subject, Padmavajra has a question on Oriental culture.

Padmavajra : This really is a spin off because Ratnapala when he was a young lad, seems to have been subjected to homosexuality or at least Carrithers infers that. But what I want to ask is this...

S: Yes, it isn't very clear because as he also says it could have been something like eating supper. I think we have to be very careful not to jump to conclusions in this individual case, because as I mentioned, in his writings, even his autobiography, a bhikkhu would not make statements which could be read by non bhikkhus. So we must be quite careful not to jump to conclusions, it may well have been that, but we don't really know.

Padmavajra : Jumping to that conclusion (laughter) not supper! In the Eastern Buddhist tradition generally, is there or has there ever been any tradition of friendship between men and boys that included sexual activity, and which was positive - positive in the sense of being one means among many of contributing to the boy's development?

S: I can't recollect any official statement to that effect, I mean there is at least one instance in the Vinaya, where young sammaneras do as it were misbehave in that particular way and where that is condemned. It does seem that in India, a purely mundane view was taken of sex, and it was considered to be completely inimical to spiritual development until of course we come on to the Vajrayana which is rather a different kettle of fish, one might say. Even there, whatever sexuality in the literal sense might have been present in Tantric practice, it seems to have been exclusively heterosexual. In this connection I remember when Ginsberg came to see me in Kalimpong, he wanted to question Mr. Chen about the Vajrayana. So I arranged for him to meet Mr. Chen and on the way there we were talking about the Vajrayana and Ginsberg, perhaps not unnaturally got on to sex in the Vajrayana and asked me what were these sexual practices, and I did not know any more about them really other than what I had heard from Mr. Chen really. So I didn't want to satisfy his curiosity to too great an extent because Europeans who came to Kalimpong were always asking about the Tantra and the sexual practices and one got rather fed up with it. So I just briefly indicated what it seemed to represent so then he turned round to me and said, "Say, can you do it with a boy?" (laughter) And I said, "Well really I don't know,

you will have to ask Mr.Chen!" So he did ask Mr. Chen, and Mr. Chen was horrified and really shocked! Oh yes and he just wouldn't answer the question, and didn't really know what to say. He spoke to me about it afterwards, when I met him again, and that was absolutely beyond the pale, that sort of question or that sort of idea. He was really quite not only shocked, but thrown in a way that he wasn't usually thrown.

So one might say that this had been the general attitude in the East, though again in practice, there were let us say various alleviations of the rules made. But it was never made very explicit and certainly not brought out into the open and honestly discussed and the question considered; whether a certain measure of indulgence in sex, whether heterosexual or of any other type, could be compatible with the spiritual life up to a certain point. The inference can be drawn, or the implications are there in the Pali Canon even, because we are told on a number of occasions, that certain lay people, who presumably had not completely given up sex, had attained stream entry. I think it is generally understood, that the attainment of stream entry does not require complete celibacy, I think that is generally understood though not insisted upon. Stream entry is open to lay people who have not given up sexual activity altogether. Obviously not that it plays a very important part in their life. But I think this whole issue awaits discussion from the Buddhist point of view. I mean some of our Buddhist friends in the States seem to have just gone to the other extreme, that anything goes, you don't need to exercise any sort of restraint in the sexual sphere. And sometimes it's all done in the name of pseudo-Tantra, pseudo-Vajrayana, even pseudo-Zen. Again one needs to get back to a middle path, between repression and permissiveness, or whatever one might call it. But clearly it's an area where there is great room, not only for repression but also rationalisation. But I think it is very important to understand that physical sexuality needs to be gradually phased out, but not in such a way, or not given up in such a way that there is a rebound or reaction from the rest of your nature, and you don't make it more difficult to lead the spiritual life instead of less difficult.

It is quite a fine issue in a way. You don't want to justify anything and on the other hand, you don't want to force the pace in an unproductive way.

Abhaya : Bhante, I am linking up in my mind what you are saying about winding down sexual activity round about the age of forty.

S: Yes, not that one's whole attention is centred on that, obviously the main emphasis will be on spiritual life, spiritual development, meditation, and partly as a result of that, partly perhaps as the result of a natural waning of your powers, there will be less and less emphasis on and interest in sexuality.

Abhaya : I was going on to a question of sexuality in communities, with homosexuality in communities and this question of 'Greek Love', where you have say an older Order Member having sexual activity with a younger Order Member in communities as an expression of spiritual friendship. How do you think we should play that so to speak.

S: Well first of all one has to take into consideration, the law of the land, and perhaps even to a certain extent one has to take into account public opinion. But on the other hand, one doesn't want to be engaging in any activity that you have as it were, to keep secret, it is not an easy situation at all, certainly not in Britain and very likely not in other countries, because we aren't living in ancient Greece, no matter how much some people might like the idea of living in ancient Greece. I think we have to be quite discrete and quite sensible, and place the major emphasis on the

living of the spiritual life and the spiritual interests of the movement.

Devamitra : We have one question which remains concerning the question of hygiene.

Suvajra : The question arises partly out of Abhaya's consideration. It didn't arise within our group it arose within the study leaders' questionings, and it is to do with hygiene and AIDS, and the whole question of discretion. I have been following the discussion over the past number of months on AIDS and it is reaching in some places so-called epidemic proportions. Do you have any concern in this area, anything that you'd perhaps (like to see us doing)?

S: We have certainly talked about it in the Order Office, and Dharmadhara has been following this particular matter, but only in today's papers, Sunday papers, there were articles on this very subject. And no doubt it is growing and expected to grow further, and there is as yet no remedy. So I think it does behove people to be very, very cautious. It was formerly thought that it was confined to homosexuals and could be communicated only from one man to another. But it seems quite recently it has been communicated to men by prostitutes, especially in certain places, I forget exactly where, I think in Africa and Asia. Apparently AIDS originated from Central Africa, which sounds rather strange, but this is what one is told. So this would suggest, and probably this does not apply to people in the FWBO, this would suggest that it could be quite dangerous to have recourse to prostitutes. It could be quite dangerous in fact perhaps to have casual sex with anybody, whether male or female, with whose sexual history you are not well acquainted.

So again it almost suggests that celibacy is in one's own interest from a hygienic point of view, and those who you do select as sexual partners should be people you know quite well. As I said, whose sexual history you know. And they perhaps in turn should be very careful about their sexual contacts and they should let you know about their sexual contact because unwittingly they might even transmit something to you.

So there has to be a lot more openness and honesty on sexual matters between the sexes as well as within the sexes, than perhaps there has been heretofore. I am not quite sure how easily AIDS can be transmitted but perhaps there should be a general tightening up of hygiene within communities anyway. I have sometimes thought this, I was thinking about it only a few days ago and wondering whether to ask Dharmadhara to write something about it. I think people are still insufficiently attentive to hygiene within communities, and I think this is not desirable from a general health point of view. Perhaps I should in fact get Dharmadhara to write something. I mean he is well aware of these issues and well qualified to deal with them.

Suvajra : I was wondering about the advisability of Order Members and perhaps even mitras within the Movement being screened for AIDS if they are going to be considering indulging in sex, because you can be screened for the antibodies to it, not for the virus but for the antibodies. If you have the antibodies then you have had contact with the virus, and the chances of you carrying that virus and it developing in you, and then passing it on to somebody else are quite high.

S: Yes perhaps we do have to take these things quite seriously. I mean the Rajneesh communities have had to, in fact I think they have had

AIDS within their communities, and that is a serious matter. But as I said in any case I think there needs to be a stepping up of hygiene. One used to see dirty old towels lying around communities with everybody wiping their hands on them, I think we have to stop things of that sort. I mean you might have visitors, and they ask to use the toilet and they use that particular towel, and we don't know who or what those visitors are always or what their personal history is, and we have to think, I'm afraid, in those sort of terms perhaps. I know Dharmadhara has been following this particular topic with interest, and even doing a little research. In fact he did write one paper didn't he a short while ago, perhaps we should get him to suggest certain steps.

I sometimes wonder how it is or even why it is that these things originate at all. One is told it originated in Central Africa, well why, under what conditions, why should it have originated, what sort of set of circumstance led to its origination? One doesn't know, one isn't told, perhaps nobody knows.

Suvajra : (Well looking at the history of the viruses), quite often certain viruses would exist in certain areas, and maybe they would be all right within that certain population, and because of lack of communication they would stay in that area until something, some sort of contact took it out of the area to a population that didn't have resistance to that. Though it would be quite a normal sort of organism within that population, but outside it, it wouldn't be. Such as say, measles to us in the West is nothing, but to Greenland, it's completely fatal.

S: Well just as I've seen Tibetans coming down from Tibet and catching TB almost immediately, they have no resistance to it. I think at one point, seventy per cent of the Tibetans in Kalimpong had TB. Anyway was that the last question?

Devamitra : It was, did you have anything.....

Aryamitra : Anything a bit more cheerful? (laughter)

S: I'm not sure, it wouldn't be very difficult to get..... Ah yes, 141, end of paragraph two. "The Sinhalese commentaries recognise this village Sangha as village dwelling (gamavasi) monks whose duty concerns books and teaching (ganthadhura), as opposed to forest dwelling (vanavasi) monks whose duty concerns meditation (vipassanadhura)". We've got a similar as it were, distribution of labour, though less absolutely, in the FWBO, because we have got our city centres, and we have got our country retreat centres. Just as for instance in Christianity, you have got Priests, especially Parish Priests, and you have got monks who usually lead more retired lives. So I think in the FWBO, we don't commit ourselves to either absolutely. We have people following both paths. But I think that it's a good thing that we also emphasise that people alternate between these paths. That after you have spent a certain amount of time functioning in a city Centre, well you have a solitary retreat, or you withdraw to a country community for a while. Do you see what I mean?

Perhaps the person who has been living in a country retreat Centre who has been on solitary retreat for a while, can also then usefully have a spell of working in the city Centre. So we don't find ourselves committed exclusively and permanently to either of these alternatives, we can weave back and forth between them. Not only in accordance with the needs of the objective situation, but in accordance with the needs of our own spiritual life. Because we've got our eye on the spiritual life all the time, we are always asking ourselves what is the best situation. Now,

from the point of view of the spiritual life, should I withdraw into the country, should I go and work in a city Centre. At the same time, taking into account the overall needs of the Movement. The two don't always coincide - your personal spiritual needs and the needs of the movement, but there mustn't be too great a gap between them, not for too long.

Nagabodhi : Something along these lines occurred to me when you were talking about spiritual autobiography, to ask whether an ideal spiritual movement would give you the opportunity to live out your spiritual autobiography, to bring more of the pattern and to live...

S: ... Ah yes, very likely, but it probably wouldn't be able to exist in this kamaloka (Laughter) I suspect. It would have to be a greatly transformed karmaloka, not just a slightly reconstituted one.

Kulamitra : Bhante, as regards that point between the forest and the village monks, it struck me that that difference, that they don't really make creative use of those two different lifestyles, might be attributable to the fact that they think very much in terms of maintaining the purity of their sila, rather than gaining insight which presumably could be brought back to the villages.

S: Yes that's true because you might lose your samadhi state, your dhyana, but you wouldn't lose your real insight once you had gained it, indeed not. Yes, it's as though they think in terms of safeguarding their sila, which is fine, but they neglect the cultivation of that very element which can most truly and effectively safeguard and guarantee sila, that is to say insight or wisdom. Not in all cases because some do practise insight meditation, but they seem to be a comparative minority.

(pause)

Yes this is quite a big chapter. Yes talking about his movement, Ratnapala's movement; "They make a great point of maintaining continual contact between the monks of the group, so that the face to face trust upon which mutual purity and mutual action are based, is well founded". So that does seem very much in accordance with the original tradition of Buddhism and the Sangha.

So what are going into tomorrow? *"The total reform and unification of the Sangha."* Perhaps that will be still more interesting.

[End of Tape 14]

[Tape 15]

Questions and Answers on

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: Chapter Nine

12th August 1985

S: This is not the Fitzgerald version of Omar Khayyam, it's a stanza which he hasn't translated. It goes like this :

*You asked : what is this transient pattern?
If we tell the truth of it, it will be a long story.
It is a pattern that came up out of an ocean,
And in a moment returns to that ocean's depths.*

That is quite a good quatrain isn't it? One could say quite a lot about it. Anyway, that is the one I was trying to remember.

The other point was in connection with the question of lying. Someone expressed the point of view that it was rather remarkable, that lying was not one of the parajikas, but of course, in a sense, it is, but only in a sense. Because the fourth parajika is concerned with falsely claiming higher spiritual attainments, falsely claiming. Obviously that is lying in the extreme form. Its unskillfulness is evident. But even so one wonders perhaps why only lying in that very very extreme form was regarded as a parajika, and not any other form of lying, so in a way the question does still remain unanswered.

Devamitra : Today we have been studying the first half of the Chapter entitled *The Total Reform and Unification of the Sangha*. There are thirteen questions altogether. The first question comes from Kulamitra on the question of Sangharaja.

Kulamitra : I'm afraid this is one of those questions with a few sub-questions. Why did Mahakassapa accept being Sangharaja, and why did the Sangha accept him?

S: This is the Mahakassapa of course of medieval Sinhalese history?

Kulamitra: Yes. Even if his motives were good, his attempts to reform the Sangha through secular power seems misguided in that respect. Is it generally better to leave others to quarrel undisturbed, and just get on with ones practice? Is there a positive role for a head of our Order even if quite different?

S: Let's take them clause by clause.

Kulamitra : Why did Mahakassapa accept being Sangharaja?

S: We don't know. As far as I know we are not given that information. He may have felt that in a sense he had no option, because the king, if he had not agreed, out of devotion to the well being of the Sangha might have cut his head off. Kings were like that in those days. He might have thought that even if he didn't accept the position of Sangharaja, the king would force somebody to accept it, and he might genuinely have felt that he was the best person. It's also possible of course that he himself did think it would be a good idea to reform or purge the Sangha with the help of the king in that way. Carrithers does comment, I don't know whether in the half of the chapter you were studying or not, that even today bhikkhus in Ceylon look back with some nostalgia to that period of royal patronage, which of course they are well aware was also a period of royal interference. But they seem to have accepted that as being perhaps the lesser of two or more evils.

Kulamitra: The question goes on; Why did the Sangha accept him, in other words accept Mahakassapa, as Sangharaja?

S: Again we don't know, we have no information. They may have thought in much the same way as I have supposed Mahakassapa to have thought. They may have thought that they had no alternative, that the king was determined to get his own way. Many of them may have genuinely thought that the Sangha needed reforming and there was no other way to get it done. They may also have felt that Mahakassapa was the most worthy person among them. We don't know, we can only suppose that that was the case.

Kulamitra : One does get the impression from Carrithers that they accepted fairly willingly, or at least with not too much protestation.

S: It also does seem that the king went about it quite diplomatically because Carrithers makes the point that even those who were compelled to leave the Sangha were compensated with suitable appointments. So that the king does seem to have gone about it in quite sensible, practical sort of way, creating the minimum of discontent. Who knows? - those not very good monks might have been quite glad of an opportunity to get out and to be compensated in that way.

Kulamitra : The next part of the question really does follow on from that, because even if his motives were quite good, his attempt to reform the Sangha through secular powers seems misguided in retrospect.

S: I won't say that it was misguided, I think it was unfortunate. It may be that in certain circumstances when the Sangha has reached a certain point of degeneration, that is the only way. But it's unfortunate because the monks collectively have allowed things to come to that pass. There may be certain circumstances in which the secular authority is obliged to intervene for purely secular reasons. Supposing for the sake of argument, as has occasionally happened, monasteries become refuges of criminals, of armed bands, who from the monasteries terrorise the nearby villages. Well, clearly the king has to intervene, you can't argue that the king ought not to intervene in religious affairs, in Sangha affairs the Sangha has in effect ceased to be a Sangha in the real sense.

Kulamitra : It seems to me to parallel certain occasions in history when perhaps, during the course of a civil war or opposing parties, a foreign power has been invited in. Initially people suspect it will be to their advantage, but usually the foreign powers are reluctant to go ahead, and a similar sort of thing seems to have happened here, though it got the job done at the time, the king just became more powerful in relationship to the Sangha.

S: Well then it is the fault ultimately of the Sangha, or the people professing to be the Sangha, for allowing things to degenerate to that extent. So perhaps that suggests that one should keep a wary eye open to spot the first signs of corruption or degeneration. Supposing say in our case, in the case of the FWBOs, in as much as they are registered charities, the civil authority has a right to interfere if they are not managed properly. You cannot blame that civil authority, or that secular authority for interfering. If you have allowed your affairs to reach the point where they are obliged to interfere, or even to take over the management of your charity or whatever it is.

Kulamitra : But my question continues; Is it generally better to leave others to quarrel undisturbed and just get on with one's practice, emphasising the positive rather than tackling the problem on its own level, just trying to recreate a stronger Sangha and letting the other thing die out?

S: Well the other thing might not die out, because in fact it may flourish, and it may try to eliminate you. It may not allow you to carry on with your practice undisturbed. So in the long run you may have no alternative but to take some stand, some action. Bad monks have in the past sometimes persecuted good monks. We have seen that in the case of some of the biographies that we have studied.

Kulamitra : There was one last clause to the question; Is there a positive role for a head of our Order, even if quite different?

S: I think having a single head for any sort of body or organisation, does help in the maintenance of unity, even if that head is only a symbolic head. Clearly the question would arise as to how that head was to be chosen. I have given this matter some thought as one of the possible organisational alternatives. I can't say that I have come to any very definite conclusion, except that I think I have come to one conclusion at least, which is that I don't think it would be advisable if there was such a head of the Order, for him to be elected in a sort of political way, that is to say by majority vote because that would lead to canvassing, and that would lead to politicking and I think that would be quite opposed to the spirit of the Order, the spirit of the Sangha. So I think, even if one does believe that a single head would be an advantage, that does mean that such a head couldn't come into existence as a result of a political type election. I think that would involve a sort of democratic principle which was basically unspiritual or even antispiritual. But how one would get around that in that case, I am not yet clear, I'm still thinking about it and it is after all, only one of several possible ways of structuring the order.

Devamitra : A little while ago we were talking about Mahakassapa, Dhammaloka has a question about Mahakassapa.

S: The same Mahakassapa?

Devamitra : Yes

Dhammaloka : Yes. Perhaps by means of glorification, in later times Mahakassapa became highly regarded as a scholar and teacher, as a forest dweller and meditator, and last but not least a Sangharaja, just embodying all possible aspirations for a monk, do you regard this as a true picture, and did Mahakassapa succeed as a Sangharakshita as well? If we would translate the characteristics attributed to Mahakassapa into our terminology, and in doing so, perhaps keep the scholar, teacher and meditator, while we might change the forest dweller into one practising the precepts, and the Sangharaja into one who is both aware and capable of the regard for delicate distinctions and relations between spiritual communities and society, and as such spiritually and politically sensitive and creative; would these attributes be the main aspects to be embodied by the ideal Order Member, or would there be others and perhaps a certain hierarchy amongst them? (laughter)

S: Well, let's take it clause by clause. (laughter)

Dhammaloka : Perhaps by means of glorification, in later times Mahakassapa becomes highly regarded as a scholar and teacher, as a forest dweller and meditator, and a Sangharaja. Thus embodying all possible aspirations for a monk, do you regard this as a true picture?

S: It is very difficult to say, because to the best of my knowledge, our sole source of information is the Mahavamsa. I don't know that we have any means of checking the account given in the Mahavamsa against other sources. But it certainly isn't a historical work in the modern sense even though, it does contain what appears to be valuable historical information. It has a sort of epic quality, a certain inspirational quality, if you like. So we cannot look to it for strict history and nothing but strict history. I am not aware of whether scholars have attempted to evaluate the historical accuracy of the Mahavamsa, perhaps some of them have done that - that would have to be looked into. But nonetheless, I do doubt whether we have means of checking quite a lot of the statements contained in the Mahavamsa.

It is quite likely that in the account of Mahakassapa, there is an element of glorification, this is quite possible. He seems to be regarded as, or perhaps was even made into, a sort of ideal figure of that type. On the other hand he may well have embodied all those qualities, all those virtues, characteristics, which the Mahavamsa represents him as possessing. That is perhaps quite likely, but we cannot be absolutely certain. So the next point?

Dhammaloka : Did Mahakassapa succeed as a Sangharakshita?

S: Well, that depends what one means by a Sangharakshita, it depends what one means by protecting. He certainly protected or safeguarded the Sangha in the organisational, in the ecclesiastical, in the administrative sense, and that is after all the basis for other more spiritual developments one might say. But to what extent he was in fact a purely spiritual figure and did protect and safeguard the Sangha in a purely spiritual sense, or perhaps I should say in the higher spiritual sense, I think we simply don't know, we can only speculate.

Dhammaloka : Is that so, even if we see that obviously with this constitution that came about with the agreement between the king and Mahakassapa, there was more authority with the king in the Sangha?

S: Well that may have been the best that could be done under the circumstances, if that was the best under the circumstances, no doubt to some extent the monks were to blame. To some extent political conditions were to blame. He did apparently the best he could under those particular circumstances. You cut your coat according to your cloth. When we started the FWBO, it would have been nice if we had had magnificent premises and lots of devoted people and wealthy supporters, but we didn't. We just had to make do with what was to hand, whatever was available, that might have imposed certain limitations. It might have been better had we had had those other facilities, but we didn't have them.

Dhammaloka : If we were to translate these characteristics attributed to Mahakassapa into our terminology, and in doing so perhaps keep the scholar, teacher, meditator; while we might change the forest dweller into one practising the precepts, and the Sangharaja into one who is both aware and capable of with regard the distinctions and relations between the spiritual community and the society, and as such, spiritually and politically sensitive and creative; Would these attributes then be the main aspects to be embodied by the ideal Order Member?

S: It seems to me that it's not so much a question of these aspects being embodied by the ideal Order Member, so much as by the ideal Chairman. Because the individual Order Member may be in accordance with his own particular temperament and bent, predominantly a meditator, or predominantly a scholar in the traditional sense, or predominantly an artist, while not neglecting the other aspects. But it does seem that a Chairman needs to be an all rounder. Because if for instance the Chairman is not an all rounder, well he may not be able to provide for the interests, the requirements of all the people involved in his particular Centre. He may want to concentrate on meditation for instance, because that is what he is interested in. So that people who were more drawn to study and anything else of that sort would not find much scope for them at that particular Centre, assuming it was a general public Centre which was meant to attract everybody. So a Chairman has to be an all rounder, he cannot afford to be anything else. He must obviously keep up a regular meditation practice, he must clearly be versed in the Dharma, because all the activities of his Centre have to be based upon the Dharma. Or perhaps he ought to be able to give lectures on suitable occasions, to take the chair, to introduce people who are giving lectures and so on. Clearly he also needs to have to have some literary skills - he might have to write reports, draft letters. He needs to have a certain amount of diplomacy because he will be dealing with the outside world, perhaps politicians, bank managers, trade unionists and so on. He needs to have a reasonably pleasing personality, do you see what I mean? So it's the Chairman, I think, that needs to be the all rounder and equipped with the sort of qualities that Mahakassapa seems to have been equipped with. The individual Order Member can afford, as it were, to be less balanced, less of an all rounder, it may not affect him spiritually. Do you see what I mean? But the Chairman, not so much for the sake of his own spiritual development, but in the interests of the running of his Centre in a balanced sort of way, a successful way, both spiritually and secularly, will need to be quite an all round sort of character.

This is why you find that in the history of say the Christian church even, the greatest Saints are not necessarily the best people to run things. It seems that the best people to run things are people with a certain sympathy for spiritual things but with a definite worldly streak at the same time.

You can see this in the history of the church. Sometimes the extremely spiritual person will only upset the overall balance, with the best of intentions. Whereas the - I won't say the 'semi saint', but they sometimes have got this strong and genuine sympathy for spiritual things and the spiritual life, but at the same time in a way a sort of worldly streak. This is the best kind of person, I think, for running a religious organisation, or something of that kind. You notice that in the case of some of the more successful and better Popes and Cardinals, and Bishops, they are not

exclusively, spiritually minded men. There is a strong streak of worldliness. But that makes them all the more successful and makes them in a way able to provide or to make provision for the practical side of the Church or whatever it happens to be, more than perhaps a purely spiritually minded man would be able to do.

On the other hand I think that on the highest level, it is possible to be as it were Bodhisattva like, and be able to do full justice to material, mundane, organisational requirements without any diminution of your deeper spiritual commitment, that would be the Buddhist view. I doubt very much if that sort of balance has ever been attained, or more than very very rarely been attained in the Christian Church. I remember for instance in connection with the life of St. Francis - St. Francis was the purely spiritual person, but I think that had things been just left just to St. Francis, probably his Order would not have survived. But there was a very very friendly and sympathetic Cardinal who was appointed as the protector of his Order and there was a very sympathetic Pope at the same time. They were definitely worldly men in comparison with St. Francis, but in a way they had a better understanding of things and a more balanced view, they had a deep sympathy with him but they could also see certain practical difficulties in what he wanted to do. (laughter) The extremists would say that they were worldly and they compromised St. Francis and perhaps they did, but they also made it possible for him to survive. That part of the life of St. Francis is very interesting because the Cardinal and the Pope concerned were clearly much more worldly people than St. Francis but they had a sort of worldly wisdom tinged with genuine religious conviction which he didn't have. They were clearly great admirers of his but they weren't uncritical admirers. They could see his limitations in a sense, at least from a worldly point of view, though I believe it was that same Pope, who promptly canonised him after his death, certainly one of the Popes very quickly Canonised him, they fully appreciated him. But that doesn't mean that they appreciated him uncritically, or that they couldn't see the weaknesses in his approach at least from the organisational point of view, often the point of view of the church itself.

Do you see what I mean, you see what I am getting at?

Abhaya : Could I ask a question ?

S: Yes, but before you ask it, you see the Chairman is not necessarily the most highly spiritual person available, not that he can be an unspiritual person. Clearly the spiritual commitment has got to be there, but in the case of the Chairman you need spiritual commitment, plus a comparatively unusual combination of qualities at the same time. Considered from a purely spiritual point of view, your Chairman may be perhaps less developed than certain other people around the Centre. But pure spiritual commitment is not enough to run a Centre. Obviously the Chairman, if he is a wise Chairman, will listen very carefully to what the more spiritually developed people have to say, though he may not in the end always agree with it. You can see the delicate balance that needs to be maintained. So it seems that Mahakassapa, to come back to Mahakassapa, was a figure of that sort, he seemed to be able to steer very skilfully between the needs of the Sangha and what the king was demanding, and so on, and work out some sort of practical arrangement which was presumably the best that could be achieved in those particular circumstances. A more idealistic monk perhaps - let's say for the sake of argument - might have opposed the king, on principle that the king should not interfere with Sangha matters. That might have turned the king against the Sangha, and he might have become the enemy of the Sangha and he might even have become a devotee of Shiva or something like that. Because kings could be very whimsical in those days. They were absolute rulers virtually.

Devamitra : Is that all aspects of your question?

Dhammaloka : There are a few more. But we have others.....

Abhaya : I was going to say does this imply that with regard to Chairmen, that it is not advisable for the Chairman to remain doing the job too long in view of what you say, for his spiritual development?

S: No it isn't really quite like that. I think that would be to take it as it were too literally. Because the longer one is a Chairman, within reason, the greater maturity you develop, and the greater your capacity for judgement, the greater your experience. You don't necessarily help that particular person to develop more rapidly spiritually by taking him away from his position as Chairman and putting him, say, in a meditation centre and suggesting he meditates full-time. That may not be his particular bent, it may be his particular bent to be more of an all rounder, and that may be the way that he develops best.

But clearly within that sort of combination of qualities, there must be the genuine spiritual commitment, though I don't want to separate that too much from the other qualities because it informs the other qualities, it is not a separate thing. He finds expression through all these different activities, whether he is taking the chair of the Council Meeting, or he is negotiating with the bank manager, or addressing a meeting, his basic spiritual commitment really does find expression through all of those things. So I don't want to separate the two too much. Nonetheless, the Chairman should obviously be careful to see that he doesn't dissipate himself in too many different types of activity, and he would be well advised to take time off from time to time, and have a meditation retreat. If for instance, he is the Chairman of a very big and busy Centre and perhaps has been a Chairman for many years, he might even be advised to take a sabbatical year, and have a whole year off, and do the sort of things, including meditation, that he can't normally do while actually running the Centre.

Because it may be - one doesn't want to over-generalise - but someone of this kind, who is an all rounder, who has grown through being an all rounder and grown from being a Chairman, after a few years of that or perhaps many years of that, may spontaneously feel that he would just like to devote all his time to meditation, maybe the rest of his life to meditation - that might happen.

But a Chairman while he is a Chairman, needs to be a many sided sort of person and that suggests that his bent is to be many sided, and that his many sidedness can be an expression of his spiritual commitment, and the various other sorts of activities he engages in be not as it were a derogation from his spiritual commitment but an expression of it. A person who is always hankering after getting back to the meditation centre and resented having to negotiate with bank managers and all that sort of thing, would not actually make a good Chairman. A good Chairman really has to be able to almost enjoy doing those things and really feel that through all those activities he is giving expression to his basic spiritual commitment, because all those things are necessary to carry forward the work of his Centre.

Dhammaloka: Could I ask another question? You said that a monk, or someone who is more fundamentalist, and became () fundamentalist in the case of Mahakassapa and the king. So say another person.

S: Yes as idealistic, I said, yes.

Dhammaloka : So he might have upset the king, and this might have done much more damage to the Sangha. This seems to suggest that it is not useful under any circumstances to sort of keep the Sangha pure?

S: Well the Sangha is the third of the three refuges, or at least it represents the third of the three refuges at the very least. Presumably it is desirable to keep it in existence. (Laughter) Perhaps it is better to have no Sangha at all than a completely bad Sangha, but I assume that while the possibility of resuscitation and reform exists, well one must reform and resuscitate. Otherwise what does one do?

Dhammaloka : Concluding the passage of my question, perhaps you haven't answered it sufficiently. I take it - not the ideal Order Member but the ideal Chairman - are there others of these aspects attributed to Mahakassapa you mentioned - and perhaps a certain hierarchy. You said something about that as well.

S: I think not considered for their own sake, because how is a hierarchy established in so far as a certain practice or certain quality represents a means to enlightenment? Supposing that you personally find study, study of the Dharma, study of the Sutras, a better, a quicker, a more efficacious means to insight than any other practice, well that must occupy the centre of your mandala, that must be at the top of your personal hierarchy. But it is not necessarily going to be the same for everybody else.

Dhammaloka : I was now just thinking of the Chairmen, amongst Chairmen, their seeming need for a hierarchy of these different aspects which you mentioned.

S: I think not the different aspects themselves, but I think in the case of a Chairmen, they need always to remember what it is, for the sake of which the Centre and all its activities, exists, simply that.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Abhaya and concerns unresolved quarrels.

Abhaya : This question Bhante, was prompted by reading the inscription, *The Galvihara Inscription* which comes at the beginning of the chapter, in which the king resolves to intervene in the affairs of the corrupted Sangha. It led me to thinking about possible eventualities. Supposing in time to come, hopefully it won't, that the Order became either corrupt or extremely divisive, I was wondering what you might think about the advisability of the uncommitted intervening in apparently irresolvable differences in the Order?

S: Well they would only intervene presumably, if those differences affected them, as in the case I gave. That is to say if a Buddhist Centre or monastery just became a sort of den of thieves, and the thieves operated from that particular place. The non-committed, as it were, would then

have to intervene in their own interests, they would have no choice. Once you have given people an opportunity of intervening, well in a way, you have had it, you have asked for it! You must just not allow things to reach that point. If they do intervene because you have given them cause to intervene in their own interests, well then you have no one to blame but yourself. So I am not quite sure what the question is really asking?

Abhaya : I was thinking in terms of Mitras and Friends, rather than the secular. But I suppose that would be an automatic thing wouldn't it?

S : Well how could they intervene? I mean sometimes perhaps a well meaning Mitra could reconcile two Order Members who'd quarrelled, but it would be very strange and very anomalous if Order Members had to rely upon the good offices of a mitra. It would almost had in mind the mental state in which you as it were wallow in the feeling of guilt and hang on to it, hug it almost and don't take any steps to alleviate it or changing your course of action or your mental attitude, or simply exaggerating your guilt.

Devamitra : Now we have a question from Susiddhi on government intervention.

Susiddhi : Was it a tragic consequence of Nanananda's career that he could only realise his dream of an independent forest dwelling nikaya in Ceylon by playing off the government against the Siyama Nikaya and thereby giving the new administration the opportunity of establishing a precedent for interfering in Sangha affairs ?

S : I don't think it was quite interference in Sangha affairs. Carrithers does refer to the ancient Indian tradition or convention that the King was the guardian and upholder of all corporations, do you remember that. Usually the corporations took a caste form, but one of the duties of the King according to ancient Indian ideas was to uphold the rules or the laws of each individual corporation, they made their own laws, they laid down their own conditions of membership and so on.

The King was to underwrite those, so that if anybody offended against them and the members of that corporation were not able to deal with that matter then, then in their interest the King could intervene. So that seems to have been the pattern for the Sangha, the Sangha eventually assumed the form of one of these corporations and if it became unable to govern its own affairs and if any of its members became disruptive the majority of members appealed to the King to put things right and the King would do that. So it seems the Sangha fell into the pattern of such a corporation but as I think I indicated also, there is a parallel to that in our case in as much as legally we are a corporation, we are a registered charity. So one takes advantage of that sort of arrangement in order to be able to function in certain respects in the secular world. It suggests that the Mitra. It would almost suggest that the Mitra was in effect more of an Order Member than they were. That would suggest that the hierarchy had broken down, it no longer corresponded to any reality at least as regards that particular situation. So after the two Order Members had come to their senses, perhaps they should seriously consider the position and just say to themselves: "Look here, things have really come to a pretty pass. We couldn't settle our differences ourselves, it required a Mitra to intervene and help us to settle them."

Devamitra : A question now from Kamalasila on schism.

Kamalasila : This is very much linked in with the previous question. On page 166, the question of unresolved questions in the Order arises. Presumably our way of dealing with the problem is Sanghabheda or positive schism. Positive schism seems to be a principle rather than a rule. It seems to be a principle which might require considerable skilfulness in practise. I wondered how could we learn such a principle in depth, so that we can use it successfully, even in very difficult cases?

S: I think it's very difficult to say, very difficult to generalise, if one doesn't have an actual case before one. Let me just say this. That when personal difficulties arise it is very often because of lack of personal contact, or for instance, if within let's say for the sake of argument a Chapter of the Order, if difficulties arise, personal differences arise, it could be because there is insufficient personal contact just because the Chapter has become so big. So more aware or more responsible Order Members might notice that there were rather more personal difficulties than was really to be expected, even considering what human nature was like. So they might therefore put a proposal to that particular Chapter, saying: "I happen to have noticed that we seem to be having rather more personal difficulties than is to be expected. Perhaps there is something to be said for us dividing into two Chapters, so that the members of those Chapters can have closer contact with one another, thereby reducing the possibility of personal differences." It could be put in that way, do you see what I mean?

Sometimes that may indeed happen, that personal differences and difficulties are due to that particular reason. So if that was generally agreed to, that would be an example of a positive Sanghabheda.

End of side one side two]

There can sometimes I think be a Sanghabheda without any personal differences or misunderstanding at all. Sometimes perhaps when someone is sufficiently far sighted to see what might happen with that very big Chapter if it wasn't divided into two. Or when from the nature of the work that the Chapter was engaged in through this FWBO Centre or that FWBO Centre was taken into consideration.

Aryamitra : What do you mean by the nature of the work Bhante?

S: Well for instance it might be that under the auspices of a particular Centre, two quite in a way contradictory kinds of activity were being carried on and it was difficult for the people conducting those different activities to work together. So therefore one might decide, well let's have a separate FWBO and a separate Chapter to run those particular activities. To hive them off as it were so that they could do things in their own way in accordance with the needs of that particular work. Rather than trying to do everything under one big umbrella. For instance, one particular kind of activity might require unsocial hours, do you see what I mean. Supposing you had say a mission to shift workers, so the Order Members who were conducting that mission to shift workers would be functioning at shift work hours, and that might disturb other members of the community. It might be better if they had their own community, their own Chapter, and their own Centre, you see, this is just an example.

Devamitra : Another question from Kulamitra concerning the organisation of the early Order.

Kulamitra : In the early Sangha the monks were organised as an Order in various ways. But what about the lay followers? Did they meet as an

Order? If not, how does this differ from our conception that all who have gone for refuge belong to the Order?

S: There seems to be no record of lay people meeting regularly. It seems that the lay people were in quite close and regular contact with the bhikkhus, but not that there was any actual meeting of lay people whether separately, or together with the bhikkhus. We can't I think attach too much importance to that, because for instance there were no records of bhikkhunis meeting to the best of my knowledge, but they must have met because their Vinaya was parallel to that of the bhikkhus but there are no actual accounts of their meeting. So it is quite possible that the lay people did meet, but the bhikkhus, who after all did compile the Tipitikas, didn't take very much notice of it. We know that lay followers, to use that term, observed the full moon and the new moon days and they observed extra precepts on those occasions including fasting. Even in Sri Lanka right down to the present, lay people often go on (uposatha) days as they are called and spend the whole day at the temple engaged in various devotional practices, sometimes even meditating. But there's no record of any sort of formal meeting of lay people. One could say that they were more busy than the bhikkhus were, basically with their families and so on. There's another thing also. Maybe the whole subject needs proper investigation - we know that in many places, the village or the township had an assembly hall, where they often met and debated public topics. It could be that where the majority of people in the neighbourhood or in the township were followers of the Buddha, they continued to meet in that way discussing the ordinary secular affairs and at the same time they were in contact with one another, even as followers of the Buddha.

Very often visiting bhikkhus including the Buddha himself, would have been put up at that hall, and they would have gathered there to meet the Buddha and hear him speak, or to hear one of his disciples speak. So perhaps the lay people who were followers of the Buddha had quite a bit of regular contact with one another anyway and in the course of their ordinary lives, perhaps the need for special meetings wasn't felt so much. Whereas perhaps in the case of the Buddha's monastic disciples, especially in the earlier days they would have been spending much of their time alone meditating in the forests. So there was perhaps more of a need for them to have certain definite times and places where they would meet. One must remember for the first I think it was twelve years of the Buddha's ministry they did not meet regularly. The Buddha instituted the monthly meeting or fortnightly meeting as far as I recollect, only twelve years after the enlightenment.

We also know that in the days of Asoka, there were assemblies of lay people, sometimes on hill tops, it is not clear whether they were specifically Buddhist or not, but they had assumed a rather rowdy character, and Asoka banned them, he mentions this in one of his Rock Edicts. I think the term for them is *Samajja*, which in modern Indian language means a society, he banned these *Samajjas*. It is not quite clear what exactly happened. It is not quite clear whether they were exclusively Buddhist, but they were gatherings of lay people of some kind or other with a sort of religious association, but perhaps not very ethical. Perhaps sometimes gatherings of lay people sometimes including perhaps even those who were nominally Buddhist upasikas had degenerated into drinking and gambling sessions. I have written about this in my memoirs actually, the volume from which I read. I didn't read you this bit but at the () Vihara I found the Newar Buddhists used to come along and they used to have a bit of a puja, especially the women, but the men, the men Newars used to spend most of the full moon day there playing cards and gambling. They didn't seem to think that there was anything wrong with this, it was a sort of traditional practice, they just spent the day there happily playing cards and gambling. They were quite surprised when I pointed out that this wasn't quite the thing to do in a Vihara, they had always done it. I mentioned this also in the relevant chapter.

Kulamitra : The second part of the question; he says it is not, but presumably we do not really know. Does this differ from our conception that all who have gone for refuge belong to the Order? In fact does this whole split into the four different groups, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, and the male and female lay followers, differ from our conception that all who have gone for refuge belong to the Order?

S: It does seem that quite early on, those who have gone for refuge and stayed at home, considered themselves as supporting the Sangha rather than as being really a part of it. Though the Pali scriptures themselves contained a number of references to householders who were stream entrants. Many, many names are given, dozens and dozens of names of upasaka stream entrants are given. So they were certainly by definition, members of the Arya Sangha. So if they were members of the Arya Sangha, surely they could be considered members of the Sangha in the ordinary sense. Do you see what I mean? But in course of time the bhikkhu members of the Sangha seem to have developed in one direction and the upasaka members of the Sangha in another. The Mahayana of course tried to bridge the gap in various ways. For instance a favourite way in Mahayana Sutras is to have the most unlikely sort of person, that is to say lay, young and even female, rebuking elderly bhikkhus for their lack of spiritual development and understanding. That is the point that is being made really by the Mahayana, that one must not attach too much importance to these formal distinctions of monk and lay, old and young, even male and female.

The basic thing is spiritual understanding, insight, wisdom. Many of the Mahayana Sutras especially in the Ratnakuta collection, make this point, as you'll find out in *the Eternal Legacy* when it is published.

I mentioned the other day that lay people including upasakas didn't normally address bhikkhus as *Bhante* but simply by their names, that also suggests a sort of fellow feeling, a sense of common membership that certainly isn't there in Theravada countries today. I was going to mention, reading through the *Lalitavistara* only today, I found a reference to the four Sanghas, now I would have to check the original Sanskrit Text, but I don't think it can be a mistake, because, though the English is translated from the French, the translation into English has been checked against the Tibetan and the Sanskrit originals. So I think the word Sangha must appear in the originals, the four Sanghas. Usually in the Pali it is the four *parishads*, or the Sangha is divided so to speak into the four *parishads*. But still the four *parishads* are within one and the same Sangha, and there are several passages which I have quoted somewhere the Buddha describes the devout bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, upasaka and upasika in turn all lighting up the Sangha, suggesting that they all belonged to one and the same Sangha. But even if you regard them as constituting four Sanghas, you are putting them on a level of equality. It is more like four wings of the Sangha just as we speak of the men's wing and the women's wing of the Order.

Nagabodhi : In India Bhante, the approach of TBMSG is to go out and tell anybody who listens to them that they could and should become one hundred per cent Buddhists, that they should practise Dharma and put it completely into practise. Whereas, many other bhikkhus who have been around have simply taught them to prostrate and to give dana. Would it therefore be wrong to say that these were necessarily bad bhikkhus, but that they were just strictly traditional Theravada bhikkhus doing in their eyes the job they were meant to do?

S: Well what does one mean by bad? A lot depends upon the intention, and some of the monks I know are very concerned to collect money from the householders, others may just genuinely believe that they are doing the right thing. They may be well intentioned but they haven't really studied the Dharma or examined the tradition to which they believe that they belong, and I think in very few cases are they really trying to

lead a spiritual life, are they really trying to practice the Brahmacharya. They think very much in terms of being a monk, not even being a good monk, but just being a monk.

Nagabodhi: Could one say that the work of TBMSG in trying to rouse anybody across whose path they come to practise Dhamma, would be seen definitely to be working in a Mahayanistic spirit in that situation?

S: Well in a sense, but then the Buddha addressed people regardless of who or what they were and preached the Dharma to them. Their particular response, whether they went for refuge and then left home, or went for refuge and stayed at home, well that was up to them. So it is much the same with us. We preach the Dharma to all, whether you just become a Friend and are peripherally attached, whether you become a Mitra and want to be more deeply involved and identified. Or whether you want to go the whole way and commit yourself under the auspices of the Trailoka Bauddha Mahasangha and become an Order Member, that is up to you.

So in principle I think our approach is the same. Whether it's the early Order, that is to say the Order grouped around the Buddha himself, as comprising both of bhikkhus and upasakas, or whether it's the more specifically Mahayana approach. But many bhikkhus believe that the very first thing that you have to teach when you are teaching new people, is how to respect the bhikkhus, and they often do this because they genuinely think that is the first thing, and the most important thing. They feel that once that is established then you are definitely on the right path. Very often they don't bother to teach you any more than that because they think that is all a layman really needs to know.

Nagabodhi: So in their own eyes at least, they are being sincere, according to their own lights?

S: I don't think they very often even think in terms of sincerity or insincerity. They are not categories in which they operate. That's how a monk is, that's his job as it were, he is a monk well, someone comes into contact with him who is not a monk well, he has got to be taught how to behave as a layman. Pay respect to the monks and support the monk. They just think like this. They don't even ask themselves; Am I being sincere?, I mean, that sort of thought, that sort of idea, just doesn't cross their minds. They have been trained in that particular way let's say, they take it all for granted, they accept it. Except in the case of a very few, like some of those whose lives we have been studying in this book. They are quite exceptional.

Devamitra : A question now from Suvajra on 'sima'.

Suvajra : This arises from page 164, the very foot of it. The text says: "And within that boundary all co-resident monks had to participate for a communal act to be valid", And then at the top of the next page it says : "The rules which strictly prescribe a boundary and participation within a boundary, represent a recognition of the necessity to keep such groups small and intimate, so that their rather optimistic trust in individual responsibility could remain effective". How did large monasteries originally manage to function if this were the case? Did they have to divide into small cells or chapters, and what were the principles by which they divided into chapters?

S: Well we know in the case of the Tibetan monasteries that the large ones were often termed monastic universities, that they are divided into colleges. But what relation that has to the question of sima and avasa, I don't know, I don't know if this has ever been studied. I can't even be sure that the Tibetan monks follow the Sarvastivada Vinaya strictly in this respect. I very much doubt if we know what was the position at say Nalanda or Vikramasila - I can only speculate. I imagine they had only one sima, and that everybody would have been ordained there, but then the number of monks would have been quite disproportionate. I don't recollect that Yuan Chuan says anything about this. I Tsing is supposed to have been the Chinese pilgrim who was most interested in all matters connected with the Vinaya. I don't recollect though that he has discussed it. Someone perhaps should look this up. Usually what happened was a sima had to be established by a Sangha of twenty bhikkhus and the land has to be gifted by the king to the Sangha in perpetuity, otherwise a sima cannot be established. And a sima is marked off with stone posts, I think laymen usually drive the posts into the ground.

Of course in theory, I have thought of a possible explanation, in theory the sima and the avasa to the best of my knowledge were originally conterminous. I think probably what happened was that the avasa so to speak, became larger though the sima remained the same size or became smaller even. So that instead of having a large area marked off as a sima within which the monks lived, like parish boundaries, you didn't have that larger demarkation, but you had as part of the monastery complex just this small marked off area within which ordinations actually took place.

So I imagine that for instance at Nalanda for practical purposes, the avasa consisted of all the grounds of the monastery, but within that avasa no longer coinciding with it, there was a smaller area marked off as a sima or place of ordination. This is my guess but I don't really know. It could be that S.Dutt's work throws some light on this, you would have to look this up. But certainly it would suggest if you have thousands of monks living together in that way, that suggests a departure from the earlier pattern, and no doubt some adjustment would have been necessary with regard to sima in that later sense and the actual practical question of ordinations.

In Theravada countries nowadays simas are quite small, they are smaller than the area of this room. You only need ten bhikkhus sitting inside and usually they are on the lower floor of a temple, sometimes a separate special building, sometimes called the chapter house as described in the chapter on Nyanatiloka. The sima or chapter house downstairs used for ordinations and fortnightly confessional meetings, pratimoksa, and the library upstairs, that is a quite common arrangement in Theravada countries. Or, sometimes the sima is actually in the temple, that was the kind of sima that was used when I was ordained in Saranath. Within the Burmese Temple which was a single storey building, there was a sima.

Devaraja : It seems a very strange thing to have a piece of land that has been granted in perpetuity for this purpose. I just wonder if the origins can be seen other than the necessity of having an area which is small enough to ensure an intimate contact between the members of the chapter, and ensure that the chapter would not get too large as suggested by Carrithers, or whether there is another power of sort of richly symbolic significance to it.

S: As far as I remember from what I have read, the reason was just entirely practical. The monks needed to ensure the purity of their chapter let us say, and you can only be sure of that if you knew people personally and had face to face contact. So I mean other bhikkhus could move through your area, but they weren't allowed to participate in your chapter meetings. It's a bit like that in the case of the Order. If, for instance

let's say, there is going to be a chapter meeting, and you are going to perhaps discuss the readiness of a certain mitra whom you all know, for ordination, and there is a visiting Order Member from an entirely different Centre who doesn't know that particular Mitra, then there is no point in him attending that particular meeting. It's a little bit like that.

Devaraja : I find it strange that they need to have a bit of land given to them in perpetuity in order to occupy that form of.....

S: I don't think this was the case at the very beginning, but it is certainly the practice now and has been the practice for a long time.

Devaraja : The other thing I was wondering is whether there was any connection at all, or whether one see the mandala in the Vajrayana as in a way extending the significance of the sima maybe in some sort of way?

S: Well the mandala is the initiation area and in a way so is the sima on certain occasions though not always. The sima is of course always round. It has I believe if I remember rightly eighteen posts, or nine, there might be provision for both. That would need to be checked. I don't think a mandala is ever superimposed upon a sima. They both are in a very general way initiation areas, though in the case of a sima it served other functions too. It's the area where all sanghakammas are conducted.

Devamitra: The next question comes from Dhammaloka on the first constitution of the Sangha.

Dhammaloka : On page 164, Carrithers refers to the original Sangha constitution as depicted in the Canonical Vinaya Texts, which he regards as containing a complete and detailed legal system, defining rules for policy in terms of in terms of self cultivation and for daily administration and ratification of communal acts. On page 165, however, he mentions the inherent weaknesses of this first constitution and in doing so seems to be pointing to the lack of provision for recourse to ultimate authority beyond the Samvasika. Do you agree with the author's views?

S: Yes I think that is true because it is not only a question of recourse to an ultimate authority, but ensuring unity of action and harmony between a large number of bhikkhus distributed over a large number of avasas without almost some sort of pyramidal organisational structure.

Dhammaloka : This probably answers the next. Do you regard the constitution of the Sangha as depicted in the Vinaya as sufficiently complete even with regard to the very fundamental principles of the Sangha, that it is principles beyond mere historical education?

S: Well they were proved not to be complete, in the sense that I mentioned. That if you just had a very small number of avasas distributed over a relatively limited area, well perhaps that particular type of constitution could function quite fully. It was successful in the sense of being able to meet all the contingencies that were likely to arise in that particular situation. But when you had many more avasas distributed over a much larger area and the conditions also were changing, the monks collectively needed to take important decisions and obviously take them in unison and harmony, you needed some sort of structure to make that possible and that kind of structure is not found in the Vinayapitaka. This is why later on we saw, perhaps you will see, the institution of Sangharaja developed in some Buddhist countries.

Devamitra : A further question on the constitution from Kulamitra.

Kulamitra : Carrithers says that the Visuddhismagga and the Mahavamsa, represent substantial changes as faithful copies of the Vinaya. Is this not breaking the speech precepts? To avoid this should we cultivate an historical and sociological awareness of Buddhism and the FWBO?

S: Say that again .

Kulamitra : Carrithers says that Visuddhismagga and the Mahavamsa represent substantial changes as faithful copies of the Vinaya. This at the top of page 174. Is this not breaking the speech precepts?

S: "Let's just return then to the original Sangha constitution, as depicted in the Canonical Vinaya Texts particularly in the Mahavagga and Cullavagga". Is that it?

Kulamitra : No it says; "On the contrary, the texts themselves -the commentaries, the Visuddhimagga, the Mahavamsa, and the Katikavatas, present themselves as being of a piece with the Vinaya texts, and each substantial change is referred to an earlier precedent of which it is supposedly a faithful copy".

S: Yes I don't think there was any intentional misrepresentation, but they just assumed that there was that kind of continuity and even saw that sort of continuity lack in the absence of any real historical sense. I think now we have that new historical sense, at least to some extent in the West, we cannot help applying it to the history of Buddhism or the development of Buddhism. If we fail to do so, we are in effect being dishonest I think . I don't think we can suppress our awareness of that historical dimension. I did say I think some days ago something about - I think it was in the context of this study seminar - something about the higher criticism not yet having really hit the Buddhist Canonical literature.

Suvajra : It wasn't here, perhaps Tuscany?

Devamitra : No it was on the Convention.

S: Ah the Convention was it, yes. But we have to be prepared for it to do that, we have to be prepared for the higher criticism to hit the Pali Canonical literature or Buddhist Canonical literature, it hasn't yet done so.

Kulamitra : What do you mean by 'higher' in this context? I didn't quite understand.

S: Well, perhaps I had better not repeat all that I said then, but it is just the application of a very rigorous scientific method to the examination of ancient texts distinguishing different stratas in them. Taking apart patchwork and all that sort of thing. It involves all sorts of disciplines, linguistic and archaeological, as well as literary and historical. This is the higher criticism that has been applied especially to the New Testament, the four Gospels.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Kamalasila on women.

Kamalasila : You have been saying that we should taper off our sexual activity and aim at brahmacarya around the age of forty.

S: I might have to revise it either upwards or downwards I think! (laughter)

_____: Upwards! (laughter)

S: Round figures can be quite misleading sometimes.(Laughter) (pause) Yes! (Loud laughter)

Kamalasila : Presumably you think that the same applies in the case of women. I wondered if the process would be exactly the same for them. I am asking because I will be giving a talk on the subject of brahmacarya to a mixed audience.

S: I think when I was on the women's Convention, if my memory serves me rightly, I did make this point to the women. I may well have actually mentioned the figure or the age of forty. Perhaps if you have the opportunity, check that with the women Order members who were present. I see no reason why it should be different in the case of women. This obviously involves an examination of the difference if any between male and female sexuality. I think the broad general principle will hold good.

In the case of women, forty to forty-five is the time when they cease to be capable of bearing children, and when their children if they have had them at the normal time, have grown up, and then they could be very well thinking in terms of devoting themselves more exclusively to cultural and spiritual pursuits and that could therefore be a very good time to have created sex, so it is intrinsically holy so to speak in origin. Such Christians of course seem to have discarded the theology of the Fall and all that sort of thing, whether taken literally or symbolically, and they seem to have forgotten all about original sin. They don't explain themselves, they just present sex as God given, and therefore to be enjoyed and with a clear conscience, but you are not really convinced that they have got a clear conscience about it in fact at all. Perhaps they wished they had, but they clearly very often don't have. So I think sometime we have to get around to discussing this question because this is the point of view that people may present in opposition to celibacy.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Ratnavira concerning a Buddhist State.

Ratnavira : During the course of this chapter Carrithers describes how historically the monarchy had an increasing influence on the Sangha in Sri Lanka. This led to an increase of official recognition of Buddhism and to Sri Lanka becoming a 'Buddhist nation', inverted commas. With it this change brought, among other things, decreased autonomy for the Sangha, and increasing interest in questions such as power and property. So the three considerations arising from this are Firstly : Do you think it is possible for it to be advantageous for genuine spiritual practice that Buddhism be officially recognised as a national religion?

S: All right, let's look at that question first. My thoughts go back to Kierkegaard in this respect, I have referred to him in this connection before. Years and years ago, some of you may remember, that Kierkegaard discusses the question or speaks about the question of a Christian State. He puts it rather strongly and provocatively, and he says : Is it really a Christian State when everything is just sort of baptised Christian, so that you have Christian police and a Christian army and Christian prostitutes and Christian shop-keepers, everyone's Christian.

[End of Tape 15 Tape 16]

So it's the same in the case of Buddhism. A State is not necessarily a Buddhist State just because everybody calls themselves Buddhist, and Buddhism enjoys governmental support so that you've got, as you've got in Bangkok, well in Thailand generally let's say you've got, yes, a Buddhist police force, and a Buddhist army with Buddhist tanks and Buddhist guns and Buddhist bhikkhus blessing them with Buddhist holy water and Buddhist mantras and so on and so forth. And of course you have got lots and lots of Buddhist prostitutes. We need not go into that.

So is Thailand therefore a fully Buddhist country? So the fact that a country is officially Buddhist doesn't mean that it's really Buddhist at all. So I think under existing circumstances, I don't think you can have a Buddhist state. I would even go so far as to say it's probably undesirable to have a Buddhist state because that would conceal the real nature of the situation. I think, and I have given a certain amount of thought to this subject, that it's much better to have a secular pluralistic society within which the Buddhist spiritual community, or any other spiritual community, churches and so on, is able to freely function, and try at the same time to have a spiritualising effect on that pluralistic society. But not to be completely identified with it.

Even supposing everybody in Britain declared themselves Buddhists, I don't think I would like to see Britain become a Buddhist state in the official sense. I think it was a great mistake that Sri Lanka was declared a Buddhist state, as that's led I think to all these troubles that they have been experiencing recently. They ought not to have been a Buddhist state because there were important Hindu, Christian, Muslim minorities, so those minorities especially the Hindus and Tamils could not but feel that the Sinhalese Buddhists were imposing themselves, their language and their religion on the minorities, which in any case is an unBuddhistic thing to do. So I think that it is not desirable for Buddhism to be recognised by the State, or there to be a Buddhist State not under modern conditions.

There were a few further points weren't there?

Ratnavira : One of the points you more or less picked up here was about pluralistic societies and you have mentioned pluralistic societies.....

S: But perhaps I will add a little to that because even a pluralistic society does by implication contain a certain ideology or is by implication based on a certain ideology. For instance the principle of toleration. So I think it behoves a Buddhist spiritual community wheresoever it may be, to uphold and support the principles which are implicit in a pluralistic society. I think that is also quite important.

Ratnavira: Do you think that there are any particularly good models historically of such pluralistic societies?

S: That's quite difficult to say, because it's only I think in modern times that societies have been as pluralistic as they are now, though there are some quite big important exceptions. The Roman Empire was really a pluralistic society broadly speaking, because it tolerated different religions, cults and all you had to do was to pay external respect to the image of the Emperor as the symbol of Imperial Unity. This of course the Christians refused to do because it was against their principles, whether they were justified or not that can be argued. There is much to be said no doubt on both sides. But yes the Roman Empire could be regarded as a pluralistic society.

I think some of the Islamic empires were, because it is well known that Muslims treated Christian minorities much better than Christian governments treated Muslim minorities or Jewish minorities. What usually happened within the Islamic system was that Christians and Jews were recognised as such, they were officially classified, or theologically classified as *People of the Book*. Even Sabaens were to some extent recognised, but different churches and other religious communities were allowed to be governed by their own particular laws, but they had to elect or to accept an appointed head, a head appointed by the Caliph for instance, the Islamic Caliph. The Caliph would usually deal with that head. But they were free to practise their own religion to the extent that it did not conflict with Islamic sensibilities. For instance, Christians couldn't ring bells, because Muslims objected to bell ringing. There were a few things of that sort, but on the whole each non Islamic community, each non-Muslim community was free to practice its own religion under the overall protection of the Caliph. In India of course sometimes that pattern broke down under the Mogul Emperor - the later Emperors not the early ones, under (Deep) for instance, he brought pressure to bear on Hindus to convert to Islam and persecuted Hindus to some extent, destroyed Hindu Temples, but he was particularly fanatical, and also of course the Muslims were still in a minority and felt their position to be very precarious.

But where the Muslims were in a majority they treated their religious minorities far better than the Christian governments ever treated theirs, there is no comparison what ever. This is generally not recognised, though to anyone who studies Islamic history it is obviously a well known fact.

I will make just one additional point in connection with that. It is well known that those non Catholic religious minorities that were under the rule of Muslim Kings or Caliphs were always quite dismayed when those Kings or Caliphs were conquered by the Latin, the Catholic Christians because they felt safer under the Muslims, than they did under the Catholic Church. So this is perhaps something to ponder on. I think the Muslims have got on the whole quite a bad press in the West, which they by no means deserve. They were much less ferocious and fanatical usually than their Christian opposite numbers. We should not be misled by more recent happenings in Iran for instance, or in Palestine. Anyway that's by the by.

Ratnavira : The final part to this question. From time to time in *the Forest Monks* Carrithers mentions Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Burma - two other countries where Buddhism has become the State religion. Does Buddhism as a genuine spiritual tradition fare any better in either of these two countries?

S: It's very difficult to say. There is a sort of traditional saying among Theravada Buddhists that the Sinhalese bhikkhus excelled in the study of the Sutras, the Burmese bhikkhus in the study of the Abhidharma and the Thais in the study of the Vinaya. There may be something in that. But I must say that for whatsoever reasons there seems to have been a great dearth of spiritual activity in all these countries. If you just say judge by

their literature, what have they to offer? It is very, very limited. It is not to be compared say to Tibetan or Chinese or Japanese Buddhist literature. There are very few works of general appeal, of general spiritual value. Even the Visuddhimagga was written by an Indian we mustn't forget, not by a Ceylonee. Some of the works are being translated from the Tibetan, and so many of them are masterpieces of literature, spiritual literature especially, very very inspiring, we seem to have nothing like that in say Sinhalese literature, or Burmese literature or Thai literature, nothing at least has yet come to light.

One either has very one sided historical works, or one has very dry analytical Abhidharma type works, but nothing of a more general and inspiring character or more literary or poetic character. There are some well retold stories from the Jatakas in Sinhalese literature, these are classics if Sinhalese literature, but none of them seem to have a very wide appeal or to be particularly remarkable. So one can't help feeling that there is a lack of something in all these countries. It may be partly due to the fact that the level of culture was not very high when Buddhism arrived, but then the same could be said of Tibet.

But then not only did the Hinayana but the Mahayana and the Vajrayana too went to Tibet and no doubt that has a lot to do with the situation. Anyway what was your question? I think I have moved away from it a bit.

Ratnavira : No I think you have answered it really Bhante. Has Buddhism fared any better in these two countries than Sri Lanka?

S: It seems not to have fared very much better, that is the short answer. Though perhaps we shouldn't be too positive about that, maybe there are riches as yet undiscovered, but I personally would be a little surprised if that turned out to be the case. But perhaps one should keep an open mind a little longer at least.

Padmavajra : Is there a Mahayana phase in Sri Lanka? Am I right in thinking that there was an important Vajrayana base?

S: Indeed there was, we know from archaeological evidence that there must have been a Mahayana phase, because images say of Avalokitesvara have been found in Sri Lanka. I have also heard that there are also Avalokitesvara Temples in Sri Lanka, I have not been able to gather any firm evidence, but I think the odd article or two has appeared in archaeological journals. They are called Natha temples, Natha being an abbreviation of Lokanatha, the images are that of Avalokitesvara. They have their own temple servitors who are not bhikkhus. But I have only seen one or two references to these Natha temples. But certainly there was a short, or perhaps a short, Mahayana phase, not that Mahayana Buddhism swept over the whole Island but that it captured certain circles, certain bhikkhus, but it did not last long. It seems to have been in a sense stamped out, and there was what seems to have been a Tantric phase with bhikkhus who are usually referred to as Vetuliyavadins in Pali literature. Some think that it corresponds to Vaipuliyavada. They are said to have been blue robed, but very little is known about them. Vetuliyavadin in modern Ceylon is a term of abuse. It seems there were definitely strong Mahayana influences and Vajrayana influences at one time but they were wiped out, how we don't exactly know. It may have been through the action of the king, prompted by the orthodox Theravadin majority.

I don't think there are any literary survivors from that period but there are certainly archaeological survivors in the form of images that had been

dug up which are now in museums. To the best of my recollection mainly Avalokitesvara images which is perhaps what one would have expected.

Dharmapriya : I have a supplementary. On page 177 he quotes from : "the old Ceylonese classic Amavatuara ...' the monks wandering on their meditation walkways after the midday meal dressed in red robes". A red robe is sometimes symbolic of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

S: I think this is probably a question of poetic licence. Perhaps he was by implication comparing them to red lotuses or something of that sort. The word may be ambiguous, it may be red or reddish, yellow or orange. I think that too much cannot be attached to that.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Buddhadasa on the FWBO and the state.

S: I could just add to that, the colour of the robe varies quite a bit from one Buddhist country to another. In Sri Lanka it is more of a yellow or bright orange, in Burma it tends to be more brownish or yellow brown, and in Thailand it tends to be a sort of pinky yellow almost, almost a salmon colour. In modern times, as I think Carrithers mentions more than once, the Forest Monks tend to wear brownish robes. It could be that in earlier times in Sri Lanka the robe had more of a reddish tinge, but it could not have been actually red because red is prohibited in the Vinaya. Actually according to the Vinaya to the best of my knowledge or recollection, red, blue and yellow are prohibited colours. Though this is interpreted in various ways. Some say that it mustn't be either yellow or red or blue, therefore it should be a sort of orange; some say that it should be made of a mixture of all these three colours, mixing the dyes together in which case you produce an orangy sort of colour, orangy brown.

In Burma they use the bark and the wood of the jak tree for dye, which produces if you dilute the dye, a yellowish colour, but if you have a strong dye it produces this brownish colour which is rather a nice colour. So there are various practises and traditions of this sort. In India, in modern India the sadhus use what is called gerawamati, a sort of orange/yellow earth to dye their robes. It is fixed to some extent with the help of alum. But in the old days monks had to keep on dyeing and redyeing their robes.

Buddhadasa : On page 168, Carrithers has perceptively highlighted the three main pit-falls and dangers facing the Sangha and the spiritual community. First of all domestication, secondly strife within the Sangha, and thirdly difficult relations between the Sangha and the State, or the King. Given that we have already started to come to grips with the first and second dangers, do you have any views regarding danger number three? For example; as the movement grows we could become more influential and a political force in our own right, do you have any guidelines as to how we could best develop our relations with the State so that the Sangha will not suffer or be compromised?

S: I think the longer we can keep a low profile the better. I think the longer the State does not realise how influential we actually are, if we do become as influential as that, the better. Don't go out of your way to sort of court attack, adopt collectively a very modest demeanour. Even if one has to stand up for certain principles, do so in as modest a manner as possible, don't provoke opposition, certainly not open opposition. Don't oblige the State to virtually take a line of open hostility against you, be as conciliatory as you can without actually giving up your principles. Do you see what I am getting at?

Sometimes people, out of idealistic motives or sometimes out of hotheadedness, provoke opposition needlessly and perhaps before they are ready to face opposition, or are strong enough to withstand it. That is extremely unwise. Of course we are talking presumably about Britain mainly, but if we do get started up in certain other States, they may be opposed to us from the very beginning. It may very difficult for us to get a foothold, say in certain Marxist States, Communist States, that is an entirely different matter. Nowadays perhaps even in certain Muslim States. It even occurred to me that perhaps we should start up in Muslim countries under the guise of Sufi brotherhoods. And of course not have any images, that would be asking for trouble.

_____ : Seriously?

S: Well one could in a way, because the Sufi brotherhoods, those that do still exist are very broad in a sense. But one would have to look into that. I mean for instance, there might be provision within the constitution of certain Muslim States, allowing the existence of Sufi brotherhoods legally, and you might argue that you were a kind of Sufi brotherhood, and could be included under those kinds of provisions. Just as here, we may argue that we may be recognised as a charity, because we are a religion even though we are not too happy about the use of the word religion. Do you see what I mean?

In a communist State you might even disguise yourselves as a workers cooperative (laughter).

Devamitra : A question in a similar vein from Dharmapriya.

Dharmapriya : I must confess that this question is rather speculative, but it was stimulated by your remark the other day that in Ceylon there was no bhikkhu party. In that light, I have heard it said that you believe a very strong and concentrated effort by the FWBO in a country with a small population of the nature of New Zealand or Sweden, could lead to that country becoming, quote : "Buddhist."

S: Yes, though not lead to a Buddhist State.

Dharmapriya : Yes. Even if this only were to mean that the Friends made up a far greater proportion of the population than in Britain, nevertheless, the broad base of the FWBO pyramid of which you have spoken in that country would be a sizeable body and hence, a significant political factor, whether the Friends wanted it or not. In such very hypothetical situation, should one establish a political party, not a Bhikkhu Party, but a Dharmachari Party, or perhaps a Mitra and Friend Party. If so what would the platform be? Preserve the environment, free meditation classes for all, or what?

S: I would be very doubtful about starting up a Buddhist political party, even if Buddhists were in a majority. I think it would be much better if Buddhists through their own typical organs, exerted the right kind of influence on all parties. Because it might so could happen that there was a decline in the influence of Buddhism and the Buddhist political party had to go into opposition, that would not be a very happy state of affairs if it were the usual kind of parliamentary, democracy type set up.

So I think there should be certain Buddhist groups that were able to exert an influence on the general state of the country, and perhaps in some ways on any political parties that happened to exist. But I am very, very doubtful whether the Buddhists with their own Buddhist political party as for instance the Christians in Italy have got the Christian Democratic Party and so on, I am very doubtful about that. Of course Buddhists might be more in sympathy with one party than another, you might even have Buddhists actually joining certain parties. But I don't think that the Order for instance, or the FWBO should officially align itself with any particular party. I think it would be wise to allow itself greater freedom, greater flexibility of operation. Maybe that's just my cautious temperament, but this is what I would tend to think, I believe, the whole situation being highly speculative,

Nagabodhi : You say the Order should not allow itself to become a party, but what about one Order Member deciding to stand for election, just as an individual or do you consider that would be impossible?

S: Well I would think that he or she could do that only after careful consultation with fellow Order Members. I think they would have to take the decision. I don't think that it would be desirable for any Order Member just off his or her own bat unilaterally to take that decision without reference to the whole body of the Order in a situation of that kind. Don't forget that Richard Nixon was a Quaker.

Subhuti : One could! (laughter)

S: Well Richard Nixon seems to have forgotten it himself (laughter).

Aryamitra : Just a point Bhante, that an FWBO could not join a political party because it would be going against the rules of the charity. It would have to cease to be a charity.

S: If you had as much power as that you could change the rules (laughter). And if you were as influential as that you would probably not need to have separate charities in that sort of way.

Devamitra : A question from Achala on ordination.

Achala : In our Movement before somebody is ordained, we undertake a personal assessment of the person to ascertain if they are ready. This assessment goes beyond just their outward behaviour and intellectual knowledge, and it also includes non-quantifiable factors, such as whether at least a modicum of perfect vision has arisen in them. These sorts of attributes cannot be measured against reality and are generally perceived differently, or to varying degrees by different people. Carrithers does not appear to mention anything like this in his discussion on the bhikkhu Sangha in Sri Lanka. Is our approach in effect a new one compared with the prerequisites for upasaka or bhikkhu ordinations in the Buddhist East? And do you think that the general standard required for Order Members in our Movement will inevitably tend to float up and/or down in the future, because the basic assessment has no quantifiable measure?

S: I think the general tendency over the last so many years, has been for standards to rise. So the demands made in connection with someone's readiness for ordination, are much greater now than they have ever been and more exacting. But of course in connection with what we have come to call the Tuscan 'process', I think the Order members making up the team responsible for helping people to prepare themselves for ordination had become quite expert over a period of weeks and months in really assessing people's readiness for ordination and even arriving at a sort of consensus. Not only with regard to people's actual readiness, but with regard in a more general way as to what is required of people wanting to go for refuge.

I think actually as that process continues the requirements become clearer and clearer to all concerned. So I think it is quite important that people wanting to go for refuge, wanting to be ordained are assessed over a considerable period by a number of experienced Order Members working together and comparing notes. Sometimes it does happen to begin with that there may be a difference of opinion as between Order Members over someone's readiness in a certain respect. But from experience we know that over a period of weeks if all those Order Members are trying to deepen their personal contact with the person requesting ordination, and they are thrashing out their different views about that person among themselves, a consensus is always arrived at one way or the other. It just requires time, it requires access to that particular person requesting ordination and honest thrashing out between the Order Members concerned. So that particular system seems to work very well, in fact it seems to be working better and better every year. So no doubt that is the system which we shall continue to follow. But that presupposes several things, it presupposes the possibility of a Tuscan like course with the months of preparation leading up to that. Under different circumstances, unless someone is really outstanding, it is very difficult or much more difficult to assess someone's readiness for ordination. So I think this is why the standard has been increasing, or rather why it was lower before, because before people didn't even live in communities together. If Order Members were asked about someone's readiness for ordination, they could perhaps only go by their experience of that person from week to week in a class and perhaps seeing them for a few days in the course of a whole year on a retreat in the midst of a lot of other people. But they did not have very much to go by. Now they have got much more to go by because they can live with them in communities, they work with them in co-ops, they attend many classes together with them, and then in the end you have a whole group of experienced Order Members or relatively experienced Order Members living and working so to speak with those people who have asked for ordination over a period of months and comparing notes among themselves.

So the whole system, the whole process, has been gradually upgraded, perhaps it will be in the future, upgraded still more I don't see any prospect of it being downgraded. Even in India now though conditions are very difficult, and most people who are asking for ordination have regular jobs, they have now made it possible for several years to have a whole month of retreat, which was unthinkable five or six years ago.

So the longer the process of preparation, the more intensive, the more standards will be maintained and even increased. But does that answer all the questions?

Achala : No it doesn't actually. One part was : Is our approach in effect a new one compared with the prerequisites for Upasaka or bhikkhu ordinations in the Buddhist East?

S: Yes, it seems to be certainly an improvement on what has been the custom for centuries, because even today if you are a young man in Sri

Lanka or in Burma or in Thailand, you are almost certain to be accepted for ordination. Providing first of all you are a male human being, you're of age, you have your parents consent, you are free from certain diseases, you don't suffer from any physical disability, you will be accepted. The only qualification some may have now is a certain educational standard, perhaps including some knowledge of Pali, but I don't think anything will be said about spiritual requirements. They will assume, well you are a Buddhist, of course you are a Buddhist, of course you are committed to the Three Jewels, you were born a Buddhist, that is all taken for granted in a way that we can't by the very nature of the situation. So I think it is much more difficult, and I have said this before, it is very much more difficult to become a member of the Western Buddhist Order than to be ordained a bhikkhu. I mean people that we reject, well not reject but ask to wait thinking that they may not be ready to be ordained for some years yet, can go straight to the East and I can guarantee that they would be ordained as bhikkhus if they wanted to be, without any difficulty without any doubt! I used to be quite horrified in India years and years ago at the ease with which people could be ordained. And of course it rankled a little bit with me because I had had difficulty in getting ordained. (Laughter) I wrote an editorial in the Mahabodhi journal once saying that I thought that Theras who ordained sramaneras or monastic disciples should at least keep them with them for three months before ordaining them. This was considered very revolutionary and very extreme. I had several instances of young men wandering up to me and I will tell you one particular typical case. A young Indian came up to see me wearing a yellow robe, so I asked him; "Are you a bhikkhu?" he said, "Yes." So I said: "Are you sure you are a bhikkhu, or are you a sramanera?" He said : "Sramanera, what's that?" (laughter)

So I said : "Well, when you were ordained what happened, who ordained you?" So he said : "Well, some Burmese Baba ordained me" A colloquial term for monk. So I said : "Well how were you ordained, what happened?" So he said : " . " (He performed some ceremony) (laughter). Yes that was all he knew, and he had been with that bhikkhu I think it was in Bodhgaya for two days and had been ordained and turned loose, and he had wandered up to Kalimpong. Yes, so there were many instances of this sort.

So you may regard the WBO in the light of these instances, you can regard the FWBO or the Western Buddhist Order as a highly reformist organisation. If you see the rabble that they have got now in India, it is really disgraceful. There are a couple of hundred I think in Maharashtra, that don't really enjoy the respect of the laity. There are one or two who are reasonably decent, a little bit educated, but on the whole they are just a rabble and they can't be taken seriously, and they just went off in most cases to Bodhgaya or Saranath and they asked the first bhikkhu they met to ordain them and he was usually happy to oblige on condition that he would not have to support them and they were not to stay with him. (laughter) Yes, this is actually what happened, and back they wandered to Maharashtra and expect to be supported sometimes treated as bhikkhus and so on and so forth. Then very quickly, and though they are only with their teacher for two or three days, they pick up the airs and graces of bhikkhus very, very quickly. It's amazing how quickly they pick up all that! A few have gone to Sri Lanka or Burma or to Thailand, but very, very few in comparison with the majority who might have been sincere to start with in a way, wanting to do something for Buddhism or for Dr. Ambedkar and all that. But they can't compare with our Indian Order Members by any, any means. The Indian Order Members are streets ahead of them, even the simplest of them.

Nagabodhi : Jyotipala was staying in Bombay, and when I was visiting him he told me about a friend a sahayak who turned up one day in robes. He had just gone off and had a sramanera ordination without saying anything in advance. The way Jyotipala said he was just round here for a cup of tea last week and he never said anything about "going yellow." He did not even say, he had just gone off and come back in robes.

(laughter)

S: Yes it can happen just like that. Though sometimes we are very much aware of our own weaknesses and shortcomings and so we should be. But in comparison with some instances I could mention in the East, some that we even hear about in this book, there are shining instances, shining examples. Perhaps we should not dwell on that side of it too much. What else ?

Achala : The last part. Do you think that the general standard required for Order Members in our Movement will inevitably tend to float up and/or down, in future generations because the basis of assessment has no quantifiable benchmark?

S: No I think that so long as it remains unquantifiable it will only go floating up. But if you quantify it in the sense of identifying it with certain very specific requirements which are then rigidly enforced, then I am sure it is bound to go down. I am not saying that there are certain things which can't be quantified, but the most important thing of all can't be quantified in the last analysis. Though there has to be something in that person asking for ordination, to which you as a spiritually committed person are sensitive and can be sensitive. If you have lost that sensitivity, no quantification of requirements is going to help you because you can be deceived. It's not enough to say well, such and such person must have been in contact for four years, he must have attended at least two hundred classes, he must have had at least three months on retreat. You can't guarantee the person's readiness by making those sorts of requirements and as it were, enforcing them. In the last resort it is your own, as it were, spiritual intuition that will decide the matter, and that depends upon your own actual spiritual life.

That's it?

[End of side one side two]

S: : How far did you get?

Devamitra : To page 180 in my group, I think some of the other groups didn't get very far.

S: I'll just see, probably not. Ah yes, one thing. "This habit of planning to train large groups of monks is common to most modern reformers, and is a corollary I surmise of thinking in terms of the glorious past". (page 175) I have come across this umpteen times, I have read accounts in Buddhist magazines: "Bhikkhu so and so, has decided to train a hundred young men to spread the Dharma in India." And he would call for recruits, and sometimes there would be an actual building ready provided, lay people would give money, and you would hear that so many at least had arrived, and that would be the end of the matter. But they always seemed to think in these sorts of terms, and to announce this, they were going to recruit a hundred young men or thirty young men, or two-hundred young men who would be given a rigorous training in Pali, meditation etc. etc. in this particular place, and then sent to India it usually was, to propagate the Dharma but nothing ever happened. These were just day dreams mostly. Sometimes they actually got the young men there, but there was no real provision for their training. Perhaps there were Pali classes or something like that, but the monk organising the whole thing had his head lost in these dreams of the glorious past, and actually had no idea about spiritual life or spiritual training, had no spiritual life and spiritual training himself to very often. I mean just an

ordinary village monk so to speak, perhaps quite learned and enthusiastic for the glorious Buddhist past and wanting to revive that, but that was all. So nothing happened. I have known dozens of cases of this sort, batches of young monks going to be trained to spread the Dharma in the West and America, all round the world but especially it seems in India, India being comparatively near, but nothing ever happened.

You would get the odd one or two coming back to spread the Dharma at the most, and even then not very successfully or very well. So I really recognise the pattern, that *"this habit of planning to train large groups of monks is common to most modern reformers, and is a corollary I surmise of thinking in terms of the glorious past."* He really has hit the nail on the head to a greater extent than he realises! (laughter)

Suvajra : Do you think then Bhante, we could use that technique in Sri Lanka actually

S: I think we could, I think we could actually do it, but I must say that reading this book carefully has given me a rather different picture of things than I had when I was in India. I think that the FWBO could almost start up in Sri Lanka it's own Forest Monk movement. Yes it could! It would get a lot of support, it's own Anagarika Sangha as it were, do you see what I mean? I know I have heard that there are a lot of sincere western educated Buddhist lay people who want an opportunity of practising meditation, going on retreat and that kind of thing, and I am sure we could do very well in this respect. I think you would need perhaps ten or twelve and maybe they should go out with sufficient money to support themselves initially, but I think eventually they would be supported and there would be no problem.

Suvajra : How do you think they would be received being a Western Movement, and being white?

S: Oh I think a lot of Sinhalese people would be overjoyed that Europeans had become Buddhists. You would be likely to get all the more support.

Suvajra : But taking Buddhism back to Sri Lanka.

S: Well you wouldn't say that, you would be very tactful about that, you were going there to practise. Obviously you would attract a certain amount of attention, support. They would be seeing you getting on with your practise and they would invite you, perhaps they would invite you just for dana or something like that, or maybe you could just talk to people about weekend meditation courses, and you would find them interested. I think that before you knew where you were you could have quite a lot of work on your hands. I think you would have to be quite careful not to cross the path of the village monks, not go out of your way to offend, and be very careful how you treated them. But I think you could steer clear of them quite easily.

Dharmapriya It almost sounds as if one could leave the activities of the village monks as the kind of pagan basis arranging marriages and all that.

S: Yes they don't do marriages exactly, but I know what you mean. Yes I mean there is no need to interfere with them as it were, no need to criticise them. You wouldn't be competing with them and they wouldn't be competing with you. You wouldn't particularly want to be chanting pirit all night - well you probably couldn't, and you just say that frankly. This is not what we are interested in. Perhaps you could do just a little

bit if asked, just chant the Mangala Sutta at least, or read it in English. But not try to take over any of the functions of the village monks or deprive them of their support.

But I'm sure we could do something. After reading this book carefully, I am all the more convinced of it. All the English bhikkhus or Western bhikkhus, Nyanatiloka, Nyanaponika, Nyanamoli, always enjoyed great respect and support. Admittedly they were bhikkhus and our people wouldn't be bhikkhus, but if they went out as anagarikas in a yellow robe, I don't think it would make much practical difference.

Vessantara : Wouldn't the anagarika be quite a good thing given the example of Anagarika Dharmapala?

S: Well you would certainly be respected on account of the yellow robe even if you did eat after twelve o'clock. But I think that intelligent lay people would probably welcome the opportunity of discussing Buddhism intelligently, especially those who are Western educated and who would want to discuss it as it were, in Western terms. The ordinary Sinhalese educated semi literate villager probably wouldn't have much use for you except that he would respect you and be quite happy to offer you food, but that would be all. I think your parish would be amongst the Westernised people who were still quite devoted to Buddhism and perhaps a bit disgusted with the bhikkhus. As far as I know there would be no difficulty about staying in Sri Lanka because I heard of someone who had been there, if you are doing Dharma work you were given extensions on your visa automatically. Yes, quite different from India.

Again this is thinking aloud, supposing we did extend our meditation activities, it is not impossible that we have our own meditation centre in Sri Lanka to which people could go from this country and stay at our own centre on retreat, practising meditation and doing some study for two or three years. You might even find you have a lot of support from the Buddhist public.

Nagabodhi : If we did become established to any degree in Sri Lanka, would that not be a situation where we might find ourselves wanting to speak out in the political field?

S: Well I think first of all you'd be foreign nationals and you would have no right to in a sense, no political right. Perhaps you would have a moral right but I think you would have to exercise that moral right very carefully because you could be just asked to leave.

Nagabodhi : But it might be difficult to be active within the Buddhist world there and to be known both in Sri Lanka and abroad as being part of the general Buddhist world, and without seeming at least by implication to be sharing responsibility in the corruption and the war-mongering that is going on.

S: Well let's hope by the time that we get established there all that is a thing of the past, things do seem to be quieting down. I mean there are some people who might think that we ought to be raising our voices more in protest against what is happening in Britain. Supposing there had been Buddhists in Argentina, they might have thought that at the time of the Falklands War, we should have been denouncing Mrs. Thatcher for her aggressive attitude, do you see what I mean? There is always something going on wherever one is, on a political or governmental level, which no doubt deserves denunciation. (Pause) But after reading this book I am more than ever convinced we could set up something in Sri

Lanka and would be welcomed if we went about it in the right way. Maybe sending two or three people there and then others could join them when they had made a little headway. We have got a few Friends in Sri Lanka, we have Siri, and old friends of mine, even among bhikkhus still a few left though they are dying out rather rapidly.

Dharmapriya: We have Dharmajyoti in Sri Lanka.

S: We do, Vijjaya has been in contact with him. I think he has become a village bhikkhu in some ways at least externally because he is in charge of a little temple now and teaches Sarvastivada philosophy in a nearby college. I hope he has read this little book. Also I have been reading, this is going off at a bit of a tangent, but it is not totally irrelevant, I have been reading a volume of essays and addresses in a book produced by Arthur E. Clark, who as you know lives in Sri Lanka. From some of these essays and addresses it's clear that he is very much accepted into Sri Lankan society and he is very well respected and has become apparently, if he still is, the Chancellor of a University. He has been appointed, no doubt by the government, as the Chancellor of a new university and some of his convocation addresses are quite lively ones indeed! So that does suggest a certain openness in Sri Lanka. No doubt he is a famous person and all that, but nonetheless, he has also been involved in film making there and all sorts of other activities.

_____: Is he a Buddhist then?

S: Not to the best of my knowledge but he must have some awareness of it. But of course I don't whether anyone under forty could go to Sri Lanka (laughter). Because I think they would have to go as Anagarikas and we all know what that means (laughter)

Devaraja : Perhaps we should send all the film makers! (laughter)

S: And of course in a warm climate I believe, celibacy is all that more difficult (laughter). But there is one consolation at least, the diet would probably be very poor! (laughter)

Nagabodhi I'm not sure if that's a consolation!

S: But you see the possibilities? You see the possibilities. We can begin to think in those terms, because we are beginning to be sufficiently big and as it were organised. I mean think of the breakthrough that we are making in the 'States now, and the breakthrough we will hopefully be making quite soon with our women's country retreat centre. Think what we have done in India in the course of how many years? Seven, eight? Admittedly it is a quite unusual situation, but I think that once we got a foothold in Sri Lanka, if we were careful to avoid giving offence to the village bhikkhus, I think we could do very well.

Dharmapriya : I have a technical question. Traditionally, who can ordain an Anagarika? Or is it a 'self ordination' in the Dharmapala tradition?

S: There is not tradition of Anagarika ordination. I think in effect Dharmapala ordained himself, though I think he sort of did it with the blessing of a famous bhikkhu with whom he was connected.

Vessantara : Bhante what about the case of monks in Burma and Thailand?

S: Well I think Burma is rather different because no foreigner is allowed to stay for more than a week, and that apparently applies to monks too. And in Thailand, it seems that Buddhism is under the control of the state in a way that it isn't in Sri Lanka. I think if you wanted to go there for religious purposes, you would probably only get a visa on a recommendation of the Thai bhikkhus in Britain, this is the system they have now. I think it would be quite difficult. But again the situation could change, perhaps we should look into it a little further. But the set up in Thailand is much more rigid and bureaucratic and they are much more intolerant of any departure from the norm as it were.

Vessantara : Presumably if we did well out in Sri Lanka that might open up the possibilities.

S: Oh yes, because you might find other people coming to Sri Lanka from Thailand and then going back and spreading the word so to speak. Yes, once you get a foothold in South East Asia in a Theravada country, that is a very important step as regards that whole region. You could even get people going to your centre there say from New Zealand and staying for a while. It could be so useful in so many ways.

Devaraja : There is in Thailand probably someone who would be very sympathetic. Apparently there is a bhikkhu who has a whole monastery or whatever down in the south of Thailand and who has Thai craftsmen who make copies of all the principal works of art in the world and is very keen on people seeing great works of art.

S: Well there is also of course the famous bhikkhu Buddhadasa, I don't know whether it is the same person or perhaps it isn't but Buddhadasa has translated *the Diamond Sutra* and *the Sutra of Wei Lang* and other Mahayana texts. He is not very popular with other bhikkhus on that account, but he is very well known and he is well known as a meditation teacher too. He would certainly be very sympathetic I'm sure. I think if one looked closely one would find that perhaps in each country, Buddhism even the Sangha was not quite so monolithic as it appeared from the outside.

Kulamitra : I gather that quite a lot of Westerners drift into Sri Lanka looking for Buddhism and quite a lot of them end up at the more meditation oriented hermitages, so we could gain them as well.

S: Yes or they get disillusioned, but yes that's true. Of course the cost of living is very low there, much lower than in India and it has quite a good climate, though that's quite irrelevant (laughter). They have a very heavy rainy season too. But I mean it is good to float these ideas just to broaden people's outlook a bit and suggest possibilities for the future even if it does have to wait until you are over forty, (laughter), or even over fifty!

You can't risk any little accidents out there you know. It would completely spoil things.

Vessantara : How far would we have to play down aspects of the Movement in order to be able to function there. Would we have to present more of a Theravadin approach in order to do this?

S: I don't think so necessarily. Just speak in terms of Buddhism or say that, "I am only concerned with the Dharma," or the Dhamma, perhaps you would have to use the Pali terms rather than the Sanskrit. I doubt if we would have to play down anything really provided we were quite modest and gentle in our approach. I think we would find some people who appreciated what we had to offer. Perhaps we should be a bit cautious at first about things like visualisation practices, but then they wouldn't be suitable for newcomers anyway. Perhaps we would have to be very careful about what sort of pictures we displayed, because with the best will in the world, people could mistake them for pictures of Hindu deities. They would think therefore that you were a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism. You might even find people who were interested in the Mahayana, there are some I am sure.

Kulamitra : Presumably since you have given us sources in the Pali Canon in the word of the Buddha for many of the things that we do, we wouldn't have to talk in terms of Mahayana or Hinayana.

S: No, no - Buddhism and spiritual life, with references to the Pali Canon, *the Dhammapada*, *Sutta Nipata*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, even the *Vissuddhimagga*. It would be useful if some people knew at least a little Pali. That would be useful, because you would be able to refer more easily to the original texts, which we've got printed in Roman characters anyway to make things easier for us. The more I think about it the more possible it really seems to be. It would be much easier than setting up a retreat centre in the 'States. Anyway perhaps I should let you go and dream about it now.

[End of Tape 16]