General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

[Tape 21]

Questions and Answers on

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka

Chapter 11

15th August 1985

Devamitra : This evening we have nineteen questions which come from the chapter on meditation. The first question comes from Kamalasila concerning the myth of the decline of man.

Kamalasila : The decline of man's moral and intellectual capabilities mentioned on page 222 seems to be a very widespread myth. Could you say something about it's meaning? Is it literally true?

S: Well Carrithers refers to the Buddhist version of the myth so to speak, but in a way he only refers to half of it. It is true that Buddhist tradition does speak of the progressive degeneration of man in terms of length of life for instance. But it also speaks of a period of degeneration alternating with a period of progression, with reference for instance to the span of life itself. Over a certain period the span of life decreases I think from some thousands of years to ten and then when it reaches ten it builds up again to thousands of years. So it is not correct to say that Buddhism speaks only in terms of a decline of man, it sees throughout history, at least legendary history, if one can use that expression, alternating phases of decline and progression.

Nonetheless there is another level that should perhaps be mentioned. A level that is represented by some of the teachings in the Aganna Sutta, where Buddhism does seem to envisage man as originating, if that is the right term, at least partly as the result of the fall of deva like beings from higher realms of existence, into lower realms of existence. It is not as though the lower realms are already made, it is more as though the lower realms themselves were produced partly as the result of the involvement of those devas in lower realms of existence. So that has to be borne in mind too.

I don't think that a completely philosophical cosmology has been worked out by Buddhist thinkers. They inherit these traditions, but they don't seem to do very much with them. But even with regard to those devas who became involved with existence on a lower level of spiritual density let us say, the possibility of escape via the eightfold path, the escape to the transcendental, not merely to a higher plane of mundane existence, does of course exist. So perhaps Carrithers is being a bit one sided in speaking only of the process of decline. There is a process of decline, but only within a particular limited context.

Kamalasila : So there is a process of decline?

S: There is a process of decline nonetheless over a period of many thousands of years, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of years. Taking simply that particular phase as it were, the phase of decline, it does seem to be an extraordinarily widespread myth. It could be that it reflects something of that in a sense more basic myth of a descent of what became human beings from some higher realm, and becoming progressively more involved in the purely material level of existence. I have studied some of these texts and I have been thinking this over for some time. I have had it in my mind to write something about this for some time, but it requires still further thought and investigation. I feel it would be premature perhaps if I said very much. In a sense there isn't very much to say.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Suvajra on the degeneration of kalyana mitrata within the Theravada tradition.

Suvajra : In the text it speaks about kalyana mitrata (kalyana mitta) being solely referred to now in Theravada tradition as your meditation teacher. How is it that in the Theravada tradition the concept of kalyana mitta has come to mean just that?

S: Well it would seem that originally spiritual friendship was spiritual friendship, and it extended to all aspects of the spiritual life. But perhaps it's as though within the Theravada tradition, and here I speculate somewhat, spiritual life in the strict sense became more and more confined just to meditation, or identified even with the life of meditation and the life of asceticism along with that. So inasmuch as that was the spiritual life in depth, the kalyana mitra came to be regarded as kalyana mitra only within that particular context. It's as though outside that, there no longer was any real kalyana mitrata. Though I must say, though the technical term is used in that way nowadays say in Theravada Buddhism, I wouldn't like to say that, regardless of the term one uses, there wasn't ever any kalyana mitrata in the sense that we use the term, outside that specifically meditative context. Perhaps it isn't very high level spiritual friendship, but I have emphasised and I've observed that among Theravada bhikkhus there is usually a very warm feeling of friendship. I am sure that sometimes that does amount to kalyana mitrata in our sense even though they may not use that term for it, even though they may restrict the term kalyana mitra to the specifically meditative context.

But we shouldn't take that to mean that kalyana mitrata is never found within the broader Buddhist context among Theravada Buddhists. But that is the only reason I can think of that historically there was in a sense no serious spiritual life outside the life of meditation and the life of the forest monks. So that kalyana mitrata which should have applied to the total situation was restricted to that particular section of it.

Suvajra : I had read, I tried to check on this today but I couldn't find it, that in the bhikkhu ordination there are two officials, one is the upajaya and I thought that the other was the kalyana mitra, is that right?

S: No there are three. One is the upajaya, who is usually the seniormost monk and who presides at the ordination, the other is the Dhammacharya or simply Acharya who is normally the personal teacher of the person being ordained and who also has a particular part to play - he for instance coaches him in the ceremony in what he has to do. then there is sometimes the Kamacharya, the master of ceremonies who sees that the whole ordination is conducted properly. But no there is kalyana mitra, there is no such position as a kalyana mitra with reference to the ordination ceremony.

Suvajra : That's why I couldn't find it!

S: Kalyana Mitra in Vajrayana literature and in Tibetan literature is often used in the general sense of guru or teacher. I think in the *Blue Annals* you sometimes come across the kalyana mitra so and so. I don't think there, the context is specifically that of a meditation teacher or meditation guru.

Suvajra : What is meant then in the Mahayana tradition?

S: The spiritual friend, with perhaps a tinge of guru-like connotation but only a tinge. A spiritual advisor, a spiritual friend, not quite a guru in the tantric sense. A spiritually more advanced or experienced person to whom you can look up. Not necessarily your own personal teacher.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Devaraja concerning the inseparability of the Dharma and the Sangha.

Devaraja : On page 232, I'll just quote the paragraph : "These developments, argues Nanarama had a further serious consequence, namely that the heritage of meditation advice now written in books, was entrusted to special teachers. This change is well illustrated by a change in the meaning of the term for such specialists, 'kalyana mitta'. In early canonical texts it had signified simply 'wise companion', the sort of serious and experienced fellow seeker any monk would be well advised to cultivate. But in the Visuddhimagga it means 'specialised meditation teacher'. And Nanarama further infers that such specialists became scarce preferring to live in seclusion."

This would seem to be a symptom of an increasing interest in scholasticism and decreasing interest in meditation. It also suggests a removal of friendship and Sangha, that is shared spiritual commitment as the basis of communication of the Dharma in its broadest sense as doctrine and method with perhaps the scholastic pundit becoming increasingly prominent. This being so, the Dharma will inevitably be seen as something to which, through books, one has access to and therefore knowledge of independent of the human relationship to which one is committed. Therefore is there not a danger in putting information about meditation techniques in particular into print and that we might contribute to this sort of confusion, and how can we ensure that books that we do produce in this sort of area do not perpetuate that kind of confusion?

S: Well I think absolutely speaking you can't because people are capable of misunderstanding anything. I think that the situation is that we do have books say on the Dharma in circulation, we have books on meditation in circulation, books on the Vajrayana, on the Tantra in circulation, we cannot reverse that trend ourselves. So in a sense we are compelled or obliged to publish books ourselves which can to the extent that books by themselves able to do this, correct some of those misunderstandings, which I think they would be able to do if the books that we put out, the literature' that we put out are written with sufficient clarity and force and conviction; and if of course they happen to be read by people who are reasonably open-minded. So I think that is the situation and as i said, it applies not only to the subject of meditation, but to Buddhism generally, the Dharma generally, and perhaps especially to things like the Tantric tradition. I think it's very regrettable that books say on the Vajrayana especially are being published. It seems as though nothing is any longer sacred. It seems that Tibetan teachers, Tibetan Lamas, have decided that they are going to propagate everything, and in a sense it can't be propagated in that sort of way.

Their argument seems to be that perhaps you scatter a few seeds, which seems to me a very very chancy business indeed. There might be a chance of your scattering a few seeds in effect, if for instance you are scattering on the earth. But supposing you are scattering on an asphalted car park, I think that in some cases would be a more appropriate comparison.

Nagabodhi : Taking what you say, what is the worst harm that can be done by that sort of thing, you express it quite strongly as being very regrettable and that nothing is sacred. Is it that it depotentiates their value to people who will take them, or do you think that there is an even more serious damage that can be done?

S: I think it perpetuates the totally unspiritual approach to spiritual things. I think it encourages people to think in terms of appropriation, and if people think in terms of appropriation, then I think no spiritual life, no spiritual progress, is possible and if people at large who are as it were interested in Buddhism or any other spiritual tradition think in these sort of terms, then the tradition of the spiritual life would be in danger of coming to an end. Besides which it often flatters people's very complacent feelings about themselves. They feel that they have been initiated into the highest this that or the other, and they feel that they were really ready for that; that only the highest teachings are good enough for them. They feel they understand them already when in fact they don't, perhaps they don't even understand the basics of Buddhism, and it makes it impossible really for them to make any further progress perhaps. Not unless they radically change their attitude which they are not likely to do if they are almost in effect encouraged to persist in that sort of attitude. Their only hope is to come across some clearly written publication possibly by the FWBO.

Devamitra : Another question concerning Arahants and the wider Theravada tradition, from Kamalasila.

Kamalasila : On page 222, we read that : "In the Sinhalese tradition the last Arahant died many years ago". Is this belief common to all Theravada countries, and what about the Mahayana?

S: It seems to be more common amongst Sinhalese, certainly in comparatively recent times, Burmese Theravada Buddhists and Thai Theravada Buddhists have believed that Arahants did live in their own country, so they seem not to have shared that particular Sinhalese belief. Whether they were correct and whether the people they believed to be Arahants were in fact Arahants, that is quite another matter. But the fact is, that they do not seem to have lost faith in the possibility of the attainment of Arahantship in the way that the Sinhalese clearly have done, at least perhaps until very recent times.

Devamitra : A question from Dhammaloka on the psychological interpretations of insight.

Dhammaloka : On page 229, Carrithers emulises Vipassana meditation in psychological terms saying that the meditator trains himself to see his psychological world and experience in terms of the categories. And somewhat later he says : The propositions of doctrine are transmuted into immediate perception here and now, and the meditator (presumably in relation to samatha experience) is able to effect that change in his most intimate mental habits. I appreciate this description in as much as it goes beyond the somewhat unsatisfactory statement of insight as seeing

reality as it really is, I find that quite unsatisfying. But I wonder whether Carrithers' view might still be misleading inasmuch as one could read it as suggesting that the meditator manipulates his experience in order to make it fit with the categories. Could you please comment on the passage and perhaps suggest improvements?

S: I must say to me the passage doesn't suggest that. Though it is possible that some people might interpret it in that sort of way, could you just read the relevant bit again?

Dhammaloka: "The meditator trains' himself to see his psychological world of experience in terms of....."

S: Yes, let's take that bit. The meditator trains himself. Well, one could if one wasn't very sympathetic to spiritual life think of that training as a sort of manipulation, but clearly a Buddhist wouldn't see it in that particular way, they would see the training as having a quite objective basis as it were.

Dhammaloka: "He trains himself to see his psychological world of experience in terms of the categories".

S: Ah the doctrinal categories. Yes. So I think the important point here would be that one understood what the doctrinal categories referred to. If one didn't speak of insight into reality or things as they really are, you would have to understand that those doctrinal categories represented a more correct way of seeing things, and it was that more correct way of seeing things that you, through your meditative experience and training, psychological training if you like, were trying to align yourself with. In other words, you would have to recognise that the doctrinal categories reflected a level of insight, even a level of reality that you yourself had not yet attained, but which you could attain on the basis of your training, with your concentrated mind, with the help of those doctrinal categories. I think if you were not willing to accept that, or at least not willing to understand the passage in that sort of way, you might well develop all sorts of misunderstandings about Buddhism, about meditation, and about Insight. The important thing is to understand what is meant by doctrinal categories.

Dhammaloka: So would you think you could use such a way of describing what is happening....

S: I think it's quite sound. I mean maybe yes, a little more explanation as to what is meant by doctrinal categories and what their function is. Apart from that, I would say it represents in sort of fairly generally understandable terms what the Buddhist position really is.

Padmavajra: Would you have to be more specific about exactly what doctrinal categories you were using, because I do understand that you have said lately that the Five Skandhas were perhaps something we could do away with. How important are those particular doctrinal categories when it comes to insight meditation, things like the dhatus and that kind of thing?

S: Well they can all be used as basic schema. I mean for instance one of the most basic doctrinal categories is that of the Three Lakshanas, perhaps that is one of the best to take up, whether for purposes of practice or explanation and illustration. You know that you review your own personal experience, well what is the expression that Carrithers uses for that,in the quote? Well what is the term that he uses? "Your

psychological world of experience", that is to say your thoughts, your emotions as you actually experience them. You apply this particular doctrinal category, that of the Three Lakshanas, Dukkha, Annica, Anatta, to those. You examine your mental states and your emotions and so on in terms of those three lakshanas in a systematic manner. So those three Lakshanas represent the way things actually are, so you try to align your perception with the perception that is represented by that particular doctrinal category. Then for instance if you found it difficult to develop insight into Annica, well you could then take up a more detailed doctrinal category, you could take up that of the Five Skandhas and try to see how yes you consisted of bodily form, you consisted of feeling, you consisted of thoughts, you consisted of volitions and acts of consciousness. Or you could take up the Eighteen Dhatus and you could see the way in which eye consciousness arose in dependence on the contact between the organ of sight and the object of sight, and see how it was actually a process and something composite.

So in that way you can use any of these sort of doctrinal schemes or doctrinal patterns to develop insight. They can be short and simple or they can be highly elaborate, containing lots of sub-divisions, but the basic principle is the same. (Pause) What was Padmavajra's question?

Padmavajra: I wondered how relevant the more detailed analyses of the psycho-physical organism were?

S: I think it depends on the practitioner. I cannot say in absolute terms that one is more relevant than the other. It depends upon the needs of the individual meditator. I mean some people may find it more satisfactory to work with a very short simple doctrinal formula, representing not a very high degree of analysis, but others might find it necessary to take up doctrinal categories which were very much more elaborate, maybe go through all the eighteen different chittas as an exercise. It depends entirely on the needs of the individual. Though you may well find, for instance within the Order, that certain doctrinal categories were much more effective in the case of a much larger number of people.

Kamalasila: On what principles would you choose whether to try a more complex or a more simple approach?

S: I think probably it is best to start off with the more simple doctrinal categories, especially the Three Lakshanas or the Four Viparyasas, and when you are accustomed to working with them, perhaps allow yourself as it were to subdivide them, so as to produce more elaborate doctrinal categories or doctrinal schemes. But I think what you must be careful to do and clearly Nanarama did become aware of this, that you were simply in a discursive way reviewing very elaborate doctrinal categories with an insufficiently concentrated mind so that no insight was really developed at all and perhaps could not be developed. That is the great danger, because a lot of so called Vipassana meditation appears to consist just in that, just a discursive reviewing of very complex doctrinal schemes and categories with minimal concentration, so that actually no insight is generated. This is my basic quarrel with the way in which Vipassana Meditation, so called, as often taught, I don't say as always taught, sometimes it is taught in a way that is helpful, but not always.

Padmavajra: Do you think in that case it would be much better to take up a Vipassana Practice which, if you like, encouraged more concentration, so there was, if you like, more possibility of....

S: Well in a way no vipassana practice encourages concentration. In a sense it's inimical to concentration. In a way that's the whole point of it, that you don't develop insight without at least a minimal mental activity. If you want to develop a higher degree of concentration you have to no

longer think in terms of developing insight. But it is important, I feel, that before taking up the development of insight, or before trying to develop insight, you so to speak soak yourself in, if possible, the dhyana states to the greatest extent that you possibly can. This will make your mind
in traditional terms pliable, so that insight may be more easily developed. I think in many cases that people who practise vipassana or try to practise vipassana remain satisfied with a minimum of concentration, usually with neighbourhood concentration, and try to develop insight with the help of that. I don't say that that is impossible, I don't go so far as to say that. It is possible, but I think it is very very much more difficult. So I think for the average practitioner it is safer to develop concentration, samatha, to a point as far beyond neighbourhood concentration as you can, which has a very integrating effect on the whole psycho-physical organism and then returns in a manner of speaking to a state in which you are able to be mentally active and try to develop insight from that state with the help of the various doctrinal categories. This is the standard Buddhist, especially let's say Hinayana or Theravada procedure. And it would seem to go back to the days of the Buddha himself, at least as one approach to meditation.

So on the whole one might say, looking at the way that Vipassana Meditation is usually taught, apart from the fact that sometimes people are forced beyond what they should really do, the main defect is insufficient attention to Samatha. It's not as though the Vipassana exercises themselves are wrong, provided that they are not allowed to become too elaborate, so much as that before undertaking these exercises there is insufficient experience of Samatha.

Devamitra: Another question on Insight.

Dhammaloka: On p.239, it said, when practising Insight meditation
it is necessary to accept and analyze all sense perceptions and thoughts, this is what Nanarama says, and he criticises the Vissudhi Magga as not having mentioned that. Is this correct?

S: "**Accept** and analyze"? Well yes and no. It's not expressed with complete clarity. Let's go through it word for word. "When practising Insight Meditation", that is clear, " it is necessary to accept and analyze all sense perceptions", ah, but when? Straight away or eventually or in principle? Because yes, in principle it is necessary to see, for instance in terms of impermanence, that every sense experience is impermanent. But that does not mean that in terms of practice you start off with that. You might start off by seeing the impermanence of this perception, that perception, this experience, that experience. But eventually and in principle you have to apply that perception, apply that particular doctrinal category, to the whole of your experience. So I think there is a certain ambiguity in the way that he has put it. Just read that again to make sure that we've got it clearly.

Dhammaloka: "When practising Insight Meditation, it is necessary to accept and analyze all sense perceptions and thoughts."

S: Yes, in principle and in the long run. You may not be able to do it immediately, you are almost certainly not going to be able to do it immediately, you won't be actually trying to do that straight away, you will be working, so to speak, on whatever material is to hand, whatever sense perceptions and mental perceptions are as it were to hand. But in principle, yes, you apply that doctrinal category to the totality of your

experience of whatsoever nature.

Devamitra: A question on the Burmese Satipatanna Method.

Ratnavira: The Burmese Satipatanna Method as well other related
Vipassana type techniques seem to be practised these days by a not insubstantial number of Westerners. As Chairman of a public Centre I and I suspect other Chairmen come into contact fairly regularly with people who have been on such courses, are thinking of doing them, know people who have, or are at least interested in them. This being the case it seems quite important for us to have a clear view and some sort of clear critique of such approaches. It does seem that such methods can lead to even harmful effects, especially through the development of some kind of alienated awareness. Could you say something more precisely about the way in which such Vipassana methods lead to such effects?

Well I did refer a little to forcing the pace. In some vipassana meditation centres the hours of sleep are artificially reduced, and the Satipatanna itself was practised, for instance Mindfulness of the Walking process, in such a way as to produce an alienating effect, as when you chop up the continuity of your say bodily movements into discrete disconnected bits, and are aware of each section of movement as it were separately. That can have a very unpleasant sort of effect, I think leading to alienation. And also inasmuch as people haven't got much experience of Samatha and are not much in touch with their emotions because there is nothing in the way of Puja usually in Vipassana Centres. Some of them recommend the Metta Bhavana, but not all of them by any means, originally none of them did, and also because one is really inasmuch as one is occupied discursively with sometimes very elaborate doctrinal categories, one is mentally very active. So you've got all these different factors. You are out of touch with your emotions, such things as sleep and food and speech are reduced forcibly almost to a minimum sometimes, and then again you are mentally intensely active, so these factors, it seems to me, mainly are responsible for producing a state of alienation. One might also say that the kind of person who is attracted to Vipassana is someone with a rather rational, not to say rationalistic attitude to Buddhism and the spiritual life, someone who doesn't like things like puja and devotional practices. So they are already in many cases, I'm sure, alienated to a considerable degree before they even start practising Vipassana meditation. And Vipassana Meditation at least as taught by some teachers, and I must emphasise this, because some Vipassana Teachers in the light of experience have modified certain of the techniques, so that Vipassana as taught with them, usually does not have an alienating effect. We need to make that distinction.

But I think if we were asked about the attitude of the FWBO and where our methods differ from Vipassana, I think we should make it clear that we have no quarrel with Vipassana Meditation in principle, certainly no quarrel with Satipatanna in principle, but we believe that especially in the West where people are out of touch with their emotions, the meditative effort needs to be supported by such things as Puja and other devotional practices and the Satipattana itself needs to be supported say by the Metta Bhavana, or balanced by the Metta Bhavana, and also so far as we concerned that before embarking on Vipassana one should have a somewhat deeper experience of Samatha than they usually consider necessary, and also we perhaps distinguish more carefully between mere discursive preoccupation with elaborate doctrinal categories and an actual use of those categories whether elaborate or simple on the basis of a deeper experience of samatha in such a way as actually to produce insight.

I think there are cases where people practising Satipatanna or Vipassana Meditation, as a result of the alienated state into which they get, having all sorts of quite strange and weird experiences. I have known such people to be told that that was an experience of Insight. For instance they suffer sometimes intense pains, physical pains even, and then they are told, "yes, that means you are developing insight into the Truth of Dukkha, so yes you are on the right path" And so they persist and as it gets worse, the pains get worse, they think that their insight is developing, so they push themselves on, and this is really a terrible thing to happen, because it is not understood sometimes, the teachers don't understand, that experience of dukkha is to be distinguished from insight into the truth of Dukkha. And that is a point I have made from the very beginning of the FWBO. It is a very important distinction, and it is not always made, because millions of people experience the fact of suffering without having any insight into the Truth of Suffering, that is quite another matter. And you can have insight into the Truth of Suffering without any painful experience, on the basis of a blissful meditative experience.

But I think that if people come to us having practised Vipassana Meditation, or perhaps still practising it and being involved with it or thinking well of it, I think we should be very careful just to not criticise Vipassana Meditation and say, "Yes, within the FWBO we also practise Vipassana Meditation or practise Satipattana, but we practise it in a slightly different way. We for instance believe in supporting that practice by Puja and devotional practices, we believe that the Samatha experience should be somewhat deeper than neighbourhood concentration before you go onto develop vipassana, but otherwise", you might say, "we practise it in more or less the same way" There is no need to adopt an antagonistic approach. It may be of course that they have got a lot invested emotionally in this particular method and they may try to argue the toss, as it were, but be careful not to be drawn into an argument, especially if it's in a say beginners' meditation class. If you have got them just on their own, well you have to play it by ear, but even then, be careful not to take up too opposite a position, and stress as much as you can what is common in their approach and ours. If of course you do find that they are in an alienated state and perhaps they have begun to be aware of it, well you can just explain where they have been going wrong, quite frankly.

Dharmapriya: A supplementary question: Your comments tonight and
a few nights ago about the alienating effect of this split up walking, this super slow walking, did you observe these bad effects in certain people, did you try it yourself because it was so widely recommended or how did you notice the bad side of this method?

S: Well I started by observing those who were doing it. For instance shortly after my arrival in England I was taken up to the Biddulph Meditation Centre, which was then being run by the English Sangha Trust, and where Thai Bhikkhus and one or two of their English disciples were teaching Satipattana. And I went up while a retreat was in progress and I saw how they were being taught, and how they were behaving and they struck me at once as being as being just like zombies. It was really quite dreadful to see. And I knew that before my arrival twelve to fourteen people had been seriously disturbed mentally as a result of this practice, and two or three had even had to be confined to mental hospitals, and later on we even had a suicide of someone who got into a very depressed state after going through the Biddulph Meditation Centre, he committed suicide shortly before I went off to India. I'd tried to dissuade him from practising Vipassana because he had a certain amount of faith in me, he used to come to lectures, but he didn't have quite enough faith to be able to give up the Vipassana and he committed suicide while very very depressed. And there were three Sameneras at that time at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara who had been ordained by Saddhatissa, at the request of the then incumbent Anandabodhi, and two of them were very very seriously disturbed. I don't think it was entirely due to Vipassana, but that certainly hadn't helped.

With regard to one of them after Anandabodhi's departure, I had to take professional advice, and he warned me that this person was definitely a potential homicide and I should get him out of the Vihara as quickly as possible, he wouldn't be answerable for the consequences. This is the sort of legacy that I inherited. The other person had no homicidal tendencies, but was very very disturbed indeed. And the Sangha Trust at the instigation of Anandabodhi had arranged for scholarships to Oxford for them to study philosophy or theology, I had to put a stop to all that. What was going was really dreadful, but no one seemed to realise what was going on or how dreadful it was, and I also noticed, I must say this, that some of the meditation teachers taught meditation without practising it at all. I got the impression they had never practised, they were really driving these wretched pupils of theirs as hard as they could and producing various experiences and then telling them that they were on the path of insight, and I came to the conclusion after observing these people very carefully that two of them had quite a sadistic streak, one an Englishman and one Thai, well Anandabodhi himself, and that they derived a certain satisfaction out of feeling that they were exercising power over these people to induce these experiences in them, and some of these people were became totally dependent on their Vipassana Meditation teachers. It was a severe case, one could see, of psychological transference in the strict Freudian sense, and most most unhealthy. So this gave me a real shock, a real jolt.

Originally when I was in India and I originally heard about Burmese Satipattana meditation, I was really delighted that someone was reviving meditation, and therefore wrote about it favourably in *The Survey*, but as a result of my observation of at least the way in which it was taught by at least some teachers, I modified my view. But there has developed in recent years a great diversity of approach among meditation teachers. There are even several traditions now, one going back to (U ba Kim) and the other going back to (Mahassisabdur?) They have rather different approaches, and Goenka, who is a disciple of (U ba Kim), seems to have developed again his own approach which is considerably more relaxed, and incorporating Metta Bhavana. So some teachers of Vipassana have relaxed their methods or their approach so that in many cases or in the case of many people it's a quite helpful kind of practice, but others it seems are still very strict and rigid, and I think as taught by them Vipassana Meditation seems to conduce definitely to a state of alienation.

Achala: All the people that have done Vipassana that I have encountered have seen the spiritual life just in terms of meditation and I was wondering whether that's not another point of difference?

S: Well this point also comes up in this chapter, the author points out that meditation is Bhavana, it is development. So in a way if spiritual life is the development of consciousness to higher levels, well yes, meditation is the most direct way of doing that, but it doesn't mean that that is the only way. Because there are so many indirect methods which are supportive of the direct method. And in broader general terms, I think this is our main point of
difference with them. We believe that it is not enough just to try to tackle the mind directly, that is to say meditate, it is also necessary to tackle the mind indirectly in all sorts of other ways, through for instance Yoga, or through Tai Chi, or one might say even through study. So if they are just concentrating on Meditation, changing the mind directly, it often means they just neglect the whole of the external world, the whole of the physical side of life, so that they become alienated. But in our case we try to practise both direct and indirect methods of raising the level of consciousness - one, through meditation, two, through all these other things I've mentioned, including puja.

But yes, spiritual life is Bhavana, it's development, which is the term which is used for meditation, so it's meditation, it's development par

excellence you might say, but in practise it needs to be supported quite strongly by indirect methods of development, except perhaps in the case of very exceptional people. I wouldn't like to exclude completely the possibility of someone being engaged in full-time meditation and nothing else and breaking through so to speak in that way, without the support of any indirect method, but I think it is quite rare, because even asceticism is an indirect method isn't it? sila is an indirect method, and I don't think any Buddhist would say that you could develop a meditative life independently of Sila.

Devamitra: Now Suvajra's question on bare insight.

Suvajra: This question arose out of my trying to find the origins
for the Burmese Satipatanna method, and how they came to revive that method, and when I was actually looking through *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, I came across this term "Bare Insight", which in other texts is called "Dry Insight"...

S: Sukkha literally means Dry, one could also translate it 'bare'. It might be that bare is also Suddha, bare in the sense of mere, nothing but that, not bare in the sense of naked, but the term is Sukkha, which is literally dry.

Suvajra: So this sukkha is quite different from the Sukha which means bliss?

S: Yes because the Sukkha which is dry is spelt K K H A, and the Sukha which is bliss is spelt K H A.

Suvajra: So the text here says "though the term 'bare insight' does not occur in the Canonical collection of discourses of the Buddha, there are numerous in that collection which are illustrative of that method of meditation." So, are there meditations in the texts on ....?

S: Well he doesn't say which ones, it's a very general reference. Also terms like Upacara-samadhi don't occur in the text, but certainly if you go through the Pali canon, the general impression that you are left with from so many passages is first you practise Sila, then you practise Samadhi, and you go through all the dhyanas and then you develop insight. This is the standard picture. Now the only difference is that some people might get further into the dhyanas before developing insight than others. So a question arises, what is the minimum sort of qualification in this respect, what is the minimum degree of samatha that has to be experienced and the followers or advocates of Sukkha vipassana believe that it is upacara-samadhi. And that you really don't need to develop anything more than that. Though there is no statement to that effect in the Canon, no statement to the effect that you need to develop a higher degree than that, that is certainly the impression given, inasmuch as repeatedly in hundreds of passages, the Buddha describes the Bhikkhu practising the Silas and then going through all four Dhyanas and sometimes eight Dhyanas and then taking up the practise of Insight. So one of course can't be dogmatic, but it would certainly seem that even supposing you could develop insight on the basis of neighbourhood concentration, upacara-samadhi, that would be Sukkha vipassana, that would be a relatively rare attainment, so that it would be safer, so to speak, to attempt a deeper experience of the Dhyanas before taking up the development of insight.

So it is not as though one says that nobody could possibly develop insight merely on the basis of an experience of upacara-samadhi, one is not saying that, one is only saying that it seems highly unlikely or if it did take place it would be a very rare occurrence and also the general trend of

the Buddha's teaching is to encourage a much more extensive experience of Samadhi before taking up the development of Insight than in the case of the Sukkha vipassana method. So that's reasonably clear I hope.

Devaraja: There would seem to be a connection between the first two Arupa Dhyanas and the last two stages of the Six Element Practice. Is that so? Does that imply that this moving on would be an element of Insight? Is there a connection?

S: I don't think there is a direct connection. Because certainly you can practise those levels of the Element Practice with very little in the way of experience of the Dhyanas. So I don't think one could make a direct connection.

Dharmapriya: We generally concentrated on mistakes in meditation approach in the Theravada. Are there any dangers from what you know in the Vajrayana, or Mahayana in terms of approaches which can be alienating? Are there dangers other than people trying to do Mahamudra meditations and things as introductory practices?

S: I think that perhaps one has to understand that when it comes down to actual methods and techniques and actual practice in the field of meditation, the Mahayana, and perhaps even the Vajrayana still relies very heavily on the Hinayana. I think that must be said. And if one goes at all closely into so called Mahayana and Vajrayana meditation and similar practices, well one realises that there isn't very much that is distinctive, not really basically. I think in the case of the Vajrayana and the Mahayana the great danger is an inadequate base, so to speak, in the Hinayana in this respect. For many Vajrayanists on a more popular level, perhaps for Mahayanists, the repetition of the Mantra is the principal means of developing concentration and it can be developed in that way, and visualisation is perhaps the principal method of developing both Samatha and Vipassana if one reflects on the real nature of what has been visualised, that is to say that it is produced and it is made to cease and therefore it is impermanent, and so on and so forth. But one can't really do this properly I think with real concentration unless one is grounded in the more Hinayana type practices. You won't be able to sustain the necessary concentration. So in the case of the mantra recitation, you meditate and repeat the mantra for concentration, and then of course you can reflect on the meaning of the mantra to develop insight, as well as visualise the form of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, likewise to develop concentration, and if you reflect on its significance to develop insight.

Vessantara: This isn't something that we actually seem to stress very much, as far as I am aware, for instance Order Members who are given visualisation practices, they will usually just go through the practice and unless there is something actually in the Sadhana which leads them to reflect upon, say the insubstantial nature of the Buddha that they have visualised, as far as I am aware usually they won't actually do this. Is this something on which we should put more emphasis?

S: Eventually yes. But don't forget that the visualisation practices themselves are complemented by such things as the Six Element Practice, the Recollection of Death, and any practice of a Vipassana type. Some of the Sadhanas, such as the Manjugosha Sadhana and the Avalokitesvara sadhana, do contain definitely Vipassana type, Insight type, elements. Even that basic Mantra, which one repeats, "OM SVABHAVA SUDDHAH SARVADHARMAH SVABHAVA SUDDHOH HAM", this has a meaning, that is something to be reflected upon, and to be used as a means of developing, well not insight, that is not the correct term here, but at least in the sense of insight into sunyata. And also of course has the sky, the Sunyata, from which one conjures up the image and into which it merges back, and when one does that that is a reflection of a

vipassana or prajna type. Perhaps it should be made more explicit.

Vessantara: When you said "eventually" we should do this more...

S: Well, eventually in the sense that one as it were stabilises or even solidifies one's samatha, before going on to the Vipassana or higher complexities of Prajna.

Vessantara: And when you say, "solidify it", I don't know how you judge, but...

S: Well, consolidate perhaps would be a better word.

Vessantara: Well how would one judge when one had consolidated sufficiently in order then to go onto how to develop ....

S: Well if you hadn't consolidated your concentration sufficiently you would find that your so called vipassana became a purely discursive experience, and you would eventually find your mind wandering, because the concentration wasn't sufficiently strong to sustain a sort of directed reflection, a directed discursiveness, if I can use that expression, and also as your discursive reflection goes deeper and deeper, because it is supported by a quite strong samatha, you actually start feeling that you are understanding something, that you are seeing something in a way that you didn't see it before, which is a quite different thing from becoming more and more mentally active and in a way more and more scattered even, which is what happens if the basis of concentration is inadequate and you are not actually developing real insight.

So it is as though if you are developing real insight, your reflection on say impermanence really sort of grips you and that's quite a different sort of experience from a just little gentle discursive mental activity which gradually gets and more dispersed, so that in the end after a few minutes you find yourself thinking about something totally different, well then you know that your basis of concentration is not nearly strong enough.

Vessantara: So then, would you leave off attempting to develop insight on the basis of the visualisation until perhaps in a few years time your practice was strong enough.

S: You might, or of course you can go back to the Samatha and try to develop that and then again go back to the Vipassana when you feel that you have developed enough samatha to be able to do that. But if you did that a number of times and every time your mind wandered and became distracted, then you could conclude, "well I obviously have to do a lot more work on developing Samatha", so perhaps you put aside any attempt to develop vipassana for maybe a few months or a year or two, and concentrate on developing Samatha.

Vessantara: So would I be right in thinking that the reason why trying to develop insight on the basis of the visualisation practice would be particularly effective, would be at least in part because you have already... a visualisation is a very beautiful attractive thing to concentrate on and therefore you have a lot of emotional attachment to it, and then you detach yourself from it.....

S: Yes right, your emotional energies are much more fully engaged and therefore you are much more integrated and much more concentrated so that in dependence upon that sort of visualisation practice an insight or prajna experience or realisation is much more likely to arise. You are naturally sort of gripped by the visualisation experience, if you do it at all successfully. Since your emotions are engaged, well they are not likely to be led astray by other things, so that you can remain concentrated and develop a measure of insight. I think this is one of the great benefits of the visualisation type practices, if one is able to do them, that they do engage one emotionally and therefore for that reason contribute to a much higher degree of integration and therefore of concentration. Though I believe one can produce very much the same effect just with the simple recitation of the mantra. This is perhaps more the benefit of those who find visualisation difficult, but just recitation of the mantra by itself, will very often produce virtually the same effect, have the same effect of integrating all your emotional energies, and providing a very solid basis in concentration for reflection on say the meaning of the mantra.

Padmavajra: Is it at all necessary in those practices, for example like Tara, where there is no explicit Vipassana element or anything like that, do you think it is ever necessary to introduce an element of contemplation? What I mean is it enough to just visualise and the Prajna will naturally arise, and likewise with metta, if you just persisted with metta, is there any need to actually introduce those elements...

S: I think you would need to have very strong samskaras to be able to produce insight as it were spontaneously, but even say in the Tara Practice there are elements of insight, they may be as you say implicit, but they need to be drawn out. For instance think of the Tara mantra, OM TARE TUTARE TURE, well what does that mean? Each repetition has a particular meaning which actually leads into a kind of insight experience, and then when you visualise yourself as Tara well you are as it were void, you are like a tent of green silk, you are empty, that is quite clearly an insight type experience isn't it? So perhaps the vipassana content isn't stated so much conceptually but it is certainly represented symbolically. So perhaps one needs to make it more explicit in conceptual terms to oneself.

Sona: I was wondering if it is not useful to develop a sort of flexible attitude towards Samatha, so that when one feels that one has had quite a strong Samatha experience, then one could directly after that direct ones mind to contemplation in the Vipassana sense, instead of having a sort of rigid way of thinking that I have to develop Samatha, and then after so many years I start Vipassana?

S: Yes, if one does find on any occasion that one has developed a very strong basis so to speak in the form of Samatha, there is no reason why one should restrain oneself from developing Vipassana on the spot. It might be your opportunity, you might have a real breakthrough then. So there is no need to stick to a rigid schedule. Take advantage of any such opportunity that you get, being careful to distinguish that from just a sort of restlessness that is getting tired of the meditative state. But there is no point in putting off Enlightenment.

Devaraja: You said, "there is the Tara Mantra, what does that mean?" - what does it mean?

S: Well there are two Tara Mantras aren't there, there is OM TARE TUTARE TURE SVAHA and then there is OM MAMA AYO.....

Devaraja: What was that one?

S: Well OM TARE TUTARE TURE MAMA AYUR PUNYAJNANA PUSHTIM KURU SVAHA which is the mantra of the White Tara. Some of you have that practice, so you know. So each of them has a meaning, because Tara is the deliveress, it's from (tareyatetu), to deliver, to ferry across, so Tara is the deliveress, so what does She deliver from? So TARE TUTARE TURE, there are three steps. There are various explanations of these three steps, but I'll give at least one. First of all She delivers from a bad rebirth: with the help of Tara you are delivered from a bad rebirth, which could be interpreted as delivered from a non-human rebirth. If you do the Tara Sadhana you will be assured of a rebirth as a human being or as a god even. But then Tara also delivers from the mundane into the spiritual, from the Conditioned into the Unconditioned, but there's a third delivery which is from the Arahant path into the Bodhisattva path. This is the usual explanation that is given. So there is this threefold step by step delivery, each time on a higher level. Sometimes it is explained in a slightly different way, delivery from the human state, delivery from the state of a god, and then delivery from mundane existence itself. But the general principle is clear.

And then if you take OM TARE TUTARE TURE MAMA AYUR PUNYAJNANA PUSHTIM KURU SVAHA so, OM TARE TUTARE TURE, that you understand, MAMA is my, AYUR is life of length of life, PUNYA you understand, JNANA you understand, PUSHTIM KURU, make it prosper, develop it, expand it, SVAHA means may it be so. So when you recite the long life mantra you are appealing to Tara to lengthen your life, your life span, your life force, to increase your merit and to increase your Jnana. So that is where the Vipassana element comes in, because you can think of Jnana in the terms of the Five Jnanas, the Five Awarenesses as embodied in the Five Buddhas, so in the very Mantra itself, there is a gnostic element. I am sure that it is all in that book isn't it, *The Cult of Tara*? I'm sure quite a few of you have read that. (Pause)

So when you recite the Mantra you as it were in the case of the OM TARE TUTARE TURE you sort of imagine yourself, you feel yourself passing from one level to another, and similarly when you recite the Mantra of The White Tara, MAMA AYUR PUNYA JNANA PUSHTIM KURU SVAHA, you imagine yourself glowing with health, and therefore likely to live a long time, and then multiplying your punya through all your positive actions of body, speech and mind, and then developing your jnana through reflecting on the five jnanas flor instance, or reflecting on the four sunyatas. So very definitely a cognitive and as I say a gnostic element does enter in. Though for some people simple recitation of the mantra and reflection on its meaning is quite sufficient without even any visualisation.

Vessantara: So how far should we actually encourage Order Members as a general rule having done their Sadhana, to spend a few minutes either reflecting on the visualisation or reflecting on the meaning of the mantra just to try to absorb....

S: I think it isn't quite a case of reflecting on the meaning say of the visualisation afterwards, because supposing you visualise yourself as Tara, well you are visualising yourself as hollow, which means that you have a realisation at that very moment of the hollowness, that is to say the non-egoness, the Sunyata nature, of your being. You are as it were enacting it instead of thinking of it conceptually.

Vessantara: So would that actually have its effect regardless of whether you entered into any discursive thought about it, that you were hollow and...

S: I think it would, because... the word feeling is not quite appropriate, it's more than just a subjective feeling, it is almost like a non-conceptual

recognition of the void nature of your own being, but nonetheless there is no harm in recapping so to speak afterwards in conceptual terms. I mean that would further strengthen whatever realisation you'd had. It would maybe fix it.

Achala: I was interested in what you said earlier that you could be quite absorbed in the mantra, and this made me think of something that Abhaya said in his talk on the Men's Convention that we often think of the visualised form as being the main attraction and the Mantras as being a bit of a side line. I must admit I tend to often be a bit that way myself because of the almost drawing capacity of colour. Do you think it is just a matter of temperament, ...

S: I think to some extent it is, and also as I mentioned different people's capacity or incapacity to visualise. It is as though for some people sound is more meaningful, for others colour is more meaningful, for others perhaps both are equally meaningful. So if you aren't able to visualise very well you tend to perhaps to be thrown back a bit onto the Mantra Recitation, but if you can visualise very well, very successfully, I think in a way you naturally tend to neglect even the Mantra Recitation. Perhaps it is maybe best if you can do both successfully, but I think it doesn't matter all that much if you are neglecting one, for one reason or other, provided you are really very intensively into the other, whether the Mantra Recitation or the Visualisation.

Kamalasila: Given that it was possible that you were sufficiently concentrated in your visualisation, would it be helpful to enter into any sort of discursive or semi-discursive activity while you were visualising to help you to see ....

S: Well yes I think one could do that, yes. It's as though you
embroider the figure you are visualising with your reflections, you don't lose sight of that figure, you keep it steadily in view, but at the periphery of your mind as it were you are engaging in these discursive type reflections which deepen the experience of the visualisation because it gives it another dimension, the dimension hopefully of insight, yes.

Abhaya: Bhante, in the Tuscany discussion, Question and Answers, I understood you to say at one point that it was not possible to develop insight without engaging the rational mind in some way conceptually. Well here you have just said in the Tara practice, when you experience yourself as a sort of green empty tent that would be a sort of non-conceptual recognition of the void nature of your own being, would that not constitute insight?

S: I think it could, but I think at the same time that there is a sort of almost subconscious conceptualisation going on. I think there is a subtle discursiveness, because supposing you have this experience of yourself as Tara, like a tent of green silk or however it is described, I think very subtly you vocalise that to yourself as you experience it, do you see what I mean? And that that either assists or even perhaps constitutes the insight element. I think actually that it is very very rarely that we have an experience without as it were, as I've called it, vocalising it to ourselves.

So I was not at that time considering that possibility, but clearly what I said could be understood in that sort of way or extended to that sort of

experience.

Abhaya: So you say that it is not possible to have any sort of experience without some kind of subtle vocalising?

S: It would seem like that, I won't be too positive about that, because one doesn't want to limit the possibility, but it would seem like that. But in the case of this vivid visualisation, I think there is this even almost sub-vocal conceptualisation in the sense that you are saying to yourself in conceptual terms what is happening, there is this very faint sort of conceptual commentary going on on your own experience. You are saying to yourself what you are doing. I think this, when you are very concentrated, can be tantamount almost to vipassana. When you actually do the practice it is very obvious because you say, "Now I am going to do this, that or the other". I think even when you are very concentrated there is this as it were undercurrent of subtle, even verbalised, therefore conceptualised, commentary on your own experience, and this I think if you are very concentrated can become a sort of very refined vipassana type element. Perhaps you should watch your own experience very closely in this connection and see what it is that in your own experience actually happens. That is to say when you are meditating, supposing you are doing the Tara Practice, and you visualise yourself as Tara and as a tent of green silk, or as a statue made of glass which is hollow, just look at your own mind and see whether you are as it were in a very subtle way actually thinking that, as well as actually seeing that.
Because if you were thinking it, that would point, however subtly, to the possibility of a vipassana experience. It might be very difficult to suspend that subtle activity. Perhaps if one is being very strict one would say that normally there is that subtle activity, it might be possible to have a state in which you visualise in that way without that subtle mental commentary, in that case it might be that vipassana could not be developed, but I won't be sure about that. Perhaps it depends upon the degree of subtlety of the conceptual commentary, perhaps it can be very very subtle so that you can hardly tell whether it is there or not.

Padmavajra: You say that sub-vocalisation is vipassana, or would it be more true to say that it is a support?

S: Yes, it is a support, which could become vipassana, yes. One might even say that in self-conscious beings, that kind of visualisation is inseparable from a subtle commentary. It might be so. I can't make any definite statement on that. That's why I suggest people look at their own experience and see what happens, or see what is happening. I mean you can look at it another way, can you see a leaf falling from the tree without thinking that the leaf is falling from the tree? Do you merely see that it is falling, or do you not at the same time inseparably perhaps think that it is falling? Is it possible to distinguish the two? If it isn't, well then to visualise say yourself as a tent of green silk or Tara is tantamount to a reflection which could be the support of an insight experience.

Devaraja: Is that actually, is that process inherent in human consciousness?

S: Well I actually asked the question. I am not sure. Yes it could be.

Devaraja: Is that the same as saying to actually be aware that you are aware implies thinking that?

S: Yes, yes, one could say that. Because supposing you were to say well all sorts of uneducated savage people, even animals see a leaf falling,

but do they really see a leaf falling?

[End of tape 21 Tape 22]

S: Well one might even say what does it mean to see a leaf falling? What does it mean to see a leaf? Can you see a leaf without knowing it is a leaf, as a self conscious being? And can you know that it is a leaf without using the name of leaf? So, conceptual activity. But anyway this requires investigation. It is maybe a new thought for , going a little off the track of tradition.

Dharmapriya: In your answer to Abhaya's question, I couldn't help but think of a formula you used, I couldn't get to the exact words, but something to the effect, "Faith, heightened sufficiently is an emotional equivalent of insight" or can be, the idea of following the path of a faith-follower, non-conceptually, one can achieve insight, so to speak.

S: Of course when I made that statement I wasn't thinking of faith in terms of belief. For instance Faith is aroused in tradition just by the sight of the Buddha, usually the Buddha's attributes and so on. So when you perceive those attributes and are thrilled by them or faith arises, but at the same time, perhaps you realise the significance of those attributes, you don't merely as it were enjoy them as an emotional experience, you realise their significance and that realisation of their significance which is inseparable in fact of the enjoyment of them, is what constitutes the element of insight in so to speak faith. It is analogous to what I was just talking about. Not that belief is tantamount to knowledge.

Dharmapriya: Going back to you mentioned that
colour as one could be concentrating on one's breath, could it also be the tactile element, thinking of the Vajrasattva Practice, there is a very strong tactile element.

S: Usually there are five senses, five physical senses, the sense of sight and the sense of sound I considered the most spiritual as it were, or the most refined and therefore the most suited as a vehicle for spiritual methods and spiritual experiences, but that doesn't exclude the others, because one of the Sutras does speak of a world or realm where communication is by scent, and you can have scent type experiences in meditation, you can have tactile type experiences in meditation. I think taste is probably is the grossest of the senses, I have never heard of any taste experiences in meditation, although people perhaps have had them. But yes, perhaps one could even concentrate on a tactile experience, I think it would be much more difficult, because tactile experiences are less refined perhaps and less developed than their counterparts with regard to vision and hearing. There was a time in my own early days when I had a number of tactile experiences, sometimes quite regularly when I was meditating, as if a breeze was blowing against me. There was definitely no external source for that, that is a standard experience, other people might have had it.

I think it would be rather difficult to make that the basis of practice in the way that you could make a sound like a mantra or a visualised Bodhisattva form a basis for practice. Not impossible, I don't want to exclude any possibility. You could perhaps, I am just elaborating spontaneously now, you could perhaps reflect that the Buddha was breathing upon you as the Breath of the Buddha, it might give rise to all sorts of associations as a possible basis for insight.

Devamitra: We have still got another eleven questions remaining and there are five people waiting with supplementary questions, it is getting late, how should we proceed?

S: We will take the supplementary questions, because it seems that since this is a practical subject there are more questions. It could be that if need be that we devote some time tomorrow, because again tomorrow we get back to more theoretical matters, and I suspect that there might not be so many questions.

Achala: I might have lost the thread, but I was thinking about the earlier conversation about when we visualise Tara, and we have the visualisation and a sub-commentary on a rational level, surely if we have already reflected on the rational level, in a way we can't but have that as part of the image, I mean can you really separate the past associations that are more rational from the actual thing?

S: To some extent you can because when you are meditating you are more and more in the present moment. But nonetheless there might be a residue of past associations in the form of just pure feeling, in the present, that is possible.

Achala: I was thinking say if something has a symbolic nature, that sort of symbolic connection is there?

S: Yes, I think it leaves a sort of residue. It is not that you think of that association in a way, but there is the immediate impact due to past associations of which you may not be conscious, as associations at that particular moment. But on the other hand of course as one practises and especially as the element of vipassana enters in, you see the visualised figure in a completely different way, in a sort of transformed or glorified way, which no doubt transcends all your previous associations and expectations.

So yes it is probably difficult to shake off associations coming from the past entirely, though I think as you get more and more concentrated you do that more and more at least consciously and explicitly. But there may be these sort of residues left which determine your attitude towards and experience of whatever it is that you are visualising colour.

Nagabodhi: When you were talking about can you see a leaf without in some way subtly naming it, this is a stacked supplementary, I think on the basis of experiences I have had of that vocalising process in myself on retreats where I have become aware over days of meditation that that is going on all the time, I have always seen it as goal in a way that I am aiming at, to have an experience of awareness without that, that that would be a breakthrough for me, and if I had felt that I have reached that, that has been a delightful experience.

S: I think that would be a dhyana-like experience. It is as though you get very very close to seeing the leaf without in a sense knowing that it is a leaf, but usually a very very subtle knowledge that it is a leaf persists. The fact that it is very subtle means that there is a high degree of concentration. So because there is a high degree of concentration as well as that subtle awareness that it is a leaf, the possibility of developing vipassana is there. But no doubt that is present if you possibly can to experience the leaf, or not even a leaf, because it ceases to be a leaf in the

process - to experience just that object without even thinking that it is a leaf. Perhaps that is equivalent to a pure dhyanic experience. But if you want to develop insight, you have to start thinking that it is a leaf and that it is impermanent. But the more subtle that type of reflection is, the more it is compatible with concentration and therefore the more likely it is to be the basis of insight experience. I referred fairly recently to the experience that you sometimes have when you wake up in the morning before the mind starts operating. There is just an instant, an interval where you don't even know who you are, you don't even know that you are a human being, you just don't know anything at all, you have just a bare pure perception, so that is a bit dhyana like. And then a few instants later, as it were, back flood all the memories and you start thinking again, the mental machinery starts functioning again. But just for those few instants you are quite delightfully free of all thought, and don't know anything. But you very rarely have the experience of experience without any admixture of knowing.

Nagabodhi: Would that be in the area of the third dhyana, where on a mystical level, I think you have once said, there is a sort of disillusion of the subject-object dichotomy, but it's a subjective mystical experience....

S: Yes, it is more like that, it is pure awareness, not awareness in the cognitive sense, but in a sort of perceptual sense. I think occasionally one does have that sort of experience, that's when you are very content or just sitting on the bench and looking at the goldfish pond, and you may have it just for an instant. It is very difficult to sustain, because the mind at once starts commenting on the experience, "Oh isn't it nice here, here am I watching those goldfish, how peaceful". It is very difficult to experience the peacefulness without thinking how peaceful it is.

Nagabodhi: From literature that I have read, I have often had the impression that Zen people seem to see that state as almost the end, as a goal.

S: mm, yes, well it is a very important way of seeing things, it is a very important state, but I think taken by itself it is one-sided. I think that the Zen people at their best they realise this, they know this. But one often gets the impression from Zen literature, especially the more poetic variety, well that is the end or final state.

Padmavajra: Going back to the possibility of sub-vocalisation in a visualisation practice, if that is so, would you say therefore that visualisation practice is a truly Imaginal practice?

S: Yes, I think one could say that, and very likely it is at its best that element of sub-vocalisation - of the right sort of course - which makes it Imaginal with a capital I, at least potentially.

Devaraja: I'll go back to what you were saying about tactile and smell and taste and so on, it is just that it reminded me of this little drawing, it is quite ancient in FWBO circles, of the different vijnanas, and it shows body, tongue and nose vijnana just as it were penetrating into the objective mano-vijnana, but the eye vijnana seems to ,according to the diagram only into the klisto-mano-vijnana and the ear vijnana seems to penetrate right through to the relative alaya, so is that connected to the fact that it is almost like in a mantric sense and is connected....

S: No, I think that is quite accidental, because I think I have said more than once, that the senses are quite innocent, it is the mind that creates all the mischief. The senses merely perceive, but it's the mind that interprets the perception in terms of an object and a subject, and that is of course

the klisto-mano-vijnana. Well in a sense even the mind is innocent, that is to say the mind merely perceives mental objects. But I am not sure who is responsible for the diagram, but I never intended to suggest a special connection between the sense of hearing and any higher level. Because one could just as easily have that connection between the eye and a higher level.

Devaraja: Would there be a greater point of contact between the deeper level of the mind and by the use of sense and audible objects.....

S: I think in one of the Sutras, maybe it is the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, that methods of spiritual practice are given connected with each of the senses, so that for instance each is potentially capable of functioning as a meditative support in that way. I think the text goes onto to say that the best support is that of the ear, and the repetition of the mantra, especially Avalokitesvara, but I think that is from a quite different point of view because it says that there is a possibility of making each and every one of the senses a support in that same way, simply that hearing is the best among them, not the only one.

Devamitra: Shall we move onto the next question? (laughter) A question on Vipassana and Samatha.

S: I somehow suspected there would be a lot of questions around this particular topic. I know it's a favourite one.

Kamalasila: Would you agree with the author on p.226 where he says
that vipassana is more difficult than samatha meditation?

S: I suppose one must say that it is, because vipassana represents a breakthrough into the transcendental, whereas samatha represents only a refinement of the mundane. That is in principle. But supposing someone does have dhyana experience, it might have been very difficult for them to have that experience, they might have had to struggle for years, but on the other hand once they have achieved that dhyana experience, they might achieve vipassana experience relatively more quickly, so does that mean it is easier to develop vipassana than to develop samatha? If you are starting from scratch, clearly it's difficult enough to develop samatha, but it is probably impossible to develop vipassana. But once you have developed samatha, well the development of vipassana becomes of course much more easy, though still very difficult.

Nagabodhi: I was wondering whether you could even talk about difficulty at all in terms of vipassana? In that by working through samatha to set up the conditions, you are still to some extent in the samatha mode, you perhaps repeat the formulation for the arising of insight, but whether or not insight arises is almost ... it is up to insight not you.

S: Yes, you could say that not that it is difficult to achieve because in a way the very conception of achievement, achievement by you, is out of order, is inappropriate, one could look at it in that way.

Vessantara: Would it be true to say that there is no effort in a sense involved, presumably one makes an effort in order to suppress the hindrances in order to get into dhyana but....

S: The effort that is made to develop insight isn't perhaps related to the subject making the effort in quite the same way that the effort to concentrate one's mind is related to a subject attempting to concentrate its mind.

Devamitra: A question on the Contemplation of Death.

Devaraja: On p.225 Maranānussati is described as a samatha practice, is this correct?

S: No, I would say definitely it was an insight practice; well yes it must be an insight practice, it is a form of impermanence, it is the notion of impermanence applied to your individual psychophysical continuum, especially the physical aspect of it. No doubt if you were just to practice developing the recollection of death, there would be a degree of concentration, so to the extent that there is a degree of concentration it would also be a samatha practice, but then the minute you say "Death ( )" or "The body is impermanent, I am going to die", well it is conceptual, it is discursive and therefore potentially a means of developing vipassana. Perhaps the author's been misled by the fact that it is one of the anusatis. I would say that it quite straightforwardly is a vipassana practice. If the Theravada tradition says otherwise, I am afraid it has got it wrong. I rather doubt whether actually the Theravada tradition would say that. I think that must be Carrithers' own interpretation or his informants' own interpretation.

Tejananda: Bhante, I believe in the Vissudhimagga, Buddhaghosa says that the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Meditation on Death are the only two that anybody can do, the other kammathannas have to be specially applied to a specific effect?

S: A specific type of personality? Well that is Buddhaghosa's own classification. We don't know where he gets it from, presumably from the commentarial tradition. I don't know that it has any basis in the Pali Canon, because I don't think the classification into temperaments has any basis in the Pali Canon. So perhaps we might say that perhaps those two methods are more generally suited, but it doesn't mean that there aren't other methods that can be practised by quite a number of different temperaments, or persons with different temperaments. I think we have to beware of rigidity. I think sometimes Buddhaghosa is a little rigid.

And also what does one mean by "can be practised"? , I mean you can practise anything if you make sufficient effort regardless of temperament. Perhaps it is just a question of the degree of effort that is needed in the case of people with different temperaments. And if you were of a hate type, well you might say metta bhavana wasn't suited to you, but that's what you need. It's very difficult for you to practice and maybe someone of greed temperament will be able to practise it much more easily. So what does one mean by saying a person of a particular temperament can or cannot practise a particular method? It is almost meaningless.

Tejananda: Was not the point that Buddhaghosa made, that those two practices are suited to any temperament, whereas the other ones might be only suited to specific temperaments?

S: Well, more necessary for, but in as much as everybody has some trace of all these different poisons, every practice is suited, but perhaps in different degrees, or to different extents. There is no one completely free from hatred, therefore no one who doesn't need the metta bhavana, or

to whom the metta bhavana is not suited. One could even argue is anybody, at least potentially, really free from anger, because they may be of desire temperament or of a greedy temperament, but if you cross them a sufficient number of times, they will very quickly become angry and resentful. One can look at this distribution of methods among the different temperaments in this sort of way perhaps with a rather more critical eye than we have done. Though I myself have referred to this distribution, but I think it isn't to be taken too literally or too rigidly.

Devamitra: A question concerning Gunananda's cave-roof falling in experience.

Buddhadasa: On page 240 Gunananda is described as having a meditation experience like a great noise and the cave-roof falling in. Have you any guidelines with how to deal with extreme meditation experiences of this type in oneself and in others?

S: When I read this, and when I read Carrithers' comments, I felt that Carrithers and perhaps the monk himself hadn't understood the experience. What was the explanation that was given?

Vessantara: I think he said it was a result of forcible effort...

S: I must say I didn't get that impression at all. I got the impression that it could have been some sort of insight experience, a collapse of one's sense of self. This was my definite impression reading that passage. So I am not sure that actually it was just due to a too forcible effort. What was the question?

Buddhadasa: Have you any guidelines about how to deal with extreme meditation experiences of this type in self and in others?

S: Extreme? What does one mean by extreme?

Buddhadasa: Well, completely throws the person concerned.

S: I would have thought, it is difficult to say just from a literary text, that at that time that particular person needed reassurance that he was in fact on the right path. I mean judging just from my impression of the text, and obviously that isn't very much to go by, he wasn't actually doing things forcibly. I think he could well have continued in that way of practice and deepened that experience. It seems to me, as I read it, quite definitely like the collapse at least of his present personality. It may not have been a real insight experience, but at least the collapse of whatever personality he was at that time identifying himself with at least to some extent.

Devamitra: How would you make that connection? If you find yourself in that sort of position, with that sort of experience, it seems to you that the roof is falling in, but actually your personality is falling apart (laughter)....

S: If you are in contact with someone who is more experienced than yourself, provided that they have had that sort experience before themselves and have gone through it, or intuitively that they know what is happening and can advise you accordingly. But very often

experiences aren't what perhaps they seem to be. You might have the experience for instance that you have no head, or that you have a body and no head, or head and no body, you can have all sorts of experiences. But very often they are to be as it were persisted in and one reflects on what they mean. So yes, I feel, or I felt when reading this quite clearly in a way that he was wrongly advised.

Nagabodhi: I suppose it should be obvious to me from Tibetan iconography and so on, but there is no way you would expect an insight experience necessarily to be a benign one, a subjectively benign one, it could be an experience that actually terrifies you.

S: Well yes, it can affect your as it were conditioned personality in almost any way.

Nagabodhi: So the fact that it is frightening or shocking or alarming isn't necessarily a sign that something is terribly wrong.

S: No, but on the other hand you should be sufficiently prepared so that the shock is not too devastating, and you are tempted to give up, and this is where the basis of emotional positivity and even devotion comes in.

Suvajra: To come back to Buddhadasa's question, what would you do if actually one of these experiences came up?

S: Well you play it by ear, how can one generalise? I just got that impression reading that particular passage, but if one was in contact with somebody, well one would have either have been able to advise them from one's own experience or from one's own intuition, or one wouldn't be able to advise them at all, in which case you either say, You'd better do whatever you think best, or You'd better go and consult someone with more experience than I have.

Suvajra: And if you are on Solitary Retreat? And that happened to you?

S: Again it depends on the nature of the experience. Some experiences are as it were just psychological, the fears and terrors and horrors coming up from past experiences, your early childhood, sometimes you know this and you can grapple with them on that basis, or let them just pass over you on that basis, or sometimes you may have stirred up more than you can cope with, you might even have to leave your solitary retreat. That suggests that you have not built up a sufficient basis of positivity, and that you were perhaps forcing things in a way that this particular monk's teacher seemed to have thought that he had been forcing things.

Forcing in this context means precipitating an experience before you have a sufficient basis of positivity within yourself really to be able to support it and as it were live with it, and live through it.

Devamitra: A question about the System of Meditation.

Kamalasila: The meditation tradition almost died out in Burma
as well as in Sri Lanka, we read about that on p.239. Is there an unbroken meditation tradition in any of the Theravada countries? Ordained into that tradition yourself, did you have to revive meditation for yourself?

S: Let's take that in two halves.

Kamalasila: The meditation tradition almost died out in Burma
as well as in Sri Lanka. Is there an unbroken meditation tradition in any of the Theravada countries?

S: I think by the nature of the situation it is impossible to know. I think likewise it is impossible to know whether there is an unbroken tradition in the Mahayana countries. What is the criterion? You may know that you have a particular experience, but how can you know that it is the same as somebody else's experience, someone's experience in the past? You can't. So there may well be an unbroken chain of experience, you can't know that unless there is some transcendental faculty, but that of course is another matter.

Kamalasila: In the chapter he is talking about an acknowledged and communicated succession.

S: Because even if there had been historical records of some such thing, there could have been misunderstandings, and actually the continuity could have been broken, because bhikkhu A might have given a teaching to Bhikkhu B, the words might have been transmitted, but what is the guarantee that the spirit and the realisation is transmitted, there is no guarantee at all.

Kamalasila: But it seems that in Sri Lanka they didn't even have that, there wasn't any communicated information about meditation.

S: I think in some parts of the Buddhist world, possibly some parts of the Theravada world, there is an uninterrupted transmission of at least the words, but we cannot really know whether the words invariably had an experiential counterpart.
And the second part of the question?

Kamalasila: Having been ordained into that tradition yourself, did you have to revive meditation for yourself?

S: As regards the mindfulness of breathing, I didn't, because I met Bhikkhu Sona in Singapore who was a great advocator of the way of Mindfulness and I got my first idea about it, and to some extent instruction in it from him, and he referred me to one or two books written by people of the same tradition as himself, and that further deepened my understanding of that method, and then I started practising it, and yes, it is a quite simple method, at least to the extent that I practised it as I learned. So I can't say that I had to discover it for myself. I think I could say that to some extent in the case of the Metta Bhavana, because though many people spoke of it and practised it in a way , it wasn't in a sense taken all that seriously. But I can't say that the practice had altogether died out, and I had to revive it, I cannot say that at all. It was maybe that the practice was extant in a very mild form, and perhaps I intensified it a bit and took it a bit more seriously. Though there may well have been bhikkhus within the Theravada fold here and there who quite spontaneously developed a higher degree of intensity of Metta Bhavana without

committing any of their experiences to writing or anything of that sort. Because it is anyway quite an easy thing to do, once you get started, the metta bhavana, you naturally feel like developing it more and more and intensifying it, and you do that, and almost anyone who at least has a hint about the nature of metta from the Pali Canon, and metta bhavana, could do that, it isn't very difficult. And of course in Buddhaghosa there have been quite elaborate instructions as to how to proceed and they are quite simple to follow, there is nothing abstruse or esoteric. So I think probably the tradition of metta bhavana has never died out entirely, even the experiential tradition, at least in a diluted form, and if it exists in a diluted form, you can always intensify it, just as if you have got just a few glowing embers you can always blow them into a fire, so to that extent there is continuity of tradition, perhaps even in the sense of mindfulness. Perhaps you could apply the same simile there.

Padmavajra: What were the circumstances that led to take up the metta bhavana practice?

S: I don't think I can remember. I think I would have to think back. I think I took it up somewhat later than when I took up the mindfulness, but I can't remember now. Just like some people come to play an important part in your life, but you don't remember the first meeting or how you met, perhaps it is a bit like that. It seems quite strange. Perhaps I was conscious of it in a very diluted form, so it didn't register very strongly, it just grew upon me as a result of my general reading I came to know something about it, and gradually intensified my practice and came to be aware that it counterbalanced the mindfulness of breathing.

Nagabodhi: Is there any parallel development I imagine in say Tibetan Buddhism for your system of meditation which comprehends Mindfulness of Breathing, Metta Bhavana, Just Sitting, Visualisation and Insight, is there any parallel system?

S: It seems that on the whole they jump straight into Vajrayana methods, visualisations and so on. Mr. Chen used to criticise the Tibetan Buddhists, including Tibetan lamas, very vehemently for not actually practising the Four Brahma Viharas, but just reciting a little verse which summarised them, and then going straight on to the Vajrayana. So no, unless it was in some obscure sect, or in the teachings of a particular lama, no, method of meditation in that sense was not known.

But yes, for instance somebody like Tsongkhapa would explain Samatha and Vipassana, but no, I think in general practice there certainly wasn't a system of meditation of that kind.

Nagabodhi: So that system that you introduced on that Convention when you gave the talk and outlined it as a system, that was really quite a distinctive innovation of our Movement and the Buddhist tradition?

S: Yes, I think one could say that. I think that it did grow to some extent out of my very numerous and lengthy discussions about meditation with Mr. Chen. I think it owed quite a lot to him also, though the final systematisation was my own.

Padmaraja: You once said when you lived in India that you kept a series of meditation diaries, and that when you returned to the West you burnt them all with the exception of one.

S: That is not quite correct because I burned them at different periods, because I had a lot of them, and in my very early period I kept very lengthy meditation diaries. I think I burnt some -those I kept during my wandering period, I think I burnt them in Benares, and those I kept in Kalimpong I burnt at a later period, but I do still have one left. This is a very short annotation which I kept on a meditation retreat in the early fifties, yes, but that is the only one that survived and that is not written out at length, it is just a few notes for each session.

Padmaraja: I wanted to ask, Bhante, whether you cared to tell us what was in it! (laughter)

S: I have not looked at for years, so I couldn't tell you. It was whatever experiences I happened to have, I vaguely remember I had quite a lot of visionary experiences and heard not exactly voices, you could say voices, but teachings coming in the form of voices or communications, and other experiences of other kinds. But I noted them quite briefly. It is quite a short little journal, it is only perhaps 20 or 25 pages, covering a period of perhaps some weeks, but it is years since I looked at it.

Nagabodhi: Why did you keep that one?

S: I am not sure, again I don't know. I think it was the last one that I kept, that is to say the last one that I recorded and it is as though I had no reason to burn it, it wasn't cumbersome to carry around or anything like that, and in a way I don't know why I kept it. I just haven't felt any need or reason to dispose of it.

Suvajra: What were the reasons that led you to burn the previous ones?

S: Well I think partly because they were big cumbersome volumes like this, and also because I felt that I was finished with them. You know it was best not to dwell upon past experiences.

Vessantara: What led you to stop keeping a meditation diary?

S: Again, this I don't remember. But I think it is a good thing to keep meditation diaries, because I think the advantage of it is that you can review your progress, if there is progress. at intervals, and you can perhaps sometimes see a pattern, you can see recurrent problems which you have to deal with or you can see a certain direction, or even, it is surprising, you can refresh your memory of very positive experiences that you had, because you might be feeling "Well I'm getting on so badly, I never have a decent meditation", but then you flick back, and see only three weeks earlier, and you had quite forgotten, you had an excellent meditation; but you had completely forgotten about it, and that can be very encouraging. So I think that that is one of the utilities of the meditation diary.

[End of side one side two]

S: How are we going, how many questions left?

Devamitra: Just seven questions remaining..... There is a question about meditation lineage.

Tejananda: You have more or less been going into these areas, but this puts a slightly different perspective I think. We understand from this chapter that Nanarama experienced quite a lot of difficulty in establishing a full and effective meditation practice on his own before he got to practise the Insight meditation with U Javana in 1958. In your own account in *The Thousand Petalled Lotus* you seemed to spend quite a long time establishing your own meditation practice without ongoing instruction from a teacher, so how well did you fare in discovering for yourself the principles of effective meditation without a teacher and also what would You say was the guiding principle that you followed in evolving your own system of meditation?

S: Of course I had access to literature, and I got a lot of inspiration from that. And of course later on I did have contact with Tibetan Lamas, and with regard to discussing and talking over meditation, I had very extensive contact with Mr. Chen. I think probably my contact with him was the most useful in this respect.

But I think I can say that from the beginning I was very self motivated in every respect. So once I had taken up a particular form of meditation apart from sometimes the occasional feeling of laziness and reluctance to get up early in the morning, I found that I was able to persist with it, and I can't recollect that I had any serious difficulties or at least no experiences that troubled me. I mean somewhat later I did have the sort of experiences that many of our Friends in the Movement have had of intense existential fear and things of that sort, but by that time I had a general understanding of the Dharma and had some spiritual friends at least to some extent, and I was able to sort of carry on, push on in a way despite such experiences. I seem to have always had a very deep innate conviction, or if you like, faith that all would be well, I just had to carry on, I think this was quite strong. I never doubted that I just had to carry on.

Padmaraja: Was that in the meditation experience itself or outside?

S: I think it was mostly in the meditation experience itself, but sometimes coming up at night in dreams; but I think some of you have probably had that experience of quite overpowering and overwhelming, and you cannot do anything about it, you just have to bow your head before the storm as it were, and just wait there until it blows over, and it may take some time. But if it is really existential there is no way of grappling with it, or coping with it, you just have to endure it. Well even the word endure isn't quite appropriate, you are not even in a state to endure sometimes, but nonetheless you have to! (laughter) You have no alternative, but you come through in the end. I must have had several dozens of such experiences, but I think over a period of two or three years after which they tapered away.

Perhaps I should just add one point, throughout my whole career I think I can say that I have been constantly mindful of the Dharma, I have never forgotten the Dharma, in fact I think it might not be an exaggeration to say that during the course of so many years I have probably never forgotten the Dharma for than a minute or two at a time. So whatever happened, and even if I sometimes deviated into slightly unskilful activities, I never lost mindfulness or consciousness of the Dharma, I think I can say this. So I think there is this overall general awareness or

mindfulness or consciousness of the Dharma sustaining me all along in whatever situation it was.

Suvajra: In what sense do you mean mindfulness of the Dharma?

S: Well I just remembered the Dharma. Remembered The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, remembered the Teaching.

Suvajra: As in like mindfulness of purpose?

S: Yes. I was aware of my personal connections with it. I never lost that contact, not for more than a minute or two at a time, ever.

Padmaraja: That is not just remembering the Dharma, that is actually feeling in contact with the Dharma?

S: Oh, yes. Not just remembering it as some sort of past experience or something that you used to be connected with, no, an actual present connection, feeling a present connection, one might say.

Nagabodhi: For how many years did you practise just Metta Bhavana and Mindfulness of Breathing before your meetings with the Tibetans who took you into other areas?

S: If you reckon my two years of wandering life, and then a year in Benares, I'm not sure, I think at that time I didn't practise quite so much or so intensively, though I may be wrong, I may have just forgotten, but I have no distinct recollection, but when I was in Kalimpong it must have been up to 1956 I got my first visualisation initiation which was of the Green Tara, so it was up until then, so I was just practising the Mindfulness of Breathing and I think it was after taking up that Green Tara practice that I started regularly practising the Metta Bhavana, it might have had something to do with that, but I cannot now recollect.

Nagabodhi: So that is about ten years, ten years from first learning the Mindfulness of Breathing.

S: Yes, it could be ten years or a little less.

Nagabodhi: Ten years of just Mindfulness of Breathing.

S: Of course I was very concerned with the whole issue of Mindfulness, I was very conscious of the fact that I was not always mindful in my behaviour and walking and speaking and so on. I used to find that the situation in which I most easily lost my mindfulness was discussion. Yes, I just got carried away in discussion and realised, although it was a discussion about Buddhism perhaps, but realised afterwards that I had lost my mindfulness in the sense of my overall control of, not what I was saying so much, as my overall purpose engaging in the discussion getting sidetracked. I found it quite difficult to bring this under control, but I eventually succeeded, but I think it took some years, and I used to be quite, not exactly remorseful because it wasn't exactly a sin, but certainly quite regretful or disappointed that yet again in the course of discussion that I had lost mindfulness of the purpose for which I was engaging in discussion, and just got carried away.

And I was mindful of what I was saying, but I lost that mindfulness of purpose, one might say. So I was very concerned for years together about general mindfulness, about speaking mindfully, sitting mindfully, walking mindfully, eating mindfully, I was very very concerned, so one might say I was not just practising the Mindfulness of Breathing, I was concerned with a general Satipattana Practice. I think I did at one time get a bit one sided, and I think that was one of the reasons I was very glad to take up a visualisation practice and later on the Metta Bhavana.

I don't say I was too mindful or practised too much mindfulness, but I think it probably wasn't balanced sufficiently. Probably what saved me was that I kept up my interest in, and practice of, poetry, I think that was a balancing factor, but I think I also needed later the Metta Bhavana. But looking back in some ways it is surprising how much importance I attached to the Mindfulness of Breathing and to Mindfulness in general. What I often think nowadays is that I was not nearly mindful enough in ordinary everyday matters.

Achala:The is described as a community of meditators constantly improving and refining their techniques. They appear to have been groping to find a balanced practical well structured approach to meditation. In our Movement you have outlined the basic structure in the Four part system of Meditation. Within this framework do you see much further development of the more practical details of how we go about meditating? In this respect I would be interested in your comments on the following suggestions: I) Introducing just sitting practice as a precursor to the Mindfulness of Breathing for those people whose minds are topsey-turvey or who are slightly spaced out.

S: Of course one is using Just Sitting here in a very loose untraditional sense, because Just Sitting is something that can really be done by a very advanced practitioner, the Just Sitting that you do because your mind is in a turbulent state isn't really Just Sitting in that traditional Zen sense. It is just sitting quietly until you calm down. You might call it a Just Sitting Practice because you don't do any particular exercise, but that just sitting bears no resemblance at all, to the Just Sitting of the real practitioner of Zen. I think we should be careful to understand that. Otherwise people may even think they are actually practising the real Zen Just Sitting, which of course they are not.

Achala: II) Developing a structured technique for checking that the
meditators' approach is along the right track.

S: Yes, we have been talking about this. I am not so sure that a structured approach, but certainly a regular and systematic checking of what is happening, how people are getting on. Without encouraging too much talk about meditation, or too much raking over of experience, but just a quiet gentle kindly check occasionally just to make quite sure that the person isn't in fact practising on the basis of any misunderstanding or misinformation, and they are getting on reasonably well.But there was an earlier point in the question?

Achala: Within this framework do you see much further development of the more practical details of about how we go about meditating?

S: Yes, I think so, for instance to begin with in the Mindfulness of Breathing. I think that should be extended to more and more activities, and perhaps we could even take up more the Satipattana type approach. I think I mentioned some evenings ago, that perhaps we could emphasise more the Walking Meditation, not the Walking and Chanting necessarily, but as an alternative to Mindful Work, in the sense of Work Period, just

mindful walking up and down, as a relaxation in a way from the sitting practice. So one could continue practising for a longer period by just varying the posture, without varying the mindfulness. So I in that way we could elaborate each stage to quite an extent, and introduce a more practical way of working, a more detailed way of working.

Achala: III) When doing the Mindfulness or Metta Practices, having more sits but of a shorter durations, say for 20-30 minutes, as in the Zen tradition?

S: Yes, I have emphasised this quite a lot over the years, It is much better to have a short sit and to enjoy it than a long one, especially if you are a beginner that you don't enjoy because your knees are aching, your mind is wandering and you are tired, because I think it is very important at the beginning to associate the idea of meditation with the idea of enjoyment. And I think even if you sit just for fifteen or twenty minutes and you really enjoy your sit, it is much better than sweating it out for an hour and a half, and developing almost a disgust for meditation because it is so unpleasant. So I have sometimes said to people who have had difficulty with their meditation and were going off it and finding it difficult to go into the shrine room in the morning, I have often said well just shorten the period, just sit for twenty minutes, and make sure that you enjoy it, because even if it is difficult and painful, the fact that it is only twenty minutes means you don't mind it so much and you will go more readily the next time. But I think you have to be very (careful) that you don't develop an aversion to meditation, by prolonging it in an unwise way, and insisting on sitting on when your knees are aching and all the rest of it. So yes, in principle, it is far more important to have a short meditation and enjoy it than a longer one just for the sake of a longer one. It isn't a longer meditation, it is just a longer period of forcing yourself to sit. And perhaps in that way you can, on certain occasions, develop a practice of having a number of short sits during the day, which you actually enjoy and look forward to. I think that is much more important.

I am not really in favour of the clenched teeth approach to meditation.

Dharmapriya: Just picking up on that point, from my experience we tend in beginners' classes and beginners' retreats to have say twenty and twenty five minute meditations and say on a longer beginners' retreat you would build that up to thirty to forty minutes per session, and say with people of more experience, say on the Order Convention for example, two fifty minute periods, do you think that that is a perfectly adequate system or in light of what you have just said....

S: On the whole it seems all right, but just keep your eye on the people who you have actually got, that is the important thing. And it may be that some people will spontaneously feel like sitting on a bit longer, so make sure that there is an interval when they can do that. You can ring the bell so that yes that is the end of the meditation, so that those who are stiff or who have had enough can just relax and stretch themselves, and just sit very quietly, but others, you make it clear that for others who want to just carry on, can do so. And you can just mention beforehand that when you leave the shrineroom, leave very quietly because there may be some people who are happy to sit on a bit longer, and make sure that you don't start the next activity immediately, so that people who would have otherwise sat on meditating feel that they have got to get up and join in. Allow an interval so that some people who want to carry on sitting naturally can do so. And make it clear that it is as it were optional.

Devamitra: A question on the choice of Sadhana.

Buddhadasa: I have heard it said that when choosing a Sadhana it
is best to leave it to chance than choose the Sadhana yourself. Ideally a guru should choose the Sadhana, or failing that, a feather falling on a mandala, and only as a last resort should one feel free to choose a sadhana for oneself. Could you please comment on the apparent contradiction between this method of choosing a Sadhana, and the way Order Members choose a Sadhana for themselves in our own Movement with who knows what motives?

S: I think I have said myself, once sort of jokingly, that the Tibetans think that almost the worst method is choosing yourself. It was a little bit jokingly, though admittedly that does come at the bottom of the Tibetan list as it were. I just sometimes think
that the idea that one particular method is especially suited for someone rather than another can be a little overdone. I think the main thing is to get started. I am sure that in connection with the visualisation practices you could get on reasonably well with any practice, any practice that you took up as your first practice. But I think the practice as developed in the case of the Western Buddhist Order of people saying what they would like to choose, because I think it's important that some emotional connection is established from the very beginning, even if it is maybe on a slightly wrong basis, well that will get corrected as people do the practice.

Quite often people do ask me to select a practice for them, or say this is what they would like to do, but if I feel that they ought to do something other, well they are quite happy to do that practice suggested by me. So I very rarely feel, perhaps hardly ever feel, that someone is choosing a particular practice in a wrong grabby, even individualistic sort of way, I very rarely, I don't think I ever really feel that. I think people usually make it very clear that their own choice is quite tentative, or even if they have got a very definite feeling for a particular sadhana, they often say well that is how I feel, but if you feel I should take up some other practice, then I shall do that. So I don't feel that really there is such a difference as perhaps might appear.

The main thing is make a start and of course as you know, quite a few Order Members take up a second practice, which they add to the first, after perhaps understanding themselves and their needs better. Not that the first one was a mistake, no, not by any means, but that as a result of practising the first Sadhana they understand themselves more clearly and see that well now the time has come, maybe after two, three or four years to take up a second practice which will have a complementary or supplementing effect, so I don't think regardless of what the Tibetan Tradition says that there is really a problem here.

Vessantara: When somebody asks you to choose a sadhana for them, on what principles do you choose?

S: I suppose I have to say it is sort of intuition. I don't think I try to work it out - well, this particular person is a bit intellectual, so maybe they had better take up Tara, no, I think it is definitely on a more intuitive basis than that. Sometimes especially if someone just asks and they don't make any suggestion of their own, they just say "I would like to take whatever you suggest", I sort of feel quite intuitively on the spot as it were quite strongly, that is what they should take up. It sort of comes, one might say, it is difficult to explain it rationally. It is as though it is sparked off between us as it were, because of their openness and because I am as it were concentrating on them, what is right for them, or helpful for them, and it is as though the answer just comes between us like that, and they always feel, at least that has always been the experience so far,

"well yes that was the right one".

All right call it a day there.

[End of Tape 22]

[Tape 23]

Questions and Answers on

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka

End of Chapter 11 and Chapter 12

16th August 1985

Devamitra : Today we have been studying the Chapter on organizing for self cultivation, but we still have four questions left over from last night and also we have one or two questions which are actually from today but they are stimulated by discussion last night. So we start with those. The first one comes from Sona concerning Sanskrit and the Theravada.

Sona : On page 235, the monk, I think it's Upasena, is sent as a youth to Colombo to learn Sanskrit. I wondered what connection Sanskrit has with the Theravada?

S: With the Theravada as such, no connection at all. Formerly when Theravada bhikkhus studied Sanskrit, they studied the language but they did not study any Buddhist Sanskrit Texts. They usually studied Sanskrit classical literature, especially the, what you call the (Carpay) literature, the ornate or artificial epic literature, which in fact exerted a considerable influence on classical Sinhalese literature. It is only in comparatively recent times that the study of any Sanskrit Buddhist Text has been introduced at all. I doubt very much whether that particular monk studied any Sanskrit Buddhist Text. I imagine if he studied literature at all it would be the classical Sanskrit poetic literature.

Devamitra: Now we have two questions concerning the Kasinas. The first one from Achala.

Achala : On page 225, the text describes the kasina meditations as being designed precisely to develop one-pointedness of mind. There is also a picture on page 275, which shows the discs of different colours being used for this type of meditation. The question is in three parts.

Firstly : Is there a high degree of specificity involved whereby a particular colour is especially appropriate to a particular person, because of the feeling quality inherent in that colour? Shall I go on?

S: No let's deal with that first. I believe Buddhaghosa goes into this. Even if he doesn't, I think there is a definite correlation. Colours are usually divided into hot and cold colours. Hot colours are red and orange and yellow, cold colours are blue and green. I think that if one is perhaps of a distracted temperament, if one is prone to mental distraction, a cool colour is more suited, it has a sort of calming pacifying effect, perhaps white could be included but certainly blue and perhaps even more so green. But if one is of a dull and sluggish disposition, then a warm colour which is more stimulating is advisable. So yes, the particular colour chosen has some relation, I won't say to one's temperament quite.

Here I'm just giving my own conclusions, not related to character or temperament in the way that Buddhaghosa discusses the different types of temperament, but rather to whether one is more prone to distraction in meditation, or whether one is more prone to dullness. Just as it is also said that if one is prone to distraction, you should perhaps meditate in a darkened room; but if you are prone to dullness, then you should meditate in a bright well lit room.

Achala : Secondly, could the use of kasina meditations, particularly using brighter colours, be helpful for people who are alienated from their feelings, to the extent that they can't get a toehold in the metta practice?

S: It could be. I have sometimes spoken of it as a stepping stone to the visualisation practices, because it is a much simpler matter to visualise a simple disc of colour. In fact one does that to some extent when one visualises first of all the blue expanse of the sky and then in the midst of that a lotus flower, then on the lotus flower the white moon mat. The kasina in a way is an even more simple form of that same kind of practice.

I think it is not only an exercise in one-pointedness of mind, because colour has all sorts of emotional associations. So it is particularly good perhaps for people who find it difficult to, as we say, contact their emotions, and who perhaps are not ready for, or inclined to a relatively elaborate visualisation practice involving a Buddha or Bodhisattva.

I would like to make one point here though. One of the early methods of forming the kasina, especially for the monk in the jungle who didn't necessarily have his paint box handy, was to gather flowers and mass them on the ground in a clean spot without any leaves. So just the flowers, orange flowers or red flowers or white flowers whatever one was able to gather which were suitable, and then concentrate on that disc of colour. If it's say six or eight feet in front of you on the ground and you are sitting on the ground, you don't get a perfect sphere obviously, you get something slightly foreshortened, but you certainly get an expense of very pure colour.

The colour of flowers in of course rather different from modern chemical dyes. So I would suggest, and this is something that I have thought of myself, that if we do practice the kasina exercise we should be very careful not to make our kasina disc of harsh colours, harsh glaring colours such as you do get with some modern pigments, but try to get a very rich, warm, glowing - not necessarily warm but glowing and natural colour. I think the emotional associations of that type of colour would be more positive.

Years ago in Kalimpong a friend of mine drew my attention to the very great difference with regards to colour and general effect, general aesthetic and emotional effect. What a great difference there was between the older kind of Tibetan rugs that were produced with dyes made entirely from either minerals or vegetables, and the modern rugs which were made with the help of coal tar dyes, or what are the other dyes?

A voice : Aniline.

S: Aniline dyes. The contrast was dreadful and this friend of mine had the theory that by using these aniline dyes, we had ruined our colour sense. I think probably there was a lot to be said for this. I certainly noticed the difference and I think I have been sensitive to it ever since. You have only got to place two of these rugs side by side, one is rich and glowing and in a sense slightly subdued; the other is harsh and glaring and

sometimes the colours clash. Whereas the other colours never clash, this is in nature that colours never clash, however bright they are they are never unharmonious in juxtaposition. So that's just in passing.

Achala : The last part. Our study group was interested to know the origins of the kasina meditations. Is there any evidence that such techniques were used in the Buddha's day?

S: It would seems that they were, it does seem to be a very ancient technique, one of the handful of practices that almost certainly do go back to the days of the Buddha himself. Yes, it hasn't been a particularly popular practice down the ages it seems to have been superseded by other practices. I have never practised it myself but often thought that perhaps it should be revived. I have never practised it myself to any extent. I have just experimented with it just to get the hang of it, nothing more than that.

Achala : Just one further point. What do you think of colour therapy, I don't know much about it but it seems that there they have a great stress that a particular colour will have a certain effect.

S: I think it must have. I think it's inevitable, given the fact that colours are highly emotive, one might say. I have had from time to time the idea, which I have several times wanted to actually put into operation but haven't yet done so for reasons that might become obvious; but I have thought that if for instance one was doing the Vajrasattva practice, reciting the Vajrasattva mantra and doing the Vajrasattva visualisation, it would be really good if for the period of that practice, you were to live in an entirely white room and wear a white dress. Perhaps you could have your shrine white, with white candles and white bowls. I'm sure it would have a very pronounced effect. I would really like to see somebody try this, and in the same way if you were doing the Tara practice, to have a room decorated entirely in green and perhaps wear a green robe. I think we should experiment a little with these things and be perhaps a little more adventurous than we have been. I even had a little sort of fantasy once of a beautiful country retreat centre with rooms decorated in different colours so that people could move from one to another in accordance with the practice that they were doing. Perhaps it won't be a fantasy one day!

But it does seem reasonable doesn't it? I am quite sure that you wouldn't feel in the same mental state quite in an all white environment as you would say in an all purple environment. I remember once when I was quite young I was staying in Barnstable, it was when I was evacuated, with a family and it was a very old fashioned family, in fact it was the family of a vicar, there was just the vicar and his elderly aunt and uncle, I have written about them in the censored part of my memoirs, not really censored perhaps, but the part that the publishers didn't find very interesting. But their drawing room was decorated entirely in an unnaturally vivid purple, and it was dreadful! (laughter) The walls were purple and all the upholstery was purple, I found it very difficult to stay in that room, fortunately it wasn't used much. You can imagine for instance the effect if the room was decorated in grey. I mean a sort of dull grey, not necessarily a silver grey.

I remember once in this connection, up in Glasgow when we had our Centre in Bath Street, Gotami told me that they had been discussing with the landlord and his wife who lived downstairs, the possibility of their redecorating the upstairs flat where we had the Centre. So the landlord and landlady seemed quite amenable to Gotami's suggestion and then they got talking about colour schemes and the landlady said : "I suggest you do the whole way through in an nice battleship grey." (laughter) So I thought what would be the effect on the people coming to the Centre if

it was decorated throughout in a "nice battleship grey"! Colour has its effect doesn't it?

Nagabodhi : Bhante, I think I remember you once suggesting that if people have trouble visualising a Yidam, it might be sufficient if they can just get into the feeling of the colour?

S: That's true yes. Because in some cases especially - some more than others - the colour is very expressive of the nature of that particular Yidam, as white of Vajrasattva, green of Tara, golden yellow of Manjughosa, perhaps dark blue even of Vajrapani.

Nagabodhi : If one found oneself in a position of having difficulty visualising and in a way perhaps trying to decide whether to do that or to simply recite the mantra, which do you think would be the one to opt for?

S: I really don't know. If you were really perplexed I would say just toss a coin! (laughter) You would probably then have a problem of wondering whether to toss a penny or a pound. Perhaps you could keep an antique Chinese coin for such purposes.

Sona : What colours would you have associated with Padmasambhava?

S: I think it is quite difficult to associate any one colour. I think if I had to choose I would say red, because he does belong to the Lotus Family. Though one can also associate blue and yellow, red seems to be the predominant colour associated with him.

Devamitra : The second question on the Kasinas comes from Devaraja.

Devaraja : It says in the text on page 225, that some kasina methods lead to supernatural powers.

S: That's a very ambiguous statement. All kasina methods lead to supernormal powers in as much as they lead ultimately to the fourth dhyana. So all samatha methods lead or can lead to supernormal powers in as much as they lead to the fourth dhyana. It is said that the fourth dhyana is the basis for the development of those supernormal powers. So I'm not quite sure why they should have made that statement. It is the author's own statement isn't it, not quoted from anywhere?

Padmaraja : Just a related point Bhante, how did you practise the kasinas when you were experimenting with them?

S: For some reason or other I chose the red kasina, I don't know whether that was the most suitable, perhaps it wasn't. Perhaps red is the most obvious colour, a red disc on the wall. One sits perhaps four, five or even six feet away and it's almost so much in diameter (demonstrating). One visualises first the red disc and one closes the eyes and visualises its, as it were, mental counterpart until that comes vividly into view. I have described it somewhere, in a lecture or.....

Nagabodhi : In the Survey.

S: In the Survey yes.

Padmaraja : It might be quite a good thing to do at classes. Could you ever see it being used in that way?

S: I think it should be confined to just a very few people together. I doubt if one could do it in a class.

Vajrananda : Is it possible to use a colour as a sort of koan? I've found myself mulling over a colour or visualising a colour in a sort of fascination as if I am trying to understand it in some way?

S: If one takes the question literally, the answer is no. Because one of the things the colour or any colour is meant to do is to calm down or absorb all mental activities. Because when you are concentrating on a colour, you are concentrating on something which is a pure sense perception. It is something in which you can become absorbed. You become absorbed in the bare sensation of colour and that can satisfy you. There is in a way a sort of emotional satisfaction and that renders thought or reflection unnecessary. So if you are using the disc of colour for any other purpose, trying to fathom meanings or associations, then that is no longer the classical kasina exercise.

Vajrananda : Yes I wasn't thinking of kasina exercises so much as the colour itself seeming to represent something which, perhaps I am trying to get hold of, not so much conceptually.

S: Well it does, but on the other hand you can't really translate it into any other terms, or at least it's very difficult in as much as it is a pure sense perception. Supposing for instance somebody was blind, how would you describe 'green' to them. You could only say, well it's just green. If someone doesn't know what green is, but they are sighted you can say it is the colour of the leaves on the trees, the colour of grass.

Vajrananda : I suppose what I am getting at is that a Bodhisattva is a particular colour, as it were for a sort of reason, it's supposed to convey something. So if you mull over that or visualise that colour it is supposed in some sort of way to tell you something.

S: That is true, but it tells you something really by way of communicating a particular emotional state. The colour, of course the particular colour in every tradition has certain associations but I think those associations are usually finally emotional. You can as it were superimpose intellectual associations on the emotional ones but I think that the emotional ones are primary. For instance in the case of green, it's the colour of nature, it has a sort of soothing pacifying effect so you can regard it as the colour of peace but that becomes as it were more interpretive. Because even if green is the colour of nature, nature is also red in tooth and claw, not necessarily quite peaceful. It's probably quite difficult to see in practice where one ends and the other begins, but I don't think you can actually fathom out a meaning.

Vajrananda : But with a koan, in a way you are not trying to find a meaning in that sense either are you?

S: Well you are trying, with a koan you are trying to find a meaning, but even though in a sense you know that no meaning can be found, but

you try very hard to find it nonetheless. At least you know that no meaning can be found on the level of the koan. But yes, colour does convey something, but I think it is very difficult to put it into words. Everyone must have some experience of this, what do people have to say? Can you put into words your actual experience of colour, your emotional experience of colour as distinct from various associations with a particular colour that you may have. Some of those associations perhaps being largely conventional.

Achala : I sometimes feel particular colours, almost getting drawn into them as if there is some essence quality. It is almost like eating food - it gives something back in return. But to describe what that essence is, would be impossible.

S: Yes I know what you mean, I think it must be in connection with a particular emotional effect of that colour. Perhaps we don't sufficiently appreciate colour. Quite a bit has been written about colour I believe in medieval times. I saw some reference to all that just recently, I can't remember quite where. But I think we seem to have lost touch with that in modern times except perhaps to some extent through things like the (Roosher) colour test.

Buddhadasa : Bhante didn't Goethe write a work on colour?

S: He did, but I think it was more as a scientific work, as a scientific theory of colours. He disagreed with Newton's theory of colour. But I think Goethe's theory of colour has not found general scientific acceptance.

Dharmapriya : I ran into a medieval Christian theory of colour in Tim Longfellow's translation of Dante. He has very extensive notes near the beginning of his notes on Purgatorio. He gives the reference and then gives a summary of (pictorial colour).

S: But a theory as distinct from a system of associations?

Dharmapriya : Well it's not quite clear, but it seems that they overlap, because a colour such as black can have quite contradictory meanings.

S: Yes, I now remember where it was, I was reading something about Persian miniature painting and there is this connected with a whole theory of colour, even philosophy of colours which I think has Sufi connections. I think they are even distantly Manichaean connections. I think the Persian miniature paintings have very pure bright colours, there are no shadows you notice. So the miniature painting is supposed to represent a revelation, as it were, of the imaginal world where there are no shadows, where there is only light in the form of various colours. I think it is all connected with a sort of metaphysics of light.

Then of course another interesting point is that in the Persian miniature paintings they also use gold, real gold. So the gold which the painting as it were secretes is said to represent or symbolise what we would call the transcendental, a higher level even than the imaginal. I just vaguely recollect this. I read something about this some years ago.

A Voice : Does (Henry Corbin) go into that?

S: He goes into that yes. And of course it is now known that Dante had some distant or indirect connections with Sufism, this is now generally accepted, and it is now quite possible that his conception of that journey through hell and then purgatory and then heaven had its ultimate origins in the Sufi's elaboration of the Prophet Mohammed's ascent through the different heavens on what Muslims call the Night of Power.

Devaraja : What connection would Sufi's make, what is the connection supposed to be?

S: Well there is that particular conception of the journey through those worlds and especially the journey through the heavens and the correlation of the heavens with the planetary spheres. This journey is described in great detail by many Sufi mystics basing themselves on the prophet's night journey. Then there is this whole idea ultimately derived from Plato, but greatly elaborated by the Sufis, of love as the motivating source of the ascent. This clearly comes out in Dante's Divine Comedy.

But they traced an almost definite connection through Dante's teachers who were in Muslim Spain. It is known what works they had access to and it is known that those works provide a sort of thread of connection with the Divine Comedy. Therefore it's more or less accepted now that it is highly probable that Dante learned about those works and their teachings through people with whom he was personally in contact, even if he hadn't actually read those books. The work which first elaborated this theory and which was generally accepted, was published in the thirties in Spanish by a Spanish monk or Priest who had made an elaborate study. I am not sure if it has been translated into English but it is often referred to by writers on the subject, and his conclusions seem to be generally accepted, that there is some link, even thought somewhat tenuous between Dante on the one hand, and Sufism on the other.

Devaraja : So the theory being of this journey and motivating power in love?

S: Yes mainly that.

Padmavajra: Isn't there a strong connection between ideas of light and coloured light particularly in Persian tradition and the development of Amitabha etc?

S: Well I have pointed this out somewhere. I think it is in *The Three Jewels*, or maybe not, that there is a connection between experiences of light and colour and mystical experience in practically all traditions.

Just one final point, it is interesting to see that in the course of European art, a decline in colour and colour values. If you think of the development from say Fra Angelico, where the colours are very pure and light, to say Caravaggio. So that is perhaps in a way symbolic. Perhaps even Rembrandt is an even better example. Both are very great artists, but from another point of view, as representing a degeneration. Though I must say, speaking of Rembrandt, one can't obviously speak of him even from that point of view even, entirely in terms of degeneration. I remember seeing his famous painting of Aristotle contemplating the bust of Homer, it's in the Metropolitan in New York. I think

it was the painting that impressed me most there, because on the one side of the picture on the left, or to the left there is a bust of Homer, the blind bard. To the right there is Aristotle. Aristotle is looking at Homer, Homer of course isn't looking at Aristotle, but it is as though Homer is aware of Aristotle looking at him. Also from the expression on Aristotle's face you can see the philosopher is unable to fathom the poet, it is very clear. But the point that I was going to mention was that Aristotle is dressed in some sort of vague costume, I am not quite sure what it is, it looks rather like a medieval Aristotle. He has got a sort of baldric and there seem to be jewels in this baldric. It is incredible that when you actually look, just stand looking at the painting, actually the jewels seem to glitter. They actually seem to move and it's quite incredible. And there amid the general gloom of the painting there are these very vivid jewel like touches of colour, a quite remarkable contrast. So Rembrandt certainly was not insensitive to the beauty or the power of colour. If you look at this painting in the volume of reproductions, you just don't get that impression at all, it just isn't there. So I'm afraid you will have to go to New York to see the original painting.

Devamitra : The final question left over from yesterday comes from Kamalasila, concerning, "when the path is not clear."

Kamalasila : Yes I think his name was Gunananda yesterday, and he was having some quite extreme meditation experiences, and he had to stop. The principle on which he stopped was that when the path is not clear, you should stop. Would you agree with this principle?

S: I am not so sure that I would agree with it but I think I would point out that even stopping can be part of the path. I think anything you do with total dedication and sincerity must be part of the path. Whatever you do, even if it is stopping doing something with that total dedication and sincerity, I think the next step will be disclosed, the next step sooner or later will be obvious. Or, if it still is not obvious, you should just as it were hold yourself in readiness and be as open and as aware as you can. I am sure that sooner or later and it could of course be quite a bit later, you will see the next step, or you'll get some sign or indication. It might be a dream, or may be some words that somebody speaks to you or a book that you happen to hit upon.

I think so long as you are sincere and dedicated, even if you are not quite sure what you are sincere about or dedicated to, you are to that extent on the path. In a way you can't escape being on the path.

Devamitra : The first question coming from today's batch, harking back to last night's subject, comes from Padmavajra, involving the question of second practices.

Padmavajra : This question is about the adoption of an additional visualisation practice. In a question and answer session quite a few years ago, you said that if you take up a second visualisation practice you should visualise yourself as your original Buddha or Bodhisattva and then go on to doing the practice. How important is this?

S: It is important as providing a link. Because as a result of doing your first practice for some years you should to some extent have been transformed into that particular figure, that particular deity, that Buddha or Bodhisattva, or at least have some sense or awareness of that. So you start off with yourself as that, or feeling or experiencing that, you don't put that aside in order to take up the second practice. If you proceed in

that way you form a definite link between the old practice and the new, or yourself as having done the old practice and yourself as now doing the new practice. I am not saying that while you are actually doing the new practice, you at the same time try to think of yourself whatever Buddha or Bodhisattva it happened to be, but certainly at the beginning or before you start on the new practice, especially if you had just done a session of the old practice, you can think of yourself in that way. So there will be certain continuity between the two practices. It won't be that your jumping from one to the other, or discarding one in order to take up the other.

Vessantara : Bhante I believe in the past you have said that you shouldn't visualise yourself as Padmasambhava. Is that true, if your first practice was Padmasambhava?

S: I don't remember saying that, I might have said it to some particular person on some particular occasion in some particular connection but I don't remember.

Vessantara : So would there be any exceptions to this method of proceeding to .....

S: There is of course the point that Padmasambhava is not an archetypal Bodhisattva. It might have had something to do with that. But certainly if one visualised Padmasambhava, and visualised the connection between yourself and himself via the rays of coloured lights and mantras, and visualised either him as absorbed into you, or you as absorbed into him. But you would be seeing him then, as it were, under his archetypal aspect not as a historical figure. Perhaps I might have said something to the effect that if you have a very strong sense of Padmasambhava as a historical figure, perhaps you should not practice in that particular way. That is the only possibility I can think of at the moment.

Devamitra : Another question from Kamalasila, "talking about meditation."

Kamalasila : Last night you said that it was not a good thing to talk about one's meditation. I might be taking that remark somewhat out of context, but generally I have found that talking helps people to become more aware of the details of their practice. So would you still stand by what you said completely?

S: Well first of all, I certainly think it is not a good idea to talk lightly or in a casual way about meditation, just a little chat over lunch or something like that in a not very serious way. It might be that a serious exchange on the subject of meditation is helpful especially in the case of the beginner who isn't perhaps very clear or very sure as to what he is doing or what he should be doing or doing next. But I think that if one has got well into one's practice then talking about it can be a sort of distraction. So I think one should be quite careful about that.

Kamalasila : I was thinking of talking to people, friends, somebody you know quite closely who has quite a deep interest.

S: Yes no doubt the nature of the personal relationship has to be also taken into consideration. It can result in a deepening of your communication with that particular person. But I think one should still be quite careful and quite mindful, how one talks about one's meditation

and meditation experiences. One should be quite sure that you are remaining aware, not getting carried away, and if you have any extraordinary experiences, not to be bragging about them or anything like that. Perhaps I am to some extent conditioned by my Indian background because there people often talk very freely about their experiences in a way that clearly isn't very desirable.

Kamalasila : Yes I think that my experience has been that people's own experience of their own practice can be very vague and unformed and they hardly sometimes, talking particularly about Mitras and Friends.....

S: Perhaps we are not talking so much about meditation, as about efforts to meditation.

Kamalasila :Yes.

S: So it's not that someone has a meditation experience about which they can talk. When you as it were cross examine them about their meditation, their meditation experience, then they themselves start realising that actually they don't have much in the way of meditative experience and that can spur them on to intensify and clarify their practise.

So that isn't quite the same thing as talking about meditation. It is more like, as I said talking about one's efforts to meditate.

Kamalasila : But that seems to be the state of most people's practice.

S: Right, well if that is the case, well clearly talking about it, talking about failure to meditate or meditate very deeply can be very helpful. It can help maybe to arouse interest in the practice and give a greater sense of direction and greater clarity. Some people might for instance.....

[end side one side two]

might be genuinely under the impression that if you do a bit of wool gathering during meditation it doesn't really matter very much as everybody does it. They might not realise that actually this can be stopped, if one makes a sufficiently determined effort.

Kamalasila : And to talk about it to someone else is quite often to admit it to oneself.

S: Yes, well sometimes I get letters from people saying things like : "At last I am able to count from one to ten, three times in succession without any wandering thoughts. It is the first time I have been able to do this for years." A few people are aware in this sort of way, but if they are not then perhaps it is quite helpful to talk about the practice or their efforts to practise with someone who can help then realise what is really happening.

Kamalasila : Yes that was the sort of level I was talking
about really.

S: Yes, that that is not really good enough, probably could do better.

Devamitra : A question from Nagabodhi concerning meditation.

Nagabodhi : It's a personal question, I'm not Sure quite where it fits in after your last answer. So far as I understand Bhante, you do not meditate in the sense of practising a formal sitting meditation on a daily or even regular basis. Is this true? If so, when did you stop, why did you stop, and on what grounds did you feel confident in taking that step?

S: Well in a way this goes back to some of the things I've said about samatha and vipassana. Because if you develop any degree even, of genuine vipassana you cannot lose that. So the question then is simply of developing that insight, developing that vipassana. If you can be sure that you have got some definite insight, you don't need to sit and develop samatha, unless of course you feel that your insight or your vipassana is very weak, and you have to sit and develop samatha in order to put more energy, concentrated energy or samatha behind that vipassana. So for a few years now, some years now I have felt that I was quite easily able to go on deepening my insight without recourse to a deeper experience of samatha. So this is what I now do. One can go back to samatha from time to time if circumstances require, but it has ceased to be necessary as a support for the further deepening of vipassana.

Nagabodhi : Could I ask in that case when you say it is not necessary for any further support, does that mean that the vipassana for you is deepening in a way of itself, or that life provides the support?

S: No I won't say deepening of itself no, but I can as it were work on it without having been in that more deeply concentrated state which is represented by samatha. For instance if I wake up in the night, I can work on it, I don't need to sit up. Or if I am sitting in my chair I can work on it, sometimes I do this in the early morning without actually crossing my legs. It doesn't make any difference to the actual working on the vipassana. But I haven't said very much about this for obvious reasons, because I don't want to discourage those who need to sit from sitting. (Laughter)

Nagabodhi : It's very encouraging, what you are saying!

S: But you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi : If it's not impertinent, when you talk about working on your vipassana, from everything that you have talked about, that suggests it does not mean discursive thought about insights that arise in you?

S: Discursive thought can certainly be a basis for the developing of vipassana and a deepening of vipassana. You can deepen it by extending a particular vipassana to a wider range of objects, or simply have a deeper insight into the same. For instance you could take up the topic of impermanence or death, you can go on deepening and broadening your realisation of that all the time. In a way there is no limit. But that's in a

way the only excuse for giving up samatha - that you can get on with your vipassana, because you don't need at the time, a deep experience of samatha in order to generate and develop vipassana. So that is the short and simple answer to that question.

Nagabodhi : Thank you.

Devamitra : Moving on to completely different territory. Devaraja has a question about 'generation gaps'.

Devaraja : How can a smaller Centre such as Brighton with very few senior OMs best function as a training situation for new Order Members, beyond just showing them scope for initiative?

S: Say that again.

Devaraja : How can a smaller Centre such as Brighton with very few senior Order Members (ie. just myself and Surata) best function as a training situation for new Order Members, say who come back from Tuscany? A continuing training situation beyond just offering them scope for showing initiative? I suppose maybe I should clarify a bit.....

S: It depends of course how many of these new young Order Members you have got. If you say you have got two senior Order Members, say in relation to three or four younger Order Members assuming that is the number you have, well in a way that's not too bad. One of the things you can offer is a deepening communication on all fronts.

I must say that I haven't given thought to this, so I don't have anything special to offer on the subject at the moment. It could be that the Brighton situation, or the situation at such a smaller Centre cannot offer the relatively newly ordained Order Member everything that he needs, even though you are say, and another senior Order Member is, in deepening communication with him or with them. They may need to keep up relations of kalyana mitrata with other senior Order Members that they know well outside the immediate situation and they may need to be particulary careful about attending National Order weekends and similar functions, and perhaps be careful that they do have solitary retreats at regular intervals. The more senior Order Members around the Centre can help by making sure that they do get those things and if they seem to be forgetful or unmindful, reminding them that that is what they need, and what they ought to be doing, and helping them to make provision for that.

Devaraja : I suppose then sometimes there is quite a reluctance to accept that sort of advice or that encouragement.

S: Well then it falls back on the skilful means and the tactfulness of the senior Order Members, that is one of the differences between the senior responsible Order Member, and the young inexperienced Order Member. You have to be able to put it across in some way perhaps even without their realising it. You could for instance say : "Well let's go on a picnic today lads" then on your picnic you say, "Gosh what a lovely tree, how lovely it would feel to meditate here, let's all sit down and do a meditation". (laughter) That's a rather simple, off the cuff illustration. (Laughter)

Suvajra : I thought you said subtle Bhante. (laughter)

S: Perhaps it raises a more general question. What is the best situation for the average, young, newly ordained order Member? I have said this before, and I am only giving expression to what is best ideally. I think young, newly ordained Order Members shouldn't function around public Centres. I think that the best thing for young newly ordained Order Members is to spend at least a few years in a place like Padmaloka, a country retreat Centre where they are not meeting members of the public, where they are not meeting members of the opposite sex, except just on rare occasions. And where they can get rather more deeply into their meditation, study and communication with Order Members and Mitras and so on. Only after some years of that kind of experience, be seconded to a public Centre. I know it's not practicable at present but I am stating it, so that at least we know that we are not doing what is best, even though that is unavoidable. Do you see what I mean? I think in some ways a public Centre is the last place where newly ordained, especially young, Order Members should be functioning.

No doubt it will vary a little bit from one individual to another. So perhaps one should think in terms of what is best for the Tuscany returned young Order Member, and try to guide him into what is in fact the best situation. If you are Tuscany returned, young, and perhaps slightly susceptible Order Member, and perhaps the first class at the public Centre that you take or you support; there right in front of you perhaps a couple of yards away, are two or three women sitting virtually indecently exposing themselves. I have seen this myself on occasion. Is that really a helpful situation? It can happen, not to speak of other things, not to speak of all the general distractions of a big city. So I think we have to think very seriously about these things.

Devamitra : A question from Tejananda about Tibet.

Tejananda : It is not specifically about Tibet. On page 248, speaking of the Buddhist Sangha generally, Carrithers says, quote: "...the institutionalisation of self-reliance through the Vinaya meant that only late, and then only provisionally, did there appear anything like a church hierarchy", ie a Sangha. How true is this statement, especially with regard to developments in, say, Tibet?

S: I think it is true to say that anything like a church hierarchy appeared only comparatively late. In the case of Tibet we know that Buddhism was introduced as it were under royal patronage, I don't know how soon an actual hierarchy was set up but I imagine that in as much as Buddhism, in as much as the Sangha, was introduced under royal patronage, an ecclesiastical hierarchy corresponding to the political hierarchy must have been quite soon established. We know that for instance in China under the emperors, prominent monks were often given titles by the emperor, even given a sort of official position, and functioned as sort of heads of the Order in a way. Not because they had been elected as such by the other monks, but because they had the backing of the emperor and could do a lot of things in his name, or with his support, with his backing. That is I think, the broad general picture.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Abhaya and concerns the Chairmen's Meeting.

Abhaya : Bhante, reading about the coming together of the more experienced monks, in Jinavamsa's samstha, got me thinking about the Chairman's meeting. When I first started coming, a few years ago there were at most ten or twelve of us, each year the meeting swells in

numbers. Clearly before long the size of the meeting will be too unwieldy for the developing of close friendship which we have enjoyed over the last few years. What developments should take place do you think, to ensure the best growth?

S: Reading the passage that you probably have in mind, I was certainly struck by a parallel because, yes, there were two things to be safeguarded in the early Sangha, individual autonomy, and the harmony of all those autonomous individuals. I have spoken time and again of the Sangha being a free association of true individuals who are co-operating for a common purpose, or for the sake of a common ideal. But no doubt sometimes there is a degree of tension between those two things. Sometimes the needs or requirements of individual autonomy, conflict to some extent with the needs or requirements of harmony. So the Buddhist principle seems to have been, from the beginning, that any such tension, any such conflict, could be resolved only in face to face contact. This is why of course the Buddha stressed the importance of the bhikkhus or members of the Sangha assembling repeatedly, regularly and in large numbers. So this is what the Order does from time to time, and it is especially what perhaps the Chairmen do. Perhaps the Chairmen, the Chairmen's meetings are the most successful example of that repeated, regular assembling in large numbers, in such a way that individual autonomy is preserved, autonomy of the individual Chairman himself and of his Centre, at the same time harmony is ensured - harmony of action.

You all know quite well that it hasn't been easy to achieve this balance, it has required the development of great mutual trust which wasn't there very fully to begin with, but which I think is there now in good measure. So I'm quite sure that just to take the example of the FWBO Centres, leaving aside the Order as such, so long as the Chairmen continue to meet in this way whether there are a few more of them or a few less, the autonomy of the individual Centres will be preserved and at the same time harmony between them, and co-operation will also be preserved. It is a good general model, so to speak, for the whole movement; individual autonomy, harmony, preserved through the repeated regular meeting of all the people most concerned, but the question, at least, is about numbers and I can't see that I have got any ready made solution to this. Perhaps eventually if there are more Chairmen, you will have to have regional Chairmen's meetings, with national Chairmen's meetings only of a more occasional nature, I don't know, this is a possibility.

At present say in a region, let's say in the East Anglia Region, we have got two Chairmen, haven't we - the Chairman of FWBO Surlingham and the Chairman of FWBO Norwich, perhaps you could throw in for good measure, the Chairman of FWBO Publications if he happened to be residing at Padmaloka and so on. Very good measure! And in the case of the Southern Region, if the Chairman of Aid for India was in residence in London permanently, he could be thrown in for very good measure. But at present I think you have only two or three Chairmen per region at the most, in some cases you have only got one or two. So at present no doubt one has to continue to meet on a national basis. But I can foresee a situation in which for instance there are ten Centres, ten autonomous Centres say in East Anglia, well there could be an East Anglian Chairmen's conference so to speak on a more regular basis than perhaps we have at present, say every three months, and then a national one every year. Perhaps we could develop that sort of as it were pyramidal structure. But nonetheless there would need to be friendships kept up across not only Centres but across regions and eventually of course across countries. This is where your globe trotting Anagarika perhaps comes into the picture. He is your sort of link man carrying personal good tidings from one Centre or one Chapter to another. Because someone actually coming from another Chapter, another Centre, from another region or from another country, means much more I think even than letters or reading reportings-in in *Shabda*. A real live Order Member from that particular Centre, that particular Chapter means a very great deal,

especially in the case of those Centres or Chapters that are relatively isolated with relatively few Order Members of their own. Perhaps in some cases we should make a definite effort to keep up say cross Centre or Trans-Centre, and trans-regional friendships. You may start up your friendships say in Tuscany, but the fact that the friend who you met there is going to another region or ends up in another part of the world doesn't mean that you should necessarily end your contact. Make a special point perhaps of keeping up contact with him. In the event of misunderstanding at any time, your friendship could then almost be a life-line for the two Centres or Chapters concerned. If there is misunderstanding, the very fact that friendship is absent, makes the misunderstanding a hundred times more difficult to resolve. But if there is an element of friendship present in the situation, mutual friendship, even to the extent of one person from each of the opposing camps so to speak, well, each can speak to the men on his side, and bring them round say, to a more sensible point of view. So all the more reason for keeping up these cross or trans-Centre, or chapter or region or national or national chapter and Centre contacts.

Nagabodhi : Bhante, when we began holding Chairmen's meetings, you in fact talked about them as meetings of senior and responsible Order Members and to some extent, stressed the fact that they were not so much Chairmen's meetings as meetings of senior and responsible Order Members. In recent years the trend at least in our nomenclature and constituency has been that they are more and more, Chairmen's meetings. Do you feel it in fact is important to resurrect or reaffirm the importance of senior and responsible Order Members 'kula' being made?

S: I think it is very difficult to separate the two, because you have to do a lot of business. You don't represent your Centre because your Centre does not give you a mandate, you go back to your Centre if there has been any proposal that all the Centres should do such and such, you go back to your Centre, back to your Council, suggest it, and if possible you get it ratified, or sometimes it is modified, or an improved version is suggested. You come back to the Chairmen with that. So there is that aspect of the Chairmen's Meetings and they are Chairmen and they try in the course of their meetings to co-ordinate the activities of their respective Centres wherever that is possible. But at the same time they also meet as senior and responsible Order Members to deepen their friendship just as Order Members and to try to get a vision of the Movement as a whole which transcends the interests of their particular Centre considered separately.

And I think from that point of view, the Chairmen's Meetings, whether meetings of Chairmen, or of senior and responsible Order Members who happen to be Chairmen, or both, have been working reasonably well and in fact better and better I gather, with every meeting. But I think that the Chairmen's meetings or whatever you call them are extremely important. I would go so far as to say that if I was to unfortunately fall under the proverbial bus tomorrow, whether the Movement survived as one single Movement would largely depend upon the Chairmen. They would either make it or they could break it, depending upon the spirit that they shared and that is a very big responsibility.

Devamitra ; The next question comes from Dhammaloka and concerns
the value of gerontocracy.

Dhammaloka : Carrithers on page 249. The Buddha's proposition in the Mahaparinibbana Suttanta on how elder and younger monks are to address each other forms the scriptural basis for a gerontocratic authority structure in the Sangha, that is with the authority of the elders as a balancing counterpart of the individual monks' autonomy.

Three questions from this : How are we to take the Buddhas proposition? What is the spiritual value of attributing authority on the numeric basis of age of ordination? And did the two principles, that is gerontocracy versus individual autonomy historically work out in a fruitful way conducive to the spiritual life?

S: Well you realise I will have to speak as a gerontacrat! (Laughter) There isn't a gerontocracy in the traditional sense, just because there are not enough of us! (Laughter) Anyway let's have the questions again one by one.

Dhammaloka : How are we to take the Buddha's proposition? That proposition about addressing each other, the elders-the youngers as comrades or by name; the youngest,-the eldest as sir, or I don't quite remember what.

S: Yes, either ('Ayusman') in the case of equals, or 'Bhante' in the case of seniors. Equals address each other as ('Ayusman'), Juniors address seniors as 'Bhante' and seniors address juniors as
('Ayusman') or ( ). I think that in the Buddha's day it could be assumed that if a monk was older he was more experienced, and therefore worth listening to. So I think this provision of the Buddha was perhaps a means of tempering perhaps the rather raw autonomy of the younger monks who were not as experienced, and if one could use the expression, not so enlightened as the older monks. It was not so much that the older monks ruled just because they were older. They happened to be more experienced in a way because they were older. But what made them worthy to rule, if 'rule' is the word, was not just their greater age but their greater experience. I think this was the normal or normative state of affairs. So it is very much the Buddhist tradition to defer, to respect, to revere, and to look up to, those who are older, the assumption being that they are more experienced and that you can learn a lot from them.

Of course there were often anomalies, as sometimes you find an anomaly of this sort mentioned even in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says a monk may be called a Thera, but he may be fruitlessly old. It is not that he is not to be respected in that case - just because he is old you will respect him - but you are not obliged to rely upon him for advice or guidance. And I have noticed that within the Sangha, whether it's Sinhalese bhikkhus or Tibetan gelongs, they seem to manage this quite naturally.

I think the gerontocracy, if one can call it that, does have the effect of tempering the rawness or sometimes the rashness, the inexperience of the younger monks. But if it does so happen that a younger bhikkhu is more experienced, the fact that he is younger in practice does not, I think I can say never, prevent his intrinsic worth from being recognised or prevents him from exercising due influence within the Sangha. When for instance there is a discussion, it is the convention that the oldest bhikkhu speak first. But everybody has his say and the whole assembly may well end up, in principle can end up adopting a suggestion put forward by the very youngest monk. There is nothing to prevent him arguing his case quite vigorously and disagreeing with the older monks if he thinks that they are wrong. So I think in practice the gerontocracy does actually work out quite well. Clearly it is not in accordance with modern ways of thinking and clearly gerontocracy in the ordinary sense hardly exists now, outside the Soviet Union I suppose and outside the Catholic Church. But I think in some ways there is a lot to be said for it because there is continuity of experience. I gather that the old men of the Kremlin get really quite impatient when these restless democracies keep changing their leaders. They had just got used to Mr. so and so and they would have to start all over again getting used to Mr. so and so, a different person who is an unknown quantity so they just don't know how to proceed.

The Catholic Church has been ruled by old men for generations or centuries, rather than young men and I doubt whether it is any the worse for that. I doubt whether young men would actually have made a better job of it. I believe Cardinals retire now at the age of, eighty, some of them very much resent this because they are full of beans and think that they can still carry on for another ten years in some cases. It seems ridiculous just to retire someone simply because he is eighty and for no other reason. You might replace him with a man of sixty-five who is not in nearly such a good physical and mental condition, but he just happens to be sixty-five and not eighty. So I think that when I introduced this expression, 'senior and responsible', I think I knew what I was doing, I think it reflected my awareness of the Buddhist tradition in this respect. I think within the Order generally, within the Movement generally, first of all there is respect for Order Members. Then among Order Members, I think there is a slightly greater degree of respect for senior and responsible Order Members or those who are generally acknowledged as such. There is a greater respect on the part of Friends and Mitras and even within the Order itself. Younger Order Members do, I think, in a genuine way often look up to senior and responsible Order Members and it is generally known who they are.

But it is also clear that there is a handful of Order Members who are senior, but are not generally regarded as responsible and are perhaps not looked up to in the same way. People are well able to make those sort of distinctions. So I think to some extent at least within our own Movement this principle is acting, and I think it is a quite positive and healthy principle. Sometimes quite young and relatively inexperienced, but capable Order Members have been given extra responsibility within that infrastructure. Of course they may have responsibilities thrust upon them, sometimes a little too early because there was nobody else, but sometimes they rose to the occasion very well indeed. I had responsibilities thrust upon me at forty two, I was much too young to found a whole new Movement, but I had to do it. There was nothing else to do. I probably should have waited until I was sixty, but the situation just wouldn't wait.

Padmaraja : Do you mean that Bhante? (laughter)

S: Well it is very difficult to say. On the other hand I have sometimes wished that I had started it earlier because now that I am practically sixty, at least my physical powers have started to wane, but actually there is more and more to do. Though sometimes on the other hand, looking from a completely different point of view, I wish I could have come back and started it earlier, but perhaps it wouldn't have been possible to start it then. I took advantage initially of that 'hippy' wave, or that wave of which the hippies were a part at least, so the ground had been prepared to some extent for me, and perhaps I couldn't have functioned before that. Meanwhile of course in India I was gathering experience. So perhaps things have worked out all right, at least worked out in the best way that they could. I came back neither too early nor too late.

Padmaraja : Bhante would you say that the Movement actually reflected your own spiritual development?

S: Well one lives in hope! (laughter) What can one say? (Laughter)I have always been an optimist! (Laughter) But if I hadn't been an optimist I don't know what would have happened in 1967. Because I had very little to go by and there was not very much encouragement. I was watering some little shoots that were springing up from very stony soil! (Laughter) But I do find that the Movement and everything involved with it year by year, almost month by month, more and more interesting. Sometimes I can't help wishing that I was younger. I think if I was twenty or thirty years younger I would go and spend some time in India, I would go and spend some years in America, I would like to go down to South

America, I would like to do all sorts of things. But I am aware that my time is running out and I am not going to be able to do all those things, but the Movement is getting more and more interesting, it is just beginning to get really interesting.
It wasn't nearly so interesting when I was just taking meditation classes say twice a week in that little basement in Balmore Street and giving a weekly lecture. A few people look back to those days as the good old days, but as I have said before I certainly don't! (Laughter) It is much more interesting now, much more stimulating and encouraging in every way. I only wish that I could do more and was going to be around longer. I think, if I could retain my health and strength, I could quite happily for another hundred years but I know that isn't possible.

Dhammaloka : What is it that you find particularly interesting in the present developments?

S: First of all I think the effect of the Movement on people. One sees people changing nowadays relatively quickly and one gets more and more expressions from people of appreciation for the Movement. This was almost unknown for the first seven, eight or nine years of the Movement, I doubt if I had a word of appreciation sometimes for years on end. But now very frequently people express a very deep and genuine appreciation for what they have got from the Movement, especially new people to whom it has been quite an eye opener. So the Movement is having more a more impact, more and more bite as regards more and more people, and that is very very interesting indeed and one sees it expanding to new countries. One sees people learning foreign languages and sees us extending into other cultures, one sees all sorts of new projects developing. There is Aid for India and our publications now beginning to get under way, there are people beginning to write books. This has been a very very interesting development for me, that Order Members are writing and publishing books. Also that everything is deepening and that contact of people within the Order is getting better and better, more and more positive and deeper. So it is very very interesting, even some of the questions that I get asked are much more interesting than the questions I used to get a few years ago.
People have got more knowledge and more experience behind them in so many ways so they can come up with really good stimulating questions which I quite enjoy thinking about and trying to answer.

It wasn't like that so many years ago. So yes, almost day by day it becomes more interesting and more worthwhile. I really wish I was a young Order Member with hopefully fifty years of life in the FWBO ahead of me. So in some ways it's a disadvantage to be a pioneer because you do your pioneering and then have to hand over to others just when things are beginning to show some results and beginning to get really interesting. But I suppose one person can't do everything. But I think that young Order Members who are being ordained now are so fortunate, because they will have a much more positive and stimulating time than some, at least, of you did eight or nine or ten years ago. There are so many more facilities, so much more support, so many situations that didn't exist a few years ago so the new young Order Member is very very fortunate. I mean there was not a Tuscany was there even five years ago and look what a difference that has made. Ten years ago there was not a Padmaloka, and look at the Newsletter ten years ago, it was not like the Newsletter of today. Look at our publications ten years ago, we just managed to bring out a little booklet, I think Buddhadasa's *Essence of Zen* was the first, and I remember how pleased I was to see it. That was only about ten years ago and now we can do so much better than that, there are so many publications and thicker and thicker ones.

Also I don't like to see anything collapse or anything folded up or discontinued, I am very, very much against that, I am never happy to see that. There has to be a very, very good reason for something being discontinued for me to accept it happily. It seems to just reverse the general trend. But occasionally perhaps this could be necessary or unavoidable or even a positive step, very occasionally. Anyway that's all by the by.

[End of Tape 23 Tape 24]

Devamitra : We have a question now from Buddhadasa concerning the ceiling of one hundred on Jinavamsa's group.

Buddhadasa : I was going to ask you Bhante about the vigorous prime of forty to fifty year olds, but I think we have passed it.

S: It's obvious isn't it? (laughter)

Buddhadasa : I just wondered whether you had any hints for the twenty to forty year olds, the up and coming young Order Members? Anyway on page 264 Jinavamsa originally intended to limit the Samsthava to one hundred monks. Are there any lessons here for us? You have indicated that the number of Order Members for a chapter should be about ten. Are there any limits on the number of chapters making up a region, say could that be ten?

S: I don't know. I think it would depend what happened say at Regional Order Meetings. Supposing you had a hundred, could you have an effective Regional Order Meeting? I think this will have to be just seen when the time comes, it depends on what you want to do on that particular occasion. No doubt there will be a tier of meetings where you have say a hundred Order Members all gathered together, but which level it will be on I think is something which would have to be decided later. At the very beginning we didn't even have a hundred Order Members on a National Order Convention. It was twenty seven on the first one. It depends I think on the purpose of the Meeting.

Buddhadasa : You have no idea why Jinavamsa decided to limit the size of his Movement?

S: I suppose he found that he couldn't maintain harmony if it went beyond that number, but that is my guess, I can't be completely sure. He was a great letter writer wasn't he? He had personal contacts too. So perhaps he could keep a hundred or he does in fact keep a hundred monks functioning in harmony, but perhaps he doubted if he could keep more than that functioning in harmony. Eventually of course he did expand beyond that ceiling, but there was quite a bit of wastage also, more perhaps than we have.

A voice : It was fifty per cent.

S: Perhaps it is not surprising, we had more than a fifty per cent wastage at the very beginning, but that has rapidly dwindled ever since. Though in a way to some extent we can't really compare, because that is exclusively a monastic situation which required celibacy and a very ascetic way of life, so I think it was natural that the wastage should have been quite so high, even though they had exercised the principle of selectivity. I did once think that perhaps I would stop at two hundred and fifty Order Members that I had personally ordained, but no, I did once have the idea of stopping at a hundred but I raised it to two hundred and fifty, and I think I don't think in those terms (Laughter) at least not at present. But clearly I will have to devise sooner or later a way of devolving some of my responsibilities in this respect. I did think at one time

that perhaps I should set a limit of two hundred and fifty personal disciples for every Order Member. I mean in the course of his life as an Order Member.

That's interesting !

Padmavajra : Help! (Laughter)

S: Yes because we are raising our standards all the time aren't we? You can't work intensively with more than a limited number of people. You are not necessarily working with all the two hundred and fifty at the same time, but you would have to devote at least several years of fairly intensive contact to each one of them, perhaps two, three, four at a time. They would be between the age of twenty-five and seventy-five.

Buddhadasa : I am not quite sure how to phrase this question but saying that one person could ordain up to two hundred and fifty Order Members in any one lifetime suggests that the personal element in an ordination is very very important.

S: In some ways it is, but again this is something which I'm giving serious thought to. If I do devolve that responsibility, on what basis I devolve it? Whether to one person, to two, to three, four, five, to ten? Do you see what I mean? There are all sorts of implications which have to be thought about very carefully.

Devamitra : Since we are on the subject of ordination, we have a question now from Dharmapriya concerning reaffirmation of the private ordination.

Dharmapriya : It came out of some discussions and questions of the last few days and a reference on page 218 to re-ordination. That was with regard to monks in existing traditions and nikayas who wanted to enter Jinavamsa's Samsthava.

S: Yes, so that would really mean not even a new ordination or reordination but an ordination because in a sense you don't recognise the previous ordination and you don't recognise them as being monks when they come to you. So it isn't specifically speaking a re-ordination.

Dharmapriya : I must confess it was more the use of the word that triggered me off and then the remembrance that the reaffirmation ceremonies now annually for Mitras. So my question with that background, then runs : We express our effective going for refuge ceremonially and ritually, when we are ordained by you. This commitment we can reaffirm effectively in Order pujas and whenever we chant the refuges and precepts in Order meetings, hopefully at an ever deepening level of practice and understanding of the Dharma.

S: Or when you recite the refuges and precepts by yourself, because if you feel that you need to chant the refuges and precepts in the company of other Order Members for that to constitute a reaffirmation, you can certainly mentally visualise them as present.

Dharmapriya : That leads on to the next part in a way. I was thinking of it with other people because in a sense we can see that as a reaffirmation or a further development of the public ordination ceremony. But then thinking of the private one, what kind of reaffirmation is that, because that took place in a one to one situation.....

S: Well one could say that one reaffirms ones private ordination whenever you do your visualisation practice, and you may well like to recite the refuges and precepts before you do that. I remember in this connection incidentally, when I took my sabbatical year, I might have mentioned this before, I went to Cornwall and Vajrakumara - he wasn't Vajrakumara then of course - came with me, and we used to sit and meditate together, but quite spontaneously in the evening when we were sitting I had the experience of the whole Order sitting around me in a circle about the size of this circle. I was sitting like I am now, not in the middle but to one side sort of looking on everybody, and all the members of the Order were there. So then I thought well just by separating myself physically from other Order members you are not necessarily out of contact with the Order. So we should have that sort of feeling when, say, we do the Order Metta Bhavana, or even if you like, when we do our visualisation practice at least initially, at least at the beginning.

When I say that I had that experience, I don't mean that I thought of them, I mean that I experienced them actually present and quite spontaneously. I had not tried to experience them, it just happened.

Dharmapriya : In formulating the question, I thought of two possibilities of things which came in a sense closer to the original ordination ceremonies, a kind of direct reminder or perhaps simply because they would be a bit more unusual, perhaps in some cases more effective. One was the practice of individual confession to another Order Member, perhaps almost ritualising it, or formalising it so one would very explicitly do it rather than perhaps incidentally as part of a walk and talk, and then perhaps do a puja together afterwards or a ritualised confession.

The other one, I believe it was actually done by Vangisa on his tenth birthday, was in a sense to take refuges and precepts again from another Order Member at some point. I wondered what you thought of those two ideas.

S: I think confession is important, if one has got something of some importance to confess, something that is perhaps troubling one and which one thinks perhaps is a serious matter, to emphasise the seriousness of it both as regards yourself and the person to whom you are confessing, perhaps it should be slightly ritualised. I don't think I am in favour of an actual sort of ritual of confession, but I think perhaps you could mark the seriousness of it by saying to the person to whom you are going to confess: "Do you mind just coming into the shrine room, could we just sit for a few minutes there together and then could I just confess this matter in the shrine room and perhaps afterwards we could do a puja together." In that sort of way. Not having say a set form of words, or a set form of actions which you both go through on that occasion, I think I am not in favour of that. What was the other possibility you mentioned?

Dharmapriya : Taking the refuges and precepts from an Order Member in a one to one situation.

S: I don't feel too happy about that. If somebody has a very strong feeling that they should do that, well I suppose fair enough, But I don't feel it's necessary to encourage that. I think what perhaps would be more appropriate on that particular occasion, you recite your refuges and

precepts with fellow Order Members say on the occasion of a Chapter Meeting or whatever with more awareness, more mindfulness, more fervour than ever. I think perhaps that would be more appropriate. But I must say that I have not given thought to the matter before so these suggestions are only tentative.

Padmaraja : Bhante I was quite stimulated by what you said about your experience of the metta bhavana, the Order metta bhavana on your sabbatical. I was wondering whether it might be a quite interesting idea to introduce some visualisation element into the Order metta bhavana. Just imagining a circle perhaps of Order Members.

S: Of course it would help if you knew them individually. I think that some people do that naturally because some visualise more easily than others. So if you are thinking of or reflecting on Order Members one by one and you direct your metta towards them, I think if you are a natural visualiser, you call up a visual image of that person quite easily. If you are not a born visualiser, you might be spending so much time struggling to visualise that particular person, you would not perhaps be able to get around to the metta bhavana, and if you had a hundred or more Order Members to get around then you would be there all night! That wouldn't be a bad thing (Laughter), but it might not be possible in the circumstances. So I say let the visualisation arise spontaneously if that happens. Otherwise to pronounce the name of the Order Member is enough, it is like pronouncing a mantra, a mantra of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Because you could have a very strong feeling for someone's presence just by pronouncing their name, even if you are not able to visualise the way they look. You may not be able to remember whether a certain Order Member had got brown hair or black hair or fair hair, but by pronouncing their name you can have a very vivid sense of them, even a vivid sense of their presence. Nor to speak of their hair, what about the colour of their eyes. Even the people who are living with you in the same community, could you off hand, tell what the colour of their eyes was in most cases? Even if you shared a room with them perhaps.

Devamitra : A question of a completely different kind from Devaraja on the mobility of Order Members.

Devaraja : This grows out of a description of the life of a typical monk in the Samsthava, who spent his time in eighteen hermitages in twenty three years. The principle behind this being this mobility to discourage attachment, and also if I recollect correctly to encourage a wider experience of the Movement. So allowing for a new Order Member's period of consolidation after his ordination, should we actively encourage new Order Members to spend time in all or at least a fair selection of our other Centres to get a wider experience of the Movement. On previous occasions you have talked about people putting down roots. Is the problem different for us in the West? Do we have to counter a restlessness and superficiality growing out of a disruptive society, whereas Jinavamsa is trying to counter the conditioning of Sinhalese society which is of a much more subtle nature?

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

Devaraja : Allowing for a new Order Member's period of consolidation after his ordination, should we actively encourage new Order Members to spend time in all or at least a fair selection of our other Centres to get a wider experience of the Movement.

S: When I read that passage in Carrithers' book, my initial reaction was that probably there was too high a degree of mobility. A couple of years

on average didn't seem very long to spend in one place, but on further reflection perhaps - I'm not completely sure - it didn't matter so much in the case of those members of Jinavamsa's Samsthava, because they were going each time to very similar situations, they were going from one forest hermitage to another I think in most cases. So they would be in much the same kind of situation following much the same kind of life usually with perhaps an occasional tour of duty as an instructor in a small monastic college, which even in that case could be quite quiet and so on. That's not quite the same as say a new young Order Member spending some time at Vajraloka, then some time at Sukhavati and the LBC, then perhaps going off to India for a year or two. Those are the sort of possibilities that are open to us. So I think perhaps, in the case of the members of Jinavamsa's Samsthava, their mobility perhaps was not so unsettling as that sort of mobility, that is to say moving every couple of years, would be to at least some young Order Members.

I think in our society, in our civilisation we are very very mobile indeed compared with all previous societies, all previous history. So I think we perhaps need to follow more of a middle way. I don't think I'd like to see everybody moving every two years unless they were exceptionally settled and going from one very similar situation to another. I think perhaps the Mitra cum Order Member, that is to say the person who starts as a Mitra, is a mitra for a few years and then he's ordained, I think he should probably be in the same place for four or five years, say a couple of years as a Mitra and two or three years as an Order Member. I don't want to lay down a hard and fast rule but I think this is probably the best way of doing things, but after that I think he should certainly move around and have a look at other Centres and see where he would like to spend another few years. I do feel on the whole it is a good thing for Order Members who are ordained in Tuscany to go back to their original Centre or community at least for a year. Because it does seem that it isn't always easy to adjust to being an Order Member and if you need a period for consolidation, and other factors being equal, I think you can best do that in your original situation.

Sometimes that may not be possible because it can be in some instances that the people in your original situation have got into the habit of seeing you in a certain way, and don't find it easy to see you as an Order Member, in that case you may be well advised to move. Or it could be that your original Centre is a busy urban Centre and maybe you are well advised as a new Order Member to go to a country Centre after your ordination. But apart from those kinds of exceptions, I think that broadly speaking, a young newly ordained Order Member should go back from Tuscany through their original situations say for at least a year, just to consolidate their being an Order Member.

Devaraja : You talked earlier on about new young Order Members going to some sort of country retreat Centre like Padmaloka. It raises the issue of perhaps our need for almost like a permanent Tuscany, almost like a seminary type situation, but that in turn creates problems in that not everybody is able to be able to go to that sort of situation and it might actually create two classes of Order Member.

S: Well it means that those who for any reason are not able to take advantage of those facilities or those possibilities must ask themselves very seriously whether in fact they can't. One thing I have been quite struck by in recent years is how well women Order Members with young children, and even babies, have managed. Some of them are really determined and they haven't let it hold them back. So I think that perhaps every young Order Member would have to ask himself: Could I not really take advantage of the facilities that exist? If he isn't, then he has to try to make it up in other ways. But I don't think you can really ask other Order Members to hold themselves back because you are not able to keep up with them. Do you see what I mean?

Devaraja : Yes when I said distinguish between two classes of Order Members, that's those who were able to go to a seminary, assuming that it would be financially possible for them to go, and those who for various reasons which might be quite objective reasons, were unable to go and therefore.....

S: When you say unable, for what sort of reasons?

Devaraja : Well for example they might actually have a family to support and had to work to support that family, or they did not have the finance.

S: Well yes, finance is a different matter because maybe in due course, arrangements can be made. If someone has a family and feels that he can't leave that, I don't think you cannot expect the person who is free and doesn't have a family to be able to hold himself back for that reason. No doubt there will be danger that the two groups as it were may grow apart, but I think one has to face that danger and do one's best to overcome it, not prevent it from arising by holding certain people back. Otherwise, logically, you end up with no one proceeding at a faster pace than that of the slowest person.

Devamitra : The next question comes from Tejananda, concerning the epic cycle of the Buddhas life.

Tejananda : I'll just quote, it's the very first paragraph in the chapter : "Erich Frauwallner has argued, to my mind convincingly, that sometime not very long after the death of the Buddha, members of the Sangha composed a long epic cycle of his life from historical materials lying to hand. This cycle has not been passed on as a piece, but one very large part of it, containing the last instructions of the Buddha to his monks, is found in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta". Do you have any comments on this, is this from your own experience?

S: I must say that I read that work, I had a copy of it once, I don't think that I have it now in the Order Library. I can't remember that particular argument that he has used, but I can't remember that they made any impression on me, perhaps I wasn't convinced. I don't think his position has been, Frauwallner's position has been generally accepted. That's not to say that there may not be something in it. Perhaps I just have to read that work again, I don't have a very clear recollection of it, I read it in Kalimpong I think.

Tejananda : You haven't seen any evidence in the Pali scriptures from your own readings?

S: Well I have never noticed any evidence, perhaps there is evidence there, but I have certainly not ever felt anything like that. Except that I did once say, I think it must be in *The Eternal Legacy*, that I think the Vinaya was developed possibly out of a sort of protobiography, a sort of biographical sketch of the Buddha was elaborated by the Bhikkhus who developed the Vinaya in certain episodes dealing with the way in which the Vinaya rules were laid down. I have the impression that there was a sort of primitive Buddha biography which had been turned into the Vinaya.
For instance, I think that I mentioned that the *Mahavastu* which contains a lot of material about the Buddha's life, which can be regarded as the

biography of the Buddha, which contains also a number of Jataka stories, is described as belonging to the Vinaya of the local Theravadins. We also do know of course that in the case of the extant Pali Vinaya Pitika, there is quite a lot of material which is of a biographical nature, dealing with the events immediately after the Buddha's enlightenment and so on. So there does seem to be a connection between the Vinaya literature and the biography of the Buddha, but whether there ever actually existed a separate complete work that was purely a biography, not a Vinaya text in the sense of a biography into which Vinaya type episodes had been inserted, I think that must remain an open question.

Perhaps I need to have another look at Frauwallner's work.

Tejananda :So there is no indication that works like the *Mahavastu* and the *Buddhacarita* were based on earlier but now lost materials?

S: Well what does one mean by materials? Because there must have been an oral tradition, one can only speak of a less or a more elaborate oral tradition, you see what I mean? But of course the *Lalitavistara* is clearly based on or incorporates more primitive material and incorporates it in what we would regard as a highly legendary framework.

But sometimes it has seemed strange that there should have been no early biography of the Buddha, but assuming that one did originally exist, why should it have been lost or why should only portions of it have survived, it is difficult to understand why. So there are several questions in this connection which are still to be cleared up. If they didn't have a Buddha biography, why not? It would seem to be an obvious thing to have, and if they did have it then how come that it was lost?

Devamitra : The last question this evening comes from Devaraja and concerns higher education.

Devaraja : An increasing number of Order Members are taking up studies at universities. This question grows out of Jinavamsa discouraging disciples of his from studies at educational institutions. Of what value do you think this is to the Movement, that is studies at universities. Under what circumstances do you think it would or wouldn't be a waste of time, and a side track? And what studies would you like to see people following if you think it's possible?

S: I can only think of a few off the cuff remarks here because it's clearly the area that requires serious study, one needs to collect information and so on. So ask me again.....

Devaraja : OK the first one was : Of what value do you think studies at university are to the Movement?

S: I think one value is that through the particular individual Order Member, a certain kind of information can be fed into the Movement. For instance if you studied as some Order Members have, Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and perhaps those languages are studied best at a university under academic auspices. I think some Order Members could definitely deepen their knowledge of the Dharma from at least a historical or doctrinal point of view, through engaging in a course of academic studies, even if their lecturer perhaps was not particularly sympathetic to Buddhism, they could still learn quite a lot in the more detailed way that they couldn't at this stage within the Movement itself.

Then there is also the point that on entering into the academic world, the academic sphere, we have contact as Buddhists, and Order members, with academics, some of whom are now not only quite sympathetic to Buddhism but in some cases are actually Buddhists themselves. So we make the FWBO known and its attitudes known within the academic sphere itself and perhaps one day we shall have some of our own Order Members holding these positions. Because at present it's these people who are regarded, generally speaking, as the authorities on Buddhism, not seriously practising Buddhists. So I think that it would be a good thing if the Order becomes large enough soon enough, I think it would be quite a good thing if we captured all these posts. Otherwise we are in the intolerable position of people who are not Buddhists, who haven't gone for refuge, no spiritual sympathy with Buddhism, publishing books about Buddhism and telling the world, that is telling the general public, what Buddhism is really all about. So in order to prevent that I think that Buddhists themselves have to capture these positions, and then of course even though they would be teaching Buddhism from just an academic point of view, they will definitely, because they are Buddhists have an effect on the people who go to them. I rather question myself whether Buddhism or any religion, should be taught as it were academically, and I question whether literature should be taught academically. I think it is really quite a perversion or distortion in many cases, even though there are some very gifted and sympathetic teachers, I think the system is wrong. It must be a wrong system where you are considered as more qualified to speak about Buddhism if you are not a Buddhist and approach the subject with an attitude of cold, alleged scientific objectivity, this is really as it were madness. It shows the extent of the alienation of our civilisation from all traditional spiritual values. Anyway what was the next part? (Laughter)

Devaraja : I think it is partly covered but it was : "Under what circumstances do you think it would or would not be a waste of time and a side track?"

S: Well I think if the Order Member concerned genuinely wants to extend his knowledge and is going to use that knowledge in the interests of the Dharma and his work for the Movement, especially if say he wants to learn Pali or Sanskrit which at present is difficult to learn within the Movement, and also once he is equipped he can pass on the knowledge he has in a better sort of way within the Movement itself. A few years ago I would not have encouraged people to take up these sort of studies. We lost a couple of people in this way though I don't think there is any serious danger of that happening now. I wouldn't want everybody, certainly not at present, to go through that particular mill but I think it is quite a good thing that a few people do. I think it can certainly be of benefit to the Movement. Some people find it difficult to study by themselves or in the rather informal way in which at present is the case in the FWBO. They need something much more structured, something much more demanding, which is much more of a discipline. They need that to prepare for examinations, they have to submit essays and have their essays criticised, I think that this is all very good for them, especially if they get a reasonably sympathetic lecturer or tutor.

Devaraja : And the third question : What studies would you prefer to see people following?

S: I think languages are quite important, the Buddhist Canonical languages. I would like to be able to say Buddhist philosophy, or Indian philosophy, but I have reservations about the way they are taught under academic auspices. I think that we have to be very careful studying those subjects. Studying any subject, some sort of inspiration and insight is needed really to communicate the subject and those are very often lacking in academic circles, though not always by any means. One might even find out particular teachers, particular lecturers, particular tutors,

and one might be able to study in those institutions where they did teach.

Dharmapriya : It just strikes me Bhante that the people who are studying or about to study, none of them are in fact doing Buddhist languages, and all in fact are doing Buddhist philosophy and history.

S: I suppose to some extent you've got to have an aptitude or liking for languages. Also there is another question that by studying in this way and say taking a degree you qualify yourself to teach, perhaps to function within the adult education system which can be very useful as a means of livelihood. So one has to look at it from that point of view, that is to say look at taking up of academic studies. If you get a degree then there is a means of livelihood, not necessarily by academic teaching. You wouldn't be able to teach in a College or University if you just had an ordinary degree, you would have to go further than that, but you could function within the structure of adult education. A local authority would happily take you on in that sort of capacity. You could take evening classes in Buddhism or Indian philosophy and support yourself.

Tejananda : A point of correction here to what Dharmapriya just said. The course that three people are hoping to study in Bristol involves both Sanskrit and Pali, but not exclusively so.

Vessantara : Jnanavira too is thinking of doing mainly languages.

S: Yes this is in the future. You are correct as regards the past, no doubt. But yes it seems that people are thinking of taking up languages too. (Pause) Any further point?

Devamitra : Any points of your own Bhante?

S: There might be one or two. Yes I made a note about a sentence here. This sentence was interesting, it does not really require any discussion but let me underline it. "The unbroken continuity of this mutual communication from the very beginning and the rigorous discipline of its maintenance, contribute more than anything else to the unity of the Samsthava despite the powerful forces which continually threaten to turn it into a loose association of isolated beings". I thought this was quite well put.

Then again another interesting point: "In fact a great deal of Jinavamsa's preaching effort since the very earliest days of his reform has been devoted to educating laymen on those details of Vinaya which circumscribe a monk's life and which are not usually practised by the village Sangha". This rather reminded me about what I was saying about the Newsletter when it becomes a magazine as a means of educating the whole Movement and perhaps circulating beyond that. (Pause) Those were the only points. All right then.

[End of tape 24]

[Tape 25]

Questions and Answers on

The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka

Concluding Chapter

17th August 1985

Devamitra : Today we studied the Conclusion and we have fourteen questions altogether. The first question comes from Padmavajra and concerns James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Padmavajra: Carrithers seems to describe the practice of the Dhamma-vicaya as exemplified in the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Would you agree with this? What modern authors would you say exemplified Dhamma-vicaya or for that matter awareness in general?

S: I must say I didn't really see the point of the comparison. He seemed to be dragging them in rather unnecessarily. I mean Dhamma-vicaya, technically speaking, I think I have explained this before, is the investigation of mental states, primarily. It is distinguishing them into Kusala and Akusala, skilful and unskilful, so that one can proceed to develop the skilful mental states and not pay any attention to the unskilful ones. Sometimes it's regarded as being an investigation of the Dharma in the sense of the teaching or doctrine, but when one considers the place of Dhamma-vicaya in the Bodhiangas one finds that it doesn't in fact bear that meaning at all. You start off with mindfulness or awareness and then, being mindful, being aware, you as it were introspect, examine your own mind. You investigate your own mental states and you separate, so to speak, the skilful from the unskilful mental states, and then, and this is the third bodhianga,
you proceed with energy to develop those mental states which are skilful.

So I don't see this. James Joyce was at particular pains, say in *Ulysses*, to discriminate skilful from unskilful mental states. I might say that in certain chapters he loses the distinction altogether. As for Virginia Woolf, well one knows quite well that in some ways the Bloomsbury Group wasn't characterised by an overdeveloped ethical sense! (laughter) I'm just being a little provocative.

Padmaraja : You don't really mean it though do you Bhante!? (laughter)

S: Well let's say they weren't rigorously ethical.

Devaraja : Could you repeat that Bhante? (laughter)

S: They weren't rigorously ethical at least in certain respects. Moore came to believe that they had misunderstood and misinterpreted his ethical

principles, perhaps we should not go into that now. But no, I don't really see the relevance of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf here at all. What did you proceed then to ask?

Padmavajra : Is there any modern author who you think does exemplify Dhamma-vicaya or that you could hold up as somebody that has a heightened awareness?

S: Well how could an author exemplify that? I think it's rather difficult in a way. Does it mean that the author divides his characters into good and bad and clearly labels the goodies as goodies and the baddies as baddies so that you know who to identify with and who to approve of? It surely doesn't mean that! I think if an author has a developed moral sense, that will come through indirectly, if the author has a sense of ethical values.

Perhaps an author or novelist who springs to mind in this connection is, I think quite obviously George Eliot who did have a very, not only developed but reflective, moral sense. You couldn't say that for instance of Dickens. Dickens rejoices heartily in certain virtues, he loves generosity and he detests meanness. But you wouldn't say that he had a developed ethical sense in the way that George Eliot did. He wasn't perhaps sufficiently reflective. Perhaps it isn't the business of the novelist to reflect too much. Sometimes one feels that George Eliot did overindulge in reflection. She is sometimes a little heavy handed, even though her ethical principles are really quite admirable. But they are not always fully assimilated into the novel itself, not fully absorbed. They remain sometimes like lumps in porridge. Sometimes reading George Eliot, although one agrees with much that she says, one can't help thinking that I can think in that sort of way myself. I don't need the novelist to write her own ethical commentary on her characters and their stories, that should be implicit more in the story itself. Sometimes it is. She doesn't always overdo it but on occasions she does. So I think it isn't easy to say what exactly one expects of a novelist in this sort of way, or say of a poet, how they could be very directly led to demonstrate their Dhamma-vicaya.

Devamitra : We have a second question on the Dhamma-vicaya from Dhammaloka.

Dhammaloka : Yes, Carrithers seems to see Dhamma-vicaya applied in Anandasiri's activities. The way I understand it is that he sees it as an activity which is beyond the level of Samatha. He seems to see it equally with Vipassana actually.

S: I wonder whether he thinks of it as investigation of the Dharma, in the sense of investigation of the Doctrine, rather than as investigation of mental states, not that one can perhaps altogether separate the two.

Padmavajra : I don't think that is what he thinks it is. He comes up with another description of it as : "In each moment, in each introspective insight, in each ineluctable modality of the visible". I suppose that last phrase seems to be just dealing with the things around them, with their overall experience.

S: But can you be more explicit, I am not quite sure what exactly is being asked in this connection?

Dhammaloka : Yes my question was whether that was a suitable way of seeing it. So whether one could see Dhamma-vicaya as something which is beyond the level of Samatha, which seems to be a fairly much higher rank than we usually use the term.

S: I suppose it will depend upon the degree of intensity of the concentration with which you make that kind of investigation. It would seem perhaps that Anandasiri isn't thinking of just a mild gentle sorting out of skilful from unskilful mental states. He seems to look upon it in an almost existential sort of way, something that really grips his attention, grips his interest. So it could well be that when he is engaged in that kind of activity, he does reach a point of intense concentration and is discriminating unskilful from skilful mental states so vigorously, with such an awareness of why unskilful states are unskilful and why skilful states are skilful in a deeper almost philosophical sense that that activity does amount to the development of Vipassana.

One could certainly look at it in that way, that may be quick way of understanding Dhamma-vicaya as understood by him. And one can also see Dhamma-vicaya in that sort of way leading on to energy quite naturally. He does seem to have been a person of great energy, especially perhaps mental energy.

Devamitra : A question now from Tejananda about the playing down of Samatha.

Tejananda : On page 278, summing up Anandasiri's experiments with Samatha type and Vipassana type meditation, Carrithers says : "This is an injunction, in other words, to a dynamic and continually self transcending sensibility, (i.e. he's talking here about vipassana) as opposed to the static states of mind attempted in the Kasina meditations." (i.e. samatha). The implication is that Anandasiri tends to underplay or reject the Samatha meditations and to emphasise Vipassana meditations. In our group we couldn't decide whether this was in fact Anandasiri's emphasis or the author's, what is your opinion?

S: When I read this passage I wasn't happy with the description of Samatha and of Jhana states as static, I think this could be very much misunderstood. They may be static in the sense that in themselves, however prolonged and however more refined they become they do not lead beyond themselves. In other words they don't lead directly to the transcendental, the interposition of another element is required i.e. Vipassana. So they could be described as static in the sense of operating in principle on the same level, regardless of whether they pertain to the second or the fourth jhana, but they are certainly not static as experience. Though there is concentration, though there is balance, in a strange way jhana states are experienced as intensely active, not active in the ordinary sense, because at the same time they are states of stillness or states of peace. In a way they transcend that dichotomy as normally experienced, they are intensely active, even intensely dynamic, but at the same time balanced. So I think from the standpoint of experience, it is quite mistaken to refer to them as static. The term is an English term, even if Anandasiri had so described them, one doesn't know what Sinhalese or Pali term he used, so that may be more the authors understanding of the matter. But what else did you go on to ask?

Tejananda : Well that was it more or less, the implication was that Anandasiri tended to underplay Samatha. This came out not just in that particular sentence but throughout that section of the chapter, and we just couldn't decide whether it was in fact him.

S: It may be he does underplay but then again one must consider his situation. He was leading a very ascetic life, a very mindful life, so it could be that he did have consistently a high level of mindfulness, a high level of awareness, and perhaps it wasn't very difficult for him to get into a concentrated state of mind. So it could be that his strict observance of sila and his general ascetic life did conduce to a sort of jhana-like experience in the way that a more active busy life, even if dedicated to the Dharma, doesn't.
So from that point of view and in that way, he might, practically speaking, have been justified in playing down Samatha in the sense of seated meditation at least a little. Though I think again that the Vipassana traditions as distinct from his own personal practice, the Vipassana traditions that have become well known and popular in recent years, do I think play down Samatha in a quite unjustifiable way.

Tejananda : So in fact the author's emphasis is incorrect, because although he isn't emphasising sitting Samatha, he is in fact experiencing Samatha?

S: I would assume so, I would think that highly likely in view of his whole way of life and also his previous practice. Is that all?

Tejananda : Yes.

Devamitra : A question from Suvajra about mindfulness internal and external.

Suvajra : Anandasiri emphasises to his pupils on page 290.:" - the acquisition of wisdom through insight meditation entails not merely an introspective understanding of oneself, but also fundamentally introspective, if outwardly directed, understanding of the world of living beings."
You mentioned in 1982 in the seminar being held on *The Satipatana Sutta* of the aspects of mindfulness of the internal and the external perhaps being a thread from an earlier period of the tradition, in which there was an observation of oneself and observation of others to develop mindfulness and insight. But you said that you thought this required much fuller investigation?

S: I think that was something slightly different. I think Anandasiri was referring to such things as reflecting and being aware of one's own in and out breathing and also being aware that other beings are breathing in and out. So that seems to me important, because if one reflects, if one practises in that way, it leads eventually to a transcendence of the whole subject object dichotomy, the whole distinction between oneself and others. The dimension of compassion enters in as a dimension, so to speak, of wisdom. So it would seem to me that in this respect, Anandasiri's practice represents something which is quite balanced, that one is as it were reflecting that all living beings breathe just as one breathes oneself. That creates a sense of solidarity and fellow feeling and as I've said, ultimately a transcendence of the very distinction between self and other.

So it seems to me he is very much on the right track and almost beginning to approximate to the Mahayana ideal or principle of the unity of wisdom and compassion. He does seem to come quite close to that in fact. It's quite interesting in a general way to see that if someone does take the spiritual life very seriously, he really can come to quite important conclusions as a result of his own reflections, his own experience. He can surmount to some extent the rather limited and conditioned understanding of Buddhism which has come to him from, single inverted commas, 'tradition'. He seems quite a good example of that.

Suvajra: I think what I was trying to get at here was what Anandasiri was doing, with the in and out breathing of himself, and observing others. Was that what the Satipatana Sutta was getting at when it mentions the observation of the breath internally and externally?

S: I don't remember it fully, but I rather suspect that what I was thinking was that perhaps what lay behind that teaching was something a little different from what Anandasiri seems to have been doing, but I will have to check what I said then to refresh my memory, I would have to look at that whole passage again. But perhaps in a general way that particular passage of the Sattipatana Sutta did suggest indirectly an awareness of the non-self, that is to say the other person, which one doesn't usually find in Theravada practice at that time. I vaguely remember that discussion but I can't remember the details of it or exactly how it was connected with the text.

Devamitra : A question from Kamalasila on relinquishing states of mind.

Kamalasila : On pages 277 and 278 the author describes a progression of mental states culminating in :"A dynamic and continually self-transcending sensibility". A state in which he constantly relinquishes states of mind rather than developing skilful states of mind, which is the way that I think we generally conceive our practice. Could you comment on this way of practising?

S: I think there must be both. There must be a cessation of the unskilful, a relinquishment of the unskilful, and a vigorous development of the skilful. I don't think you can neglect either in a balanced practice.

Kamalasila : He seems to be relinquishing both skilful and unskilful states.

S: Yes but you must develop the skilful states before you can relinquish them.

Kamalasila : Yes I think that was clear in the passage.

S: Yes but you can also be paradoxical and say that you must develop your relinquishment, that relinquishment is a positive mental state or a positive attitude, so it comes to the same thing in the end. But it is meaningless to speak in terms, for instance, of giving up the dhyanas before you have even experienced them, like so many good armchair Mahayanists do very happily give up their own individual enlightenment. (Laughter)

Kamalasila : Yes I think it is quite clear, he wasn't suggesting that.

Devamitra : A question from Devaraja on the historic sense of mindfulness.

Devaraja : It comes from page 272. Anandasiri, Carrithers states, got his radical sense of history indirectly from Western scholarship and turned this to good effect in getting to the real purpose, as he came to see it, of the Buddha's teaching. You have encouraged Order Members to read the

area of history, and you are keen to see the historical approach to the Buddhist scripture taken much further. More and more it seems to me that in order to truly evaluate new ideas and to assess what one's society is and where it is going to and oneself too, one needs a sense of history. Is the historical sense important enough to think of it as an aspect of mindfulness? Could we speak of it in terms of the fifth foundation of mindfulness?

S: I think I have spoken of the importance of continuity in spiritual life and there is no continuity without mindfulness, without in fact memory, and therefore without self consciousness. So one might even say that history is to the group, as that mindfulness and that memory is to the individual. There is no sense of identity, relatively speaking, without memory, without mindfulness, and so there is no sense similarly of group or corporate identity without a sense of history.

But that does as it were leave the two side by side, I'm trying to see the connecting link between them, I suppose the connecting link is that one is not only an individual, one is also a member of the group, and the fact that one is a member of the group, ultimately of the human race, has affected one in one way or another, if only to the extent that one has reacted against it or has had emancipate oneself from it. Your own small history which you personally remember is part of a larger history, which you do not personally remember, but about which you can learn.

Suvajra : You have spoken about the historical sense not being developed until comparatively recent times, so how could a group have an identity without that historical sense?

S: Well yes and no. How recent is recent because the ancient Greeks had historians, they had Herodotus. But before that of course, very ancient society did not have the sense of history that we have, they lived in a sort of mythic continuum. Supposing you were an ancient Egyptian, you might for instance be told and you might believe, that a certain god had created your land and that the King, the Pharaoh was his representative, but whether that god had created your land and created Egypt just those few years before you were born, or ten thousand years before you were born, you wouldn't be particularly bothered. Do you see what I mean?
For you things would always have been essentially as they were, that was the divinely fore-ordained pattern of things, so you would be living in that, as I called it, that mythic continuum. You would be aware of the passing of time, you would be aware of the life and death of the members of your own family, but you wouldn't have a sense of history in the sense that we have it, stretching back with changes and developments and Empires rising and falling. So far as you were concerned things would always have been just the way that they were, and that was the right way.

So that's the sort of consciousness men seem to have had ever since they had that sort of consciousness at all, before the invention, so to speak of history. Before the invention of history. In between let us say the period in which men became aware of history, the period in which they were living in this mythic continuum, there would be an intermediate period in which there were vague legends of ancient heroes, sons of the gods. For instance in the Classical period, the period of Plato and Socrates, many Athenian aristocratic families traced their descent back to the gods, traced their descent back to an ancestor who was literally the son of a god, Apollo and Zeus and so on, and usually they had only to reckon about eighteen generations. So fancy living in a society where you literally believe that there were only eighteen generations separating you from the gods! So you wouldn't have had much in the way of history in between in our sense. You would have just had records of a few battles and a few abductions, perhaps the odd massacre, but nothing more than that. Your view of human existence would have been strangely foreshortened,

much as for instance the Christian view of existence was foreshortened by the belief that the creation took place 4004 BC. But it was as though that was a sufficiently long period, so yes there is quite a lot of history during that period, and yes history is important from the Christian point of view, and inheriting the Jewish point of view, because in the events of history God reveals his Will to mankind and that is quite a different way of thinking.

So I think also in India you find this relative absence of history. There is merely a legendary past, there is not history proper until much later. It seems the Buddhists practically introduced or invented history in India. There was the history of the Sasana itself. The earliest histories seem to have been histories, or chronicles, the Mahavamsa, the chronicle of Ceylon and the Tibetan chronicles. In India to the best of my knowledge there was only one chronicle in Sanskrit literature that is the (Rajatarighini), the history of the Kings of Kashmir. You have a lot of legendary material in the Puranas where some historical facts are deeply buried, but they are certainly not history. But I think our sense of history, and not only our sense of history but our sense of historical development, has enabled us to look at religion in a completely different way. Because in the past the tendency would always have been to think that as things were, so they had always been, so you didn't question them. But now we can see how certain ideas and institutions developed. We can even think in terms of progress and degeneration.

So that enables us to look at our present day religious traditions and beliefs, our religious inheritance generally, our human inheritance generally, in a completely different way.

Tejananda : Could you say that there is some correlation between those stages of awareness of history and the emergence on the individual level of individuality in more the sense that you talk about it?

S: Well there is this old saying that ontology recapitulates biology, or is it the other way around? But you know what I mean, the idea that roughly speaking, the child as he grows up recapitulates the history of the race. I don't know whether this is a generally accepted scientific principle. I think it is broadly but with certain modifications. Does anybody actually know?

Dharmapriya : There are the modifications. It was originally thought that for example that the human embryo literally goes through the shape and form of certain primitive animals, for example it becomes actually a fish and then an amphibian etc., which it doesn't do. It tends to show a lot of the characteristics of the infant of these species, but not fully developed.

Buddhadasa : Bhante, obviously a sense of history is important and as Chairmen we should all be aware that we are in a way making history today. How can we practically realise this in our Centres, in our lives. One example would be the setting up of archives. Have you any other ideas as to how we can establish our history?

S: Well anniversaries, the observance of anniversaries is a way of assimilating one's sense of history. I always remember this about the late Christmas Humphreys of lamented memory. He had quite a strong historical sense, as regards the Buddhist Society itself. He was very fond of anniversaries and commemorating things. If something had happened fifteen years before in the Society, even something relatively insignificant, he would like to commemorate it. He had a very strong sense of history, so there are such things as his deeply prizing the armchair in which Sir

Edwin Arnold wrote *The Light of Asia*, and all that sort of thing. There used to be a joke in the Buddhist Society when I was there that one day, Mrs. Humphreys' floppy velvet hat would go into the Buddhist Society's archives. (laughter) She was famous for this floppy velvet hat that was in fashion in the twenties in artistic circles.
But yes I remembered this and noted this about him that he had this very strong sense of history. I think that yes, that is a good thing, because then one has also a sense of growth and development or the contrary. In a way one has a standard to measure oneself against. So the keeping of archives, anniversaries, of course the writing of history itself, the writing of historical accounts. This is why Christmas Humphreys was fond of bringing out these little booklets; *Forty Years of Buddhism in England, Sixty Years of Buddhism in England*. The principles were right even though perhaps the Buddhist Society, not to mention Mr. Humphreys himself, did figure a little bit more prominently than was really objectively justifiable. But the principle was quite sound, one must admit that. So perhaps we could think in terms one day of writing the history of the FWBO, The First Hundred Years, it would be really very very interesting.

Vessantara : Photographs?

S: I think it wouldn't be easy because so much has happened on so many different levels. Even to write the history of the FWBO as it has so far existed would already I think be quite a tremendous task. I think if you were to do it properly it would be quite a thick volume, perhaps even several thick volumes, just to write the history. I reckoned while I was writing my memoirs just recently, that, what was it, it wasn't a page a week. I worked out how much space was devoted to each..... yes I have written say two hundred and fifty pages covering a period of two and a half years. So how many pages per week is that, can you calculate it please?

Suvajra : Two and a half pages.

S: Two and a half pages a week, just of my individual life and activities practically. So if one was writing about the FWBO over a twenty year period involving some hundreds of people, some no doubt more prominent than others, and the activities of many, many Centres, communities, co-ops, in several countries; if one were to do it in depth, explaining and discussing the principles involved, well you would have several thick volumes on your hands probably.
There would be several crates full of archival material, research material, that perhaps some American university might pay millions for! So yes, the writing of history. Also of course listening to the fathers of the Order, and listening to them reminiscing about the early days of the Movement. (laughter) Writing perhaps your own memoirs as a modest contribution to this history, just making quite sure that the little part that you played is not forgotten or overlooked.

Nagabodhi : Bhante, do you think that it is important that Chairmen do try and keep diaries, daily diaries, because I think when they're involved in maybe quite petty day to day procedures in their co-ops or communities or wherever, they don't realise that in a way they are forging a whole new way of life through these small incidents which we tend to take for granted, but which if you look at them from a broader perspective, they are quite revolutionary.

S: I would like to think that there were two or three regular Pepys amongst us writing it all down every evening. It could produce some really

fascinating documents.

Devamitra : A question from Padmavajra on the exhortation to the first sixty arahants.

Padmavajra : Carrithers translates one of the lines in the Buddha's exhortation to the first sixty arahants as: "The absolutely perfect and completely pure life of celibate renunciation".

S: Yes I noticed that, it's a dreadful translation wasn't it?

Padmavajra : Yes well I wanted you to .... (laughter). But basically he says that that's the foundation of the bedrock of the division between monk and lay, would you agree with that?

S: Well if one speaks of celibacy as the distinguishing factor traditionally between monk and lay, then I think that is absolutely correct, perhaps it is the most important distinction, at least external distinction. But Brahmacarya means something much more than celibacy, it includes it or eventually includes it, but it goes far beyond simply strict celibacy. I think I have gone into this on various occasions haven't I? It is the Brahmacarya, the Brahma life, the life which is devoted to, or lived from, higher and higher states of consciousness. It's living more and more in the Rupa and Arupa Lokas rather than in the Karma Loka.

But yes, by implication it does as I have said at least eventually include celibacy, but it can by no means be identified with celibacy. It is something much more than that. You might even say that if you understand Brahmacarya merely as celibacy this is what distinguishes monk from layman. But if you understand Brahmacarya in the broader sense, in the original sense, well that is a common factor between the monk and the layman because Brahmacarya in that sense represents your basic commitment, it is an expression of your basic commitment. Whereas if you speak of it in terms of celibacy, that is associated more with lifestyle. So perhaps here this translation exemplifies again the subtle modulation of commitment into lifestyle, Brahmacarya is interpreted in terms of lifestyle instead of in terms of commitment. Because one could say that even technically you can be following the life of Brahmacarya and can be a Brahmacari and be celibate, and still live at home and be technically an Upasaka and not a Bhikkhu.

Dharmapriya : You said that Brahmacarya includes celibacy, and then you followed by saying that it eventually includes celibacy.

S: Yes in the sense that you can make some progress towards higher mental states and therefore be practising Brahmacarya without necessarily at that point, being strictly celibate. But it would be expected that as you progressed more and more towards higher states of consciousness, you would tend to be more and more celibate and eventually be completely celibate. As I think that I mentioned some time ago, one can't really divide people into celibate and non-celibate, as into sheep and goats, without having to decide which is which. (Quiet Laughter)

Dharmapriya : Does this mean then Bhante that perhaps a good translation, perhaps a bit free, of Brahmacarya would be simply the 'spiritual life'?

S: Well this is how I usually translate it now, yes.

Dharmapriya : And Brahmacarya which is usually, or often translated when one becomes a sub-Brahmacari, as fellow ascetic.

S: Co-celibate, well it doesn't convey the flavour of it at all! It's your friend in the spiritual life, your fellow in the spiritual life, your permanent companion in the spiritual life. Permanent in the sense that you are actually living together with him in the same spiritual community. He is not your co-celibate! Who wants to be a co-celibate!? (Laughter) It's not a very inspiring idea at all! (laughter) It's enough to put anybody off celibacy, just when you are beginning to get them interested in it.

Padmavajra : This is a slightly different point but in that exhortation to the first sixty disciples, the word 'anukampati' is mentioned, that is the word that is usually translated as compassion. I was reading in one of Mrs. Rhys-Davids books the other day, that she thought that this was the crown in the jewel. The crown .....

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....the crown of the teaching - the mandate I think she called it - and she said that it was a wholly Buddhist invention, or a wholly Buddhist discovery much more than 'maitri' or 'karuna'. Would you like to comment on that?

S: Well in some ways it does seem quite remarkable that the bhikkhus, if they were bhikkhus in the later sense, were to go forth out of compassion - Anukampa. Anukampa is sort of trembling or vibrating with. It's a sort of empathy, a fellow feeling, and it is usually understood as what we call compassion. So if one thinks of those first disciples as following the Arahant path in the later Hinayana sense, it makes complete nonsense of Arahantship as generally understood by the Hinayana, for the Buddha to address those disciples of his and tell them to go forth out of compassion. It sets forth compassion as the motive of their activity, which is a typically Mahayana sort of attitude or virtue. So one really sees how little the Hinayana, or what came to be regarded as the Hinayana ideal, how little that was present at the very beginning. It's as though as soon as the Buddha's disciples became enlightened, they were expected as a natural expression of that enlightenment, to act out of compassion for other living beings.

So it wasn't as though the Buddha had compassion and they did not. He out of compassion urged them to go forth out of compassion. Just as he taught out of compassion at Brahmasahampati's request, so they taught out of compassion at his request. Again it's not as though they were devoid of compassion and were simply going forth at the Buddha's request, or developing compassion because he asked them to, or said they ought to, but it was clearly the natural expression of the spiritual stage which they had attained.

So one sees right at the very beginning the so called Arahant following the Mahayana, in a sense, Bodhisattva Ideal. So there is I think something new in Indian spiritual life, I think Mrs. Rhys Davids is probably quite correct. And he says: Go forth (sukkhaya vitay) for the happiness and welfare of many people. I think I mentioned before and I'm not going to expand on it, that in what seems to be early Buddhist

Texts, you sometimes get Brahmacarya used and sometimes Dharmachari used. You get Dharmachakra used, you get Brahmachakra, Dharmayana and Brahmayana, the Dharma and the Brahma seem to be practically interchangeable. So the Brahmacharya is also the Dharmacharya. In the case of Dharmachari there hasn't developed the narrower connotation that Brahmachari has over the ages. It hasn't been narrowed down in quite the same way. So you could say that you were a Brahmachari in the sense of being a Dharmachari, but if you were to say this to a Buddhist or even to a Hindu, they would definitely misunderstand you and think that you were meaning to say simply that you were celibate.

Devamitra : A question on a similar theme from Tejananda concerning the goal in a monk's life.

Tejananda : This is page 281, from the beginning of the first paragraph on page 281. "In this view of course, the monk's way of life is more than merely a means to an end: it is very nearly the end in itself. And indeed one never gets the idea from the canon and commentaries that a monk who attains release might then hang up his robes and do something else: the goal is wholly within the ambit of the monk's life". So would you agree with this statement, especially with the final clause?

S: Well yes and no. First of all about the end being indistinguishable from the means, the goal being indistinguishable from the path. This is certainly true in a sense, in a sense that in a sense there is no goal as distinct from the path. But clearly of course means can become an end in itself in a negative sort of way, it can represent a sort of cul-de-sac. Presumably when you don't understand that paradoxically the means is a means to an end, but it is not an end which can really be regarded as something totally separate from the means, rather does it represent a sort of intensification of the means, the means carried to the furthest possible extent.

As for whether the goal of the spiritual life is to be found in the monastic life, well that depends entirely on how you understand the monastic life. If you take it as the spiritual life par excellence, well yes fair enough, but if you identify it with shaving your head, wearing particular robes, then clearly you have mixed up lifestyle with commitment. You have confused the externals of the spiritual life with the essentials. I think in principle, and understanding Anandasiri's language sympathetically, I think probably he is right.

Devamitra : A question from Dharmapriya concerning monks and work.

Dharmapriya : Bhante you have often mentioned in various forms that physical work is alien to the Theravada bhikkhu tradition. In this book there is no sign that bhikkhus ever indulge in physical labour except for sweeping around hermitages, until we reach page 286 where we discover Anandasiri's monk pupils doing some building work.

S: That is quite interesting yes.

Dharmapriya : Do you think that this activity is a positive sign in Sinhalese life?

S: I would say definitely yes. I must say, I've said it more than once before, that the fact that the monks don't work in Theravada Buddhism,

don't engage in physical labour, is not altogether their fault. To some extent they are restricted by the Vinaya. The Vinaya forbids the fully ordained monk from digging the soil. But lay people don't like to see monks working or doing things for themselves as it were, because if a lay person does something for a monk, he gains merit.

So one might even say that lay people regard monks who do things for themselves as robbing the lay people of the merit which is rightfully theirs. So lay people don't like to see monks doing things for themselves, especially practical things, things with their hands. If they see a monk about to do something, they will rush up and prevent him and forcibly take over, I have seen this myself. I know quite a few of the Sinhalese monks that I've known have been very active, quite vigorous people who have liked to do things, but have not being allowed to, so they cannot be entirely blamed for this. But there are certain things, certain duties, that bhikkhus are allowed to do because they are mentioned in the Vinaya, especially the younger monks, the novices, especially to sweep the Vihara courtyard, to sweep up the dead leaves. This is done I believe in Sri Lanka morning and evening, so that in the courtyard you will never see fallen leaves. Of course don't forget that the Viharas will be surrounded by trees even when they are not actually situated in the forest, but you never see fallen leaves around the temple or the stupa. Everything is always very tidy. So the monks are by tradition permitted to do that sort of thing, and the laymen do allow them to do it, but hardly anything more than that, certainly not usually building work. So yes this is quite an exception.

Though I believe that in the Pali Canon or perhaps it is in the commentary, Sariputta and Moggallana are represented as supervising building operations during the Buddha's lifetime. Moggallana supervised the workmen and Sariputta paid them at the end of the day. Yes I don't remember where, but that incident is recorded. But it was not very usual, not very customary.

Dharmapriya : A supplementary question. In brackets I found a very interesting point there, the anthropologist speaking very much for himself says that during this building work there was a slight holiday atmosphere, which he attributes to his presence, and speaks disapprovingly of a certain amount of very nearly frivolous conversation, or perhaps tongue in cheek. Do you believe this is what you have often referred to as mistaking merriness for mindfulness, or actually just positive emotion and friendliness?

S: It is very difficult to say but I have been told by people accustomed to doing building work, that when you are engaged in that sort of work, your emotional state is not of the most refined. It could be that when the monks were engaged in that sort of activity, there was a sort of relaxation of their mindfulness. Perhaps they were, for the period of that work, in a slightly courser mental state which led to their laughing and joking and so on in a way that they wouldn't have done on other occasions. I put that just as a possibility. But certainly the visiting anthropologist noticed the difference.

Padmaraja : Bhante, do you have that same problem of monks not being able to work in non Theravadin countries as well?

S: You certainly don't in Tibet, you certainly don't in Zen monasteries, though I think one could say that especially in Tibet that the lower ranking monks, so to speak, do the work and the higher ranking monks don't, they are usually engaged in study and teaching and meditation, administration. But in all Tibetan monasteries the monks have an awful lot of work to do, because there was the drawing of water, sometimes the carrying of pails of water up flights of hundreds of stairs, there was no water laid on. There was chopping wood, there was keeping the

monastery fires alight, there was making the tea, there was cooking the rice and so on and so forth. There was carpentry work, there was sewing, there was tailoring work to be done, and they did it all themselves. So there was nothing like the embargo on manual work in Tibetan monasteries that there was in those of the Theravada. Don't forget the Theravada went to the sunny South, whereas the Mahayana and the Vajrayana went to the bleak north. So the situation was rather different. Yes and the Zen monks in China often did work. It is well known that the principle was propounded that a day of no working was a day of no eating. The Japanese inherited that tradition to some extent.

Padmaraja : What effect Bhante would you say that has on the minds of the monks? Would you say that it led to a less complacent, more independent state of mind, having to fend for oneself so to speak?

S: Tibetan monks I have noticed are very resourceful. I think probably at least some of the Theravada bhikkhus would be less resourceful but I don't want to overgeneralise, because I can remember Sinhalese and Burmese and Thai bhikkhus I met were very practical, capable people. I think if the need had arisen, some of them could just have buckled to and done whatever was necessary. But they were quite often usually restrained, both by their understanding of the Vinaya and by the attitude of the lay people. In Tibet lay people did not have the same attitude towards monks as lay people had in Sri Lanka say, or Burma or Thailand. They respect them but not in a very excessive way, the respect of Tibetans is usually concentrated, one might say, on the incarnate Lamas. I would say that in the case of young men, especially perhaps young women too, a certain amount of physical work, physical activity, is necessary. I'm referring to those who are seeking to lead a spiritual life.

Padmaraja : If I could just ask you a personal question. Could you speak about your own experience of having to fend for yourself, to work for your self?

S: I have had to fend for myself in a way but not to the extent of doing physical work. In fact I could say that I have probably done less physical work in my life than almost anybody I know. But that was mainly for accidental reasons, that is to say because I was supposedly a sufferer from heart disease in my childhood and I was confined to bed. Even when I got up after so many years I wasn't allowed to do so many things. Even in the army I had very little experience of physical work, because I went into a signals unit and the emphasis was on technical training, not on the usual army nonsense. Sorry Buddhadasa (laughter)

Buddhadasa: Very well Bhante, I'll let you off this time! (Laughter)

S: I was sometimes on fatigues and general fatigues, general duties they called them. But very quickly the technical people were taken off them, it was quite rightly considered a waste of our valuable time! (laughter)

S: So even in the army, I had hardly any experience of physical work at all. I never cooked in the army, I don't even remember making tea, I was never on cook house duties at all, ever. So where and when it came to my life in India, well yes I walked from place to place, I begged, but that isn't physical work in the same sense. I never dug, I never built. I supervised digging and building and I have sometimes gone so far as to indulge in a little gentle weeding in the garden. But I can't remember engaging in any physical activity, any physical work to a much greater extent than that. I mowed my mother's lawn once (laughter) So I would say that in that respect, my own life has been extremely unbalanced, I

do not hold it up as a model at all. I must make it clear that I don't regard my own life in all respects as a model to be imitated or emulated by any means.

In this particular respect I must confess I have been grossly deficient and I hope that all Order Members will do considerably better than I was able to do, at least in this respect, but probably in many others. So I don't hold myself up as a model at all!

Padmaraja : I was thinking more in terms of rather than physical work Bhante, but you did support yourself in Kalimpong?

S: Yes I was resourceful, I was independent, there is no doubt about that. I fell on my feet wherever I landed. When I came back to England, I was told that I wouldn't be welcomed, wouldn't be supported, I came back without any money at all and no guarantee of support. I had no money whatever. But then I didn't give it a thought, I was quite confident that I'd manage. In India I always managed. Much of the time in India I had to gain support myself and a number of other people through my writings and taking English classes and so on. I didn't mind at all, it was all in a days work, I was quite happy to do it. I didn't consider myself hard done by because I had no wealthy supporters, and I had sometimes to earn money myself even as a monk. But I earned it just in these two ways, by writing articles and book reviews for a few magazines that did pay, and teaching English to the Tibetans. I taught a number of people free, but it was usually the Tibetans who were sufficiently well off to be able to pay. And after of course some years I became sufficiently well known and those people were ready to help and support me.

I think all the time that I was in India I was never entirely free from some responsibility for my own support, and support of the Vihara and the people who were staying there, but it didn't bother me, I was able to take it in my stride.

Devamitra : A question from Susiddhi on Anatta.

Susiddhi : Bhante what do you think of the translation of Anatta as: Absence of a compellingly real essence?

S: It's not bad. I wonder what the author means by 'compellingly real'? I suppose he means an essence, the existence of which one feels compelled, that is to say psychologically compelled, on account of ones conditioning, to acknowledge. I assume he means something like that. But I think in a way it is too abstract, I think it's a bit one sided. You need to do justice to the fact that yes, you do experience yourself as having a self or being a self, you can't deny that. But your experience is not ultimate in the sense that that self is something that is changing all the time. To the extent that you hang onto it, you cling to it as though it is something that doesn't change, well to that extent you are deluded. I think any definition, any translation of this term Anatta, has to do justice to those two aspects. It is something that you experience as real but it is not ultimately real. It is something that you experience or would like to experience as permanent but it isn't permanent, it's impermanent, it is changing all the time. But at the same time the fact that it is changing all the time is a great blessing, because how terrible it would be actually to be stuck with what you are just now. The fact that your self is a changing self means that there is a possibility of life, growth, development and eventually deliverance even. So really if you render Annata, you should try to convey, try to communicate. all of that, so probably you need to paraphrase the term. The translation can be no more than a makeshift.

If you are speaking to beginners, to new people, it is probably better to eschew this term or any attempt at literal translation altogether. Speak in terms of growth and development, this is what Anatta is really all about, the possibility at least of growth and development.

Devamitra : A question now from Tejananda concerning Western Buddhism affecting Eastern Buddhism.

Tejananda : This is in fact on a passage which you have already commented upon, but in a slightly different respect, page 272. Anandasiri may have got his radical sense of history straight back to the roots which led him to speak of wanting to attain Buddhahood rather than Arahantship, indirectly from Western scholarship which had been concerned in this period with discovering an original Buddhism. To what extent do you think that Western Buddhism, both that of a scholastic and that of a more practice orientated nature, has affected traditional or orthodox 'Eastern', inverted commas, Buddhism. Can you think of any significant instances of this kind of influence?

S: I think it has probably affected it very little. I think Anandasiri could just as easily have been influenced by the Jataka stories which are a very well known and popular part of Buddhism in Sri Lanka as in other Buddhist countries. I don't see that one needs to posit an indirect influence of Western scholarship. It may have been there, but in the absence of any direct evidence I don't think one needs posit that influence at all. Sinhalese Buddhists are very, very familiar with the Jataka stories, but they haven't come into this book very much, but it is quite possible that Anandasiri was not only familiar with them - and he must have been familiar with them - but that he took them very seriously in this respect. We do find a reference to them earlier on in the biography of, who was it, the man who ordained himself?

Several voices : Subodhananda.

S: Yes, Subodhananda, and he found his canonical justification or semi-canonical justification at least, in a Jataka story. In the fact that Sumedha, after receiving his prediction from Dipankara Buddha, did not join Dipankara's Sangha, but even though that Sangha was in existence, became a Tapassi, an ascetic by himself. So clearly the Forest Monk circle was not only familiar with the Jataka stories but prepared to use them to substantiate and justify their own position on occasion. So it could be that Anandasiri was inspired by the Jatakas, all of which represent the Bodhisattva as aiming at Sammasambuddhahood, Samyaksambuddhahood. But your further question was?

Tejananda : Could you think of any significant instances of this kind of influence?

S: I can't think of anything significant, I do know though, that for instance there were some Western Buddhists who have been very much influenced say by Theravada Buddhism of the rather rationalistic variety, then they write a book and that book is read by Western educated Buddhists in a Buddhist country and they are influenced by that. But I am thinking of for instance of Paul (Dalker's?) Buddhist essays, I know that has influenced some of the Amarapura bhikkhus in Colombo. I remember that Bhikkhu Soma thought very highly of that. But then Bhikkhu Soma himself though Sinhalese, was a Sinhalese of Burgher origin, do you know who the Burghers are? The Burghers are the descendants of unions between Dutch and Sinhalese, between Dutch men and Sinhalese women. They form almost a separate part of the community in Sri Lanka. So Bhikkhu Sona, like Bhikkhu K who were both famous Amarapura Nikaya bhikkhus, they were of that origin

and were brought up as Roman Catholics, and were very much attracted by the more rationalistic, puritanical side of Theravada Buddhism. They and their friends were influenced very much by (Dalker's) writings, especially his Buddhist essays, and he presents a very bleak sort of impression of Theravada Buddhism. That appealed to them, and their writings reflect his influence, you see what I mean? So you get him being influenced by Pali texts or a selection of them, writing his book under the influence of that selection. Then, western educated Buddhists in Sri Lanka of Roman Catholic origin are influenced by that, and they in turn produce their own literature which reflects particular book by Paul (Dalker). So that is the only kind of influence I can think of. I think broadly speaking there has probably been very little influence. Sri Lanka especially has produced a number of Western trained scholars. Thailand and Burma I think have hardly begun to do this. There have been quite a lot of Western educated Sinhalese laymen and monks, writing in a scholarly way on different aspects of Buddhism, beginning with Dr. (Malarasekara). There are some good and quite well known ones now. So they are influenced by Western modes of scholarship and Western scholarly attitudes, and with those scholarly attitudes, approach Buddhism with more or less sympathy for Buddhism as a spiritual tradition. But how much influence their writings, which are very often in English of course, have on ordinary Sinhalese Buddhists in their own country is quite another matter, probably very little.

Tejananda : What about other areas, say Tibetan. For instance, would Lama Govinda's writings have been of interest to Tibetan born Lamas?

S: No I don't know of any Tibetan born Lama even though if knowing English, having ever read his writings! I think they would find them quite difficult to understand.

Nagabodhi : What about your *Survey*, because that has been available in India for a long time. It must have travelled around the East quite a bit. Surely that could have made an impression.

S: My approach one must remember is very traditional, so it might have in some respects have confirmed them in their traditional approach to Buddhism in the broader sense if they had happened to read it. I know it was read and appreciated by number of more liberal minded Theravada bhikkhus because they spoke to me about it. I believe Trungpa had read it, because he recommends it to his disciples. But I doubt whether many Eastern Buddhists would have read it, mainly those with perhaps Western education, who don't find purely traditional expositions very convincing. I know some people in South East Asia have read it, some people in Malaysia have read it. Some in Thailand have read it. I don't think it has had a tremendous impact though, perhaps by its very nature it appeals to a limited circle of readers. Certainly it wouldn't appeal to the ordinary devout practising Buddhists.

Of course where my writings have had the greatest impact in the East is among our own friends and followers in India. Some of the lectures I have given there, which have been brought out in booklet form have been quite influential, I'm thinking especially of "*Dr. Ambedkar's Dhamma Revolution*." The second edition was ten thousand copies, the first was five thousand. They sell very well, and they have weekend workshops and seminars just on this particular text.

Nagabodhi : There is now a booklet of the three talks you gave
at Ahili Ashram on the Threefold Way. I gave quite a few of those away as presents in Panchgani.

S: Ah. Was that the first series or the second series?

Nagabodhi : The series that I was with you for was the second series.

S: Oh good!

Nagabodhi : People were so impressed by that, those that I gave them to. These were not TBSMG people at that time, at that point they had never read anything like it. They were so pleased!

S: Yes, so I think probably my writings, especially my simpler ones, have the strongest impact as regards the East, in India. But as I've been saying I think that Order Members and others must write more for Eastern Buddhist Journals, whether about the Dharma directly or about the FWBO.

Tejananda : Bhante, just a final question. Do you think it would be a case of Eastern Buddhism and Western Buddhism, and never the twain shall meet; or is there likely do you think to be a synthesis of some sort or influence going from West to East in the future?

S: It's very difficult to say. There is a difference between ourselves and at least some other Buddhist groups, because a number of Buddhist groups in the West represent simply a transplantation of Eastern Buddhism to the West. So they are not going to have any influence on their parent bodies in the East, except perhaps they may send back money to them, be a source of income to them, or a source of pride that they have got people following their form of Buddhism even in the West. So they are not going to have any real influence. As far as I can see the only Buddhist group that is likely to have any real influence is ourselves. That has already begun to happen in a small way, most of all of course in India and to a very much smaller extent here and there in places like Malaysia, even Sri Lanka, even Thailand where a very few people do know about us and do think very highly of us. Perhaps they will be more and more influenced by us.

Devamitra : A question now from Abhaya concerning the forest monks in Thailand.

Abhaya : Over the past twenty years, I have heard reports of forest monks in the north of Thailand, they would always be good reports. I wondered if you know anything about these monks, and how they compared with the forest monks of Sri Lanka?

S: I am not sure how they compare. I do know that there are forest monks. I think originally they tended to be hermits, perhaps they have always existed in Thailand. I believe in north Thailand there is a lot of dense jungle still, and I think originally right down to modern times you had the solitary hermits literally living in the forests. It was a recognised way of life. I think more recently perhaps during the last twenty years, there has been the tendency for forest hermitages to spring up, hermitages in the sense that a number of these ascetic monks would be living together and perhaps practising meditation and perhaps in some cases eventually providing facilities, providing teaching for lay people. But what the proportion is of these ascetic monks or forest monks, that still actually lead solitary lives in the forest and how many, what proportion

have settled in these hermitages and are in contact with lay people, who are studying say meditation with them, I just don't know, I don't have any information. But there is a certain amount of activity of this sort going on.

I think that one of the differences is that in Thailand the Sangha is much more under governmental control than it is in Sri Lanka. It is controlled by the education ministry. So I think in many ways the bhikkhus don't have so much freedom of action and perhaps even movement as they have in Sri Lanka. But I don't really know very much. I have got a biography of one particular forest monk who became quite famous, it is quite an interesting biography translated from the Thai. Many of his experiences seem much closer to Mahayana than Theravada, strange to say, but perhaps not strange to say. He was certainly very highly regarded in his time. He is dead now but he lived in this century and quite extraordinary tales are told about him according to this particular biography. He does seem to have been a quite remarkable man. So the tradition is still alive I think in Thailand and almost certainly in Burma too. But exactly how the life of a forest monk in Thailand or Burma compares with the life of a forest monk in Sri Lanka, and whether they have undergone, or any of them have undergone the sort of experiences that the monks that we have been reading about underwent, I really don't know. We don't have a book like that of Carrithers for them as far as I know.

Subhuti : You know that Sumedha considers himself to be a forest monk and his teacher is Achung Cha who is again supposed to be a forest monk. Do you know anything about him and his ..... ?

S: Well again it seems perhaps that tradition is more of those forest monks who set up hermitages in forests, and centres and are now in association with lay people. But I couldn't say that I would regard Sumedha now as a forest monk, he might be an honourary forest monk, but not really more than that. In a sense all bhikkhus are forest monks, in that sort of way they are all honourary dwellers in the forest. But at present he is not leading that sort of life very obviously, maybe doing other good things but certainly not that. He is no more a forest monk than I am a begging monk. You see I was a begging monk once upon a time, yes I can say that, but I am not following that way of life now. So it would be quite incorrect for me to describe myself as a begging monk, it would be quite false. So I think in the same way he should not describe himself as a forest monk if in fact that is what he says he is.

Padmaraja : Is the forest monk tradition reflected in the regime at Chithurst though Bhante, do you know?

S: I don't think that we can have forest monks in the traditional sense in Great Britain at all because we don't have any forests! I don't want to be pedantic but I think we need to get away to some extent. I mean we do get away to some extent here, but it is nothing like really living in the forest. We mustn't deceive ourselves I think. Chithurst after all is, how far from the nearest railway station? - it is very, very near. Dozens of people arrive in motor cars every weekend! So one can't really seriously regard that as a forest hermitage, or the monks as leading lives of forest monks, even though they may be doing their best under the circumstances.

Abhaya : I heard in a round about way when you first decided to study this book with us, it was reported that you had said one reason why you were interested in doing it was that you were of the opinion or you got the impression that some of the monks described in the books had achieved quite a high level of spiritual development, probably were stream entrants. Is this a rumour?

S: Oh that is a rumour! I never said anything like that. I did give one or two reasons why I thought this would be a good book to study. Mainly because I saw some quite single minded and even quite noble people, struggling to find their way, even to break their way through to a more genuine and better form of Buddhism. Do you see what I mean? And having to struggle with the wrong understanding of Buddhism and the monastic life in their environment. So I saw them as providing a very sort of rough parallel to some of the things that we've had to do in the FWBO. I thought that the one might throw some light on the other. I certainly regarded some of them as definitely individuals, but what degree of spiritual attainment they had achieved I would not like to say. I think perhaps Carrithers wasn't in a position to judge. He doesn't even try to judge, so he provides us in a sense with nothing to go by. Some of them could have been people of quite high spiritual development or not. It is difficult to say, we have to keep an open mind about that. But at least some of them were well, not rugged individualists, but rugged individuals, some of them.

[End of Tape 25 Tape 26]

I think that we have seen that there are certain parallels roughly speaking, at least for instance things like common principles are involved, as between what they were trying to do and what we are trying to do. One of the things that really appalled me when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, was the extent to which already I felt Buddhism had already become corrupted in Britain. That was really astonishing. The incident that sparked it off, and I'm afraid I have mentioned this before but some of you may not have heard it, was that I let my hair grow just a little tiny bit. I didn't let it grow beyond the regulation length but formerly I was completely smooth shaven as regards the head, and I let it grow, maybe it was not even half an inch which is certainly permitted. And this seriously upset some people who were coming to the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, it seriously upset and disturbed them. Then I thought to myself and these were the very words that passed through my mind: "Buddhism in Britain is already on the wrong track!" It really was astonishing to me. So it needed to be drastically reformed before it had really started almost. This is one of the signs, I think it was in my second year.

Suvajra : These were English people?

S: English people yes. English people!

Devamitra : The last question. It comes from Tejananda and in a way overlaps with your answer to the previous question.

Tejananda : Well this is in fact to ask you to be a little bit more specific on the comments you have just made, because my question is: Would you like to make any concluding, critical remarks on Michael Carrithers book. Perhaps give us something of an overview on it which you have done to some extent, and also I might say here that I have agreed to write a review of this for the Newsletter, so I wanted some ideas! (laughter)

S: I'd be more interested in hearing your ideas (laughter)

Tejananda : Thank you!

S: Well I find it quite difficult just to as it were, verbally off the cuff. I think it is pretty evident what we all think, what we all feel about the book. I certainly think it's a good book, as books on Buddhism go, written by someone who presumably isn't a Buddhist. I certainly found it myself both in the course of the last couple of weeks and when I recently read it, very interesting with all kinds of implications especially for us. He seems quite an intelligent person, he writes quite well. One of my little criticisms is this dragging in of bits of sociology and psychology which he just didn't need to do. Today we have had James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, I think that just wasn't necessary. I think for an academic and for a sociologist, he is quite sensitive to what these people were trying to do, sensitive to the whole climate as it were of Sinhalese Buddhism. He seemed to have definite human sympathy for these monks as they struggled to make sense of their lives and break through the very moribund Buddhism in which they found themselves involved. He seems to treat them very sympathetically in a quite illuminating way. Sometimes one could wish he went a little deeper, over some of the questions raised by their lives and what they were trying to do. But perhaps one couldn't expect that of someone who is not a Buddhist, perhaps it is surprising that he has done as much and as well as he has. So on the whole I think I appreciate the book and find it quite useful.

Tejananda : Would you consider that any particularly important lines, avenues of thought or discussion which you didn't perhaps necessarily expect, came out of the seminar?

S: I can't think of any off hand. Perhaps you could even ask me which specifically these issues would be as I can't think of anything off hand. Perhaps I hadn't expected that there would be so many questions about meditation. I think I tend to assume that because we have gone over the ground of meditation so often, that there are perhaps no more questions left and it's all clear. I was a little surprised that there were so many questions about meditation.

Tejananda : Your point about the internal vocalising in visualisation and so on seemed to be a new point.

S: Ah that's true, I don't think I had brought that out in quite that way before, no definitely not.

Devaraja : I just wanted to comment that I thought some of his comments on metta seemed very good indeed, particularly in the last chapter. It made me wonder why he hadn't actually been doing meditation practice.

S: Could be, it's difficult to say. I didn't get that impression I must say, from the book, but nonetheless, certainly a good understanding of that aspect of things.

Dharmapriya : Is it time for questions which in a sense are not related to the last question? (Laughter) One which have just come up in the course of the questions and answers tonight?

S: All right.

Dharmapriya: In a sense it's linked to the talk of Western Buddhism and the FWBO influencing Eastern Buddhists and the possible, I'm not sure how to describe it - assault on Sri Lanka - that sounds a bit too violent, but it made me think simply of China and Hong Kong in a sense the biggest area of all. Until 1998 it is as though the door is open to Hong Kong, after that it's closed. Once it is closed, if the FWBO is present there it's going to be present in all of China. Have you had any thoughts on this?

S: We discussed this, when was it, I had talked about it quite recently, when was it?

Subhuti : You were talking about it with Baladitya I think.

S: Ah yes. I certainly take that point, and perhaps we should think in terms of getting into Hong Kong in good time, possibly from Malaysia. But another point indirectly related, I read recently that a third of the world's population speaks Spanish. So clearly we should get into the Spanish speaking world as soon as possible, possibly from Venezuela via Spain. (Laughter) I said Venezuela because that's where Manjunatha comes from. I believe he has started brushing up his Spanish which he is a bit out of contact with.

Devamitra : Bhante, were there any other points from this particular chapter that we have not raised which you wish to comment on?

S: I think there might be one or two. Yes, some of the points I was going to raise have been dealt with already, about the bricklayer monk. Yes this is at the end of the first paragraph on page 289, Carrithers says :"As an emotional referent it (metta and so on) represents a deep aspiration to the well being and harmony of individuals: the notion of a loving community of believers, here or in the hereafter, is no part of it". I would rather question that because there is the representation which he refers to of the three monks living in the forest and having as it were, one mind or one heart between them. So I wouldn't say that the notion of a loving community of believers here or in the hereafter is no part of it. But the whole notion of the Aryasangha! I think he rather slips up there. (Pause)

That was all.

So do people feel after living with this text as it were for nearly two weeks, that their outlook has been broadened or deepened in any way, or any access of information? Would anyone like to just comment on what they feel very broadly they have learned from this text and from going through it together?

Abhaya : I think what I have gained Bhante, is a deeper understanding of the general principles. You've gone into things again a little bit more deeply, which you have gone into on other occasions.

S: I think this is one of the advantages of taking roughly parallel cases, because inasmuch as there are definite differences, sometimes very big differences, you have to dig rather deeply to uncover the principles which underly your respective efforts at say reform.

Suvajra : I think by reading the struggles that many of these bhikkhus have had, has given me a far greater impression of what the state of

Eastern Buddhism has been like.

S: Yes indeed! I must say I was even more shocked going through the book and discussing it with all of you than I was when I originally read it, even though I do know to a great extent what goes on there. I didn't fully appreciate the extent to which the Sangha is riddled with caste. I knew in a general way, that yes, in the case of the Siyama nikaya they only wanted but I had not realised the extent to which caste had pervaded almost all of the Sangha. Also I don't think I had realised the extent to which the village monks had virtually dropped all serious consideration of the Vinaya, except for the observance that was expected of them by popular belief and custom. I don't think I had realised exactly how dependent the Siyama nikaya bhikkhus were, the ordinary ones, on the village and to what extent they belonged to that. In India I met relatively respectable representatives of that particular group, that particular nikaya.

Suvajra : I think also what I had gained from it is the breaking up of this seeming monolith of the Eastern Sangha. I had not realised this before.

S: Yes right, indeed. That does suggest that the Western Buddhist Order has a chance as it were. I must say I was quite encouraged though to think that even in Sri Lanka, even in the midst of that corruption there were individuals who struggled against it. This is very encouraging to see the resourcefulness of human nature, that individuals can arise anywhere under even quite unfavourable circumstances. One couldn't help feeling that perhaps the FWBO would meet with a welcome in some Buddhist circles at least in Sri Lanka and that we would be able to gain a foothold. I think after going through this book in this way, I feel very optimistic about our being able to do something there, but there is only one shadow over that, represented by the fact that just a couple of days ago at the Order Office, we got a circular letter written by a Buddhist in Holland drawing attention to what was happening in Sri Lanka, and what the Buddhist majority was doing to the Tamil minority and had been doing for a long time, he had a lot of facts and figures. He was suggesting that it was time that Buddhists raised their voices in protest, and that they did not appear to condone that sort of behaviour in the name of Buddhism. That is quite a dark shadow across the whole scene. We will have to respond to that in some way, Subhuti and I will be drafting something.

Dharmapriya : Would it be possible at all to get a copy of that because in fact it has already cropped up in South Western Germany, one of our Mitras has already encountered some of this.

S: Yes we could send a copy of that letter or that communication and our response to it to all Centres for their information. We may write something in the magazine. This is what will be one of the functions of the magazine. Make it clear with out going into too much detail just where we stand, that we as Buddhists dissociate ourselves from that sort of behaviour. I suggest in this connection we read or re-read my review of Walpola Rahula's - *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*; what I have to say there is very pertinent in view of later developments. Read some of my old editorials in the Maha Bodhi Journal.

Dharmapriya : I don't know if you realise but that when Vijaya was flying to Ceylon was sitting and talking to some of the Bandaranayakas and seems to have got a picture of a kind of international Tamil terrorist plot, and that there is a reasonableness in the response of the Buddhists.

S: I didn't know that. But even if that is true, what has driven the Tamils into terrorism? There was nothing of this sort originally. This is what I call in my review, "Religio- Nationalism."

Nagabodhi : In some way I feel from the week, that I have received something more of an almost historical sense on our Movement, in that to some extent some of these experiments represent stages that we could go through or side shows that our Movement could go through. I feel we take quite a lot for granted.

S: Well Himi for instance was almost a hippy Buddhist, and he didn't last long did he?

Nagabodhi : Yes I was particularly struck yesterday when you were talking about the Chairmen but in a way you could have been talking about this generation, we can make or break the Movement. Reading this has given this picture of the rise and fall of even worthy experiments. So we can't be complacent at all.

S: Yes, one can to some extent see our own Movement in context and how it compares with, very broadly very roughly, parallel Movements in Sri Lanka. In a sense we are preoccupied with common problems at least to some extent, common issues even though the circumstances are vastly different. On the whole, though the responses of these particular monks to their particular spiritual Buddhistic situation were not always successful, at least they were in principle quite creative.

Subhuti : As presented by Carrithers they also seem to have been cumulative, unless that's the accident of his own presentation but they seem to have gradually augmented each other.

S: Though it does seem that there are now in Sri Lanka only two noteworthy centres of the Forest Monks. The Movement does seem to have dwindled on the whole over perhaps the last fifteen years.

Padmaraja : And however creative their approach is, I find still quite limited. I mean I could not imagine them surviving under any other circumstances. And then comparing the Forest Monk, their tradition say with our own tradition - the FWBO - what we have got just seems so much greater. I can imagine what we've got surviving under any circumstances, being able to adapt to almost any situation and expanding indefinitely.

S: Yes, our base is much broader.

Padmaraja : Yes it is, it seems to be almost a possibility for infinite expansion with what we've got, whereas that situation, however good, is very limited. Even Jinavamsa has settled for a hundred monks, it's very good but very limited. It's made me realise just what tremendous possibilities we have just in creative energy.

S: There is one interesting omission in a way from the book and from their lives, even necessarily so, I don't know whether you've noticed it,

there is an entire absence of women. There seems to have been nothing parallel for women, though I believe there is something now to at least a small extent. But you never hear of a single female Vipassani.

Padmaraja : In the end, I hope this doesn't sound too drastic or too black and white, but what the Forest Monk tradition seems to be concerned with ultimately is just the personal salvation of a handful of monks, because it's not just women but also the laity, they don't get much of a look in, there's not a lot of hope for them.

S: Well of course one finds that the laity don't want much of a look in, spiritually speaking. They want to earn merit and of course it was one of the characteristics of, well, not Anandasiri the one before that.

Several voices : Jinavamsa.

S: Jinavamsa, he tried to educate the laity and of course he tried to educate them with regard to the real needs of the monks and how they should behave with regard to the monks who wanted to get on with their spiritual practice and didn't want to have to perform all night 'Pirit' for the laity and so on and so forth. But there seems to have been no sense of continuity between the aspiration of people living as lay people and the aspiration of people living as monks.

The lay people could always become monks but there was no continuity between the aspiration of the layman as such and the aspiration of the bhikkhu as such. Whereas in our case we see a continuity of aspiration at all the different levels from Friend to Mitra to Order Member. But again that was no doubt a limitation of the situation. Also if you want to meditate full time, someone has got to support you.

So if you don't abandon that exclusively monastic model, you are dependent on the outside world, so in order to get the support they have got to believe in you to some extent. For you to get the support they have got to believe in you to some extent, but they have to get from you something that they want which doesn't necessarily have any close connection with what you are basically concerned about.

So traditionally the symbiosis has developed in this way; the monk devotes himself to his spiritual life, the layman has faith in him and believes it is good for the monk to do that, but he doesn't want it. But he also believes that by supporting the monk in his efforts, he, the layman, will gain merit which will rebound to his benefit in this life and in the next. So it is as though you can only have a monastic Sangha in this sense, by having a laity. So it is only possible for someone to follow the spiritual life in this sort of way if somebody else doesn't.

So we don't see things quite in that way. We are not fully successful yet because we are still to some extent via our friends who are on the 'dole', dependent on the State. But at least we are struggling with that particular issue, because we have our Co-ops and our other similar sources of income. So we are trying to be self-dependent. So we are seeing that you can only get over that hard and fast distinction between monk and layman, if you are prepared to be self-supporting economically. And if you do that in accordance with Buddhist principles, in accordance with Right Livelihood, well that means Co-ops or their equivalent. So I think we have in a way solved a problem which they haven't, but in a way

they weren't called upon to solve it because traditional Buddhism did permit them to be supported and therefore did provide a possibility of a viable way of life for them.

Supposing the laity all lost faith in Buddhism or lost faith in supporting monks, what then would they do? How would they then lead that kind of life? It would be impossible wouldn't it? So this is one of the reasons why I said we are more broadly based.

Kamalasila : I thought that one of the most obvious things that I got from the text anyway, was seeing how we could deepen from that broader base, especially in the area of monastic life.

S: Indeed yes, it seems that we can include a greater element of 'monastic life', single inverted commas, than we have done as yet. And more still, not only just remaining true to the general principles of the FWBO, but applying them in a more thorough going manner at least as regards some individuals. Also for us there's a possibility of shuttling back and forth between different lifestyles, as for instance between working in a Co-op or at a busy Centre, and somewhere like Vajraloka.

Any other comments or conclusions?

Dhammaloka : Yes, what I found very impressing was to see the sense of urgency with which some of these monks just 'went forth' and were prepared to question everything they did and really find out for themselves. This is very encouraging for me personally and for others as well.

Sona : One thing that struck me during this week was, the need to constantly go back to first principles, Abhaya mentioned this. And that if we have to resort to rules more and more, then there is a degeneration already that sets in. This seems to me to be the biggest threat to the expansion of the Movement, the success of the Movement. That to apply first principles one needs a degree of spiritual experience and without that it does seem as though more and more rules will creep in and a degeneration will take place.

S: Yes. If you have that then there is nothing else to go
by. If you can't fall back upon your own experience, your own insight even, then you are obliged to fall back on rules.

Something roughly connected with that occurred to me this morning when I was reading through this particular chapter, it must have grown out of something we had talked about earlier on. Sometimes people find it quite difficult to make up their minds, whether say a certain Mitra who has asked for ordination, is ready or not. So what does that really mean? That you are finding it difficult to see whether someone is committed. But I would say that at least in some cases that suggests that you are unable to see that the person is really committed, because you are not clear about your own commitment yourself. If you were really clear about your own commitment and felt it very, very strongly, you would recognise its presence or its absence in somebody else with very little difficulty, even on the basis of a very slight acquaintance with them, even though there might be cultural differences, psychological problems and so on. But if you were really, strongly committed yourself you could not but recognise the commitment of another person, or its absence. So it's because people don't always have that strong sense of commitment, that they ask such things as: "Well how can we recognise someone's readiness, will he be like this or will he be like that, or will he do this or will he do

that, or not do this or not do that?" This is almost a falling back on the rules, because you don't have that sense, that strong feeling of commitment which if you have, you can recognise in others.

Devamitra : Bhante, would you make similar comments in the cases where one mistakenly says that someone is ready, or that someone is not ready for ordination; or does that represent a completely different case?

S: I think that is a little different. I think that when one says that someone is ready for ordination, one should mean that they are ready now, which means that you can see their commitment now. Not that you think that if they go along the same lines for another six months well then they will be ready, no. That sort of statement is almost meaningless. We must be able to see it now. If you don't see it now, well it's not there. You can perhaps see that a person is building up a very favourable basis for commitment, but you don't know. They may continue to build that up and then actually commit themselves or, they may give up half way and never get around to committing themselves. But if someone say asks for ordination because in fact they want to join the group, they don't want to be left out, if you yourself are strongly committed you will be able to see that at once. You will know exactly where they stand and you will feel that that sort of commitment is not fair.

So I think that one of the things that Order Members perhaps should do, if they have difficulty making up their minds whether someone is ready; take it as a sign that they should intensify their.... I won't say their own commitment, but at least their sense of their own commitment. Perhaps sometimes your judgement is confused by extraneous factors, for instance you might like that particular person very much so you might want them to be with you in the spiritual community, you might like the idea of their being ordained and that blurs your judgement.

Buddhadasa : Also Bhante, the opinion of your fellow Order Members can blur your judgement.

S: Yes sometimes if you discuss someone's readiness and talk about it too much you just end up very confused. It's better perhaps to make sure that first of all, yes, you experience your own commitment quite strongly, and then you have serious contact with that person who has asked for ordination. Otherwise you are giving an opinion based on very slight knowledge of that person, you are being influenced by what you hear others say and so on and so forth. So that is not really the way to come to any conclusion. Sometimes you can talk things over with other Order Members just to clarify but perhaps not too much.

Padmaraja : Bhante could I ask a question? How do you develop a sense of your commitment, a sense of one's own commitment. From living from it would you say?

S: Well yes it's living from it, from reflecting on it, becoming more aware of it, not allowing it to be smothered by the multifariousness of its expressions. The fact that one is doing this and doing that, doing something else, presumably always is an expression of your commitment to the three jewels. For instance, when one repeats the refuges and precepts, say before the evening puja, take it very seriously, it must not become a routine, otherwise you lose or at least maybe you don't lose your sense of commitment, but it is somewhat blunted. Because the expression of it, or a certain expression of it, namely the recitation of the refuges and precepts has become a bit routinised. Of course there is then the question of

the ten precepts, if you are not observing those properly, your sense of commitment will become somewhat blunted.

Nagabodhi : A few years ago I heard you say that you should never question another Order Members commitment. After reflection, what I have taken that to mean, is that you can't by definition question commitment, and a commitment once made is a commitment. But you can question another Order Members application of his or her commitment.

S: Application or expression, yes you can certainly question whether that is adequate to the circumstances. What I meant basically when I said that you shouldn't question another Order Member's commitment is that if you do that you are actually ceasing to regard them as an Order Member, and you are disrupting the possibility of communication between you. You are cutting off communication, even contact with them which of course you should never do. If you have made a mistake, which in a sense by definition you have, if that person has not actually said that they resign or they withdraw, then you are negating that other person's existence in the most drastic way that you could, because you are in effect saying that when they say that they are an Order Member, or that they are committed, they are in fact telling a lie. You refuse to believe them, so you cut off all possibility of contact and communication. This is a very, very extreme thing to do, so once someone is ordained, even though we know that people go up and down, even though we know that people can resign even, so long as they are this side of stream entry, but you should never either directly or indirectly question someone else's commitment. For instance it shouldn't take the form of saying : "Well, I think it was a bit of a mistake ordaining him." That is a really dreadful undermining sort of thing to say, not only with regard to the person about whom you are speaking, but to the whole Order.

So one should never say that sort of thing, one shouldn't even think it. You are at fault even if you think it, and if you think it perhaps you should confess it as a fault. I mean so long as someone hasn't said that he resigns and is no longer an Order Member, then he is an Order Member and he is committed, at least relatively speaking. (Pause) One might put it paradoxically, and say and admittedly it is paradoxical; a bad Order Member is still an Order Member!

Nagabodhi : It must be implicit in the going for refuge to the Sangha that there will be bad times and that is when you are going to need them. So it's not the time to start questioning that commitment, it's precisely the time to.....

S: Yes even though it may seem to be in abeyance for the time being, at least as regards its outward expression, that is not to say that you cannot encourage someone to give a fuller expression of his commitment, or even point out that his expression of it to you, you say perhaps in all humility, is somewhat lacking.

So any further points for reflections, or else we can all have an early cocoa!

Buddhadasa : Well I must say Bhante, I've enjoyed hearing you give so much to this event, obviously it would not have been the same without you, and what you have given has been tremendous!

S: I think I have found it probably somewhat more stimulating than I sometimes do find study, because these are quite relevant issues for me as

well as for all of you. They are issues and values that I do think about quite a lot, the ones that we have been talking about. It's not that it's all so already settled and sorted out as some things are, but there are still some things that are open questions, which we are still exploring. So from that point of view I found it quite stimulating. I also did feel that people were getting a broader perspective on the Movement, seeing it much more in its wider Buddhist context and I think that cannot but be for the good. No doubt you will be taking quite a few things back to your own Centres and communities, so no doubt there will be quite a good spill over from this study retreat throughout the Movement. Maybe some people will be writing up a few highlights, and perhaps in due course all the proceedings will be duly transcribed and even edited.

I must say that quite a lot of my replies on certain more technical points would require to be elaborated I think more satisfactorily. A lot of questions one can't answer very satisfactorily just off the cuff or just from memory as it were. So I think as regards the more technical points, make quite sure that you have grasped the point and make quite sure that I have in my reply covered all the relevant aspects. Don't take it for granted that my reply in each case constitutes a complete and comprehensive answer to that particular question. It may often give no more than a few hints or a few guidelines. And don't hesitate to look up things in the Pali-English dictionary and in the Buddhist texts themselves, in fact you should do this all of the time. If I say something like well: "The Buddhist scriptures say such and such, somewhere, I can't quite remember where," don't leave it at that, you go and search for it and look it up yourselves and check it, and where possible compare two different translations, perhaps check what the key terms are in the original. Be accustomed yourself to doing that sort of 'homework'. It will certainly deepen your own understanding of those particular points. Don't be content simply with what I've said on a particular occasion, even compare it with things I might have written or said in the past. Because I can't deal satisfactorily with every issue, as it were, on the spot.

In some cases on can in certain cases, one feels one has dealt with pretty exhaustively with a particular point for all practical purposes, but not when more technical, say historical and doctrinal questions are involved. I certainly don't consider that in those matters I have said the last word on the subject even provisionally. So with that little word of warning.....

Devamitra : Bhante, you mentioned earlier in the week that we should refer to Sanskrit dictionaries etc. I wondered which particular Sanskrit dictionary you would recommend for our use?

S: The standard big one seems to be McDonald which I have. Of course for Buddhist Sanskrit terms, the Buddhist hybrid dictionary. But there are other shorter Sanskrit dictionaries which might be more useful, there is (Aktay's) for instance which I don't have, but which is very highly spoken of. Perhaps we should get a few more of these things for the Order Library. Then at least people can see what they are like and see perhaps how useful they might be. I think we should make more use of such tools. Perhaps next time I will have had a look around.

O.K. then.

- END OF SEMINAR -

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