

## General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

### Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team*

## Seminar Discussions Based on “The Religion Of Art” by Sangharakshita

Held at Madhyamaloka, Birmingham, UK in the Spring of 1999

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1. Not to be inspired by dead artists!
  2. Should artists just represent contemporary situations?.
  3. Is there a Buddhist view of things getting better with time?.
  5. Is Bhante’s view of human evolution infinite?.
  6. You cannot predetermine sources of inspiration..
  7. Copying another artist’s style and work.
  8. Musicians generally not liking to perform modern (post 1920) pieces.
- Why, in 1953, Bhante wrote “The Religion of Art”  
Was there a conflict between Sangharakshita the poet and Sangharakshita the Buddhist?
10. Finding Time for art or other interests
  11. Poetic truth. Were Buddhists creating art in earlier times?
  12. What is a masterpiece?  
Where does inspiration come from?
  13. The difference between creating art and ‘dabbling’  
Seeing the craft in art
  15. Poetry. Prosody, Rhyming couplets.  
Being born as an artist or becoming an artist?  
What is genius?  
Saint Catherine of Siena
  17. Can genius be karmically inherited?
  18. Genius and talent
  19. Great artists and good/minor artists.  
You can still enjoy artists who are not great!
  20. Bhante’s interest in Neo-Platonism  
Neo-Platonism as the leading spiritual tradition of the West
  21. Fear as hatred of death
  23. Neo-Platonism and the arts, Michelangelo and Neo-Platonism
  24. Rudolf Steiner and the visual arts  
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  - 27The Pre-Raphaelites were not always dreaming and seeing visions  
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  30. What is the aesthetic and aesthetics?
  32. The eight rasas/tastes
  33. The horrific as an aesthetic experience.  
Pleasure is not essential for the appreciation of art
- Samuel Beckett, Jackson Pollock. Francis Bacon
34. Depicting hell and Depicting paradise
  35. What is beauty?
  37. Disinterestedness, egolessness
  38. Archetypes
  40. Coming up with a basic definition of beauty

- 41 Do all people like bright colours?  
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- 46 "Whatever we love, we adorn"
- 48 Is content/subject matter relevant to art?  
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- 50 Beauty as the third vimoksha
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- 54 Bhante's use of the term 'egolessness'
- 55 The need to express **me**  
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- 56 "It's not necessarily a good man that has a great mind"
- 57 In what sense did Coleridge have a great mind?  
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- 60 Does 'self-expression' have to be gloomy?  
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- 62 Bhante's definition of art
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- 66 Does art need an audience?
- 67 A sense of values Sense and sensibility
- 71 The Won sect in Korea doesn't use a Buddha image, but a circle  
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- 72 Culture is not enough
- Annotating a brief biography of figures from history featured in pictures in art galleries as many people no longer know the cultural references used.
- 75 The enucleating ego
- 76 Do FWBO Buddhist artists need to rise to the challenge of Bhante's definition of art?
- 77 Can the work of Jackson Pollock/abstract art communicate a sense of values?
- 78 Looking at the assumption we bring with us when we look at a work of art.
- 79 "You can't deny feelings as feelings or experiences as experiences"  
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- 80 Other Buddhists' views of the place of art in Buddhism
- 82 An FWBO Institute for the Religion of Art?  
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- 90 Learned and acquired perceptions

- The ease with which children can learn languages
- 92 Why is there more poetry in Islamic and Christian traditions than there is in Buddhism?
- 94 Ryokan, Japanese and Chinese Buddhist art  
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- The fact that some people get more from works of art than from Pujas and rituals, and vice-versa
- 95 Symbolic Buddhist art - representing teachers etc. The FWBO Refuge Tree
- 96 Ashvagosha's Buddhacarita - is it great art?
- 98 The Buddhist path in terms of stages of beauty?  
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- 101 Muses and sexual partners - not to confuse the two!
- 102 "In love and in friendship there needs to be trust and freedom"
- 103 Arranged marriages compared to 'falling in love'  
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- 113 The Puritan's rejection of art. The lack of representational images in Judaism and Islam  
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