

## 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 [Mitrās](#). 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 Adhithana Dharma Team*

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript has not been checked, and may contain mistakes and mishearings.

## THE TEN PILLARS OF BUDDHISM

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

IL CONVENTO, BATIGNANO, TUSCANY, 1984

Session 1: 20 October 1984

Present: the Venerable Sangharakshita; Retreat team: Vessantara, Devamitra, Susiddhi, Prasannasiddhi, Sarvamitra, Kamalashila, Padmavajra, Lalitavajra, Dipankara, Abhaya; new Order members in order of ordination: Aryacitta, Aryadaka; Ratnabodhi, Indrabodhi; Dharmabandhu, Dharmamudra; Satyaraja, Satyananda, Satyaloka; Shantavira, Jnanavira; Baladitya, Kuladitya; Manjunatha, Vajranatha.

Vessantara: So, there are one or two quick requests to start with. Ratnabodhi?

Ratnabodhi: Can you just tell me the origin of the phrase you use on page seven that "You must love them before they seem worthy of you love."?

S: Ah yes, this comes from one of Wordsworth's poems. Now which one is that? "And you must love him ere to you he will seem worthy of your love." It must be one of those 'Matthew' poems. Do you remember? I won't be certain of this but it's certainly Wordsworth. Ah... now just a moment... is it "The Statist"? The 'Statist' means politician or statesman. I think it's that one. "The Statist". No... just a moment. No... he refers to The Statist. Isn't it his poem on a poet's grave? Do you know that one? It's a famous one (laughter). I'll try to think of it, but one, it is definitely by Wordsworth and, yes, I think it occurs in that poem where he is writing about, I think about the death of a poet, but I won't be certain of that. If anyone has a collected Wordsworth here I'll find it for you.

Kuladitya: I was wondering if you could tell us more about these mysterious sixteen arahants?

S: There are various legends about them. I think some of the legends occur in the Divyavadana, a Sanskrit work. As far as I remember the sixteen arahants lived (and their legend appears in Tibetan Buddhism,

perhaps in an elaborated form) at a time in India when Buddhism was being persecuted. I think it was shortly after the time of Ashoka. And on account of the persecution which I think has some historical basis, they decided to go elsewhere. And there are various accounts of where they went. According to one account, they went up to the mountains of Kashmir, and according to another account they went across the sea to China. Therefore in Tibetan Buddhist art, the sixteen arahants are represented in two different ways: they are represented among mountains, and they are represented as travelling on the sea - sometimes with all sorts of dragons and strange beasts for vehicles, and sometimes they are represented as flying through the air. I think that when they are represented as going up into the mountains, they are represented as flying through the air, and when represented as going over to China - over the sea - they are represented as flying on the backs of these strange beasts. It's a popular theme in Tibetan art, I'm not sure in Chinese art. In Chinese art of course they have the five hundred lohans or five hundred arahants: that's very popular, especially for sculpture. But the story goes about the sixteen arahants, that they live forever. No... not forever, that's an exaggeration. They don't live forever, but they are very, very long lived and I think that they live, if not till the end of the present kalpa, at least until the coming of Maitreya. They (as it were) fill the gap between Shakyamuni and Maitreya. They are a sort of Earthly link between Shakyamuni and Maitreya. There are a few other stories about individual arahants. There's one about Kashyapa: He's immersed in meditation in a mountain cave somewhere in south India and he will rise from his meditation at the time of Maitreya Buddha. In the case of the Mahayana there is the idea that a particular Bodhisattva links the - what shall I say - links the dispensation of one historical Buddha with the dispensation of another historical Buddha, and sort of functions during the interregnum as it were. But within the more Hinayanistic context (and these traditions about the sixteen arahants seem to have originated among the Sarvastivadins) speak of actual Enlightened human beings as providing that sort of link. So they are rather mysterious figures. In other traditions you have these sort of mysterious figures which in human terms live forever and who appear from time to time when they are needed. They are not other powers, they are not anything of that sort. They are human beings who have gained Enlightenment and wander over the Earth. In the Islamic and Sufi tradition there is the very strange and mysterious figure of Khidr - the 'green man'. He is identified by the Sufis or Muslims themselves with Elijah of the Old Testament. But it has sometimes occurred to me that there might be here echoes of Buddhist ideas. They do appear in Sufism quite frequently, but that's quite another topic. But you get this idea: Khidr appears and he plays an important role in the lives of various Sufi masters. He appears and they meet, and he disappears and they perhaps never see him again. He's always around. So the sixteen arahants represent this kind of principle in, you know, mythological form. But it's a quite interesting conception as it were. Through them there's a kind of living link with Shakyamuni Buddha. You might remember I met in South India that strange person the Alahanka

Swami, and I sort of wondered or speculated whether he couldn't be Aryadeva or somebody like that. But it was a very strange experience certainly.

Padmavajra: What happened to Aryadeva?

S: Well, I suppose he's still around. Not necessarily there, but still around.

Prasannasiddhi: This Maitreya is supposed to appear on this planet? [2]

S: Well, Buddhist tradition doesn't think in terms of planets in the modern Western geographical/astronomical sense, you know. But certainly Maitreya is due to appear on Jambudvipa which is the same dvipa or 'continent' (if you like) or 'island' or 'world' (you know) where Shakyamuni himself appeared. Not in any other world.

Prasannasiddhi: That's not equated with India?

S: Well, some modern scholars equate it with India. They believe that Jambudvipa (you know) really represents the world as known to ancient India. I must say I think that's rather doubtful.

Vessantara: Doubtful because...?

S: Well, doubtful because Jambudvipa - it's described as flanked by two large islands. Well, where are those two large islands? You could say that Ceylon was one of them, but Ceylon's only one large island. The tradition very definitely speaks of two large islands flanking Jambudvipa.

Prasannasiddhi: Africa possibly?

S: No. They are represented as being quite close and similar in shape. Anyway, let's carry on.

Abhaya: I was wondering about the term 'Going for Refuge'. It's not used in any other religion as far as I know - Eastern or Western. And I wondered whether it belonged to the language of ancient India or whether it was invented by the Buddha?

S: It would seem that the term 'Going Forth', that is, 'sarana', was well known in the Buddha's day. That was a common term. You commonly 'went forth' (you know). The Buddha himself went forth before there was any question of Buddhism. But this idea of 'Going for Refuge' would seem to be distinctively - well - aha! - Wait a moment. I was going to say distinctively Buddhist, but no. The Jains have Refuges. So perhaps it might be more accurate to say that it was a Sramanic rather than a Brahmanic concept. The Jains have four Refuges. I don't think I can remember what they are, but they don't quite correspond to the Buddhist

ones. They have a Refuge in dharma, as understood by themselves, and I think 'truth' also, and I think in their community, and I think another one... I can look this up because I have a book here. The Jains do have four Saranas, as they are called. Subsequently the idea of Sarana was to some extent adopted by the Hindus, for instance the word appears in the Bhagavad Gita. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna is represented as saying to Arjuna "Sarva dharma paratiyaga mam ekam saranam pratya"(?) Which means: "Sarva dharma" - all dharmas; "parati-yaga" - giving up; "mam" - to or in me; "ekam" - alone; "saranam" - refuge; "pratya" - take. Many scholars believe nowadays that there is a strong Buddhistic element in the Bhagavad Gita. Many believe that the author of the Bhagavad Gita was attempting to incorporate elements from Buddhism to weaken Buddhism and strengthen Hinduism. Some believe that the work was composed for this very purpose - which may be the [3] case. But certainly you may say that the concept of 'sarana' or 'Going for Refuge' is characteristic of Buddhism in a way that it is not characteristic of Hinduism. Though one must admit that it is similar, to an extent, to Jainism. I'm not so sure 'doctrinally' whether the concept of 'Going for Refuge' is so important or so pervasive for Jainism as it is for Buddhism. I would have to check up on that. But certainly the Jains are familiar with the concept. In Hinduism, you get very widely the concept of surrendering to the guru or to the divinity, but Refuge in the Buddhist sense - I would say no.

Abhaya: Following on from that you seem to have favoured in the FWBO the term 'commitment'. You seem to have used that a lot, and not so much talk in terms of 'Going for Refuge'. Do you think 'Going for Refuge' can be a misleading sort of term, or what?

S: Well, I think originally I decided to talk in terms of commitment instead of 'Going for Refuge' because the whole idea of 'Going for Refuge' or 'taking Refuge' in something seemed to spark off, you know, the wrong sort of associations. But more recently I've not been too happy with the word 'commitment'. Apparently the word 'commitment' comes really from Existentialism. It's the sort of Anglo-Saxon version of engagement, the state of being 'engaged' with something, and I believe that goes back to a Russian term, but I won't be too sure of that. But the associations of commitment, one might say, are political rather than spiritual. I would say that commitment, although we have used it happily all these years, is quite a provisional, sort of makeshift, you know, 'Going for Refuge'. I do nowadays speak quite frequently in terms of Going for Refuge, and those times I've used it I do put a capital "G" and a capital "R" to make sure it is seen as something quite special.

Aryacitta: If the term 'Going for Refuge' was originally a sramaneric term does that not imply a political aspect?

S: No. Broadly speaking in ancient India there were two main streams of religious tradition, the Brahmanic going back to the Vedas, and the sramaneric which did not go back to the Vedas. There was no political

implication at all except that the sramaneric tradition did not accept the 'pretensions', as one may call them, of the Brahmins - did not recognize them as inherently superior in any way.

Vessantara: Padmavajra - did you have a related question?

Padmavajra: Do you think that the phrase 'Going for Refuge' itself undervalued the act of Going for Refuge?

S: You mean that it was used in a very casual sort of way?

Padmavajra: Yes, I was thinking using a term like 'Refuge' resulted in a certain passivity.

S: No, I don't think so. I would think what happened rather was that the act of Going for Refuge came to be thought of in purely ceremonial terms. Going for Refuge meant simply [4] reciting certain formulas in Pali or in any other language, after a monk, and that was that! You know. The act of Going for Refuge became evacuated of all significance. This is rather what happened. It became just a formality as one can see today in most Buddhist countries.

Vajranatha: Could you say a bit more about the political nature of commitment and say why it is unsatisfactory?

S: Well, if the word 'commitment' conveys to a lot of people the idea of political commitment, to commitment in a political sense, it wouldn't be a very good word or expression to convey, you know, an act which was essentially spiritual, like the act of Going for Refuge, which implies a very definite ideal, a transcendental ideal (you know) of a type which is not recognized within the milieu within which the term originated.

Vajranatha: So you think there could be no analogy between spiritual commitment and political commitment?

S: Well, there could be an analogy, but an analogy is quite different from a similarity. So there is a danger of people confusing an analogy with a similarity: that because there is an analogy, there is a similarity - but no they are not - they are only analogous.

Padmavajra: Is there any way of seeing how the Going for Refuge came to be related in those terms? Came to be the distinctive expression of conversion in Buddhism. Why prefer that to, say, a term like 'surrender'?

S: Because if we go through the scriptures we find that this is what people actually said over and over again, repeatedly, (you know) when they were impressed by the Buddha's teaching and wanted to follow, they'd say 'I go for refuge. That was the expression they used, constantly. That was their response to the Buddha's teaching. So that became the - I won't say

'standard' response - it became the sort of paradigmatic response one might say. Almost the archetypal response: that when one saw the truth, or intuited the truth, you moved towards it, you committed yourself to it, you took refuge in it. Recently I've been thinking that the concept of 'Going for Refuge' needs to be clarified. I don't mean the meaning of the word in Pali and Sanskrit, but the actual concept itself. What do you mean by 'Going for Refuge' to something, or 'taking Refuge' in something? You can only go for refuge to something if it is in fact a refuge. This is obvious, but perhaps it isn't so obvious. In other words you can take refuge in something only if you can depend on it. Just as when you take refuge in a particular person. For an analogy let's say you take refuge in your doctor, so far as your health is concerned. (You know) you take refuge in your doctor when you're ill because you have faith in him. You have that sort of confidence in him, you can rely upon him in the sense of relying on his medical knowledge and skill, so you take refuge in him in that particular context, you know, to that particular extent. [5] But when, you know, you take Refuge absolutely in the highest sense you are sort of relying on something which cannot possibly let you down. Everything else will let you down, but that will not let you down. So, what is that thing, you know, that will never let you down? Which cannot possibly let you down? Well, there's only one thing which won't let you down, and that's Reality itself - anything else will let you down, if for no other reason than it's changing. So how can something which is impermanent not let you down sooner or later? Because it won't be there, so of course it will let you down by not being there. So it's only the Unconditioned which is really totally reliable, upon which you can rely, you know, in which you can take refuge, to which you can go for Refuge. Either the Unconditioned or those persons whom to some extent are at one with, or reflect, the Unconditioned. Either the Buddha, and those who have entered the Transcendental Path. So therefore, you have three Refuges: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. You see the Transcendental principle, the Transcendental person, and those upon the Transcendental path. So, only Reality or those who embody Reality, either fully or to some degree, can be taken as objects of Refuge, otherwise as objects of your unconditional reliance.

Padmavajra: If you were to get inside those words and examples in the Pali canon where people expressed spontaneously the Going for Refuge. That's basically their discovery for the first time of something they can rely on?

S: Upon which they can truly rely, because very often we rely upon things which are not worthy of that reliance, you know, which are not able to sustain that reliance, or support that reliance. So that's why the Dhammapada says that many people tormented by fear go for refuge to what is it? - hills and groves - you know. So perhaps this needs to be clear. I mean what one means, or what the concept of Going for Refuge actually means. It doesn't mean sort of burying yourself in something comforting and consoling. I think that is often how people understand it.



Padmavajra: Do you think the advantage of using the term 'Going for Refuge' as opposed to commitment is in bringing out the 'other-power' aspect involved, rather than the 'self-power' brought out by 'commitment'?

S: I'm not sure about that because, you know, you yourself have to Go for Refuge. It is an act on your part, even though there is an object to which you go for Refuge. I think what is important is that we get out of the habit, actually we haven't got into it, of, you know, using the Eastern idiom or what has come to be the idiom of Eastern Buddhists and some Western Buddhists speaking in Western languages, of 'taking Refuge' which is not correct, which is not "grahana"(?) which is what taking is. In Pali one speaks of 'taking' the precepts, yes, but of 'Going' for Refuge. So I think we should never speak of 'taking' the Refuges, or of 'taking' Refuge. But of 'Going for Refuge'. This is exactly what the Pali is: "gacchami", you know, as I've explained. Which is why it comes [6] right at the end of the sentence. Which is why we say "To the Buddha for Refuge I go", not "I take Refuge" - this has quite a different feeling, even connotation. Whereas, you know, the pious layman in Ceylon or Thailand will turn up at the vihara in the morning and he'll say to the bhikkhu, "Can I please take the Refuges from you?" And, you know, that is just the feeling of taking the Refuges, just of repeating something after the bhikkhu. But I've also noticed a rather odd idiom grown up in some English Buddhist circles. I've heard people saying things like, "Oh, he's taken Refuge with lama so-and-so." You see? It's quite an un-Buddhistic idiom actually. I suppose you could say that you took the Refuges from lama so-and-so, but even that wouldn't be really traditional because what you do is to repeat after him the Going for Refuge formula. You don't 'take' the Refuges from him. That is not a traditional Buddhist idiom. So, I think we should avoid that "he took Refuge with lama so-and-so, or bhikkhu so-and-so." It sounds quite odd to me at least, not quite Buddhistic even.

Satyaloka: Are there any other existing western Buddhist groups that have recognized the importance of the Going for Refuge as the central act?

S: No, I'm afraid not. I'm sorry to say not. They are usually too busy getting on to what they consider to be more advanced practices. No, I don't think anybody has bothered with this point at all, which is rather strange in a way. It's like, sort of, becoming a Christian and not bothering much with what baptism is all about. It's probably not a very strong comparison, but it fits like that.

Aryadaka: In the Vajrayana one Goes for Refuge to the lama, the guru, as well as the Three Jewels. Can you explain why this has not been emphasised in the WBO?

S: I think it's connected with what I mentioned just now, that we've tended to go back to basics rather than press on to more advanced teachings.

You know - we've rather stayed with the Hinayana-cum-Mahayana rather than, you know, going off into the Vajrayana. Apart from that I've also indicated that there is even a bit of misunderstanding with regard to these matters, even among people who regard themselves as Vajrayanist, even among some Tibetans themselves, some Tibetan lamas. One is not to think of the extra Refuges as separate additional Refuges. There are lots of sets of Refuges - there are three exoteric, you know the ones we take, and then there are the three esoteric refuges, you know: the guru, the deva, the dakini. Then you've got the 'secret' Refuges, then you've got the 'suchness' Refuges, and there's a whole other set which I don't remember. So I think you must not, as it were, think of one set of Refuges stuck on top of another set of Refuges. Certainly, as is the case of the several esoteric Refuges, they represent more an inner or deeper element of the exoteric Refuges themselves. Let me just give an example. I mean I have spoken about these things I think on a convention once. For instance, to give an example of the Dharma refuge. You say "To the Dharma for refuge I go," but what does that mean in practical terms? The Dharma is very vast. Are you Going for Refuge to the whole of it? Are you Going for Refuge to the entire contents of, you know, the Pali Tipitaka? The Tibetan Kanjur? The Chinese Three Treasures? And what does it boil down to? Well, certainly [7] for those who practise the Vajrayana, it boils down to a faithful daily practice of your own visualization and mantra recitation. The whole of the Dharma is, for you, contained in that particular practice, in that particular figure, that particular personality, in that deva, that is to say in that particular Buddha or Bodhisattva on whom you meditate, whose mantra you recite and whom you try to become like, as it were, whom you're trying to realize. So the Dharma is in effect just that practice, just that deva, just that figure. So you don't so much take Refuge in the Dharma, as take Refuge in that deva. So that's the esoteric Dharma refuge. So here, as I've pointed out, the esoteric refuge means your refuge in that part or in that aspect of the Dharma which is effective for you, which is effectively the Dharma. You don't really take refuge in the Abhidharma for instance, usually because for you the Abhidharma is not effectively the Dharma. It doesn't mean anything for you, it doesn't really help you. So the esoteric Dharma refuge is for you your refuge in that aspect or part of the Dharma which does really help you. Do you see what I mean? And similarly in the case of the Buddha Refuge and the Sangha Refuge. You say "To the Sangha for Refuge I go." Well, in the highest sense the Sangha is the Aryasangha and, alright, no doubt Bodhisattvas are sending out their 'grace-waves' but, you poor fool, you can't perceive them. What are you to do? So, for you, effectively the Sangha is just the people you are in contact with. It's the people who actually inspire you, who actually spark you off. They may be very humble individuals, they may not be Enlightened, they may not even be on the Transcendental path. They may be just ordinary Buddhists. Gampopa has a lot to say about this. But they do actually spark you off, so they constitute your esoteric Sangha Refuge, they are the dakini Refuge. Do you see what I mean? So similarly the Buddha Refuge. Yes, we do go for refuge to the Buddha. So the Buddha's not around, Maitreya's not arrived yet, and as

for the archetypal Buddhas - we can't perceive them. So effectively the Buddha is the person from whom we do actually learn the Dharma - the body from whom we do actually learn the Dharma. So that is the esoteric Buddha refuge - the Guru Refuge. So in this way one sees the several esoteric refuges not as separate or additional Refuges, but the so-called exoteric refuges in, so to speak, their actual 'cash value' - what they actually mean for us. I won't go into the other refuges. So people who follow Tibetan Buddhism and think they've got Tantric initiation, think they've left behind things like the exoteric refuges, the practise of the precepts, even meditation in the ordinary sense. They don't realize that the so-called 'higher teachings' are really inner dimensions of the so-called 'lower teachings', and the way to get into the higher teachings is not to leave the lower teachings, but to get more deeply into the lower teachings - to practise them more thoroughly and even more faithfully, not to give them up. So very often the Tibetans speak of four Refuges. The fourth refuge is actually the first of what they call the three esoteric Refuges. Strictly speaking one should speak of the six Refuges if one is to speak in those terms at all. But they often speak in terms of the four Refuges, or they speak of the guru Refuge as the fourth refuge, which makes it appear as a separate refuge from the Buddha Refuge rather than a sort of inner dimension of the Buddha Refuge.

[8]

Dharmabandhu: Bhante, you said: effectively those who inspire you are the Sangha Refuge. You said those who teach you ... is the Buddha Refuge?

S: Those who really teach you and make an inner connection with you, not simply impart information about Buddhism.

Dharmabandhu: So there could be more than one, as it were, esoteric Buddha Refuge?

S: There could be, but usually there is one, because supposing two or three disagreed? What would you do then? There would have to be one whose verdict you finally accept, otherwise you are thrown back on your own resources. Which is alright, but it means there is no Refuge. Anyway, how are we going for time?

Lalitavajra: Bhante, this principle of plugging away at the basic teachings instead of the more higher teachings - is that also expressed through the development of other meditation practices in the way of just the mindfulness of breathing and the metta, are they sufficient in a sense?

S: In a sense they are. But on the other hand you could say that they represent different aspects of meditation practice and that one, you know, also needs to have recourse to other practices. If someone was to say that they intended to stick to either the mindfulness or the metta bhavana and

they didn't ever want to take up any other practice I certainly wouldn't discourage them. But it does seem that most people need a certain amount of variety, so to speak, in their spiritual life and spiritual practice. So it isn't a bad thing if you've three or four or five different kinds of practice including meditation practice, that you can take up in turn. In turn, but not thinking of one practice being definitely superior to another. It may be superior for the time being so far as you're concerned, in the sense that you might need it more, but apart from the distinction (to the extent that it can be drawn) between samatha meditation and vipassana-type meditation (and that does represent a genuine vertical distinction) I don't think one can really say that one type of meditation practice is better than another.

Satyaraja: Have the ten precepts been used as the ethical basis of any other movement apart from the WBO?

S: Not that I know of. I think one could almost certainly say no. Which again seems rather strange. There are ten sramanera precepts. I think I've mentioned that they are different, and those are observed by sramaneras throughout the Buddhist world. And in the Mahayana Buddhist world there are various sets of Bodhisattva precepts, but to the best of my knowledge this particular set has fallen into desuetude for a very long time. But I think it provides a very good ethical foundation for the reasons that I stated. That makes it clear that the ethical life finds expression in body, speech and mind. If your set of ethical precepts is to be complete they must relate to body, speech and mind. That seems to be rather overlooked among Buddhist circles.

[9]

Satyaraja: You mean that there are other sets of precepts which don't refer to all three?

S: Not explicitly, for instance the five precepts don't. If you take the sramanera silas, you know, the last five of them are very external indeed. I'm not saying that they're not useful. I don't think, for instance, that not wearing garlands is so ethically important as to be listed along with not taking life, not killing, and not stealing. Well maybe in ancient India the young sramaneras were inordinately prone to decorate themselves with garlands. That precept might have been necessary. I'm prepared to concede that, but there's no evidence for that. But men don't show a great tendency, not in the west, to decorate themselves with garlands. A few hippies might (laughter). One might try to find equivalents for that - expensive shaving cream, things of that sort... No, that comes under mala gandha vilepana, garlands no... buttonholes perhaps, or something like that.

Prasannasiddhi: Badges perhaps?

Satyananda: I came across - when I was studying the 'Four Simple

Foundations' (I can't remember whether it was in the 'Torch of Certainty' or one of the other teachings) - that it seemed a basic Tibetan Mahayana teaching that this first step was this 'path of the ten virtues'. I can't remember what the translation is. Why does it disappear? It seems that it's exactly the same as this list...

S: Yes, well the list of the ten kusala dharmas is there in quite a number of Buddhist scriptures. So it can't be ignored. So sometimes it is listed or repeated by later authors, but they don't make anything really of it, which is rather unfortunate. They do very much the same in fact with the Three Refuges themselves. Atisa refers quite frequently to the 'Ten Virtuous Deeds' as they often translate them.

Satyananda: ... (unclear) ...

S: I think in the Kadam School, you know, which of course goes back to Atisa, the ten precepts were stressed more than in other forms of Tibetan Buddhism. But I think this just illustrates a point, which is a general point, that there's all sorts of things hidden away - well not even hidden away - in the Pali canon which people haven't bothered with for centuries but which are very important, very relevant and very useful teachings often. Think of the twelve positive nidanas - what a glaring omission from Buddhist teaching for hundreds of years! Or maybe in the case of the Mahayana they did at least have something equivalent, but the Theravadins never had. So it was a great omission from the teachings so far as they were concerned. It's almost as though Christians had forgotten the Sermon on the Mount - well perhaps they have forgotten the Sermon on the Mount! (laughter) You know, I get surprised sometimes when I think: Is it really possible that, you know, millions of Buddhists, including Buddhist monks, have been blind for centuries. Have they not ever read their scriptures?! This is what one sometimes cannot help thinking.

[10]

Aryacitta: You have come into contact with different people. What served as useful for the monks is it (isn't?) enough for (us)?...

S: Not enough for the monks? They took more precepts in a way didn't they? Maybe a little was too much for them! (laughter) You might say that if ten precepts are too many for you to observe, you'd better observe two hundred and twenty seven! (laughter)

Satyaloka: Did you come across these lists of precepts fairly early on in your studies? Or was it that their importance only came to you later on?

S: I cannot remember attaching any particular importance to them when I was in India. But when I came, you know, to England and when I was thinking about starting the Western Buddhist Order and when I started, you know, giving attention to this question of precepts, what precepts it

would be best for people to observe, then I started thinking that this was the most suitable set of precepts for the reasons which I've recently given.

Satyaloka: ... (unclear) ...

S: Not necessarily, because for instance on the one side one had the Theravada lists of precepts, or the precepts of the monks, you know, being too numerous, were out of the question for obvious reasons. The Five Precepts didn't seem enough, again for the reasons I've mentioned. On the other side, from the Mahayana we have the various Bodhisattva precepts. Well, in India I've taken the Bodhisattva precepts myself, but I started to feel that, you know, in a way the Bodhisattva precepts were too advanced, and subsequently I began to think that they couldn't be thought of in terms of individual observance in the strict sense. So on the one hand, so far as I was concerned, the various sets of Theravada precepts were out of the question; the various sets of Bodhisattva precepts were out of the question. So what did that leave one with if one wanted to base oneself on a set which was traditional, which was actually found in the scriptures and which was relevant and useful, and neither too long nor too short. Well the ten kusala-dharmas seemed to fit the bill perfectly. Anyway, what next?

Padmavajra: In the Buddha's day was the division between bhikkhus and lay-followers so pronounced as it so became? What were the main factors in the creation of that wide division?

S: I think I've talked about this on a number of occasions. Well, I'll deal with only one point - the first part of the question. One gets the impression, reading the Pali scriptures, that there was less of a distinction between, let's say, those that had 'gone forth' and those that had not 'gone forth' of the Buddha's disciples, in the Buddha's day than subsequently was the case. It was not that the bhikkhus were not observing more precepts, well they were, yes, they were observing the pratimoksa, the two hundred and fifty precepts. Lay people were not observing those precepts, perhaps observing only five or ten. So there was definitely a distinction between what was subsequently called the upasakas and the bhikkhus. But it would seem that that distinction, or difference even, was much less [11] strongly felt. I think one of the reasons for that, perhaps the most important reason, was that both among the bhikkhus and among the upasakas, there were people who were Stream Entrants and so on. So that being the case, the view that he, as an upasaka is a Stream Entrant and he as a bhikkhu is also a Stream Entrant, you're not going to attach to what we might nowadays call a difference of lifestyle. Do you see what I mean? But not only that. Reading the Pali scriptures one gets the impression that there was a good deal of camaraderie between bhikkhus and upasakas (that is to say lay-followers). Upasakas were often good friends of bhikkhus and vice versa. Sometimes upasakas didn't hesitate to rebuke bhikkhus, or bhikkhus

might rebuke upasakas. There wasn't the sort of spirit of "Oh, you can't say that to a bhikkhu" which is now the case in Theravada countries. Do you see what I mean? There was a much more human relationship between bhikkhus and upasakas, even though they were, you know, following different patterns of life, one might say. But perhaps we'd better leave it there. The whole question of how a distinction developed into a real difference involves so many historical factors. It's probably quite difficult to go right into it. Right-ho.

Session 2, 21 October 1984, Questions on chapters 1 & 2

Vessantara: So this evening we'll start with the leftover questions from the first section and then go on to questions on the section we studied today. Padmavajra - you had more...

Padmavajra: It's a bit of a long question. Members of the Western Buddhist Order are neither monk nor lay. But are there not disadvantages in this for the West? Does it not leave open the possibility of an, as it were, dilettante attitude to the Dharma, which could result in the undermining of the integrity of the Order? I was thinking of this dilettantism particularly in the sphere of sexual relationships where one could create a situation where one isn't committed to chastity or to the married state. Should we demand more commitment in these areas? The kind of commitment that, say, people have to make in India?

S: I'm not quite sure what the question is getting at. Hmm, there seem to be a lot of questions sort of, almost, mixed up together. Maybe quite a lot of assumptions that need to be sorted out. I think we'll have to take it very much, you know, piece by piece. Let's just take the first bit or the first clause.

Padmavajra: Umm - Members of the Western Buddhist Order are neither monk nor lay.

S: "Are neither monk nor lay". Maybe that needs understanding first. What does one mean, for instance, by monk and lay? And also, why isn't one monk or lay? Y'know, what is the reason behind that? Y'know, what is the background of that? Do you see what I mean? One mustn't forget that it goes back to the Going for Refuge, which we were talking about yesterday - [12] wasn't it? If one says simply that members of the Western Buddhist Order are neither monk nor lay, well, if one takes that out of context, well one is already placing the emphasis wrongly, because one hasn't said a word about Going for Refuge. What one should say - basically the first thing that one should say about members of the Western Buddhist Order - as one should say, or should be able to say about Buddhists generally, is that a member of the Buddhist Order is one who goes for Refuge (you know) to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. So I think it is only if one says that first, that the statement that a member of the Western

Buddhist Order is neither monk nor lay, not only has any significance, but is seen in its proper perspective. Because when one speaks of monk or lay one is in a way speaking of what I have called lifestyles, hmm? So one shouldn't define, or describe, a member of the Western Buddhist Order primarily in terms of lifestyle. He or she is only to be defined primarily in terms of Going for Refuge. So that supposing somebody outside the FWBO, outside the Order, was to ask you, well, what is, you know, a member of the Western Buddhist Order, the first thing that you should say is not: Well, they're neither monk nor lay. Do you see what I mean? Because that would place the emphasis entirely wrongly. You'd be getting off, you know, on the wrong foot, so to speak, to begin with. The very first thing you should say is: A member of the Western Buddhist Order is one who goes for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Then of course the question may arise as to, you know, which particular lifestyle, to use that term, any particular member of the Western Buddhist Order adopts. Whether it inclines, so to speak, more towards the monastic or more towards the lay, huh? So that is the first thing that really needs to be said. One needs to be sure that one puts the emphasis, you know, in the right place, because it isn't a question of being a monk or being a layman, or being a nun or being a laywoman, it's a question of Going for Refuge. I think this is what needs to be made clear to anybody who approaches us and asks us about ourselves, or asks us to explain ourselves - especially people coming from other - in a sense more traditional, in a sense less traditional - groups, who find it difficult to identify us as this or that. Anyway, that's the first bit of your question, so what was the next bit?

Padmavajra: Does it not leave open,... but are there not disadvantages in this for the West? i.e. the fact that the Western Buddhist Order is neither monk nor lay.

S: Well, in a sense I've dealt with that, because originally, at least, the question shouldn't be discussed in those terms. Initially at least membership of the Order shouldn't be defined in those terms, huh? If one defines membership of the Order primarily and essentially in terms of Going for Refuge then there cannot possibly be any disadvantage. Of course I'm quite sure that you didn't suggest that there would. So therefore the question arises: What is the disadvantage that you see? Clearly you're seeing some kind of disadvantage somewhere, huh? So perhaps you need to bring that out more clearly, huh?

Padmavajra: In a way I'm not expressing my point the way... I'm going round the houses really. My initial thought was that in India the situation seems to be that one is either married, [13] and one is with all the responsibilities that that entails and which seem to in many ways have a number of advantages, and - er - you're an Order member...

S: But there's one thing to be said about that. In India, as an Order member, one hasn't chosen to be married. Do you see what I mean? To the best of my knowledge, none of our Indian Order members has married



after becoming an Order member. They were already married when they became Order members. So it is not as though, you know, Indian Order members have chosen to be in that particular position, because clearly, if you already are married, and you become an Order member, you cannot immediately jettison all your responsibilities. You have to, in most cases, remain married. So, the way you put it seemed to suggest almost that that was the option that Order members, as Order members, had adopted. But that really is not so. It's simply that they've carried their married status into the Order, you see? In a way they had no choice.

Padmavajra: I didn't mean... that's actually the point I'm trying to get at is that in India there is no option. You are either married or there could be the possibility of being an Order member and being, you know, celibate, chaste even. Whereas in the West we have a situation where there isn't that, where you do have a choice, and where, you know, you can be celibate for a few weeks if you feel like it, you can be promiscuous if you feel like it, you can be in a relationship if you feel like it. And it seems as though in a way that doesn't put you on the spot so much - it has disadvantages.

S: Well, one could argue that it puts you on the spot more, huh? Because it really is a question of: Is it disadvantageous to have more options, or is it disadvantageous to have fewer options? One could even argue that the more options are open to you, the more you are put on the spot, because the more definitely and clearly you have to make up your mind what you do really want to do, huh? If there are only two options before you, well, it's comparatively easy, huh? If there's only one option before you it's easiest of all! But perhaps that doesn't give much scope to expression of your own individuality so to speak. So one could argue that - well, that if it's a question of your being put on the spot it is having all these options, as one has in the West, that really puts one on the spot. One isn't necessarily, I would say, put on the spot just by having fewer options.

Vessantara: One does have more often to have to come to a definite decision if you're faced with just a couple of options. If you can, as it were, move between options then in a sense you ... yes, it gives you the opportunity to come to a very good individual decision, or it leaves you with the possibility of not ever really taking a decision - you can just move from one to the other.

S: But if it is a question of being put on the spot, I don't see that having fewer options puts you less on the spot than having a lot of options. I would say that it puts you more on the spot because you have to make up your mind to a much greater extent. In a way you have to think much more for yourself. [14] I mean if your options are narrowed down to two, well, maybe neither of those options actually, genuinely, suits you. You've got, as it were, to accommodate yourself to the existing options. But if the options are more numerous, well then you have to ask yourself, well, which really is the best, huh? So therefore, I mean, I would say that most

of your statements so far, you know, need further examination, or at least further clarification. So, alright, let's go back to this question of advantages and disadvantages, hmmm. What was the statement? That it was... What was more advantageous according to the question?

Padmavajra: I was suggesting it was more advantageous, the kind of situation we have in India, it was actually more advantageous to - er - in a way, to your commitment, then the situation in the West.

S: So on the one hand one has got commitment, that means one has got Going for Refuge. So that's quite, in a way, clear and simple and straightforward. On the other hand one has got a number of possible lifestyles through which one might express that commitment, hmmm? I'm leaving aside lifestyles which are inherently unskilful. I'm assuming there are a number of lifestyles which are - which can be - skilful, and through which you can give expression, you know, to your commitment, to your Going for Refuge. So you are actually saying that it more advantageous to have fewer lifestyles among which to choose. But one has to enquire what one means here by advantageous. In what sense is it an advantage in this particular respect or in this particular context? How is it an advantage?

Padmavajra: I was - well - the sort of thing I had in mind was that in a way being presented with less options of lifestyle, in a way it's a more... (I think Vessantara sort of put it...) It's in a way a more real situation - You've got less of an opportunity to - um - well, to fantasize about possibilities. You...

Vessantara: Is it not that in the Indian situation you are forced to a decision about your options, whereas in the West you're more in a position where you can keep your options open?

Padmavajra: That's the kind of thing I had in mind.

S: But the question still arises: In what sense is the one more of an advantage (And in any case what does one mean by an advantage? What constitutes an advantage?) than the other - huh?

Aryadaka: If there's fewer conflicts in your life so you'd have more energy that you put into the Dharma, you wouldn't be searching through all the different options.

S: Well, I know (I mean) quite a few young Indians who are thrown into conflict by the fact that only two options are open to them. They don't want to be monks and they don't want to get married either. But those are the only two options that are open to them really, practically, in a way honourably. [15] But then they try to postpone it as long as possible. I mean young men in India often put off marriage as long as they can, and they are, you know, often quite upset that they have to get married. But they don't want to become monks. So I don't see that they are less in a

state of conflict necessarily than young men in the West who are able to choose between a larger number of options. You could even argue that the conflict is more intense inasmuch as it's a conflict between two things instead of between four or five things. The conflict is much more highly polarized, and that sense could be said to be more intense (chuckle). Anyway, just to go back to this question of advantage and disadvantage. If one is thinking in terms of expressing one's commitment through a particular lifestyle, well what is it that constitutes an advantage or disadvantage? What is it that one has to take into consideration?

Padmavajra: Whether it adequately expresses that commitment.

S: So that would suggest that it would - you know, differences among people being considerable - that would suggest that the wider the range of options the better.

Devamitra: And yet the situation seems to be that, say in the West, the response that we've had in the FWBO to our efforts has not been as notable as it has been in India where the options are considerably reduced.

S: I think one shouldn't mix up different things. The situation there is totally different. The situation there is that one has a mass movement, initially largely socially, not to say politically, inspired, which one just doesn't have anywhere in the West. So the two are really not at all comparable, huh?

Padmavajra: I suppose one of the things that I wonder about in terms of options is that there must surely be... that sooner or later you must take responsibility for a particular lifestyle that you choose to follow, and you must be prepared to, you know, really see that through.

S: I think what you are really trying to say is that you definitely need to express your commitment in a definite, specific, determinate way. You are concerned lest the fact that there are a number of options prevents you from doing that, hmm? Though I think the fact that there were only two options, neither of which appealed to you, could also prevent you from doing that. I think the valid point that emerges in a way here is that whether the options... whether the possible lifestyles through which you are able to express your commitment, or you could express your commitment, are few or many, your commitment must find some such expression, huh? And you must be quite clear, and quite, well, conscious about it, huh? At the same time I think one mustn't define lifestyle too rigidly, as if to say, well, there are a number of lifestyles open to you and the one that you choose now you're going to be stuck with forever. I mean there is not such a hard and fast line of division between [16] one lifestyle and another in the West now, as there was perhaps in the past, huh? Or as there still is in India. Supposing you have a girlfriend and you stay with her from time to time and you have sexual relations with her from time to

time, but not with anybody else. Are you married or are you not married, huh? Well, you may not be legally married but it could be argued that she was at least your common-law wife, even if only a part-time wife. And Buddhist scriptures do recognize part-time wives (laughter). So it isn't a question of your being either married or not married and deciding to follow the lifestyle of a married man or not follow the lifestyle of a married man; there are in the West today all sorts of intermediate shades, all sorts of intermediate possibilities. So I don't think you can necessarily or invariably sort of solve the problem by, you know, defining your lifestyles quite rigidly and mutually exclusively, and insisting that someone opts for one particular lifestyle and sticks to it. I think that's a bit too rigid. But I think what one can say, and in fact must say, is that whatever lifestyle you are following, and even if that lifestyle changes a little from time to time, it must be a genuine expression of your spiritual commitment, or your spiritual commitment must genuinely find expression through that, hmm? For instance some people do take vows of celibacy for three or four or six months. In a way that is a slight change of lifestyle, hmm? But is one going to say, or is it suggested that one should say, "Well either they've got to be celibate all the time and have just a celibate lifestyle, or they've definitely got to be non-celibate all the time and live a non-celibate lifestyle"? Is that what one means, huh? So I don't think you can solve the question of lifestyle, or lifestyle as an expression of commitment, by defining lifestyles in a sort of rigid way and insisting that people, you know, make up their mind to follow this one or that one and not change. On the other hand the point does need to be made quite forcibly that your existing lifestyle, or your lifestyle at the moment even, must be a genuine expression of your commitment. I think you're only concerned that people shouldn't just dither.

Padmavajra: That's really what I'm saying.

S: Anyway, let's go on further. There was a bit more.

Padmavajra: Well, in a way that's covered it because... I think actually that's covered it really. I don't think...

S: But there was a further concern. Because you did bring in celibacy or chastity in a rather marked sort of way! (laughter) So perhaps we should look at that a bit. I mean, is the sort of upsurge of shaven-headedness going to be accompanied by an upsurge of celibacy? Well, let's see! (laughter)

Padmavajra: (reluctantly) I'll read the rest of the question (laughter). Well, we've only covered the first three lines actually (more laughter) ... Does it not leave open, this monk and lay business, the possibility of an, as it were, dilettante attitude to the Dharma, which could result in an undermining of the integrity of the Order? [17]

S: Well, let's be clear about one or two things first. Of course there is always the possibility of a dilettante attitude to the Dharma, unfortunately. One finds this in the East as well as in the West. One can find lay people in the East, Buddhist lay people, with a very dilettante attitude to the Dharma. One can also find lots of bhikkhus, lots of monks in the East, with a dilettante attitude towards the Dharma. So a dilettante attitude towards the Dharma is obviously a danger whatever your particular lifestyle may be, because the only thing that makes your lifestyle not to be dilettante, or your approach to be dilettante, is the sincerity and urgency and depth of your commitment, you know, to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and the extent to which that commitment finds expression through the particular lifestyle that you've chosen at the moment, huh? But anyway, how does that question of a dilettante approach tie up with this question of monk or lay?

Padmavajra: Right - er - well shall I read on? I was thinking of this dilettantism particularly in the sphere of sexual relationships where one could create a situation where one isn't committed to chastity, or to the married state...

S: Well, some people do have a dilettante attitude towards sexual relations, this is true (laughter). Whereas other people have a very professional approach (more laughter). So what does one mean here, huh? I think probably what you're getting at is that, you know, as between celibacy and non-celibacy you should be clear and decisive in your attitude, yes? I think probably what you have in mind is something like, or something analogous to, the Jataka story I mentioned about the wolf and the sheep the other day, huh? You shouldn't be swayed by circumstances or opportunities. It shouldn't be that, well, you know, maybe I'll be celibate, maybe I won't, it sort of depends. So if an attractive woman, sort of, comes along you think, "Oh well, maybe I won't be celibate after all." But then supposing she turns out not to be very interested in you and your advances, you think, "Oh well, never mind, I suppose I can always be celibate for a while!" That would be - I wouldn't exactly call it a dilettante approach - but an indecisive approach. Of course there's always the possibility of a mental state where you really, genuinely, don't mind either way, but I think very few people reach that, huh? So I think that if one has decided to be celibate, well you should be celibate. If you've decided not to be celibate, alright, fair enough, you're not celibate. But perhaps you shouldn't dither. I think it's not so much a question of adopting a dilettante approach to these things as sort of dithering. You seem to be concerned that the fact that there are so many options open to people in the West, and that there are a number of options as regards lifestyle open to, you know, people in the FWBO, shouldn't mean that they dither. That's true, but I think the opposite to dithering is not the sort of rigidity with regard to lifestyle that I mentioned, but being concerned to maintain the genuineness of one's commitment, and to make sure at every stage whatever lifestyle you adopted or were following did in fact express that commitment. Anyway, there's more I'm sure. [18]

Padmavajra: Well, the last sentence - Should we demand more commitment in these areas? The kind of commitment which people in India, say, have to make, i.e. between chastity or...

S: Oh no. That isn't a commitment. The commitment is to the Three Jewels, huh? Those who are married don't have any option. I mean their commitment has to find expression through that particular lifestyle. For instance I know individual cases where particular Order Members have dearly wanted to go along to a Sunday evening Order meeting but their child had to be taken to hospital because it was sick. Well, what could they do? Nobody else to take the child - they had to take it, huh? So they had to miss the Order meeting. So there are definite limitations, but they don't have any choice, hmm? But something else I wanted to say was: You talk of (say) celibacy and non-celibacy as options, but is celibacy actually considered an option by most people? You're assuming that, you know, people regard (say) celibacy as equally an option with non-celibacy. But as far as I know, most people, even in the FWBO, regard non-celibacy very definitely as an option, but celibacy, certainly celibacy for any length of time (I mean more than a week or two perhaps) is not regarded seriously as an actual option, do you see what I mean? So I think one needs to also clarify what one really considers to be options, because some options are options in a purely theoretical sense. They're not live options for you, they're not living options for you. For instance you might say, well, as an Order Member you have the option of going out and starting a Centre in South America, or going and starting a Centre in Australia, but it's not a live option for you unless you really think, unless you really believe, you could do that. So you're free to decide, you're able to decide, whether you do it or not. But if you don't really think that you can be celibate, and a lot of people don't really think that they can, not really, well then celibacy is not really an option for you, there's no question of choice. In some ways you're as bound as those Order Members are, huh? So have we really got more options? At least, do we have that option? In the sense of really considering it seriously as something that they could actually do if they wanted to? Because I certainly know of people within the framework of the FWBO who in some cases are even horrified, not to say terrified, at, you know, the idea of doing without sex for more than a certain, you know, length of time. I mean, certain apprehensions were expressed before the first Tuscany but, you know, people have got used to the idea now of three months of, well, at least relative celibacy. So the options are perhaps widening or deepening. But I think when one considers options one has got, you know, to be quite clear that they are real live options between which you have a genuine choice; that they're not just theoretical options. I mean theoretically, for instance, every citizen of the United States has the option of becoming president, huh? It's open to them. Yes, but it's an option for only a very few people. Anyway, what's the rest of your...

Padmavajra: That's it. [19]

S: So, I mean, what I'm really getting at is that we need to examine some of our assumptions and suppositions quite rigorously in order to know what we really are asking. But I think that we haven't really dealt with, perhaps, what was at the back of your mind with regard to, you know, monks and lay people and... you mentioned something about promiscuity.

Padmavajra: Umm ... (laughter)

S: I mean what really is the question? I mean there is a question, I'm quite sure. It all needs 'boiling down' a bit more. Perhaps it does just come back to what I said: that one shouldn't dither, and, you know, one should be quite clear and quite conscious in one's decision as between options, or one's choices between options, and make sure that they really are genuinely options.

Padmavajra: One of the things I've sort of got at the back of my mind is that I wonder how sometimes - er - that you need to somehow make your situation, as it were, more existential, to use that word, but that you, you know, you really do have, say, um - let's say that you're non-celibate, but in a way that you do make the celibate option an option for you, I mean a live option. Actually create a situation where you have, if you like, a kind of tension.

S: Well, you see, you can only create a situation within which you can exercise an option if you believe in the possibility for you of exercising that option. So it does come back, you know, to what I said about - well, regarding something as a live option and not just a theoretical option. And if you conclude that that particular live option is the best option for you then you will obviously go about creating the circumstances within which you can give effect to that option, and actually follow that particular lifestyle, and give expression to your commitment through that.

Aryacitta: Was the original bhikkhu sangha originally set up in order that men might practise celibacy, or was it for some other reason?

S: Well, celibacy was not the be all and end all of the original bhikkhu sangha, although it was very important. One might say that in a sense there was no purpose behind the set up of the original bhikkhu sangha, in the sense that many of them, certainly in the early days, had nothing further to achieve anyway. A lot of them were arahants. So for what purpose was the bhikkhu sangha set up? So far as they were concerned it was simply the way that they were living. You could say in the case of the less developed, the bhiksu sangha or the membership of the bhiksu sangha was an ideal training situation. And then you can ask, well, why or how did celibacy come into it? Celibacy seemed to come into it in two ways. First of all, in those days if you engaged in sexual relations with women you usually, almost invariably, became a father - well, it's the same even today actually, very often (laughter). But nowadays you can,

to some extent, postpone the day, huh? But at that time, if you engaged in sexual activity with women, well sooner or later you became a father, you had a family, and that meant you had to support that family, that meant you had to work, you had to earn money, so you could not devote yourself to the Dharma, in the sense of not spend much time meditating, not spend much time on your own, and so on and so forth. And also of course there was the [20] other aspect of the matter, namely that sexual desires were considered klesas, they were considered as defiling passions which were not helpful if one wanted to enter into dhyana states and meditate and thus develop insight. So one had these, sort of, two aspects of the matter, or rather two approaches even, to the matter, and therefore in the Buddha's day one had, you know, a celibate sangha. But one mustn't make too much of that because there were a number of lay people, living at home, who also became Stream Entrants and, you know, Non-returners and Once-returners, and who formed part of the Aryasangha, you know, even if not part of the bhikkhu sangha. But for many the life of celibacy was the best life and the life through which they best expressed their commitment to the Dharma. And, you know, in the case of those who were spiritually developed and Enlightened, well that was the sort of way they naturally lived anyway, not as a discipline but as a natural expression simply of the way they were. Anyway perhaps we ought to pass on to some more questions... (pause)... There's another aspect, to go back a bit, to backtrack before we go on to the next question. There's another aspect of the whole business, more generally, going back to this question of monk or lay. People love to categorize. They love to categorize other people, hmm? And if they can identify you, say, within the Buddhist context: as definitely a monk - a familiar, shaven-headed, yellow-robed figure - or definitely a layman, white robed and smiling, and his hands full of offerings for the monks, well that in a way is very reassuring, huh? In a way you've stereotyped people, huh? You don't have to deal with them as individuals, as they are, you don't have to ask yourself where they are really at, you're let off the hook. You don't have to relate to them actually as individuals. You know, you relate to them as something else. You relate to them at worst just as social or ecclesiastical sort of roles, or role figures. So supposing just to take a concrete example, if someone from some other Buddhist group approaches you and asks you, well, "Are you a monk?" and you say "No"; and "Are you a layman?" and you say "No", they're nonplussed because they're not able to categorize you, huh? If you were to say "Yes, I'm a monk" or "Yes, I'm a layman" they would think that they understood you and knew what you were, whereas in fact they would not know, you know, what you were, they wouldn't know you. But if they're not let off the hook in that sort of way they have to come to terms with you as an individual; they have to establish, you know, communication with you as an individual. So there is that very important aspect of the matter too, hmm?

Satyananda: Won't you have to actually make an effort sometimes to prevent people from stereotyping you? Because I mean they can come and say "Are you a monk?", "No", and they probably might not even ask if



you are a layperson, they will insist that you are. Should you make the effort to say, to point, to try to put yourself in a position where you can't be stereotyped?

S: I think it's very difficult to do that completely, because for instance people might ask you, well, "Are you a Buddhist?" And you say "Well, yes". Well in a sense, in a way, that would stereotype you, in a way, in the eyes of many people, hmm? [21] What you have to do is just establish personal communication, individual communication, where you can, huh? Some people are more intent on categorising than others, huh? Some attach more importance to it than others. Some feel more uneasy if they are unable to categorise people than do others. So it's just a question of knowing, at the moment, what is the best approach to take. You could even with some people say, "Well, yes. I'm a sort of monk, in a way I am." That might be the most skilful approach, or the most skilful beginning. It's sometimes very difficult to deal with these sorts of questions. There was a very interesting example of something of this sort in the October Shabda - I expect some of you noticed it. That is to say with regard to Surata when he was interviewed. Did you notice that? Surata is hoping to take some course, I think it is in... what is it? Counselling? Counselling. So he was interviewed, and he was asked... what was the question he was asked?

Vajranatha: "Are you willing to put aside your religious views for the sake of personal development?"

S: Yes. Ah, So... What a question! Hmm! I mean in a sense it's a thoroughly dishonest, presumptuous, ignorant question ... really. I think he got out of it really quite well. I think he said the right thing actually. He said "yes" after drawing a long breath. But look at the assumptions, you know, with which that question was riddled! "Are you willing to give up or to put aside your religious beliefs in the interests of your personal development?" In other words religious beliefs have nothing to do with personal development, that is the sort of suggestion. That being a Buddhist, for instance, or a Christian for that matter, gets in the - or could get in the - way of personal development. Well, yes that is true in a way, but what about views on the other side? I mean what about the people, say, teaching the counselling? Would they be willing to give up their views? It doesn't seem to be a very mutual thing. Also there seems to be the assumption that Buddhism itself has nothing to say about giving up views, hmm? Do you see what I mean? It's got, in the case of Buddhism at least, a very wrong sort of idea. And it would seem to suggest that the people doing the interview, or the people who would be teaching the counselling were, or would be, people completely free from views - sort of enlightened, sort of liberated people, whereas you would be, well, in a completely different category. So what a sort of tendentious question that was. Do you see what I mean? But this is the sort of question by which you may well be confronted. When people, say, ask you things like, well "Are you a monk?" well they might genuinely want to know because they see your shaven head and they know that monks often have shaven

heads, and Buddhist monks in particular have shaven heads. So they might think that you're a monk, and quite genuinely and honestly they might ask, well, "Are you a monk?" Well you can always in a sense prevaricate, and in a sense try to pave the way for explanations by saying, "Well, it depends what you mean by a monk. In a sense I am a monk, I'm a monk in the sense that I'm fully devoted to the spiritual life. I'm a full-time Buddhist. If by a monk you mean, well, someone who lives in a monastery and doesn't have anything to do with the world, well I'm not a monk in that sense because I help run classes in a Buddhist centre and I work in a Buddhist co-op. [22] But we don't think that monasticism in the true sense is incompatible with those things." If you are talking to a Christian you might say, "Well, we're more like Franciscan friars." Do you see what I mean? So it isn't, say, a question of giving a straightforward yes or a straightforward no. But now we really must get on to the next question.

Abhaya: Yes. I've noticed, in the various elements of the human personality which you enumerate from different traditions, you mention Neo-platonists, Hindus, and so on and so forth. But I've noticed only in the Buddhist categorization do you have speech. I wondered if you had any thoughts on that.

S: Well, yes. I have thought about this quite a lot. Though I did mention I believe that the Zoroastrian tradition divides man into body, speech, and mind, which is very interesting. That awaits further investigation, so far as I'm concerned. But yes, it's very interesting. It's as though Buddhism were saying that speech, that communication, is an essential part of the very definition of a human being, huh? Recently I was reading a little Heidegger, and he seems to have arrived at similar conclusions, rather surprisingly perhaps. But anyway, apart from that, perhaps at the moment one can do more than sort of register the fact. Yes, Buddhism is practically unique in recognizing the importance of communication, recognizing speech, as being, in a sense, at least partially constitutive of human nature itself, huh? There's also the point that speech doesn't just mean speech in the ordinary sense. Through his body, one might say, man belongs to the material world. Through his mind he belongs, potentially, to absolute mind, to ultimate Reality itself. And through speech he belongs to the archetypal sphere. There is that sort of correlation too. What in man is body, in the cosmos is the whole material universe; what in man is speech, is the subtle realm, the archetypal realm, the realm of images; and what in man is mind, in the (what shall I say?) in the cosmos, in the universe at large, is Reality itself. So there is that sort of correlation. It's speech in a quite, sort of, broad sense, though it's certainly not excluding speech in the ordinary sense.

Vessantara: Could you expand on the correlation between speech and the archetypal realm?

S: Well, for instance the clue is given in the Trikaya doctrine, because it is

said that what in an unenlightened person is body, speech and mind, in the case of a Buddha is Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya. So speech corresponds to the Sambhogakaya realm, which is the speech of the Buddha. And the Sambhogakaya realm is the realm of the Buddha's communication with the Bodhisattvas and even with other Buddhas. So the Sambhogakaya realm is a realm of, one might say, archetypal communication, archetypal speech, speech at the highest level.

Abhaya: You do get - I seem to remember in the Gospel of John - you get this idea of the Son of God being the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". So that seems to be a similar sort of idea, about communication being included in the... [23]

S: I'm not so sure that "logos" implies communication. "Logos" is more thought, one might say, and thought as expressed, but not necessarily, I think, thought as communicated.

Abhaya: No, I was thinking of John's idea of Christ being a sort of Sambhogakaya form of God, God the Father... of Christ as the equivalent of the Sambhogakaya form.

S: I'm a bit sort of suspicious of these equations, hut nonetheless perhaps, in a very broad, and a very general sort of sense, if one wanted to make any sort of comparison, well one could perhaps compare the incarnate Christ - the incarnate logos of traditional Christianity - with the Nirmanakaya, and the discarnate logos, that is to say the logos, or the second person of the Trinity, before incarnation (so to speak) with the Sambhogakaya. But I wouldn't like to sort of pursue that sort of comparison, because I think one has to establish very very carefully the different contexts within which these texts occur. I mean if, say, you find three things in one tradition and three things in another, they're not necessarily the same three things in different words or different terms. I don't say that - (what should one call them?) I don't say that relationships (although that isn't quite the right word) or even parallelisms, can't be established between one tradition and another. But what I am saying is that it has to be properly done, huh? And usually what is obviously parallel, or what seems to be obviously a parallel, is not in fact a parallel at all if one goes a little more deeply into it. There may be structural parallels, but perhaps one can't really say more than that. For instance, if you take the idea of the incarnate logos, well you've got a sort of body-mind dualism there which we don't find in Buddhism. You've got an idea of the flesh, you know, the Word taking flesh, which you don't find in Buddhism. You don't find it, well, anywhere in India, I think, in any Indian tradition, this idea of flesh in quite the same way that you have it in Christianity. So "taking flesh" is not the same thing. I mean the Word taking flesh is not really the same thing as a Nirmanakaya. But on the other hand there is perhaps a very general distant resemblance, but I think one shouldn't make too much of that, or try to, you know, draw

conclusions from that prematurely. Was that all the question?

Abhaya: Well just... then therefore speech doesn't actually mean talking or writing. It's something much more than that when you say you've got...

S: Yes, one can communicate through images. According to the Vimalakirti [Sutra] one can communicate through odours. According to the Vimalakirti Sutra there is a whole Buddha realm where the Dharma is preached through different scents. So it is the principle of communication, not speech necessarily in the sense of vocalized speech.

Padmavajra: So then does communication partake both of the material world and of the world of Absolute Mind?[24]

S: Well, I think one must ask here what one means by communication. Communication would seem to be possible at all levels where the distinction of subject and object obtains. And the more subtle the distinctions, presumably the more subtle the communication. Also the more effective the communication where such communication takes place. I mean does a stone communicate with a stone? Huh? Or does a tree communicate with a tree? Human beings communicate, and even among human beings there are different levels of communication. Animals certainly communicate, birds communicate, angels communicate, but there would seem to be different levels of communication. Anyway let's leave that one for the moment.

Kamalashila: Yes, I just wondered why you thought that the Buddha was unlikely to have thought of the idea of the triad of body, speech and mind?

S: I thought I'd probably... When I wrote this I thought I'm going to get asked a question about this (laughter) sooner or later, but I let it stand nonetheless. Ah, I didn't mean to suggest that the Buddha lacked the capacity, you know, to originate such a triad. Just what were my actual words? Just read them again. Was it "it was unlikely.."?

Vessantara: "The triad of body, speech and mind did not form part of this already existing 'language'. Indeed, according to sources which I have not, as yet, had the opportunity of checking, the concept of man as consisting of body, speech, and mind is not to be found in the Vedas. If the Buddha did not think of it himself, and it seems unlikely that he did, then where did He get it from?"

S: Yes. It was unlikely I think more because the Buddha seemed willing to use, or to prefer to use, terms which lay ready to hand and which were, in a sense or up to a point, already understood. To the best of my knowledge the Buddha didn't ever coin neologisms in a way, say, that Teilhard de Chardin has done. So therefore on that sort of general principle I considered it unlikely that that triad, you know, would have been an

invention, so to speak, of the Buddha himself.

Lalitavajra: Would you see that as another aspect of compassion, or of skilful means: Not necessarily creating new...

S: It's just an instance of a - what seems to be a general principle. You've got something new to communicate, so what do you usually do? You usually use the old words in a slightly different way, huh? You give them a slightly different meaning, and that meaning, you know, is, as it were, injected into them, you know, from or by the context within which you use them. If you just take the word out of context, well it ceases to have its new meaning, it just has its dictionary meaning. But if you persistently use a word with an accepted meaning, within a context of your own, in a way that modifies that meaning - the meaning of that word or that term in a novel sort of way - then people who are reading your article or your book or whatever, or your series of books, you know, gradually learn that new significance of the word and latch onto your new meaning. This is what usually happens. It's very rarely I think that completely new words do catch on and become part of the language. [25]

I mean a new word in the sense of a word for a new idea which has occurred just to one individual. Usually people modify the meanings of existing words, or they combine existing words. When they don't do that - as for instance Heidegger doesn't do that - well, they're very, very difficult to follow. It's not only difficult, it's very tiring to follow them. Perhaps you don't grasp their meaning, perhaps they're too remote from ordinary speech and the accepted meanings of words. In the FWBO there are all sorts of words that we use, I mean words that are in general circulation, but we use them in a modified sense. We use the word "individual" rather in a sense of our own. We use the word "spiritual community" in a sense of our own. We use the word "commitment" in a sense of our own. There are lots of other words: I think we use "positive emotion" rather in a sense of our own. Perhaps we use "communication" even, in a sense of our own. I don't think we've introduced any completely new words into our vocabulary, not to the best of my knowledge. I mean we have introduced here and there a Pali or Sanskrit word because we had no satisfactory word in English. We tend to use the word "metta", don't we, quite a bit. So therefore I think it unlikely that the Buddha should have sort of invented this triad. I think it must have lain ready to hand in some tradition, which does not seem to have been the Vedic tradition. I believe that the Jains also used this triad, but again I'd need to check that.

Abhaya: But in a way it's not like creating a new word is it? Isn't it more like the Buddha would see that the principle of communication, which is after all a very important part of the human being, had been left out by the Vedas, and so just introduce that? It's not like... is it? I can't see how it's like introducing a completely new concept.

S: That's true, but when you have, say, a collocation of three terms like

that, the Buddha uses them in the Pali canon, as far as we know, as though they already existed, as sort of three terms which people, at least in some cases, were accustomed to find together. I mean for instance take the slogan, say, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". Well, there are three terms put together there at the time of the French Revolution. Well all three terms existed before, but when they're put together in that way they acquire a sort of special significance, they become a sort of threefold slogan almost. So if somebody was to take up that and use it, say within the context of the French Revolution, well people would have understood what he was getting at. He wasn't speaking simply of liberty, equality, fraternity, but of Liberty! Equality! Fraternity! - do you see what I mean? So in the same way in the Buddha's time perhaps that triad was already in circulation - the Buddha simply took it up. There's no point in the Pali scriptures where he... where we actually see him first of all operating, say, with the old nama-rupa and then deliberately adding speech onto that. He always seems equipped with 'body, speech and mind'. So one can only assume that he used it from the very beginning and that it was already extant in that particular threefold form. Of course it is possible, on the other hand, that, well, there are passages missing or episodes from the Buddha's life of which there are no records. It may be that he did actually decide to add speech on to body and mind, and that that was a novelty. But then on [26] the other hand we do have that triad, you know, in Zoroastrian sources and I think probably in Jain sources also, and they're more ancient than the Buddhist sources. Then I think it can be regarded as established that the Buddha did not devise that formulation himself.

Satyaraja: In the Upali Sutta isn't there a Jain who comes to the Buddha and starts talking about body, speech and mind?

S: Yes, it was current usage. But on the other hand of course the Pali scriptures have been edited, and very often, later, more elaborate formulations are put into the mouths of people living in the Buddha's time, and even into the Buddha's own mouth. And we know in fact that they are formulations. So that wouldn't necessarily be a proof or an argument. One would have to see which particular sutta, and to what strata of the Pali canon that particular sutta belonged, and so on and so forth. (pause) But I was concerned to make I think here two points. One is that this inclusion of speech as one of the three main principles of man was quite unusual and, well, unique as regards the use that was made of that as regards Buddhism. Well, we see it extends, say, into the Trikaya doctrine. It has all sorts of ramifications. It extends into the ten precepts. So that is quite unusual and even, in that more elaborate sense, unique, and must have some very important significance. The second point was that there was a possible connection with the Zoroastrian tradition which I want to follow up. But I think it's not generally understood there's quite a lot of things in general Buddhist teaching that are not found in the Vedic tradition. I think it is generally understood that Buddhism represents a non-Vedic tradition - it is a Sramanic and not a Brahmanic tradition - but I think the extent of the difference isn't always appreciated. This is something I want to go into

because clearly there are certain things that the Buddha, as it were, 'takes up', or adopts, or makes use of, or takes recourse in, that do belong to an existing tradition. But it isn't the Vedic tradition. We know that in certain cases because we know that certain teachings are not found in the Vedas. Alright then, to which tradition does it belong, huh? Do you see what I mean? So that leads to all sorts of interesting possibilities. Anyway we'd better not go into them now.

Vajranatha: With regard to this idea of giving words a new meaning, which we've done with words quite a lot in the FWBO, I was thinking that sometimes if you're talking to people outside the FWBO and you're using one of these new words we've redefined, it seems possible to use one of those new words, and actually to them, with its new meaning, even though you haven't actually, sort of, defined it in its new form to them. Do you think that's actually the case? That they are understanding it in the form that we understand it?

S: Well they don't necessarily do that, huh? It depends, of course, whom you're talking to. If you're, say, talking to someone who's been involved in, say, left-wing politics, and you talk about commitment, he'll certainly understand it in the sense he's familiar with, not in the sense that you are familiar with. It depends how long you talk with any given person, the extent to which you can go into things with them and the extent to which they're open-minded and so on. But [27] I think one must be very careful that one doesn't assume that when one uses words that we've redefined in their redefined sense, people will necessarily know what you're talking about. If one does that, well then one is more likely to be engaging in, or indulging in, what I've called jargon. And there is, I think, an extract about that in one of the Mitratas isn't there? FWBO jargon. So I think that if we start using these redefined terms very, very loosely, or using them when talking to people outside the Friends without realizing that we are using these terms in a sense to which they are not accustomed, and don't make allowance for that in our communication, then that is a serious weakness on our part. We must know what we are doing, we must know what is the accepted standard meaning of a given word, and we must know the extent to which we've redefined that word, the extent to which we deviate from the accepted standard meaning, hmm? Otherwise we'll not be able to communicate with people; we'll be at cross purposes with them.

Abhaya: It might be good to make a list of all of them and make sure you know the...

S: The possibility of doing this has been discussed for a long, long time, for years and years, and somebody was actually going to do it, but nothing has happened yet. But we really do need something of that sort.

Padmavajra: A sort of FWBO Abhidharma.

S: No. I think that will come in about two hundred years time! (laughter) I

think we need, you know, a little FWBO dictionary, you know, with all the important Buddhist terms, general Buddhist terms, plus terms which have acquired a specific connotation within the context of the FWBO.

Vajranatha: Do you think it's out of the question that somebody might understand those terms then if you were in quite a lot of sympathy with them, if it was quite sympathetic communication?

S: Well, it would depend on the extent of the context in which those words were embedded. Unless they were thought readers, unless they were telepathic, if you simply used the term and there was no substantial context there would be no way for them to understand the different sense, you know, as modified by the FWBO, in which you were using that particular term.

Prasannasiddhi: In a sense the terms are part of a whole world.

S: Yes, yes. When you use particular words, in a way you enter the world to which those words belong. When you start using words in a different sense, a sense of your own, you're sort of living in a different world, or entering into a different world. Anyway, let's press on - how is the time going anyway?

Vessantara: It's just gone twenty-to.

Dipankara: My question, Bhante, was that you seem to take as your primary sources the Pali Tipitaka, and is this because that recension is closer to the word of the Buddha, as compared with the Sanskrit? And if this is so, is that due to a remoteness [28] in time and space, where the Sanskrit was put down?

S: I think there's one important fact about the Pali canon which we should realize. It is the only Buddhist canon, the only Tripitaka, that has survived complete in the language in which it was originally compiled. There was a corresponding Sanskrit canon, of the Sarvastivadins, but that has not survived complete in the original language, in Sanskrit. We have fragments of it - even quite extensive fragments - especially of their Vinaya Pitaka. We've of course quite large sections in Chinese and, you know, Tibetan translation. But we do not have very much of the original Sanskrit Tripitaka. There was an Apabhramsa version and there was also a Paisaci version, but we have fragments of those only in Chinese translation as far as I know. So the Pali canon is important mainly on account of its being, as I said, the only surviving canon which has survived complete in the original language. This is not to say that it was necessarily closer to the sources - closer to the Buddha and his own teaching, his personal teaching. Then there was the Sanskrit canon which we do not have in its entirety, or the other canons, which have practically disappeared altogether. But it is the nearest complete source one might say. But of course within the Pali canon one has to distinguish different



levels, different strata, you know. Some portions were clearly compiled later than others. Some portions are clearly, for various reasons, closer to the Buddha himself and his personal teachings. So I've used the... I've relied on the Pali canon mainly for these practical reasons. I haven't relied exclusively on the Pali canon because I've also quoted from the Mahavastu, which is a parallel Sanskrit source. The Mahavastu is part, traditionally, of the Vinaya Pitaka of the Lokottaravadins, who were a branch of the Mahasanghikas. We have only... we have some parts of the Mahasanghika canon, a few bits and pieces and some translations in Chinese, but I have been quite concerned, in some ways, to try to get back to what the Buddha, in a sense, actually taught. I don't think we can ever be absolutely certain that the Buddha actually used this particular form of words and did not use that particular form of words, but I think we can have a pretty good idea as to the gist of the Buddha's teaching, the general drift of his original teaching, and I think we are able to distinguish it from the later developments, in some cases the not so very desirable developments. So if one is concerned, you know, with what the Buddha originally taught, especially what he taught in a more practical, almost 'down to earth' sense, well one needs to dig, and dig quite deep, in the Pali canon. The Mahayana sutras, though their teaching is, you know, very sublime and profound, aren't of much help in that sort of way, huh?

Satyananda: I was just wondering, Bhante, if the anagarika precepts that are taken traditionally in India, are the same as the ones that we take in the Order, or whether they are... they're a distinct...

S: Well there aren't really any traditional anagarika precepts. The word anagarika is known, the term or the title anagarika is known, but the anagarika status didn't exist in the way that the bhikkhu status did, or the upasaka status did. The [29] word anagarika does occur in the Dhammapada, but there are very, very few references to anagarikas in traditional Buddhist literature. For instance there is a reference, it must be in the Divyavadana, to the sixteen arahants as being accompanied by an anagarika, but that sort of reference is very, very rare. So there has been no tradition of anagarika ordination in the East at all. The title, and one might say lifestyle, of anagarika was revived, well one might even say introduced, in modern times, by Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon, who was the founder of the Mahabodhi Society. So the question arises, well, you know, why did he call himself 'anagarika', huh? Why did he introduce this? Well the reason was this: he wanted to work for Buddhism, he wanted to spread the Dharma. He was a very enthusiastic young Sinhalese Buddhist. He wanted to revive, you know, Buddhism in India, he wanted to get back Buddha Gaya, Buddha Gaya temple, from the hands of the orthodox Hindus. He decided, when he was quite young, to devote his whole life to Buddhism. But he realized that that meant quite a lot of work, especially in India, and he felt that if he became a bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk, which would have been the normal course in Ceylon for someone wanting to take up full-time religious or spiritual life, well he wouldn't be able to do the work for the Dharma that he wanted, because

there were so many rules that a monk had to observe which would simply come in the way. And at that time in Ceylon those rules were quite strictly observed by most monks. For instance, a monk shouldn't handle money - well how was he going to carry on his work in India if he couldn't handle money? I mean, a monk is not supposed to ride on an animal or in a vehicle drawn by an animal - well how was he to get around? He couldn't go everywhere by train, there were no cars in those days. So he decided that if he became a bhikkhu, which meant that he would have to observe all the precepts, it would handicap him to such an extent that he wouldn't be able to work for the Dharma, which in a way really seems ridiculous, well in a way it is ridiculous. So he decided that he wouldn't become a monk. At the same time he definitely didn't consider himself as an upasaka, as a layman. He felt definitely, really committed to the Dharma, he didn't want to get married, he didn't want to involve himself in worldly life, he didn't want a job, he resisted a lot of pressure from his family on these scores. He just wanted to live and work for the Dharma. So he hit on the idea of calling himself anagarika. I'm not even sure he took any particular ordination - I think he might have taken a brahmacari vow from some senior monk whom he respected. Anyway he was the first in modern times who became an anagarika. So since him there have been quite a number of people - very often Europeans, European Buddhists in the East, who haven't wanted, for various reasons, to become monks, to become bhikkhus, but who definitely didn't consider themselves as lay Buddhists, who became anagarikas. There was Anagarika Sugatananda and then there's a Bengali, old friend of mine, Monindra, Anagarika Monindra, who became a well known meditation teacher. There are a sort of handful of these anagarikas, but it isn't anything very regular, or [30] very recognized. Technically, in the eyes of bhikkhus, they are upasakas, because there is no such thing as an anagarika according to the Vinaya, if you see what I mean. So the view is that they are technically upasakas. But in a way that is nonsense - technicalities carried to that extreme do become nonsense. So they are sort... I used to describe them as freelance bhikkhus, or freelance monks. So that is what is meant by anagarika nowadays. So there's no question therefore of anagarikas in the Western Buddhist Order sort of conforming to any established tradition. But they are anagarikas in much the way that Dharmapala was. That is to say they're full-time workers for the Dharma, within the context of the FWBO. They've taken a vow of celibacy, and of course those in India - and at present we only have them in India - wear a yellow robe, which is not the bhikkhu robe. Dharmapala, by the way, wore a robe, not the bhikkhu robe which has got patches as it were. It was a plain yellow. And he didn't cut his hair. Anagarikas in India cut their hair, but Dharmapala, just as a matter of information, didn't; he had sort of half-length hair. So that's anagarika. I think the main thing about the... well there are two main things about the anagarika I think. One is that he is definitely a full-timer, so to speak. He follows a lifestyle which permits a sort of full-time involvement in directly Dharmic activities. And two, he is celibate, he takes an actual precept. It's not that he just happens to be celibate, he actually takes a vow of celibacy, he takes the precept of celibacy, of

brahmacariya.

Satyananda: Does that mean that Govinda, for instance, when he got married he's no longer an anagarika?

S: Oh yes, of course. I mean there was quite a fuss about that, because I remember I got a little bit involved in this because when I was editing the Mahabodhi journal, Govinda used to send me articles for publication, and he'd sign them "Lama Anagarika Govinda". So I used to just send those on down to Calcutta for publication. But the general secretary of the Mahabodhi Society, through whose hands they passed (he used to have to pass them on to the printer) struck out "Anagarika", and Govinda was very, very annoyed about this. I can remember a rather acrimonious correspondence about it. But Valisingha, the General Secretary, maintained, well, he just shouldn't call himself an anagarika. And he was a disciple of Dharmapala so he took it almost as a slur on Dharmapala, that a married man should call himself anagarika. So he just refused to have this in the Mahabodhi journal. But Govinda maintained that his writings were known... he was known as a writer under this name and there were questions of copyright involved and all that sort of thing, so he insisted on being Lama Anagarika Govinda. To make things even more difficult some other friends of ours said he had no right to call himself a lama either (laughter) . He started off as a sort of Brahmachari Govinda, so there've been these various sorts of changes. Well, my friend Valisingha also started off as Brahmachari Valisingha, the disciple of Dharmapala, but he quietly dropped the Brahmachari - I asked him once why he dropped it and he just smiled (laughter). But he was a very good man, huh? Anyway, that's clear I hope. [31]

Vessantara: So there wasn't any particular set of precepts that Dharmapala and his followers took up?

S: No. No. To the best of my knowledge not. To the best of my knowledge if he took anything at all it was simply a sort of vow of celibacy in front of a senior monk in Ceylon.

Satyananda: In the book on Dharmapala it mentions that he followed something... the Hinayana version of the Ten Paramitas, and it mentions things that he actually dedicated himself to doing.

S: Yes, that's in his, sort of, personal spiritual life. He didn't sort of take them as precepts or anything. But there is a Theravada version of the ten paramitas found in the Pali canon. They are considered as late. But they do play some sort of minor part in Sinhalese Buddhism - they're not altogether unknown. And sometimes in collections of the Jataka stories, the Jataka stories in Ceylon are arranged under the headings of these ten paramitas, according to Theravada tradition. They're a quite different set from the set with which we are more familiar.

Vessantara: So would they just be seen as the ten perfections practised by the Bodhisattva in the sense of Shakyamuni in his previous lives?

S: Yes, yes, indeed. Or by anybody who aspired to be a Samyak Sambuddha at some time in the future.

Vessantara: When you talked about anagarika you said "at present" we have them only in India. Do you envisage having them in other places as time goes on?

S: I've been wondering about this, hmm. I've been thinking that it wouldn't be a bad idea if the sort of monastic, or semi-monastic, element within the Order wasn't strengthened a little, if only to sort of counterbalance the tendency, which I regard as unfortunate, for Order members to get married. I'm not referring to Order members who are already married when they become Order members. I've already made it clear, you know, that's quite a different matter. But I'm very, very dubious about the desirability of any Order members who already are, as it were, free, in a sense tying themselves down in this way. I'm not saying that in the abstract it could be altogether ruled out, you know, in a completely ideal world as it were. But I think there is so much to be done in the way of spreading the Dharma that we need all our available resources, and I think that, you know, if you got involved in married life, as an Order member (that is newly involved in married life) and if you take on the responsibilities of, you know, being a husband and a father and raising a family. And if you sort of take that seriously, as in fact you should do, I mean that limits your effectiveness as an Order member. And I think we've got so few Order members - really there's only a miserable two hundred and fifty of them, well not more than that - and there is so much work to be done in the world - I think that we just can't afford to limit ourselves in any way. But since there has been this what I regard as unfortunate tendency for some Order members to get married or involved in sort of permanent relationships tantamount to marriage, and, you know, parental responsibilities and all that sort of thing, I think well, perhaps we should think of counterbalancing that [32] a bit by encouraging at least a few more people to be anagarikas. On the other hand one doesn't want to develop within the Order itself the sort of upasaka/bhikkhu polarization that one gets, you know, within traditional Buddhism, or some forms of traditional Buddhism. But I must say I have been quite concerned, not to say disturbed, by this tendency, though it's only a slight tendency, in some quarters within the Order, in the direction of settling down domestically, you know, with or without the benefit of clergy, huh? This cannot but limit us. I mean if you have existing commitments and obligations, well by all means discharge them, and you should. But please don't take on any additional ones.

Indrabodhi: But how does this go with what you were just saying earlier about realistic options? Surely some people, from what you were saying then, don't see celibacy or anagarika as a realistic option so...

S: No doubt some don't, and perhaps the majority won't, but I'm just thinking that perhaps a few should, huh? to counterbalance the few who are, you know, sort of definitely going in the opposite direction, no more than that.

Indrabodhi: But you seem to be saying that those few shouldn't in a way, that's what you were indicating - that there were so few of us that...

S: Well yes. There are two ways in which we can look at this, or one can look at it from two points of view, you know. What, given the circumstances, is best ... (break in recording)... of the situation in the world, and on the other hand simply the situation in the world and the need to mobilize our resources totally. One might, of course, come to different conclusions on different scores, for instance, looking at say an individual case one might say, well, that person could well get married and raise a family without detriment to his personal spiritual life. But even though that might be the case, since the situation in the world is such well, they shouldn't do that, so as to leave themselves free to devote themselves to spreading the Dharma in a full-time sort of way. On the other hand, you might say, well, in the case of certain people that, well, even supposing the Dharma was being spread quite effectively, we didn't need any more people, well they shouldn't get married in any case; it just wouldn't be good for them personally - it wouldn't help them in their personal spiritual development, huh?

Padmavajra: You could forestall that danger of a two-tier thing developing if anagarikas were ordained over here, and presumably anagarikas in the West wouldn't need to wear robes and...

S: I think this is something about which I will keep an open mind. I don't see any need for it at the present. I wouldn't like to say definitely: "Well, no. I don't see any circumstances under which in the West anagarikas would ever wear robes", I wouldn't like to put it as strongly as that. But I don't think it is very important in the West that people should wear robes publicly, if anything it is probably counter-productive. But I think it would probably strengthen the situation - apart from the desirability for the individual concerned - if more people took the anagarika precepts, which means the precept of celibacy, [33] as it were to counterbalance things a bit, looking at things in those terms.

Padmavajra: Because you don't call the anagarika... you don't call it an ordination, you call it precept which you give yourself.

S: That's right, yes. Because I want to - as I've said repeatedly - safeguard the uniqueness of the Going for Refuge as what really constitutes ordination.

Padmavajra: So you could say that an anagarika is just someone who's

practising the third precept more intensively.

S: One could say that yes, yes indeed. Well that would be a correct statement of the position so far as the FWBO was concerned, with perhaps the rider that it would be a matter of public knowledge that he was so practising, so that people should not place, even unintentionally, any sort of hindrances or obstacles in his way. Alright, another question if there's time.

Vessantara: We're over time actually.

S: Oh well then we'd better stop there. Have we got any questions left?

Vessantara: Yes, about four or five.

S: And we're meeting tomorrow?

Vessantara: Yes.

S: OK then, fine.

#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE TEN PILLARS OF BUDDHISM TUSCANY 1984, Session 3, 22nd October, Tape 3 side 2 (remaining questions on Part 1. chapters 2 & 3 + questions on chapters 4 & 5)

Dipankara: In one of the chapters we have been studying, we have heard something about the dreams of the irreversible Bodhisattva, how he keeps in mind skilful action even in dreams. What I'm interested in is the occurrence of taboos in dreams. When they come up, they are quite surprising and often disturbing. I have mentioned this to several people and it seems that some people generally believe that taboos are something to do with primitive tribal culture and belong to a state of unintegrated emotions, but it seems that they are still alive in the subconscious. The question is: What bearing do taboos have on morality?

S: It is as though - just speaking from my general rather vague anthropological knowledge - it's as though in the early history of man, in the earlier history of human groups, human societies, taboo, and what we've come to call taboo, adopting what I believe is a Melanesian term, takes the place of morality and one finds this to a very great extent even in some existing societies, especially more traditional societies. There are certain things which, as we say in English, are just not done, and no one asks why, you know, they are not done, they are simply just not done. Not so long ago, I was reading a book by Herman Melville called Typee. Herman Melville, of course, is famous mainly as the author of Moby Dick, but there are a number of other quite good novels which he has written and Typee is one of the earlier of them, and he describes a three of four

months' stay of his - somewhat fictionalized - among the Typees, a people or one of the peoples of a very small Pacific island, and he has something to say about taboo among them. For instance, it was taboo for a woman ever to sit in a boat; a woman never sat in a boat, even when the boat was drawn up, you know, on the dry land and she certainly never sat in the boat on the water. If a woman did, as it were by accident, happen to sit in a boat she would be instantly killed, she would just be speared, there was no question about it, it was utterly taboo, and Melville was unable to find out why this should be and no one was able to enlighten him. Similarly, one day a young man arrived who wasn't a member of the Typee tribe, belonged to some other tribe with which the Typees were normally at war, but he was received almost with open arms and Herman Melville couldn't understand this but this stranger knew a little English - apparently he had been to Australia - and so Melville eventually got [35] into conversation with him and asked him how it was that he was received in this way even though his tribe, you know, was at war with the Typees, and he said: "Oh, - me taboo!" So it seemed that a taboo could be laid on a person, that person became sacrosanct, hut again Melville wasn't able to understand why, to find out why.

So it seems in so-called primitive societies this is what one often finds: that their lives are governed by what we've come to call taboos and sometimes one has heard people violating taboos unintentionally; when they realize what they have done they will sicken and die. They take them as seriously as that. So taboo seems to be a rather extreme, in some cases apparently arbitrary, form of custom or convention but it does seem to hold that tribe or the community together and that probably is its function. There's no question of right or wrong, there are some things which are done or not done. There are some things or actions which are taboo and that the force of the taboo is very strong, is very (as it were) irrational, and very often no one knows, you know, why the taboo is observed, it is sufficient that it is observed. Obviously there are survivals into, you know, modern times and into more advanced communities of so-called primitive taboos, you know, of this sort. Some of them relate to quite trivial things and some of them relate to things which are still of quite fundamental importance. According to some anthropologists, and I believe according to Freud, the fundamental taboo in all human societies and one which still persists today is the taboo against incest. (I mean) it is sometimes violated but nonetheless broadly speaking it does remain an extremely powerful taboo. And then there are taboos of a minor kind, for instance it is taboo, say, in some societies in the West, to spit on the floor, or you know, to eat your peas, you know, with your knife, and you wouldn't dream of doing such things, you'd find it much easier to commit adultery perhaps than eat your peas with your knife, or some people would, I think, (laughter) and so on. It's as though in the evolution of human societies you get taboos which are apparently irrational - there might have been a rational, (you know) reason (so to speak) for them originally - you get taboos which are irrational gradually, you know, coming to be replaced by ethical observances and ethical standards which

are more rationally based.

But then what about dreams, because the question was about dreams? Well, in dreams it is as though you go back to a more primitive more archaic level of your own, you know, mentality, your own psyche, [36] a more irrational level. So it's not surprising that one should have taboos there. You didn't give any examples or make it very clear what exactly you had in mind, but perhaps it is clear in a sort of general way that, well, it's even natural to encounter taboos in dreams because dreams relate to the irrational and that is where, you know, taboos have their sources. From the irrational they derive their strength and perhaps it is in the irrational, in the unconscious level, that they in many cases still survive.

Dipankara: The dream was one of incest.

S: Well that's interesting then, isn't it? But then again, you know, Freud, in dealing with this particular subject, in dealing with the Oedipus Complex, refers of course to that famous play by Sophocles, and you know, Freud actually quotes from the play the statement, by one of the characters on the topic of incest, the character says - I forget which one - "...After all, every man has dreamt of sleeping with his mother." So that's rather interesting, isn't it? It's rather significant that on the unconscious level there should not only be that taboo, but taboo should even be violated. (pause)

Satyaloka: Don't some taboos have.. Maybe they don't have a rational basis but they do make sense, as in, well, something like incest?

S: Oh, yes, I have dealt with this in my essay on Aspects of Buddhist the Morality, oh yes. I mean, incest taboo makes evolutionary sense. It could be that many other taboos, you know, do make sense at least for the society which observes them; at the very least, you know, they have you know, a cohesive influence. I mean, there's nothing very rational about the rules of football, yes? But, you know, if you are going to play team games together you have got to have rules of some kind! You could presumably have a quite different set of rules.

Susiddhi: You get a taboo in the north of Scotland that if you're in a boat you always turn it clockwise, the way the sun goes, the other way is called widdershins...

S: But is that a taboo in the strict sense? Because if you know why they do that, they know, as it were, that it is, say, unlucky or sinister to do it the other way, it will bring had luck. Very often in the case of taboos observed by primitive societies they don't observe the taboo for any such reason or at least they are unable to assign a reason to it. (pause) Anyway, where does that leave us with regard to taboos in dreams? So you are really referring more to the breaking of taboos in dreams, though clearly it must be experienced as a taboo before it can actually be broken as a taboo.



[37]

Dipankara: What I was wondering was whether they deserve some respect, that they weren't just expressions of unintegrated emotion.

S: I don't see why there's any reason to regard them as expressions of unintegrated emotion, unless one has very definite evidence to that effect. (pause) But presumably you aren't referring just to taboo, you are referring - if there is a question of, you know, lack of integration - you know, to a strong compulsion to observe the taboo but at the same time perhaps an almost equally strong compulsion not to observe it. Well if that was the situation, that no doubt would require some examination and perhaps there would indicate an unintegrated attitude: if on the one hand, you respected that taboo, even feared it, but on the other hand you wanted to break it. Anyway, let's pass on, unless someone wanted to add something. (pause)

Ratnabodhi: We were discussing the analysis of the human individual and wondering how a modern Western man would analyse himself. We concluded that whatever else his analysis might contain, it probably wouldn't contain a spiritual element, that is, man doesn't generally term himself as a spiritual being. But I was wondering whether it would be possible to formulate an analysis of the human individual in such a way that it did include the spiritual element without contradicting analyses such as the Five Skandhas, which analyse man purely in terms of the conditioned?

S: I think there is a little bit of confusion there, actually. Go through it again, bit by bit, you know, slowly.

Ratnabodhi: We were discussing the analysis of the human individual and wondering how a modern Western man would analyse himself.

S: Well, there are various analyses, of course, yes.

Ratnabodhi: We concluded that whatever else his analysis might contain, it probably wouldn't contain a spiritual element.

S: Wouldn't contain a spiritual element in more traditional sense, perhaps one should say. Because I have found for instance that translations of some Marxist writings, that is, writings translated from the Russian, often use the word spiritual, but obviously they don't use it quite in the, you know, the traditional sense.

Ratnabodhi: I think we were more concerned (about) the average man on the street. He probably wouldn't consider himself spiritual... wouldn't have any spiritual element in his make up.

S: I'm not sure. (I mean) surveys do suggest that the majority of people in

Britain, and certainly the majority of people in the United States, believe in God, so presumably God represents something spiritual and presumably they believe that they have some relationship with God and that therefore there is some kind of spiritual element in them, one [38] would have thought. But nonetheless it is true that a lot of, say, modern Western thought, for instance behaviouristic psychology, does not recognize, certainly not explicitly, the existence of any spiritual element in man. Anyway, let's go on.

Ratnabodhi: I was wondering if it would be possible to formulate an analysis of the human individual in such a way that it did contain a spiritual element without contradicting analyses such as the five skandhas

S: Mm, ah, I think this is where the confusion comes in, possibly. It suggests that the five skandha analysis is as it were almost materialistic. Do you see what I mean? This raises all sorts of questions. I don't think one can really, as it were, assimilate the five skandha analysis, you know, to a purely materialistic or at least non-spiritual analysis of the human individual, but there is a lot to be said on this particular topic. From the way in which the five skandha analysis is presented in some modern books on Buddhism, written both by eastern Buddhists and western Buddhists, one might well think that it was a materialistic analysis. It would seem to exclude any spiritual element, but even if one looks at it in purely traditional terms, that isn't really the case, because the five skandhas are first of all, rupa, which is let's say, material form, then there is vedana which is feeling and emotion, there is samjna which is perception or recognition, or interpretation. Subhuti calls it in his recent book - the latest book that is - and then there is consciousness. If you analyse the skandha of consciousness you find it is analysable into a very large number of states, according to one analysis for instance 89. And these are graded and these states of consciousness are not only, you know, states of kamaloka consciousness but states of rupaloka consciousness, states of arupaloka consciousness, and all these are included in the five skandha analysis, therefore are included in the human individual. So if one includes, you know, in one's analysis of the human individual the experience, which is what it amounts to, of rupaloka and of arupaloka, well that certainly couldn't be described as not being a spiritual analysis, or one couldn't say that the analysis didn't include a spiritual element. Do you see what I mean? But very often this is not made clear in many books on Buddhism. One is left with the impression that by the vijnana skandha is just meant consciousness in the ordinary sense, consciousness of the material world, but that is not even correct if one follows the strict traditional account. So I think one can retain the five skandha analysis, but that analysis should be presented in such a way as to make it clear that it does not exclude a spiritual element. There's a lot more that could be said on the subject of the five skandhas and their various interpretations, but perhaps [39] that is really all that needs to be said at the moment. (pause)

Susiddhi: Do you see any advantage or necessity in Order members taking an extra precept that they will do their visualization practice every day?

S: Let's just have that again, to get the full force of it. (laughter)

Susiddhi: Do you see any advantage or necessity in Order members taking an extra precept that they will do their visualization practice every day'?

S: Mm.. Any advantage or necessity. Necessity would assume that they are not going to do their visualization practice unless they take that precept, so one could well query that, because I think quite a few Order members do do their daily visualization practice without actually having taken explicitly an extra precept to do that. Whether it would be an advantage, well, in some cases it might be because equally there are some Order members who find it difficult to keep up their daily visualization practice for one reason or another and it might be that in their case the taking of an extra precept so to speak to the effect that they would keep up their daily practice would be helpful, in which case it would be for them an advantage.

Susiddhi: I was thinking, you know, what I was thinking behind it was the contrast between the situation here, where I think almost everyone manages to do their practice almost every day, and the sort of hurly-burly in which most of us live, where sometimes your visualization practice, which you would hope to have at the centre of your mandala, sometimes gets pushed a bit to the side.

S: Yes. It shouldn't be necessary to take a precept. As I say, some people might find it, you know, helpful to take a precept just to, as it were bolster up their determination to, you know, do their visualization practice every day.

Susiddhi: You would see it as a personal thing?

S: I see it as a personal thing. I wouldn't like to make it general because that would suggest that you expected, you know, people not to keep up their practice or they at least would not be able to keep it up without taking actually, you know, that extra precept in a sort of formal and explicit manner.

Vessantara: Do you think there are any of the existing Ten Precepts which you would encourage people going back from here to give particular attention to? (Admittedly) they all need attention...

S: Particular attention? It might vary from one individual to another. I have been saying that, I think I said it in this particular paper, that it would seem that the precepts which were most likely to be broken, or were

broken most easily, were the speech precepts. So perhaps one needs to give them special attention. I'm sure that some people at least would need to give special attention to the, you know, kamesu micchachara precept, because I do know that on some occasions people have gone, you know, back from Tuscany straight into the waiting and eager arms of their girlfriends, which would not seem to be the very best, you know, sort of way of going back. Or maybe one does get around to it sooner or later but not within the first two or three days, surely, of getting back? (laughter) So maybe, you know, some people may need to be particularly mindful of that. But yes, as I say, it would vary very much perhaps, from one individual to another. The more one thinks about it, the more one feels that all the precepts require special attention.

Satyaraja: In the Kutadanta Sutta, it seems strange that the Brahmin should go to the Buddha, someone from a different tradition, to ask him about animal sacrifices. Could you say something about this?

S: Ah. Mm, Kutadanta Sutta. This is in the Digha Nikaya. These suttas have certain rather distinctive characteristics, they seem to be on the whole compilations. And according to, I believe Rhys Davids in his introduction to the Sutta the whole point in making the Brahmin go to the Buddha to ask him about sacrifice, the compilers were sort of making a definite point. Do you see what I mean? You know, that they were sort of making the point that, well, even in those matters, you know, which fell within their own province, it was as though, you know, the Brahmin had to, you know, go to the Buddha as the supreme authority - even on those matters, with regard to which they themselves were supposed to be the supreme authority. So the compilers, according to Rhys Davids, were sort of making the point that, well, it was the Buddha who knew and not the Brahmins. Do you see what I mean?

Satyaraja: Yes, but would it be taken as actual fact or would it be just taken as the sutta trying to make a point, would it be historically the case that a brahmim would...?

S: I think there is no doubt, from all that we can tell from the Pali canon, that Brahmins did go to the Buddha to ask, you know, questions of all kinds, and some Brahmins of course even became his disciples and became bhikkhus. So there was nothing unusual in a Brahmin by birth approaching the Buddha even for instruction. Some of course, [41] approached him just to try to trip him up or something of that sort, but many, it seems, did approach him quite genuinely seeking spiritual instruction. But it's as though perhaps the compilers of this particular sutta gave an extra twist to that fact by making a Brahmin, you know, approach the Buddha for instruction even on those particular matters where he himself, by the very nature of his profession, was supposedly proficient. It's rather as though, say, a Church of England clergyman should approach, you know, an eastern guru, say a Buddhist guru, not just, you know, for general spiritual advice, but for advice as to how to

perform a particular liturgy. (Laughter) That would be rather underlining his ignorance and incompetence! Do you see what I mean? It would seem that the compilers of the Digha Nikaya wanted to underline, even, the ignorance and the incompetence of the whole Brahmin class, as a hereditary class. In other words they wanted, you know, to undermine the whole idea of spiritual knowledge and spiritual proficiency being something that was sort of inheritable, that was in your blood, as it were. This idea is still very strong in India, it's very strong, generally. I mean, Indians will often tell one, as I myself have heard that, say an understanding of spiritual things or even the knowledge of Buddhism is in their blood. (I mean) how can it possibly be in anybody's blood? But this is a very sort of strong feeling that a lot of people do have in India. It's as though, you know, people in the West might say, well, science is in our blood, you know, nuclear physics is in our blood, we don't have to learn it, we don't have to study it, we just know it anyhow so that whatever we say on the subject must be right! But this is the attitude of many Indians, you know, when it comes to spiritual knowledge and spiritual things and, you know, no doubt it was something of that sort in its particular or specific Brahminical form that the compilers of the Digha Nikaya were getting at or trying to undermine.

Aryacitta: If you gained Stream Entry, could you then say that spirituality was in your blood, in a sense?

S: Oh no, it wouldn't be in your blood. (laughter) Where would it be? Would it be in a sense anywhere? (laughter) If it was anywhere, presumably it would be in the higher reaches of your consciousness. (pause) But one could say in a very poetic sort of way that, you know, that it was in your blood, meaning by that that it was part of your very nature that and that you were incapable of going against, which is of course, you know, part of the very definition of Stream Entry. You would be using the term blood analogously. [42]

Padmavajra: In your... in the various references you made to... references in the canon, to the Precepts, a lot of, I think most of them, except the Sariputra extract, were to do with some sort of Brahminical right, which seems quite interesting: the Buddha taking something and giving a new meaning...

S: Of course not only that but in connection with this whole question of nonviolence and non-killing, it was agitated in the Buddha's time mainly in connection with Vedic sacrifices. Not in connection, say, with capital punishment or, you know, vegetarianism, no, but in connection with animal sacrifices, that was the most glaring instance of a sort of ideologically sanctioned mass-violence, mass-killing, mass-slaughter.

And the Brahmins had, you know, a deeply rooted vested interest here, because, you know, they made money out of it. And of course, it was based allegedly on the Vedas. So in the Buddha's day it would seem that

the whole issue of violence and nonviolence came up in its most crucial form within the sacrificial Vedic context. And after all, the Brahmins were the spokesmen, as it were, for what we might call orthodox traditional religion. So it was only natural in a way that the Buddha should have defined his views very often in relation to theirs. I mean they were the people who challenged him because by implication he challenged them.

Padmavajra: The expression you quote from the Kinnari Jataka, that the highest rule of religion, paramam dharmam ... is that a quite pointed kind of use of the term paramam dharmam? I'm thinking, you know, that the term Dharma in Hinduism refers to caste duties. Is there some play on that word, some pointed use of that word?

S: It could be, that is possible. There could be a sort of play on that double meaning: the word Dharma as a spiritual teaching or spiritual truth and as a sort of socio-religious duty.

Padmavajra: You mention Zoroastrianism in the chapter, which I understand is a dualism. You have said that Buddhism is a dualism. Could you say more about that and how it compares with other dualist traditions? Should we make more of the fact that Buddhism is a dualism?

S: I think what I have said sometimes is that Buddhism is a dualism practically speaking or a dualism for practical purposes. And I think I have gone even further than that and I have said that religion or the spiritual life necessarily has at least in its earlier stages a dualistic basis. I think I have referred in this connection to the beginning of the Ariyapariyesana Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya, where [43] the Buddha says that when he was a Bodhisatta, that is to say before his Enlightenment, at first, being himself conditioned he went in pursuit of conditioned things, but then it occurred to him that suppose being himself conditioned he should go in pursuit not of conditioned things but of the unconditioned, whereupon he went in pursuit of the unconditioned, which eventually he attained. So one has here a distinction, one might even say a duality, between what is conditioned and what is unconditioned, and that is quite basic to Buddhism, especially to the Hinayana but even to the Mahayana and Vajrayana, at least practically speaking, because if you are thinking in terms of spiritual life and spiritual development at all, you are thinking in terms of getting, metaphorically speaking, from here to there, from the conditioned to the unconditioned. You posit two principles, one of which you move away from and the other of which you move towards. So your spiritual life, if you think of spiritual life in terms of growth and development, is necessarily based on as it were dualistic assumptions or dualistic postulates. Whether that duality is metaphysically ultimate is another matter. Hmm? Pali Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Pali canon, Theravada Buddhism, as it came to be called, does not go into this. It is quite content to rest, as it were, with the practical dualism, which is possibly the wisest course. What you find, what you experience, when you realize the unconditioned, well, it doesn't say very much about that -

whether you realize a state which is a non-duality, whether you then see that there is no difference really between conditioned and unconditioned - about that matter the Theravada is silent and possibly the Buddha himself was silent. So in the Theravada you have a practical dualism, as you must have it would seem if you lead a spiritual life at all, but nothing is said as regards the metaphysical status, or the ontological status, if you like, of that duality. In the case of the Mahayana, it boldly reduces the duality of conditioned and unconditioned to a non-duality through the concept or experience of sunyata. That of course raises its own difficulties, its own metaphysical and philosophical difficulties. In the case of Zoroastrianism, it does the opposite. Yes, it has a dualistic practical basis, as has the Theravada and has even the Mahayana, but unlike the Theravada, it doesn't rest content with that practical dualism, it asserts that the practical dualism is in fact a metaphysical dualism, that there are in fact two ultimate principles in the universe which are [44] equally real, neither of which can be reduced to the other, and most forms of Zoroastrianism and derivatives of Zoroastrianism maintain that one principle cannot be subordinated to the other, you know, that there is necessarily conflict between them. The Zoroastrianism usually maintains that the principle of good will win in the end but not by destroying the principle of evil but only by permanently holding it down, only when a point is reached when the principle of evil is permanently held down, is never able again to attack the principle of good. But it does not envisage the extinction of the principle of evil nor its absorption into the principle of good nor does it envisage the absorption of the good principle and the evil principle alike into some higher principle. Yes? Do you see what I mean? So therefore you have a position in which all religions and all spiritual systems have a practical as it were working dualistic basis, that they are all agreed, necessarily agreed, on that score, but some regard that the dualistic working basis is at the same time metaphysically ultimate, others don't regard it as metaphysically ultimate and others don't say anything one way or the other.

Padmavajra: (Has Buddhism) in any of its traditions, has it ever suggested that dualism is metaphysical..?

S: That the dualism is metaphysically irreducible? To the best of my knowledge there is no school of Buddhism which explicitly makes that statement.

Padmavajra: I had in mind a phrase in your review of the Life of Padmasambhava, where you referred to the myth of Tarpa Nagpo (and said it's) almost a dualistic...er.. kind of...

S: But it is a myth, eh? It is not sort of stated in philosophical terms. But it is reminiscent, certainly very reminiscent, or was reminiscent to me, of some of the, you know, the great Middle-Eastern myths of perhaps Zoroastrian or distantly Zoroastrian origin, you know, some of the Manichean myths, let us say... [45]

o & A on Ten Pillars, session S (cont.) Cassette 4 side 1.

S: (cont.) ..but thought itself, thought itself is dualistic. It's very difficult to get round to a statement of non-dualism. If you happen to believe in non-dualism - which is not itself dualistic, at least in form (laughing). There's actually a sort of double-bind situation, here. Even if you say, well, you know, the conditioned and the unconditioned are ultimately, you know, not two. But what conditioned? What unconditioned? They must be two in some sense for you to be able even to make that statement. If you say, well, it's an illusory difference - but even an illusory difference is still a difference and then you have got, or you set up, a duality between what is illusory and what is not illusory. Mm? Do you see what I mean? For instance Shankara, the great non-dualist Vedantic thinker, his particular form of advaita, that is Hindu version of non-dualism, is what is called - oh, what is it called...? I forget the technical term now, but what he actually says is this: According to some schools of Vedanta, the universe, the world, originates from Brahma, you know, the absolute principle, it actually originates from it and the oneness of the universe and Brahma consists in the fact that the universe is made out of Brahman in the same way, for instance, that a pot is made out of clay. Do you see what I mean? But Shankara does not accept that, he does not accept that the universe, jagat, and Brahman, the ultimate reality, are one in that sense, he does not agree that the universe in reality emanates from Brahman, he maintains it only appears to emanate, and according to him this is the purest form of non-duality, this is an assertion of unmitigated non-duality. But then the point which I make when discussing this system with my Hindu friends was that even if you say that the universe appears to originate, that it does not originate in reality but only in appearance, there is still duality, because there is a duality between appearance and reality, even though that appearance is unreal! So in, sort of, stating your position as one of non-duality, you imply a duality. I mean thought is, it would seem, inevitably, irreducibly dualistic. So it would seem to me that every philosophy in a sense is bound to be dualistic, in as much as it cannot operate without at least two ultimate principles, it can't make any statement without them. And so if there is to be any question of non-duality, it can only take the form of a sort of purely spiritual, a purely transcendental, experience which cannot be formulated in any way. And it can only be communicated by, as it were, by means of a sort of ultimate [46] dualism, in which thought is stuck, beyond which thought cannot go, but which enables in some as it were mysterious way, enables one to intuit, you know, the... well, you can't say anything, you can't really say the state or principle that lies beyond because you will bring in a third principle then! (laughter) You can only say, well, perhaps therefore the Theravadin position is wisest, or the Buddha's position is wisest: that you are left with two principles and you don't make the statement that they are, you know, metaphysically ultimate, but you just rest in your



realization of what you ever do realize, whatever you do realize at that particular point. If you come down to thought and speech you can only use dualistic language.

Padmavajra: So, I mean, probably.. so in a way from where we stand, could you say that in a sense the whole of the development of the Mahayana, ideas of non-duality etc., are an irrelevance?

S: But irrelevant to whom? Surely the Mahayana thinkers must have found them relevant. It would seem that some people have very subtle minds and they need to go on refining and refining their dualism, you know, in order to transcend it, and it would seem some of the Mahayana philosophers did this. Some of them were under the impression, you know, that they were non-dualist; but at least so far as expression goes, they were not. Whether they, you know, were as regards their own spiritual realization - who can say? (long pause) But the main point is that all spiritual life is based on assumptions which are practically dualistic. Of course some spiritual traditions, even within Buddhism, profess to be based upon assumptions, so to speak, of a non-dualist nature, but I think they have misunderstood their own position.

Kamalasila: What's an example of that?

S: Well, there are some schools which maintain you are Buddha. There's no difference between you and Buddha, all you have to do is - to act Buddha. But you've already used the terms 'you' and 'Buddha' in order to make that statement. You have already set up a duality which you then proceed to negate as you think. But it would seem to me that the duality you have set up has not in fact been negated. (pause) You can only negate it by setting it up, you have to set it up in order to negate it. You know, by negating it, you set it up! (laughing) Anyway, that probably isn't very useful. hm.

Abhaya: With reference to the term kusala (p.30) Bhante, you emphasize that it is not applied to human behaviour in a very abstract sense and that implies the notion that 'right' is conducive to Enlightenment and 'wrong' [47] what does not conduce to Enlightenment. Is this emphasis on Insight with respect to ethics an example of something which is there in the scriptures but has not up to now been sufficiently considered by Buddhists, and you yourself were the first to highlight it in this context?

S: I don't think so. I think that the point has been made before, perhaps quite often before, that Buddhist ethics, or kusala, the notion of the skilful, suggests or conveys an element of intelligence. I think that is fairly well appreciated. I certainly don't think that, you know, I am the first to have noticed that, though it may be that I do place more emphasis on it than is usually done. It goes back in a way to what we were talking about a little while ago that ethics, unlike the observance of taboos, was something rational, you know, something involving intelligence, and the use of the

term kusala brings that out, because skill is something that has to be learned. Skill, again, involves intelligence, it involves mindfulness, it involves practice and experience. So it would seem to be a particularly good term and even a particularly Buddhist sort of term.

Abhaya: Yes, I was thinking more in terms of Insight, you actually bring in the.. well, Enlightenment as the goal, therefore there's an element of the transcendental.. the kusala...

S: Yes, yes, one could say that in the sense that it includes some element of awareness of the goal, which is of course ultimately a transcendental goal. Perhaps one shouldn't stress that too much because traditionally in Buddhism, certainly in Buddhist countries today, that sort of reference of kusala isn't always there by any means, but if one considers it at all deeply and if one thinks of, you know, the whole course of the ethical life, the whole course of the spiritual life, well, that transcendental factor or transcendental goal is ultimately of that. Your karma is involved. Your ethical life ultimately is for the sake of that, your karma is for the sake of that. It isn't simply, you know, for the sake of a happy rebirth in heaven.

Abhaya: But were you saying that one should really stress that?

S: No, I was saying that it isn't stressed explicitly, you know, in traditional.. in Buddhist countries today. Whether we ourselves stress it, you know, in talking to people, is a matter of a skilful means. (I mean) for instance, in connection with meditation, from the very beginning of the 'Friends', you know, we have quite explicitly adopted two different approaches with different kinds of people, one what [48] we call the psychological, the other the spiritual. I mean, some people would just want to learn meditation for the sake of gaining peace of mind so we just make it clear to them that that is possible, you can practise meditation up to a point simply to gain peace of mind without thinking about Enlightenment at all, that's the psychological approach. But others come along to centres and meditation classes definitely thinking in terms of Enlightenment or, you know, some kind of ultimate spiritual goal. So we make it clear to them that meditation is a means to that goal, so with them we adopt the spiritual approach, which is not so much a different approach but an approach that, you know carries on further beyond the psychological approach. It's just the same with ethics, with some people you can talk about ethics simply as necessary to human life, necessary to social life, you know, necessary to the life of the human community, but with others you can talk about ethics or the skilful. as being necessary, you know, for the development of, or insight into the nature of reality itself.

Abhaya: I was probably misreading. (Actually) I thought you were really sort of stressing it and introducing it as a very important element in our approach to the precepts, one that has been neglected - that's not the case? (pause) You do make a point of introducing it.

S: Well, if one is thinking of the kusala in terms of the precept and if one takes the precepts after having gone for Refuge and after all one's Going for Refuge implies a transcendental goal, well, one then must certainly be aware that, as I said, your precepts aren't just sort of tacked on, you know, to your Going for Refuge, your precepts support your Refuge, your Going for Refuge, your precepts point in the direction of your Going for Refuge and therefore in the direction of the Transcendental. But this, of course, is in the case of those who actually Go for Refuge in the full sense, you know, as we understand it, and also take the precepts upon themselves. For them, of course, the precepts are integrated, so to speak, you know, with the Going for Refuge. They can't be regarded as a sort of ethical extra with no organic connection with the Going for Refuge. I think this is, you know, what I was getting at, that they are as it were continuous with the Going for Refuge, the Going for Refuge is, you know, continuous to them, a common thread runs through them all and that is, you know, for those who Go for Refuge, a transcendental thread. I think this is what I was getting at. But in the case specifically of those who do Go for Refuge, or those who take the Going for Refuge with the seriousness that we take it or give it the central place that we give it. I mean, [49] for instance, quite often in Buddhist countries you 'take the refuges', well, that means you are a Buddhist, you belong to the Buddhist community, you're not a Hindu or a Christian or a Muslim. And then you also take the precepts or you don't take them or you observe them or you don't observe them. It's as though they are two sort of separate things. Hmm? But you know, we don't see things in that sort of way. So I think if there is any question of emphasis I give, it is for the practising Buddhist, you know, for the person Going for Refuge, the observance of the precepts is an integral part of the Going for Refuge itself and therefore has a transcendental orientation in the same way that the Going for Refuge has a transcendental orientation. If I stress anything, I think it is that. (Pause)

Shantavira: In the front of the Ten Pillars of Buddhism the ten precepts are rendered in terms of 'items of training', explained in section five as a translation of sikkhapadas. Having emphasized in section four that the precepts are not rules and that confusion with rules should be avoided, I wondered why you entitle section five 'The Ten Precepts as Rules of Training' only to then proceed to drop 'rule' in favour of 'item'. In other words could not this section be entitled 'Ten Precepts as Items of Training' to avoid the confusion anticipated?

S: Someone raised this question when the book was printed. I think elsewhere we have got the expression 'items of training' or... is it 'rules of training'? Is it in one of our other publications, possibly in the Puja Book or the new Puja Book?

Padmavajra: In the Puja Book I think it's translated as "I undertake the training principle".

S: So I think as far as I remember, although I won't be sure of this, we retained the expression 'rule of training' to provide a link with that rather than change 'rule' to 'item'. This is as far as I remember. As regards the word 'rule', I didn't intend to give the impression that I was against rules, rules are sometimes necessary, but rules are always means to an end and we have always to bear in mind the principle which underlies a particular rule, of which the rule is an expression. If we do that, well, there is no harm in having rules. I think the difficulty arises, or the danger arises, when there are rules which are as it were like taboos, you know, no one knows why exactly you have them, but everybody is afraid of breaking them. I think it's more like that. I don't object to the word 'rules' but I think we have to always remember what a rule really is or why we have a rule or what the rule is based on. (pause) [50]

Yes, I've just thought of something else, in connection with the five skandhas, to come back to beginning. Who raised that point? You did. This was something I was thinking about the other day. Buddhism has the reputation of being a very negative sort of religion. As presented by some Buddhists, mainly Theravada Buddhists, it does sometimes seem like that. For instance, with regards to the whole question of the attainment of Nirvana, what is usually said is that you consist of five skandhas, and these five skandhas are as it were powered by craving, by trsna, and when trsna, when craving, is extinguished, those five skandhas eventually cease to exist. Do you see what I mean? So Nirvana ultimately consists in the extinction, the non-arising, of those five skandhas. This is how Buddhism is usually understood. And I think this comes about because such presentations of Buddhism entirely overlook the positive nidanas. If one takes the positive nidanas into consideration what one has got is not simply a gradual waning of the five skandhas but one has got a gradual building up, a gradual accumulation, of positive mental faculties which constitute a series which eventually becomes irreversible, and as it were sort of disappears, as one might say, into the depths of Nirvana, hmm? Which presents rather a different picture. Do you see what I mean? So if of course one compares the positive nidanas with the five skandhas, the positive nidanas themselves are included in the five skandhas but that is not usually made clear, if you see what I mean. So that one doesn't think in terms of what one might describe as negative elements or negative factors comprising the five skandhas being eliminated, and those positive factors which are included in the five skandhas gradually increase - one thinks only in terms of the elimination of the negative factors, so therefore one's ultimate goal or ultimate spiritual realization presents itself in purely negative terms as a complete extinction of the five skandhas. (pause) Anyway, that perhaps requires further thought.

Vessantara: Did you say that the positive nidanas are included in the five skandhas?

S: Yes, the positive nidanas are included in the five skandhas. You might

say that a point arises here, well... mainly with regard to vijnana skandha, because this would suggest that there's not only a conditioned vijnana but an unconditioned vijnana, and that unconditioned vijnana could be included in the five skandhas. But even in the Pali canon there is a reference to a completely pure and radiant consciousness. [51] Theravada tradition does assign this to the arupaloka, but then one could go into this whole question of arupaloka: is even the arupaloka or was the arupaloka, originally, you know, mundane in so to speak the later sense? This raises all sorts of interesting questions. But to come back to the question of vijnana, if you recognize, you know, within the context of the five skandhas, not only mundane vijnana, a mundane citta, but also a transcendental one, then of course you have included a spiritual element, quite explicitly, within the five skandha formulation itself.

Vessantara: If you do that can you talk about Nirvana as the ceasing of the five skandhas?

S: Well, no, you speak of Nirvana as a cessation of five skandhas to the extent that the five skandhas are cyclic but not to the extent that they are spiral. Hmm? (pause)

Vessantara: Is there any suggestion of that in Buddhist tradition?

S: Of...?

Vessantara: Inasmuch as Nirvana is very often, or is usually, equated with the cessation of the five skandhas, is there any way of the idea that, if you like, a positive residue or a continuation of the five skandhas is present in Nirvana?

S: Well, of course this raises the whole question of what is Nirvana?

Vessantara: I'm afraid it might do.

S: You see Nirvana, in later Buddhist thought, say in the Abhidharma, is regarded as a dhatu, as an existent, but this is certainly not the case in what seems to be the earlier Buddhism or in the Buddha's own teaching. One doesn't get Nirvana as a noun, as a substantive, at all in the earlier teaching, but only as a verb, as in the Dhammapada, at least in one place. 'Nibbuta', which is the word from which we get Nibbana, means exhausted, breathed out, expired, so it refers to the, you know, expiry or the expiration of all unskillful states. But that is of course not to say that skillful states have been expired but in as much as the Theravada later on forgot that there were such things as positive nidanas only the expiration, as it were, or the waning away of the unskillful mental states was taken into consideration and the concept of the expiration of those unskillful states was hypostatized, as it were into the entity of Nirvana and there was no parallel, as it were, hypostatization of the, you know, the end result, so to speak. if one can use such expression, of the positive nidanas. So

therefore the goal appeared to be something purely negative and, you know, the overall negative impression was thus reinforced. [52]

Padmavajra: With the term Nirvana, I think you once.. well, you once said that you thought the Buddha might have had in mind the fact that the blowing of a flame, in the Indian tradition, that there is actually... Then you blow a fire out that there is a subtle fire still left.

S: Yes, this is true, this point has been made by some scholars, yes. If one uses that analogy at all - the expiry of a flame - it isn't that the flame, you know, from being existent becomes completely non-existent, it is rather that from existing in a gross form, it proceeds to exist in a subtle form, so one mustn't forget, possibly that sort of background of Indian thought. (pause) Though possibly, you know, the Theravadins, as they moved away from Indian thought generally, they did forget that.

Lalitavajra: I was also going to say, also in one of Rhys Davids' introductions there's quite a lot of words which were used for the designations of the goal, other than 'Nibbana'.

S: Yes, that is true, yes, but these tend to be very early, like, well, 'attha', the goal. That is in a way quite positive. Or even 'amrta', 'amatapada', (you know) the state of immortality or deathlessness, it's grammatically negative but the connotation is quite positive.

Ratnabodhi: I may be mistaken, but don't you say somewhere in the Bodhisattva Ideal series "Bodhicitta isn't contained within the five skandhas".

S: Yes, this of course is a Mahayana teaching, I think it's probably Nagarjuna who says that, yes. But the sort of position, the general position of the Theravada, at least nowadays, seems to be that man can be reduced to the, you know, five skandhas, man is the five skandhas; it's not made clear that there is any higher sort of spiritual or transcendental element included there and emancipation is held to consist in the complete cessation or even annihilation of those five skandhas, and such annihilation is tantamount to Enlightenment. So this does seem quite wrong.

Vessantara: If you add to it the idea of existence being suffering... (unclear couple of words).. depressing.

S: Yes, right, yes, yes. I think a lot of modern Theravadins don't quite realize what has gone wrong. I don't think they always realize what they're actually saying because quite often they themselves are, you know, quite emotionally positive and (are not) negative in their personal attitude at all, but they come out with what is in a way a very negative statement of Buddhism. It is sustained by their own personal cheerfulness but that doesn't help us very much if you are concerned with the teaching

itself. I remember many a sort of plump, jolly, you know, Theravada bhikkhu telling me that, you know, 'life was all suffering, ha-ha-ha!, (laughter) At least they don't take it seriously! (laughter) Anyway, what's [53] the time by the way?

Vessantara: It's a quarter to nine.

S: So have we more questions?

Vessantara: One or two, yes. While we are talking about the spiral path, you mention the ox-herding pictures. How far do you think they are useful as a sort of pictorial representation of the spiral path?

S: I did once upon a time, you know, think of giving a series of talks on those ox-herding pictures. I never got around to it. That was when I was giving series of lectures in London. But that thought did occur to me. I haven't reviewed them at all recently but at that time I must have felt that they could be useful or that they could be made use of. (pause) One of the things that the young Zen monk told me about.. - the young Zen monk I've spoken about in the current issue of Shabda [October 1984, p.19] was that in America, in Zen circles, they always go straight onto the last of the ox-herding pictures.(laughter) They don't bother about the ones before that! (pause) I've a vague idea, I'm not sure that somebody might have given a talk on the ox-herding pictures, an Order member some years ago, it might - though this is just a guess - have been Buddhadasa. I've a very vague recollection of something of that sort. It would be five, six, seven or eight years ago.

A voice: I think Vangisa did.

S: Ah, Vangisa...? Certainly not one of the younger Order members... This sounds like the bold sort of thing that Vangisa might have done. Anyway.

Vessantara: The ox seems to be given different interpretations. I have noticed that sometimes it seems to stand for the mind that needs to be controlled, but in others, seeing the ox seems to be... (unclear few words).

S: Well, it can have many meanings, it doesn't have to be cut-and-dried, It's a symbol after all, and by the way, I have recently learned, or learned a few years ago, that it's not an ox, it's a buffalo, strictly speaking.

Padmavajra: A water buffalo?

S: Possibly!

Abhaya: In the last paragraph of section 5 on page 34, you imply that a great deal more could be said about imbibing the spirit of the ten precepts as distinct from the letter. Could you say more.. now...? (laughter) You list other things like taking vows and confession, about which you have said

quite a lot in different contexts, but that particular one I thought, maybe you might... [54]

S: What did I exactly say?

Vessantara: "Learning the Ten Precepts or the ten great ethical principles in this way involves a number of things. It involves learning - in the sense of genuinely imbibing the spirit as distinct from the letter of the Ten Precepts, learning how to apply the Ten Precepts in the affairs of everyday life and confess, make vows..."

S: When one has got a list of precepts like that, when one has got things as rather cut-and-dried, formulated and tabulated, I think there is always a tendency gradually to regard the letter of things as more important than the spirit. So I think it was for this reason that I made the point that one did need to think in terms of imbibing the spirit of those precepts rather than simply sticking to the letter or trying to adhere to the letter. Not that one should not scrupulously observe, you know, the precepts in the letter but that, you know, that it was not really the letter of the precepts or even the observance of the letter of the precepts that was the most important thing one needed to imbibe, you know, the spirit behind them, if you like, the principle behind them, have more of a feeling for them. For instance if you take the second precept it isn't a question of just of being very scrupulous about not taking something that doesn't belong to you and, you know, repaying your debts and all that sort of thing, it's really a question of imbibing a spirit of sort of total generosity. Do you see what I mean? If you have got that spirit of total generosity the details of the observance will almost look after themselves.

Ratnabodhi: So you would say in that case that the positive counterparts are more important than the negative?

S: I think they are psychologically more important, very likely. I wouldn't say that they are absolutely more important, because someone might, you know, and be breaking the letter of the precepts claiming that he was observing them in the spirit. But I think psychologically it is always better to observe, to emphasize, the positive side of things rather than the negative side. One might say that the negative is always included in the positive but that the reverse is not necessarily the case.

Manjunatha: Could you say that the positive counterpart of a rule which is negative, is the principle behind it? Or is it that there is a principle which is ... (unclear). [55]

S: I think if one was to formulate the principle or, you know, if one was to speak of the principle in either positive or negative terms, yes, it should be spoken of in positive rather than negative terms. The positive in a sense is the principle, I mean, generosity is the principle, one might say, in regard to the second precept. One might even ask whether one can



have a negative principle. Perhaps one can have a negative formulation of a principle but when can one actually have a negative principle? If your spiritual principles are negative principles you probably aren't in a very happy state! (laughter) If your principle is just to be against this and your principle is not to do that, but you don't have any principles to be for this or to do that, you're probably not in a very happy position. So I think the spiritual principles, to the extent that they are principles, are positive rather than negative. [56]

Oh, how far have we got in the book?

Vessantara: We've gone through five sections. So we are at the moment at the bottom of page 34.

S: Good.

Padmavajra: You seem to lay quite a lot of stress on the precepts as being something one trains in and through which one learns, and the fact that there is somebody to learn from, who trains you up. I have never really come across that emphasis before with our precepts.

S: First of all, it is implicit in the word siksa which means training or learning or education, and the Buddha himself uses metaphors of training quite frequently in the Pali canon. He often speaks of the training of the bhikkhus in terms of the training of a horse, you know, a wild young horse, I think Plato uses the same kind of analogy.

So the idea of the spiritual life, including the ethical life, as a life of training is by no means new, and you could even say that the Buddha emphasizes, you know, this particular way of looking at the spiritual life and ethical life, or the learning of the spiritual life, that he sees it or presents it as a training, you know, quite explicitly.

Padmavajra: Do you think we could, we should try and see more in those terms, do you think there is value of us in the FWBO.. in the WBO, seeing it in those terms?

S: But this would depend on whether one thought that there was a utility, a particular utility, in seeing it in those terms. There probably is, because first of all it makes it clear that ethics is not something necessary which is in your blood, you've actually got to learn it, you've got to acquire it, you've got to train in it, and also it suggests indirectly that you can change, that you don't have to be the way that you are and that ethics or the moral life is an instrument of change. I think this is a very healthy emphasis. I think even among Buddhists, maybe even within the WBO itself, there probably isn't a firm enough grasp of the principle that human nature can change, that you can change habits, you can form new habits, and it's only by adding as it were one change to another, replacing unskilful habits by skilful ones, that you actually do develop and grow. So I

think from this point of view it probably will be very useful to emphasize to a greater extent, you know, the precepts as principles of training, and of the spiritual life as a life of training, even discipline, if one dare use that word. Because, you know, you train for your marathon, you train if you want to be a cabinet-maker, you train if you want to be an artist [57] and you train if you want to be all sorts of things, but it doesn't occur to you that you need to go into training if you want to gain Enlightenment or even if you want to lead a reasonably good, healthy, happy human life.

Padmavajra: Do you think the fact that we don't sort of, you know, see enough in those terms, does that suggest an arrogance, do you think, a sort of fundamental conceit and a ...?

S: It might do but it might be more, you know, our sort of inheritance from Christianity.

Vessantara: Inasmuch as the FWBO is (unclear 6 words)... amateur(?) still? especially.

S: There could be even something of that, especially perhaps on the intellectual level, you know, as regards understanding: 'it's not done, it is not gentlemanly to take things too seriously, or to be too good at them!' (laughter) The gentleman ought to be able to win without trying! And his ambition is to be a flanneled fool at the wicket, not a muddied oaf at the goal! (laughter) Have you never heard that one before? I think it is from Kipling - "the flanneled fool at the wicket, the muddied oaf at the goal." That's what he has to say, you know, about English sport. (pause) It's also perhaps a question of seriousness, or rather, if you are serious about something, you will tackle it seriously, you take it up seriously, you pursue it seriously, you try to be really proficient in it, you want to be really thorough.

Dharmamudra: That comes down to really wanting to do something.

S: Hmm.. yes, yes. One really sees the difference, for instance I... (Just to give a comparison that some of you will be familiar with) I've seen people who have, you know, become interested in art, they've wanted to do a bit of painting and I've seen certain people, whom I know quite well, just sort of dabbling, you know, for years without. . you know, just dabbling with a bit of painting, and trying to paint but not really able to succeed, not really producing anything. But then they go perhaps after years and years along to art school and they spend three years there and they acquire all sorts of techniques and learn different ways of doing things and they learn about colours and how to combine colours and how to draw, yes and, you know, in the end they can really do something because they have gone through a regular course of training which was necessary and which enabled them to learn things that they wouldn't just have picked up by themselves just doodling around. And this applies I think also to the ethical and the spiritual life. It isn't just a question of professional

expertise, it certainly does involve a certain [58] skill, it does involve a process of learning, it does involve actually acquiring knowledge and, you know, doing things in a regular systematic way.

Dharmamudra: It probably also involves being with other people who are doing the same thing.

S: Oh yes, I think it's very difficult. - You could go to art school and there might be all sorts of beautiful facilities there, you know, stacks of lovely paper and all sorts of beautiful colours, but you need to be shown how to use them, how to handle them, what to do with them. So it's just the same with Buddhism to a great extent. I think you need to be with other people who can show you the ropes and, you know, advise you from time to time, give you the benefits of their experience or just point out to you perhaps where you are doing it wrong, show you a better way of approaching things, more sensible way, or a more enlightened way. So obviously that's where kalyana mitrata, you know, comes in. But also I think in the, in kalyana mitrata, it's important that you don't just stress the aspect of chumminess, that kalyana mitrata isn't just having a good happy time together, but it also involves an element of actual learning, not necessarily just intellectual learning, not necessarily just transmission of information, but learning in a more comprehensive sense. But It isn't just having a, you know, good time together. No doubt that's included, but no doubt kalyana mitrata involves more than that. It's a learning situation, also. But learning can also be fun, no reason why it shouldn't, even when it's painful! (laughter) (pause) All right then, is that all for tonight? OK. [59]

Question & Answers on the Ten Pillars of Buddhism Session 4, 23rd October 1984, Tuscany

S: How far have we got, as regards sections?

Vessantara: Today we were covering section six on The Ten Precepts as Mula Pratimoksa. Some days we have done two sections when they seemed quite short.

S: I just wanted to give you a little correction. There is a misprint - you haven't quite come to it - on page 49 [1984 edition]. Where it says "emotional blackmail and greed", "greed" should be "fraud".

Vessantara: There are one or two mistakes.

S: Yes, I have noted a few. So "fraud", that does alter the meaning slightly. (pause) Anyway, what have we this evening?

Vessantara: After nearly running out of questions last night we have probably got more than we can deal with tonight. There are a couple of follow-up questions from last night. Firstly Ratnabodhi on the skandhas...

Ratnabodhi: This follows on from the answer you gave last night when you said that the positive nidanas are included in the five skandhas. In saying this, are you not in effect saying that the unconditioned is contained within the conditioned - either saying that, or that the unconditioned is an extension of the conditioned? Would it not be true to say that the first seven nidanas are contained within the five skandhas, but from "Knowledge and Vision of Things as they Really Are" onwards - they cannot be contained within the five skandhas. In which case - if that is so - then, as the "Knowledge and Vision of Things as they Really Are" represents, as you say in the Mitrata Omnibus "the transition from what is really psychological to what is spiritual" then the five skandhas do not contain a truly spiritual element.

S: I think one needs to take this bit by bit because there are all sorts of (you know) complicated philosophical questions involved, also questions of the relationship between the Hinayana and the Mahayana. I doubt if one can sort it out properly or thoroughly in this sort of way. It needs (you know) rather a paper. But anyway, we can give, perhaps, a few hints or a few indications. There are some quite important questions involved here.

Ratnabodhi: In saying that the positive nidanas are included in the five skandhas, are you not in fact saying either that the unconditioned is contained within the conditioned, or that the unconditioned is an extension of the conditioned?

S: Yes, let's stop there. In a sense, one is. The basic difficulty is, in a way, reconciling a static with a dynamic model of existence or reality. It is as though one can think of existence, or reality if you like, either in terms of space or in terms of time - either under the form of space (as Spinoza would say), or the form of time. In the case of the five skandha analysis you are seeing existence (as it were) spatially. Leaving aside for the moment whether you are seeing conditioned and unconditioned existence or only conditioned existence, you're seeing it spatially. The five skandhas gives you a sort of cross-section and that is necessarily static. In the case of the twelve positive nidanas, that is part of a series which, so to speak, unfolds in time. So when you are comparing the nidanas, whether the positive nidanas or the whole series of twenty-four negative and positive nidanas, with the five skandhas, or trying to (as it were) fit them in to the five skandhas, it isn't easy, because you are trying to fit an explanation in terms of time into an explanation in terms of space. But let's just look for the time being at the nidanas - at the twelve nidanas or the twenty-four nidanas. They constitute between them the Pratitya Samutpada, that is to say, conditioned co-production. They constitute, or they comprise, both the round and the spiral. Now one of the questions that I have considered in the Survey (you may remember) is whether the Pratitya Samutpada is an all-inclusive reality or not. And I come to the conclusion, following Dr B. M. Barua, as well as certain Buddhist texts, that Pratitya Samutpada is an all-inclusive formulation and that it therefore includes Nibbana. So, all

right, it's clear that your formulation of existence - total existence in terms of time or under the form of time - includes both the round and the spiral - the so-called conditioned and the so-called unconditioned. Do you see what I mean? So the question arises: Is there a comparable formula in terms of space which comprises the whole of existence, conditioned and unconditioned, in the same kind of way? Well, in a sense there is and in a sense there isn't. You've got (you know) your formulation of conditioned existence and unconditioned existence. But then that's two things. What (as it were) is the connecting link? This is the great difficulty in a way: that if you have the conditioned as one... (what shall I say?) one 'thing' to use the simplest term, and the unconditioned as another 'thing', well, what is the nature of the connection, or the relationship, between them? How do you make the transition (you know) from the one to the other? Of course, if you think of the unconditioned simply as the non-existence of the conditioned, then in a way there is no problem, because you make the transition from the conditioned to the unconditioned simply by virtue of the conditioned ceasing to exist (you know) , and its non-existence, or its negation, is then considered as the unconditioned. But that position would contradict several important Buddhist texts - that is to say, texts in the Pali canon. So you've really got to have a cross-section of something which comprises conditioned and unconditioned, and which is (in a sense) continuous. It's as though if you are going to see man as capable of attaining the unconditioned, you've got at the same time to see man as in some way containing already (so to speak) the seed of the unconditioned within him, and therefore your analysis of man has got to make provision for that particular element, and therefore your analysis of man cannot [61] reduce him only to conditioned elements, but must also make room for an unconditioned element. So if your analysis is the five skandha classification or analysis, then it would seem you have to, well, (as it were) stretch that on to include within it some element, some mental state (if you like) , or some dharma, which is not conditioned but which is unconditioned. Otherwise you're left (you know) with a purely conditioned human individual who attains a non-existent unconditioned, a purely conceptual unconditioned, simply by ceasing to exist; which would seem to imply the heresy, as Buddhism regards it, of annihilationism. It would seem that, if you are to avoid that heresy of annihilationism, you've got to include, in your analysis of man, some kind of transcendental element which - I won't say continues in the unconditioned state, but which has in some way some continuity with it. Do you see what I mean? Much as in the series of the positive nidanas, or the series of the nidanas generally, there is a continuity (you know) between to so-called negative ones and the so-called positive ones.

There is another point here, and that relates to the question of the use of the expression "the unconditioned". This isn't very satisfactory. I have discussed this elsewhere on some other occasion. The English term "unconditioned" really translates the Sanskrit "asamskrta" which means "the not put together". You get the same word or the same root in the name of the language "Sanskrit". "Sanskrit" is "put together language", or

"artificial language", as compared with Prakrit, the natural language, or if you like, the ordinary vernacular. So in the same way, something which is samskrta is something which is put together, something which is composite, something which consists of parts - which can therefore of course fall apart. So the asamskrta is not so much the unconditioned as the unconstituted or the incomposite. Now an incomposite state can, in the sequence of the positive nidanas, arise in dependence upon a composite state. Do you see what I mean? That happens when in dependence upon samadhi there arises knowledge and vision of things as they are. So in dependence on a composite state arises a state which is non-composite. But if you translate "asamskrta" as "unconditioned" then you have to say: In dependence upon, or conditioned by, a conditioned state an unconditioned state arises. So that the unconditioned would seem to be conditioned. That contradiction arises only when you translate asamskrta as unconditioned and paccaya, or pratyaya, as conditioned. So the difficulty here is (as it were) purely verbal. Another word ... and this in connection with the Bodhicitta. Someone, it might have been you, mentioned that Nagarjuna had said that the Bodhicitta was not included in the five skandhas. So this illustrates, in a way, what I have been saying. The Bodhicitta is definitely transcendental and Nagarjuna found it necessary to say that the Bodhicitta was not included in the five skandhas, because the five skandha formulation with which he was (as it were) working was the old Hinayana - specifically perhaps Sarvastivadin - five skandha formulation which consisted only of conditioned elements. [62] But Nagarjuna saw in man this unconditioned element as represented by the Bodhicitta. So what was he to do? He couldn't (as it were) tamper with the existing five skandha analysis, so he couldn't say that there was an unconditioned element contained within the five skandha analysis. At the same time he didn't want to give up the Bodhicitta - that would have meant giving up the whole Mahayana. So therefore he stated that the Bodhicitta is not included in the five skandhas. But both are human possibilities. So if you want to get (as it were) a total analysis of man, from the Mahayana point of view, in those terms, you have to analyse man into the five skandhas plus the Bodhicitta. So that comes, in practice, to the same thing as subdividing your vijñāna, or consciousness skandha, into both conditioned ... or rather I should say composite and incomposite, - mental states or states of consciousness. That perhaps makes it a little clearer than it was. Anyway, that is the first part of the question. What was the next bit?

Ratnabodhi: Would it not be true to say that the first seven positive nidanas are contained within the five skandhas, but not those beyond knowledge-and-vision-of-things-as-they-really-are?

S: Well, it depends, you know, whether ... if you want to make the five skandha analysis a comprehensive analysis of man then you will have to say that it includes both the incomposite nidanas and the composite ones. If not, not. Then what came after that?

Ratnabodhi: I think you have actually answered the rest. The rest actually says that: if this is the case then there cannot be a truly spiritual element within the five skandhas.

S: I think myself that the five skandha analysis, let us say, taken in a rigid way, and taken to exclude any transcendental state - any transcendental vijñāna - has done (one might almost say) a lot of harm, a lot of damage, certainly created a lot of confusion; because it has tended to create the impression that if man was completely exhausted by this five skandha analysis, and if it contained no transcendental element, then man himself contained no transcendental element, and that therefore his spiritual life didn't consist in the development of that transcendental element in the way that is suggested by the twelve positive nidānas, but simply in the negation or cancelling out of himself; which negation (or cancelling out) constituted Enlightenment or emancipation, which would seem to amount to the heresy of annihilationism.

Padmavajra: The Hinayana Vijñānavāda ... did they include that transcendental element in their analysis of the skandhas?

S: Well, the Vijñānavāda adopted (one might say) the eight-vijñāna doctrine. If you regard those eight vijñānas as subdivisions of the fifth of the traditional five skandhas, then of course you include (you know) a transcendental element in the five skandhas; inasmuch as within the eight vijñānas you do have the absolute as well as the relative ālaya. [64] Whether the Yogācāra explicitly made that connection I'm not sure. They may have done - I would have to check that. But the connection is certainly there by implication at least.

Aryacitta: Did they not include the transcendental within the old five skandhas because it was around before the Buddha gained Enlightenment?

S: I'm not sure that the five skandha analysis was current before the time of the Buddha. There is also some doubt, among some scholars, whether the Buddha actually used that formulation himself. Some scholars are of the opinion that it represents a later scholastic development within Buddhism. But certainly in the existing Pali Tipitaka the Buddha is represented in certain texts, in fact in a number of texts - in a number of suttas - as actually making use of this analysis. My own view is that he may well have made use of it but that he did not intend it to amount to a (sort of) reduction of man to (you know) a number of discrete, mundane, that is to say conditioned or composite elements, and nothing more.

Prasannasiddhi: You mentioned that you don't like the terms conditioned and unconditioned, or that you find them unsatisfactory...

S: Well, I consider them unsatisfactory as translations of samskrta and asamskrta, which strictly speaking mean composite and incomposite,

because you have got what we refer to as (you know) the unconditioned nidanas. That is to say those nidanas are transcendental, they represent an irreversible sequence, they partake of the nature of the asamskrta, not of the samskrta. But if you speak of them as unconditioned and at the same time you speak of them as arising in dependence on conditions - that would appear to be a contradiction. Really there's no contradiction. It is simply that you are translating two quite different Sanskrit or Pali terms for one and the same English word. That is to say translating pratyaya as conditioned and translating samskrta as conditioned and asamskrta as unconditioned. It's a verbal confusion. I must admit I've contributed to it myself unintentionally by using the expression "unconditioned". Probably we should drop that term "unconditioned" and perhaps speak, quite literally, of the "incomposite" if we mean to represent the term asamskrta. The term which I translate as transcendental is quite literally translated by that word: that is, lokuttara. Loka is world and uttara is above. It is sometimes translated, or used to be translated, as hypercosmic - which is not bad. I mean "that which goes beyond the cosmic, that goes beyond the cosmos": loka-uttara. But transcendental, you know, is equally good. Recently I have been giving some thought to the question of: In what sense is the asamskrta "lokuttara"? Or: In what sense are those last few positive nidanas incomposite? But I'm not going to say anything about that here. I will just mention one of the conclusions I have come to and that is that incomposite, in this particular connection, does not literally mean incomposite, but it is a particular kind of composited-ness. But more than that I won't say. (laughter) All right, let's go on. [65]

Vessantara: We have another follow-up question from Padmavajra.

Padmavajra: It is to do with dualism. What advantages are there in having an ultimate dualism as one's world view? Are there any more suggestions in Buddhist literature that Buddhists held that ultimate dualism as their world view?

S: Just go through that again bit by bit.

Padmavajra: What advantages and disadvantages are there in having an ultimate dualism as one's world view?

S: Ah. Presumably one means advantage or disadvantage from a spiritual point of view. If one makes of what I've called one's practical dualism an ultimate dualism, with what might be termed a (sort of) ontological sanction, that would seem to invest the whole situation with a greater degree of reality and therefore of urgency. If you believe that there (for instance) is a good principle and a bad principle, and that the good principle is really good, and the bad principle is really bad, and that there is a real genuine conflict between them, and that you must align yourself on the side of the good and you must fight the evil: well, that will give a greater sense of reality and urgency to your spiritual life than if you were to say - certainly in the early stages of your spiritual life - "oh well, that



distinction is only provisional, it's not really real", (you know) "evil isn't really different from the good. They're both manifestations of (you know) one and the same ultimate reality. Good is not really good and evil is not really evil". At a certain stage of the spiritual life - the early stages that is - that might diminish your determination to actually lead the spiritual life and (so to speak) fight what seems to you to be - or is experienced by you as being - evil. Do you see what I mean? It might (sort of) weaken your resolve to think that the distinction between good and evil was (so to speak) only provisional and not ultimate. So one of the spiritual advantages in thinking of the duality of good and evil (say) as being metaphysically ultimate is that it does create (you know) that - what I have called - more urgent situation. But of course there is a disadvantage because it means you get stuck at a certain point. I mean, a point comes when you need to be able to go further and see that that duality - the duality that you set up - is only provisional. But if you really firmly believed and are fully convinced that it is a metaphysical duality, well, then you may not ... well, you will not be able to go beyond that when the time comes. But so far as most people are concerned that point lies a very, very, long way ahead. So meanwhile it is perhaps unwise for them to weaken their spiritual resolve by telling themselves too frequently or too strongly that the distinction, say, between the conditioned and the unconditioned, and samsara and nirvana, (you know) is really quite illusory.

Padmavajra: I was also wondering: if you extended that point beyond one's personal life and one's personal practice, to very much the world generally and people generally, [66] I wondered how valid it was to have a view that they were non-dual. I wondered how valid that was because there is, in the world, you know, it is ... it seems to me.

S: Well, the Mahayanists always made the point that the absolute truth was inseparable from the relative truth, and that the absolute truth was not to be realized except by taking one's stand on the relative truth. The absolute truth was, in fact, the absolute truth of the relative truth. So the Mahayanists did not see the absolute truth, the truth of non-duality, as sort of superseding the truth of duality, but saw it rather as to be realized within it, or as being its (so to speak) inner or deeper dimension. There is that story, that Zen story, of the monk who was reborn five hundred times as a fox. Do you remember that story? I probably haven't got it right - I am only remembering bits and pieces - but apparently a certain Zen master found himself haunted by a fox-spirit. There are lots of stories about fox-spirits in Japanese folklore. Anyway, he eventually got into conversation with this fox-spirit and he, the fox-spirit was ... (Yes, the fox-spirit is actually a sort of living fox. It's not a sort of ghostly fox. It is a rather weird kind of fox.) Well, anyway, he got into conversation with it and discovered it had been reborn five hundred times as a fox-spirit, but that before that he had been a great Zen master. Well, one day someone had asked him about the law of karma. Now I can't remember the exact words of the different questions or replies, but apparently someone had

asked him, "When you achieve Nirvana, or when you realize the Buddha-nature or whatever, well what happens to the law of karma?" And he said "Well, then you supersede the law of karma. The law of karma is wiped out." And for that dreadfully wrong answer he was reborn five hundred times as a fox! (laughter) So the Zen master who was interviewing the fox-spirit said "Well, that was really a terrible mistake." So the fox-spirit said "Well, what should I have said?" And he said, "Well, when you are Enlightened the law of karma doesn't get in your way!" Do you see the difference? So the ultimate truth does not supersede the relative truth - the relative truth is somehow, in a mysterious sort of way, contained within the absolute truth. Even the very distinction, one might say, between absolute truth and relative truth is part of the relative truth, or pertains to the relative truth not to the absolute truth. But anyway, that is enough about that. So there was a bit more to your question.

Padmavajra: Are there any suggestions in Buddhist literature that Buddhists held that world view which (you know) held that there was an ultimate dualism?

S: Well, as I suggested, the Theravadins, they leave the duality, especially, say, in the Abhidharma, between conditioned and unconditioned, or composite and incomposite, unresolved. But I doubt very much whether they do erect that into a metaphysical dualism. Possibly the Sarvastivadins - I won't say did - they might have moved a little further in that direction. I do not think though ... to the best of my knowledge no school of Buddhist [67] thought or philosophy represents a (sort of) fully fledged dualism on the Sariputtian or Zoroastrian model. Alright...

Vessantara: Jnanavira.

Jnanavira: In your paper, Bhante, you criticize the traditional Buddhist world for having lost sight of the central importance of the Going for Refuge, and for an ethical formalism and rigidity. And within the FWBO you re-emphasise the fundamental importance of the Going for Refuge and the Ten Precepts. I've got several points going on from this: Do you think your criticism in this area and the work of the FWBO have affected the attitudes of people in the traditional Buddhist world?...

S: Alright, well that is a question by itself isn't it? I think probably, as yet, not. Maybe because they haven't yet heard of us. I think it would be quite a novel idea to many Buddhists in the East that they had anything to learn from Buddhists in the West. Well, one can understand them in some ways taking that attitude. The only area, I think, where our emphasis on the Going for Refuge has had any effect - I will not say outside the FWBO but further afield - is of course in India itself, you know, among the new Buddhists - that is to say the ex-untouchable Buddhists. Many of them - inasmuch as they are new Buddhists - they did go for Refuge themselves, in however formalistic a way, some years ago ... means that they are

much more open to the idea of the centrality of the fact of Going for Refuge in the Buddhist life and in Buddhism generally. But I couldn't say that (you know) our view in this respect has yet started influencing traditional Buddhist circles or groups or schools in the East. It probably will sooner or later, if Buddhism doesn't die out in the East before that. Because one must remember there are (sort of) difficulties, there are obstacles. I mean, first of all traditional Buddhists in the East don't have any direct contact with us, or very very little indeed. And we don't have much in the way of literature, apart from my own books. It's only just quite recently that other Order Members have been producing things. There has been Subhuti's book, which is being quite widely read. And of course lots of Buddhists in the East don't understand English. So it's not surprising that our ideas have not as yet reached them or percolated amongst them. probably those Buddhists in the East, apart from the Indians, who are most aware of what we are doing and our attitudes, are the English-speaking Buddhists in Malaysia of Chinese origin, for whom English is, if not their mother-tongue at least a second language, and many of whom are unable to read Buddhist literature in Chinese. They know spoken Chinese but they do not know the written language, they don't know the characters. So we may be having some influence among those people - just a little - beginning to. Anyway...

Jnanavira: You have already said a little about this... Do you expect to see the traditional Buddhist world taking heed of your criticisms in the future? And how much capacity do you think [68] the traditional Buddhist world has for self-regeneration?

S: It's very difficult to change something which is established. It is easier to start afresh. I say this partly after studying people who have come into contact with the FWBO: either without any previous experience of Buddhism or even knowledge of Buddhism, and those who have come - especially those who came some years ago - from or through other Buddhist groups. The latter very often came with all sorts of misunderstandings and confusions which had to be cleared up, and which sometimes took a long time to clear up. But the former class of people come with open minds relatively speaking, at least as regards the nature of Buddhism itself. Once people are (sort of) established, once they are set in their ways, and once they have developed a certain way of doing things, and if that has continued for hundreds of years, it isn't easy for them to change. Well, one saw in Europe itself, you know, what were the conflicts, even the actual wars which came to pass, which developed in connection with the Reformation: there were lots of Christians who did not want to be reformed. I mean the people who, well, almost for centuries resisted the reform most, were the popes and the cardinals, and it was to a great extent due to their unwillingness to be reformed that the Protestant/Catholic split eventually developed. And only after that did the Catholic Church realize, quite belatedly, that it needed to put its house in order to some extent - and then one had the Counter-Reformation. But meanwhile there were the terrible wars of religions which continued for

decades and devastated whole countries. So people aren't very willing to be reformed, they aren't very willing to change. So I'm not very hopeful that we shall have very much influence in the Buddhist East or that they will change their long-established ways. But let us see - huh? In most Buddhist countries there is a younger generation of Buddhists that is somewhat alienated from traditional Buddhism, and it may be that among them we will find some sympathisers and friends and followers. This has certainly happened to a small extent already in the case of those English-speaking Chinese Buddhists whom I've mentioned. Well, one has already become an Order member and gone back, and we've got another over with us in England and there are a couple more on the way. So that seems quite promising.... Then?

Jnanavira: Do you think the FWBO is less likely to gain a hearing from the traditional Buddhist world after your death, when the leaders of the movement at that time will not have your status or standing as a very senior sort of bhikkhu?

S: I don't think on the whole that makes very much difference. I'm afraid I'm going to be almost a little cynical here, I'm afraid, I hope in a positive sort of way. I recall an experience of my own when I was in India. It's an experience I have referred to more than once because it made quite an impression on me at the time, and gave me quite a lot of food for thought. For years and years in India I was writing books about the Dharma, giving lectures on the Dharma, teaching meditation, trying to lead a Buddhist life, trying to [69] be a good monk, you know, as best I could, with not very much encouragement from anybody (laughter) . So I was regarded by other bhikkhus - other Buddhist monks who I knew in India - as not a bad sort of chap, though taking things a bit too seriously, a bit extremer you know, this vegetarianism and meditation every day .... that is really taking Buddhism a bit too seriously! a bit one-sided! (laughter). So, you know, they liked me, they got on all right with me. They were quite friendly and they were quite hospitable but, frankly, they didn't think very much of me. I didn't count so far as they were concerned. I was not considered very important. I was not an important monk. But then a change took place. This change took place when I acquired a piece of property. That is to say, some friends and supporters, mainly in England, gave me some money and I bought the Triyana Vardhana Vihara. The instant almost that that happened my stock soared! I had arrived. I was an important bhikkhu, at least I was beginning to be an important bhikkhu. I was on the right track, I was acquiring property, et cetera, et cetera. Overnight the attitude - not just of Buddhists but in particular of bhikkhus that I knew - changed radically. Their attitude towards me changed radically just because of that. And that gave me food for thought. So traditional Buddhists in the East will begin to take the FWBO seriously not when you have great meditators and (you know) great lectures on the Dharma, but when you are a large, well known, prosperous and influential organization. Then they'll start taking the FWBO quite seriously, and then perhaps that will be our opportunity. So even at present - I mean, after all

in England itself I've not changed all that much over the last seventeen or eighteen years, but why is that the FWBO is taken much more seriously now than it was? The main reason is a certain capacity for creating trouble if it wants to (laughter). I mean, the FWBO has the capacity to be difficult, and so other Buddhist groups have learned to take it rather seriously and to tread a bit warily where the FWBO is concerned. And they've started becoming aware that, well, yes, we have got Centres, we've got members, we've got funds, we've got communities, we've got businesses. And just more recently they have started becoming aware of Aid For India: we're doing all this work in India. I mean hundreds of thousands of pounds are passing through our accounts. They're beginning to take us seriously, not because they take our ideas seriously: they take us seriously on account of our... (break in tape) ... Amongst Buddhists belonging to other Buddhist groups in England there are some who begin to appreciate us for our spiritual qualities, our spiritual outlook, our ideas; but the majority have been forced to recognize our existence just because we have been successful and they are just no longer able to ignore us. Sometimes they are not really very willing to recognize us, but as I have said, they've been forced to. So it will be much the same with traditional Buddhists in the East. I have a rather philosophical attitude now towards these things: there's nothing succeeds like success; if you succeed people will forgive you quite a lot, they will overlook quite a lot. I mean, they will even forgive you for taking Buddhism seriously. (laughter) Yes, so I hope that doesn't sound too cynical, but it is based on a certain amount of experience. All right then. Next? [70]

Jnanavira: That's the end of the question.

Vessantara: Dharmabandhu?

Dharmabandhu: You say that the ten precepts together with the Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels constitute the surest possible basis for unity among Buddhists and that the time has come for Buddhists to give greater emphasis to what is common and fundamental rather than what is disruptive and superficial. And in this respect the Western Buddhist Order has perhaps given a lead to the rest of the world. I just wondered if you had come across any Buddhist groups or spiritual communities where this Going for Refuge and observing the ten precepts was emphasized. I was thinking perhaps in Tibet or among your Tibetan friends, or in Kalimpong with Tibetan teachers.

S: It's true that the Tibetans and Chinese Mahayana Buddhists do place somewhat more emphasis on the Going for Refuge - that is, the spiritual significance of the Going for Refuge practice - than do the Theravada Buddhists on the whole. But even so the emphasis they place is far short of what it should be. But to go back to what you quoted, perhaps I should make it clear why I said that. There's quite a lot of talk in the Buddhist

world about unity and Buddhists getting together, but when Buddhists talk like that in the East, and even in the West, they almost always are thinking in terms of an organizational unity, an organizational getting together, creating a bigger and better (you know) organization which everyone belongs to. But the point I'm really making here is that unity is fundamentally spiritual. There cannot be any real unity if that unity is to be only organizational, if it is merely an organizational getting together. There can be unity among Buddhists only if they all agree in giving the greatest importance to these things which are actually of greatest importance. So that if all Buddhists do come to the realization - Buddhists in East and West alike - that the Going for Refuge is the central and most important act of the Buddhist life, then they will really have a basis for spiritual unity. But if they don't have such a basis then talk of an organizational getting together and union is almost meaningless - well, it just becomes a matter almost of politics. So this is really the point that I am concerned to make. I mean, I would be very happy indeed - well, who wouldn't be - to see Buddhists all over the world unite, and it could be a very 'powerful' (inverted commas) force for good; but it must not be political, it must be spiritual to be genuine. And the ultimate basis for union among Buddhists is the Going for Refuge. So as long as people in other Buddhist groups, or other Buddhists, don't regard the Going for Refuge as very important or significant one hasn't really got any common basis with them on which one can unite.

Abhaya: Do you think it's likely that people will follow your lead in this? Have you seen any...

S: It is very difficult to say. Though again, I must say that over the last year or so people from other Buddhist groups have begun to approach me, to seek to establish contact with me, in [71] a way that they hadn't done before. I don't know whether this is going to continue and develop, but it is possibly significant. Again, it is also a question of making ourselves known to other Buddhist groups and Buddhist individuals all over the place, and one of the most important ways in which we can do that is just through our literature, and at present we don't have very much literature. I mean, even the books that I myself have written are written mainly from a fairly traditional point of view with some personal interpretations here and there, but they tend to be rather buried among quite a lot of fairly traditional exegesis of doctrines and practices. We really do need quite a few more popular writers, like Subhuti, to write more popular books embodying in a perhaps clearer, more intelligible form the ideas that I have been putting forward. I suspect that I'm not a particularly good 'popular' writer. I suspect we need other people to do this sort of work. I think once our ideas do start getting around, I think they would make quite a lot of sense to people who weren't just nominal (you know), hereditary Buddhists, but who were either the new Buddhists, or who did in any case take their Buddhism seriously and want really to understand what it was all about and really to practise it. I think we could possibly be quite influential among such people, but providing they could

come to know about us. We really must have, I feel, more and more a lot more literature, a lot more well written but popular literature in circulation. Well, we have in India to a much greater extent than in the West. Our literature there sells very, very well. It's mostly translations of things I have written - or lectures I've given actually - mostly. And, I mean, quite often five thousand copies of something are printed. I think we've sold now ... I'm not sure, I think fifteen thousand copies of Human Enlightenment in Marathi. We sell far, far more books and booklets in Marathi than we do in English; that is to say, taking the whole movement into consideration. There are far more copies of my books available in Marathi than in any other language. I mean mostly little things - not the Survey, but smaller things. But they sell very, very well indeed. There's a great demand for them and I'm sure that demand will grow.

Dharmabandhu: Do you think it's possible to bring something out like that? You know, The Wheel comes out and that's very popular.

S: Well, it is possible but, one: we need funds; we need people to do the work ...

Abhaya: Just related to that: one thing we were discussing at one of our meetings - I only noticed it yesterday and really took it in - the price of The Ten Pillars being £3.50. I just wondered whether that cuts out a certain number of people who might otherwise buy the publication.

S: I remember somebody told me that Satyadeva had said - Satyadeva being the Order member who runs the Croydon bookshop - that according to his observation people purchased a Buddhist book up to three pounds without thinking about the cost, but when it went over three pounds they started thinking quite seriously about the cost. So his inference from that was that we should try to keep our publications just below three pounds, which seems reasonable. In the case of the Ten Pillars I didn't have anything to do myself with the fixing of the price, but I understood afterwards that Nagabodhi fixed the price before he made arrangements [72] to ... or rather he found out that it was possible to print it more cheaply than he had thought. Actually it was going to cost more to print than it actually did cost and it was at that time that he fixed the price at £3.50. But I understand that to help finance other publications he decided to retain the price at £3.50 even though he afterwards found it was possible to print it more cheaply. So if this wasn't priced at £3.50 it may be that some other small publication couldn't have been brought out; because we do suffer from a cash flow problem. You see, if we put so much money into bringing this out, it's locked up until we have sold it, and we cannot bring out any other publication with that money till it all comes back to us, and that might take a couple of years, or three years. Even if copies are sold, very often you don't get the money back from your distributors and others for six months or a year. So there is often a big cash flow problem in Publications. So there are considerations like these to be borne in mind. But nonetheless, despite all that, the more

publications we can have attractively produced and at a low cost, the better. Of course you appreciate that the larger the print order the smaller the cost? I mean, I hope everybody appreciates this: that if, say, you can print five thousand copies the cost will be less than if you printed only two thousand copies - in fact, very much less. Do you see what I mean? This is why Nagabodhi tries to get advance orders guaranteeing sales from Centres so that he knows he can rely on those sales and get money back quickly, and that enables him to make a bigger investment, therefore print more copies, and therefore price individual copies more cheaply. I believe we printed only a thousand - was it a thousand copies? So that makes it very expensive. But we didn't have the money to print two thousand which could have, presumably, brought down the price. So these are some of the ways in which these things work. We don't have any capital. This is one of the big difficulties. Windhorse Publications is very much a hand-to-mouth business, though it is now, fortunately, in the black, and Mitrata is in the black, not to any great extent but at least in the black. But yes, the more cheap publications the better, and in India this is certainly the rule: we bring things out very, very cheaply because there we just have to. And we're not only now bringing out publications in Marathi, but we have started bringing them out in Gujarati too. There have been three, if not four, booklets brought out in Gujarati, though our potential sales there are probably not as great as in Marathi. We print at least four thousand copies of Buddhayan, our Marathi magazine, every issue. And sometimes we print five thousand copies and we've got quite a few distributors. We've had some trouble with some of them - I mean they don't pay up after selling our magazines, but if we had more people and more finance we could print more copies, distribute more copies, sell more copies. The demand is certainly there.

Indrabodhi: It might be a good idea to make announcements when we bring out a publication, at each Centre, so that we can get advance orders.

S: Well, Nagabodhi always tries to do that, yes. But I'm afraid he doesn't always get much co-operation. Well, partly because Centres have their own financial difficulties, et cetera, et cetera. [73] Sometimes I do feel - in fact quite often I feel that Order members at centres do not push our publications nearly enough. You have to keep waving them under people's noses, because my experience is that people, especially relatively new people, are not at all sure what to buy. They're quite willing to buy, maybe they want to buy, but they don't know whether this book is suited to their needs or not. But if you said, well, look, here is a book on the Ten Pillars of Buddhism, the Ten Pillars of Buddhism are the ten basic ethical principles. If you want to know about Buddhist morality - and that is an integral part of Buddhism - this is the book for you. If you explain it like that, well, then people will very often buy. They need a little encouraging, or even urging, but very often this is not done in centres and so we do not sell as many books as we might. I mean, my own experience in the past has suggested that very new people, perhaps coming for the first or second time: they



like to buy at least a booklet. They are going to think twice about investing in a big book, but a little booklet they are very happy to buy. So if people can be advised, well, this is the one that will answer your questions, or that's the one which deals with that particular aspect of Buddhism in which you are interested, well, it helps sell the publications along. But, I mean, the same applies to Mitrata and the Newsletter. People really need to announce it and push it in the centres, and that isn't always done. It has to be announced and pushed in every class and maybe, you know, a few words spoken about a new issue of the Newsletter drawing attention to certain articles and their significance and so on. Saying to people things like: well, you may remember we [mentioned] such and such topic briefly in our study group the other evening, well this article deals with it at some length, you had better read it. Anyway, enough of that. This will concern you more when you get back.

Vessantara: Aryadaka?

Aryadaka: My question is about tradition. Is there in the Vajrayana tradition a qualification or an empowerment that one must have in order to give a sadhana practice? The reason I ask is because sometimes Buddhists from outside the FWBO may ask whether you are qualified. And further: Will Order members some day be able to teach the sadhanas?

S: I think in Tibet itself, in Vajrayana circles, there is a lot of (sort of) mystique about empowerment and handing on of traditions, and very often it is formalistic (you know) rather than real. I don't really see any fundamental difference between handing on a Vajrayana practice and handing on any other. If you yourself have practised a particular method, a particular meditation or whatever - if you yourself have genuinely practised it and have experienced at least some fruits of that practice over a number of years, then you are able, effectively, to teach it to some other person, and they are able to (so to speak) receive it from you. But the fact that you have been (sort of) formally initiated, and then yourself formally initiate somebody else is, in comparison with that, practically nothing. I mean, for instance, I mean as part of the regular training of an incarnate lama he is given initiation into many hundreds of practices - most of which he never practises in his life but he is technically qualified to transmit those practices and often does so. [74]

So my view is that that has become practically meaningless. Also, you can transmit a Vajrayana practice without necessarily having all the ceremonial accompaniments. They would seem not to have existed in India, certainly not in the earlier phases of the Vajrayana, and certainly not at the time of the Buddha. So I think there's a lot of mystique, or even false mystique, about (you know) these things. I think if one is oneself asked (you know) where you received these practices and you say you received them from your teacher, and then they ask who that is, and then you say, well that is Venerable Sangharakshita, and then they ask you where did he receive them from, well there are names of various teachers

you can mention. But nonetheless that is a sort of concession to their way of looking at things, and they may find what you say quite acceptable, but they might find it acceptable for the wrong reason. For instance, one hears expressions like "Oh, it's a very powerful teaching" or "It's a very powerful initiation" or "That line is a very powerful line". This word powerful is heard again and again. Why is this? I find this very (sort of) suspicious. It is quite true that the Tantric initiations, to use that term, of some teachers are more efficacious than those of others, but according to my interpretation of the matter it is because those particular teachers, those particular gurus, have actually practised those methods and can therefore genuinely teach them, and also select their disciples properly. But when you have got, say, a lama who has received technically an initiation into a certain deity, and then one fine day he (sort of) gives that to a crowd of several hundred people, some of whom (as happens in the West) are not even Buddhists and haven't even Gone for Refuge, well, maybe it has got some sort of value as a blessing, and blessings are always good to have, but can one take it seriously as a Tantric initiation? It is making a mockery of the whole thing in my view. So if people come to you and say, well "What initiations have you received?" or "Why don't you go to lama so-and-so? He's giving a very important initiation next Sunday," well, I think one must take a firm stand and not just be carried away by that sort of mystique or go along with that way of thinking too much. I remember in this connection some of my Gelugpa friends in Kalimpong - some of my Tibetan Gelugpa friends - used to make little (sort of) religious jokes about the Nyingmapas sometimes and, you know, even Tibetans have got this (sort of) initiation-hunting tendency sometimes. Some of the more sincere lamas are well aware of this and they try and discourage it. So some of these Gelugpa lamas had a little story about there being a very wonderful, a very highly advanced, Nyingmapa initiation which you could actually impart to others without having practised it yourself! So they had this little joke. But it makes a point, you know, if you see what I mean. So yes, the more intelligent and sincere Tibetan lamas are well aware of these sort of difficulties and misunderstandings. But in the West, unfortunately, so many people have got this tendency to grab at things, even to grab at spiritual things. They're very greedy, which means they don't really understand those spiritual things or spiritual life at all. Well, it's not only people in the West: the Chinese, the wealthy Chinese in places like Malaysia and Hong Kong, Taiwan - they are apparently going after Tantric initiations now like anything, and paying lots of money for them because they believe - this is what I was told by friends whom I've asked about the matter - they believe that these Tantric initiations are very powerful, they give you lots of power in the world and success in your business and all that sort of thing. Well, we've got very far away from the genuine Vajrayana, we've got very far away from Milarepa in his mountain cave, or even dear old Marpa (you know) going off to India with his [75] load of gold in search of Naropa.

Padmavajra; Milarepa, I think, in one of his songs somewhere speaks of

the initiations being an attainment. Do you think it is much better to have that kind of attitude? You just get on with your practice and if something like that (sort of) shows up it shows up.

S: Indeed. Well we know within the FWBO sometimes it happens that some people have a slightly grasping attitude towards ordination and we know that that is discouraged. And everybody understands you shouldn't have that grasping attitude towards ordination however sincerely you may want to commit yourself. If you can imagine that grasping attitude magnified a hundred and a thousand times, well, that is the attitude of some people in the West, or even in the East, towards Tantric initiation. It really is almost - well, almost neurotic, almost pathological sometimes. I think that isn't putting it too strongly. And, I mean, that represents a (sort of) competition and (you know) this is one of the reasons why perhaps the more prosaic, sort of matter of fact, maybe less colourful FWBO doesn't spread quite as rapidly or widely as we would like it to. Was that the whole of your question or is there any more?

Aryadaka: I asked you about the Order members - whether or not some day they would have to teach the sadhanas. I think that's....

S: Well, I would hope so. I mean I hope they don't die out. I hope that a good number of Order members will be able to pass them on. Exactly how that will be done, you know, with what sort of traditional accompaniments - that no doubt remains to be seen. But Order members do teach the mindfulness of breathing, they teach the metta bhavana, they teach the six-element practice. So eventually I hope they will be able to teach everything that they have learned. If you cannot teach everything that you have learned sooner or later, well, what's going to happen to your tradition or your movement? In fact I'd like to think that people will be able to add something from their own experience. How's the time going?

Vessantara: It's getting on for a quarter to. In a similar area you've talked about being cautious about turning the Upasaka ordination into an actual Dharmacari ordination, because that would be to step outside the tradition.

S: Yes. (laughter)

Vessantara: If, in time to come, we have Dharmacaris - who aren't members of the bhikkhu sangha - giving Upasaka ordination, will this be to step outside the tradition, and does it matter?

S: Hmmm. I think that is an interesting point. I did think a little bit about this because ... I thought about it last year as well as this year ... that we do say in the ordination ceremony "Upasaka samvara". If I was to say "Dharmacari samvara" one would be stepping outside tradition in the sense of stepping outside the letter of tradition. Though I think if one was to say "Dharmacari samvara" instead of "Upasaka samvara" one would

not be stepping outside the spirit of tradition. Now personally I prefer not to step outside even the letter of tradition wherever that is possible. But if one has to (as it were) choose between the letter and the spirit, well, clearly one must prefer the spirit. [76]

So I think probably we will eventually change and speak of a Dharmacari ordination. After all, you know, the Mahayana came to speak of a Bodhisattva ordination whereas there was no such thing whatever (you know) in the Buddha's time. So I anticipate that it will in fact come to that, because I think if it doesn't, and if we continue to speak of an Upasaka ordination, it will reinforce the idea that the people in the Order are Upasakas in the sense of being not bhikshus, and therefore that distinction will still be really maintained, and the whole thrust of the idea of the Order is that we place emphasis on the Going for Refuge and not on lifestyle. What was the second part of the question?

Vessantara: It was to do with will we be stepping outside the tradition and does it matter, that was it.

S: I think preferably we should not step outside tradition, but if we have to we have to. It is the spirit of tradition, after all, which is important and not the letter. That shouldn't be used as a reason or an excuse for adopting a sort of cavalier attitude towards even the letter of the tradition.

Vessantara: Dharmamudra?

Dharmamudra: Yes. I'd like to give you an example Bhante of something that happened to me. My boy persisted in playing around with the fire when he'd been told not to, and I took his hand and held it close to the fire until I could feel him resisting. This was used as an example, it was quite simple and it worked very well. What do you do when you can not appeal to the rational mind? I was thinking about this - to do with the breaking of precepts, or someone that maybe continues to cause themselves harm - and then how does punishment or discipline fit into the Order?

S: This is to raise the question of the relation of power to love.

Dharmamudra: Well, it was force I used you see.

S: I think I've made it clear that there are situations in which love is not effective - love can't do everything. Sometimes power - sometimes force - is necessary, and the case of the child I think is almost the exemplary case, because a child may be insisting on doing something that is harmful to himself. You can restrain the child only by force. But it is force, or it is power, guided or directed by love. One might argue that logically you could extend that indefinitely. Some people would argue that, well, you could even kill people out of love; I've heard myself people arguing that way. Well, then one can only ask oneself: would it be possible for you to do that? If I ask myself that question, well, I have to say, well, I cannot

envisage myself actually killing anybody out of love. Because for me the two things would be absolutely irreconcilable. But nonetheless, even though to kill someone would be inconsistent with loving them, the exercise of a degree of force, as it were under the guidance of love, is not necessarily incompatible with love. I think each person has to decide for himself or herself exactly where that point is fixed beyond which you cannot go and beyond which it is not in fact possible for love to have recourse to violence, even under the influence of love, without ceasing really to be love.

Dharmamudra: So you would have discipline. How do you think about discipline within the Order - when you have something that recurs? [77]

S: Well one has to ask what one means by discipline. Probably one can't usefully discuss the question without getting down to concrete examples. What do you really have in mind?

Dharmamudra: Well, I didn't have anything in particular. It's just sometimes you can find yourself in a position where you can't deal with somebody's rational mind.

S: Again I think one can't say anything about that without being more specific. Whose rational mind? Are you speaking of a child? Are you speaking of someone sane? Are you speaking of someone who is insane? Are you speaking of someone who is just for the time being angry? I mean, for instance, if it's just someone who is for the time being angry, well, the best thing to do is not to try to appeal to him rationally at that time, to wait until the anger has passed and he is in a more reasonable mood.

Satyaloka: Do you think it is possible that love can kill?

S: I've heard that maintained. I've heard that point of view maintained. I am not yet convinced. I recognize (you know) it is a very abstruse question. I'm not convinced that that is true.

Indrabodhi: Wasn't there the case of a Tibetan monk who shot a king who was slaughtering a lot of Buddhists?

S: Yes, that's true. Well, it is said in Tibetan tradition that he did it out of compassion, that he was a real Bodhisattva. I must say, despite such examples, I am still not convinced.. I put it no more strongly than that for the time being. I'm not convinced.

Padmavajra: Talking about punishment and discipline, maybe one could use the word penalization within the context of the Order.

S: Ah, but wait a moment. I have said that (you know) in the Order there is no question of operating in accordance with the power mode. To the

extent that one does, or to the extent that one did, it would cease to be the Order. So if you were - for the sake of argument - to deal with anybody in that way, well, you would be in effect saying you did no longer consider them to be an Order member, which is a very serious thing indeed to say.

Padmavajra: I was wondering how you feel therefore about the apparent punishment of breaches which the bhikkhu sangha seem to employ in disciplining bhikkhus.

S: I think one must distinguish two things here. One is punishment, to use that term, sanctioned by the Vinaya, and punishments which have been introduced allegedly in the interests of the sangha by the secular authority, the government, as in the case of the government of Thailand where the sangha is a branch of - and administered by - the Education Department with a lay minister at the head. For instance, you find in the Mahaparinibbana sutta that the Buddha is asked just before his passing away what the monks should do about a certain disobedient bhikkhu. I think his name was Chanda. And the Buddha said "You are to administer the Brahmadaṇḍa, the extreme penalty". So the monks said, well "What is that extreme penalty?" [78] (It isn't actually mentioned in the Vinaya, which is rather interesting.) And the Buddha said "You are not to speak to him or advise him or exhort him." That's the extreme penalty. In other words a sort of withdrawal from communication. There's no question of locking him up. You know, in the Middle Ages in Christian Europe monks were locked up sometimes, or flogged if they broke the rules or precepts. There has never been anything like that in Buddhism, certainly not according to the Vinaya. The worst thing, the extremest penalty, is just to give up on somebody and say, well, it's no use talking to him any more. That's the extreme penalty.

Padmavajra: For ever? That's it?

S: Well, no. In this particular case Chanda, when he was treated by the monks in this way, was so stricken by remorse he confessed his faults and was readmitted.

Padmavajra: Does that have any relevance, do you think, to the WBO? That particular incident?

S: Well, let us say ... How could you commit a breach of your obligations or duties as an Order member? Well, first of all there are breaches of the Going for Refuge traditionally, and breaches of the precepts. Let's take a very extreme example: that you breached your Going for Refuge to the Buddha. Let's say you started to go to church ... (laughter) that you went to Holy Communion. I have known Buddhists, when I was staying (you know) back in the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, who used to go to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve! Some of the pillars of the Buddhist establishment used to go to Midnight Mass or Midnight Service on Christmas Eve!

Padmavajra: There was a recent incident of Order members ....

S: Anyway, leave that aside. (laughter) Supposing someone breaches the Going for Refuge - well, what would happen then? Well, other Order Members would get to know about it and would tell them that they shouldn't do that sort of thing. It's inconsistent. I would say, well, "Do you consider yourself a Buddhist or not? Because going to church and taking Communion is inconsistent with being a Buddhist. So don't you realize you've breached..." They might have (sort of) not realized that. They might have just intended it as an ecumenical friendly gesture, in which case it wouldn't in fact have been a breach. But on the other hand there might be some genuine confusion, or actually they might be slipping back into Christianity, their Christian upbringing might be reasserting itself. So then what would happen? Would you (sort of) take them to court or would you forthwith expel them from the community? You'd certainly want to discuss the matter among yourselves - that is to say, other Order Members in your Chapter. You might conclude, well, so long as that person is in that particular state, it would be better if they did not take classes (laughter) ... a matter for the Centre - that it didn't allow that particular person to take classes. There's no question of a punishment. There is no question of a penalty. You are just trying to sort something out, you are just trying to help somebody to be clear. I mean, this is in a way the most serious matter of all. [79]

Or suppose someone commits a breach of the Dharma by, say, teaching as Dharma something which is not Dharma. Well, in the same way, you deal with it. Now supposing someone commits a breach of the precepts. Let's say they don't repudiate that particular precept - they don't say, "I don't believe in that old precept any more". They just happen, through weakness or whatever, to break it. Well, to the extent that they have broken it, if it is a serious breach, you know, they have ceased to be an Order Member. So in that case they should be advised to confess it, and in a way repent it, in the local chapter. Because otherwise there'll be a sort of uneasy difference between them and the other people in the chapter. Do you see what I mean? Their commitment will be flawed. For instance, I mean, there have unfortunately been a couple of examples in recent years of this sort of thing. Say one Order Member strikes another. One might say this is the worst thing that has happened within the Order so far. Fortunately, to the best of my knowledge, there have been only two instances. In the case of one instance eventually it was cleared up. I don't know whether the person formally confessed in his chapter, I rather think he did. But anyway it was cleared up. In the other case I'm afraid it probably has not been cleared up. An act of violence between Order Members is clearly a very serious breach of precepts. So if someone is guilty of that he should definitely be persuaded, or she should be persuaded, by fellow Order Members, to recognize what a serious matter it is, and actually confess, and genuinely repent and resolve not to do anything like that again. But there is no question of punishing them, or any penalty. But if anybody is guilty of too many breaches, well, he will

sort of drop out of the Movement, drop out of the Order. I mean, he will - in a sense - insensibly expel himself, he won't feel comfortable with you, presumably, as far as I can see..... (break in recording)... a sort of legalistic attitude: "Oh, if someone breaks a rule then he's got to be punished, or taken to task." That shouldn't be the attitude at all.

Devamitra: Is it the case then that you couldn't envisage circumstances under which it would be the best course of action to actually expel someone from the Order? Is that just absolutely....

S: Well, that might in extreme cases be necessary. If for instance someone, while actually (you know) breaking - say, to take an extreme example - all the Refuges and the precepts, but nonetheless insisted on attending Chapter meetings, insisted on attending Council meetings, insisted that he or she was still a member, insisted on being present at classes or even leading classes, then you might have actually to ask that person to resign.

Vessantara: Who would be competent to expel somebody ...

S: This I haven't thought as yet. But I assume that inasmuch as it's myself who gives the ordination, if I withdraw - after all, someone can resign from the Order, so if an Order Member has the right (so to speak, 'right' is not a word I generally use) to give up their membership of the Order, well, I assume I have a corresponding right to give up my connection with them. Which would mean that they were, in effect, out of the Order. It works both ways presumably. But so far no situation of that sort has arisen, and [80] we hope it doesn't.

Devamitra: Are you aware of any incidents involving the Buddha himself, where someone was actually expelled from the Order after he's Gone for Refuge, or did expulsion occur later on?

S: There were examples. For instance there is an example in connection with the parable of the mighty ocean, where the monk is not exactly forcibly removed, but Moggallana takes him by the arm and leads him out.

Devamitra: I wondered whether it was actually explicit in that example that it was one of the Buddha's bhikkhus, someone who'd actually Gone for Refuge, or whether it was just...

S: But what does one mean by expel? I mean, one has to be very careful not to introduce legalistic, almost police type ideas and methods here. What does one mean by expel? The example I gave - the Brahmada - seems to suggest that he's not spoken to any more, you don't treat him in the way that you used to, because he's changed, you can't treat him in the way that you used to. But there's no question of (sort of) forcibly chucking him out, or drumming him out or with these (sort of) circumstances of humiliation or anything of that sort. You might even



continue to be on very friendly terms with that person, you might feel, well, there seems to be a genuine difference of opinion, and we're very sorry about that, and you may continue quite friendly feelings towards him, but nonetheless the fact is that he or she has in effect ceased to be. It's not so much that someone is expelled, because that suggests a formalistic view, but that by their actions and attitude they actually themselves sever themselves from the Order, and sooner or later that becomes recognizable to all.

Satyananda: (I was talking to Ajita's brother)? about the necessity to keep up contact with somebody who does actually break those duties or (unclear)... because there's always a chance that they might come back.

S: Yes, indeed. We've had a few people in the Order who've drifted away over the years, but I personally have always tried to keep up contact if that was at all possible, or if they were willing even to have any contact. But sometimes it is no more than just someone drifting away, not that they're in violent disagreement, or they suddenly repudiate this or that Buddhist doctrine - they just drift away, they're sometimes pulled away by other interests. So there's no point in (sort of) forcibly expelling them or declaring them (sort of) outcasts, or excommunicated. Often this requires a lot of patience of course, but then this is one of the qualities one is supposed to cultivate anyway.

Lalitavajra: What's the situation...

S: How is the time going, by the way?

Vessantara: We've run a few minutes over.

S: Ah. All right, last point then. (pause) Ah, yes. One point I want to make just before you ask your question. In some Buddhist [81] countries the Sangha has sometimes invoked the power of the secular arm, as sometimes the Church did in the West in the Middle Ages. I personally regard that as a confession of failure, I think at all costs one should try to avoid that. Anyway...

Lalitavajra: I was wondering with regards to the situation if an Order Member has been out of contact for a quite a long period of time, say more than five years or so, who then becomes re-involved again, but he's not actually resigned.

S: Well, then he becomes re-involved. (chuckles) He might have to be filled in about various developments which have taken place in the meantime, that's a possibility, but all right, he becomes re-involved, he becomes re-involved. I think it would be only right and proper if he was to give the Chapter - let's say he becomes re-involved with a particular Chapter - some explanation of why he's been out of contact for so long, and let's people know what has been happening. I mean, just as an

expression of his sincerity almost. Because if you've been out of contact for say two or three years and then you come back, well, you really ought to explain, as part of the act of coming back. What has been happening to you and what you've been doing. You shouldn't (sort of) come back and expect to be received as though nothing had happened, as though you'd been coming along all the time, that would be rather false and rather unreal. Anyway, perhaps we should conclude there. There are some questions left?

Vessantara: Yes.

S: All right, then we continue tomorrow.

Questions and Answers on The Ten Pillars of Buddhism (chapters 6,7,8)  
Tuscany 24th October 1984, Session 5

S: So, have we many questions tonight?

Vessantara: About a dozen, mainly arising still out of the sixth section, although today we studied the seventh and the eighth sections. So, tomorrow's Special Day, and the next day we'll start studying the Ten Precepts Individually. So we'll start with Padmavajra, a question about Pratimoksa.

Padmavajra: You mention that the word pratimoksa as one of the most interesting and important terms in Early Buddhism. Is there anything more to say about its meaning and significance other than that you have mentioned in the book?

S: I don't think so. No. The question was just that? No, I did mention the essential points.

Vessantara: Manjunatha?

Manjunatha: Yes, you said there were seven different pratimoksas for different categories of Buddhists. And there was the siksamana [82] pratimoksa that seemed to be between the novice and the bhiksuni. What was the reason behind introducing this?

S: A siksamana is a sort of a female probationer. That category doesn't exist for the monks. I think it originated (it's years since I studied these things, but as far as I remember it originated) from a need to ascertain that a woman wasn't actually pregnant at the time of ordination. So there was this former period of probation allowed so that if she did happen to be pregnant it would become obvious during that time.

Manjunatha: Was it introduced by the Buddha?

S: It seems to have been in existence in the time of the Buddha, yes. Again to the best of my recollection, the precepts observed by the siksamana were the same as those observed by the sramaneriya. I'm not aware that the institution does any longer exist in the Buddhist world. I think that particular pratimoksa may be regarded as having died out - like the bhiksuni ordination and pratimoksa - in most areas, it's said to be still alive in Korea. That was the question?

Vessantara: Indrabodhi?

Indrabodhi: In the Buddha's day bhiksunis were subordinate to the bhiksus, and were required to take extra precepts and conditions. Do you think that Dharmacarinis should be subordinate to the Dharmacaris? In which case which special conditions might apply?

S: Hmmm. Hmmm. Hmmm. (laughter) If anything, I've been thinking that they shouldn't be dependent. I haven't come to any definite conclusions, but one of the things I have been thinking is that women generally, including I think most women in the FWBO, tend to be over-dependent on men. Dependent in the kind of way that is not conducive to the spiritual development of the individual. So my policy at present is very much to encourage women who become involved in the spiritual life, and who start thinking in terms of ordination, and who become in some cases ordained, to try to be less dependent on men, both individually and collectively. This is not, though, to question necessarily that on the whole it may be that men have more to give by way of spiritual inspiration than women, and it may be that women, on the whole, do need to look more to men for spiritual inspiration. That is quite a different thing. But before one can even think in those terms I think the more specifically psychological dependence of women on men, both individual and collective, needs to be overcome. It can only be overcome by individual women themselves. When I speak of collective dependence I mean for instance a situation in which a woman may not, say, be involved in a relationship with a man, but she, along with other women, is (sort of) dependent psychologically on that sense of collective security which is provided by the presence of a lot of men in the environment, or in the area. I think this does tend to happen within the FWBO, and I think this is one of the reasons why women within the FWBO seem to make, or even do make, less progress, less rapid progress certainly, than do men. So I would say that at present these are my thoughts on the subject: encouraging women to be less dependent on men psychologically, while continuing to be open to the possibility, [83] which in fact seems to be more of a possibility, that they do still have, and will still have, a lot to gain from the men in the way of purely spiritual inspiration. But clearly a position of psychological independence must be established first.

Indrabodhi: A number of people have expressed the opinion that (say) women Order Members weren't suitable to take mixed retreats, and I was

wondering whether a special condition of that sort ...

S: Well, in the first place of course even when making generalizations, and this is true in most areas of knowledge and most areas of life, one has to recognize that there will very often be exceptions. So one can't say, well, all women are such-and-such, or all men are such-and-such or any other class of beings or persons are such-and-such, in such a way as never to allow for any exceptions. But I think, on the whole, it's more likely that men Order Members will be suited to leading retreats than women Order Members. This is not to say that there may not be individual women Order Members who are, in fact, able to lead retreats - certainly mixed retreats for beginners. But broadly speaking I think men Order Members are probably more suited to that particular kind of work.

Vessantara: Aryacitta?

Aryacitta: We were discussing the other night about the difference between principles of ethics and rules and petty regulations that come out of the principles, which tend to lose their significance due to changes in culture and society. And I was reading the Buddhist sutras, and it seems as if the inability to distinguish between principles and petty regulations plagued Buddhism right from the beginning, because after the Parinirvana, at the First Council, Ananda reports while reporting the sutras that the Buddha had said to him: if it wishes the community can abolish the minor and lesser rules when I'm gone, to which the elders say: look, friend Ananda, did you ask the Blessed One what these minor and lesser rules were? And when he said he didn't the elders had different opinions as to what were the minor and indispensable rules, apart from agreeing that the four defeats were definitely major, and Ananda was reprimanded for not asking the Buddha to spell it out in black and white. (laughter) I wonder if you would like to comment on why it seemed so difficult for supposedly Enlightened arahants to agree on definitions between minor and major rules.

S: This has always seemed quite extraordinary to me, and I'm really rather doubtful therefore whether that particular question was considered on that particular occasion. Because it does seem extraordinary that arahants, of all people, weren't able to tell, or to be sure, which were the major precepts and which were the minor ones. But that episode is there in the Pali canon, in the Vinaya Pitaka, and it has always been cited by Theravadins when any question of changing or revising or updating rules has been raised. And they say such things as, well, even arahants didn't dare to change the rules, who are we (you know) to change them. I think that is really begging the question, especially as I used to maintain sometimes that in effect they have, in some cases, changed the rules, but without actually admitting it, without changing them explicitly. [84]

Satyaloka: So are you suggesting it's a later interpolation? Or just a mysterious ...

S: I'm always very careful about dismissing something as a later interpolation just because one doesn't happen to agree with it. I think one has to establish that it is a later interpolation on other grounds, for instance textual grounds. I'm not prepared to say that I definitely regard that as a later interpolation. That is a possibility. In any case it does represent a rather odd sort of situation. And it's partly on account of that particular episode, that particular text, that the Theravadins have always tended to believe that the precepts, that is to say the monastic precepts, the pratimoksa and other monastic precepts, constituted a (sort of) single solid block of precepts which could not be changed or modified in any way, because they sort of all hung together. And therefore the attitude in the Theravada world, even today, with regards to monks, is that if a monk is breaking even a very small precept, the chances are that he is actually breaking them all. They regard the Vinaya (and this is not at all in accordance with the teaching of the Vinaya Pitaka itself) they regard it as sort of indivisible. So their argument is, well, if you've little (sort of) shame, or if you're so devoid of conscience, that you break one rule, well you'll certainly be breaking all the others sooner or later. That is their attitude, it's almost as though the lay people, especially in Theravada Buddhist countries (this applies less to the monks), almost can't conceive of the possibility of someone trying sincerely to lead a spiritual life, with the help of the precepts, or with the help of such precepts as are actually relevant to his life and situation. It's as though they have lost the ability to think in those terms. And this is really most serious. They think in terms of, well, either someone observes the precepts or he doesn't; well, what that actually means in terms of spiritual development, what the observance of the precepts means for someone who's trying to lead a spiritual life, hardly seems to occur to them. It's really quite extraordinary.

Padmavajra: Just in this connection could you ... I believe that some of the precepts for a monk actually came about by the urging of the laity. Could you comment on that?

S: It does seem, just taking the Vinaya Pitaka at its face value, that the Buddha was very ready to listen to the complaints of lay people with regard to the monks. It seems, again just taking the Vinaya Pitaka at its face value, that he was very anxious to keep up good relations between the bhikkhus and the laity, which meant not Upasakas, it meant the general public mostly, in those days. And this was presumably because the bhikkhus were dependent on the laity, or dependent on the goodwill of the laity, for their material support. I've been of the opinion for some time that this is one of the biggest weaknesses in traditional Buddhism - that the bhikkhus should be so dependent on the laity. At its best it's an excellent system, it allows the bhikkhu to devote his whole time to spiritual things, or at least to cultural pursuits, but it means that the laity have got a sort of hold over the monks, and if the laity doesn't sympathize genuinely with the monastic way of life (as is sometimes the case) very often the laity is only concerned that the [85] monk should keep up

appearances, or that in some cases he should just (sort of) dance attendance on the lay people, and very often lay people try to control, or do actually control, the bhikkhus. I've had a number of discussions about this particular matter with my bhikkhu friends in the East, especially with Sinhalese bhikkhus, and to some extent as a result of my conversations with them I changed some of my ideas. At the very beginning, when I was a young bhikkhu, I was very, very idealistic. (Well, quite rightly - if you can't be idealistic when you're young, well when can you be idealistic?) (laughter) (It's difficult to be idealistic when you're old - you've seen too much of life.) (laughter) But I was very idealistic and I was genuinely shocked and horrified when I heard that certain groups of bhikkhus in Ceylon were actually landowners, that they were actually proprietors of their monasteries, their viharas, and the estates belonging thereto. And some of them were actually very rich. And I discovered that in Ceylon there were three Nikayas, three divisions within the sangha, there was the shamanikaya, there was the amarapura nikaya, and there was the ramana nikaya. The Shamanikaya was the biggest, the oldest, and the richest, the other two nikayas were smaller and poorer, the smaller nikayas' members tended to be more highly regarded spiritually than the members of the Shamanikaya. So I took to begin with a rather simplistic view of this, I tended to think, well, the people who haven't got the property they're obviously the spiritual ones, and those who have got it, well they're less spiritual. But anyway after discussing this matter with a number of Sinhalese bhikkhus I came to a different conclusion. What it seemed to be was that the fact that the Shamanikaya bhikkhus were not dependent on the laity meant that they were more independent, they could take a much more independent stand on all sorts of matters, including those which concerned the vital interests of Buddhism itself. The bhikkhus of the two other nikayas could not afford to displease the laity. They were dependent on their support on a sort of day to day basis. And I came to conclusion eventually that the bhikkhus of those two nikayas were not actually better bhikkhus than the Shamana bhikkhus, they were only more concerned to keep up appearances. I must say that the Shamanikaya bhikkhus had a whole fund of very funny stories about how bhikkhus of the other nikayas (you know) used to keep up appearances in the eyes of the lay people so as to impress them with their greater sanctity and to get more support. Well, I remember one particular incident which perhaps illustrates this, I remember it very well. There was a bhikkhu called Narada who was quite famous (he died not so long ago) - a bhikkhu called Narada belonging to the Amarapura Nikaya, who was very, very well known for his keeping up the Vinaya and being quite strict. If he heard about any bhikkhu who wasn't observing the Vinaya, well, he'd tut-tut-tut like anything (laughter). There are all sorts of stories about him, but I had several little experiences myself with him, and in connection with him. And one was as follows: (This illustrates the difference of attitude between these different groups.) This little incident happened in the Maha Bodhi Society headquarters in Calcutta. I think it was at the time of the Buddha Jayanti, 1957. A lot of bhikkhus gathered together, there must have been twenty-five or thirty bhikkhus, mainly from Ceylon, gathered together in the library of the

Maha Bodhi Society for lunch. So of course the etiquette is that bhikkhus all start eating together and they finish together, and nobody gets up until everybody has finished. Anyway - ah, yes, an important point that you might not be aware of - bhikkhus must finish eating by twelve o'clock, that's the rule - there's some dispute, some [86] say you've got ten minutes grace, and you can ... but anyway, general opinion is that you must finish by twelve. So actually the Maha Bodhi Society's a bit slack (laughter) and after all there were thirty bhikkhus, and what happened was that lunch was late - well, not really late - it wasn't served until about ten minutes to twelve. And one or two of the monks, especially this Bhikkhu Narada, were getting distinctly agitated. Anyway, it was served, and so at ten minutes to twelve ... (imitates thirty bhikkhus starting lunch) ... so most of the monks were eating in a leisurely sort of way (laughter), but Bhikkhu Narada was eating furiously (laughter); I well remember him. And in the library there was a big clock - (laughter) I remember Bhikkhu Narada was eating with a spoon, so suddenly the clock went DONG! He dropped that spoon as though it was red hot (laughter). So the other bhikkhus took not a bit of notice, they went on stolidly eating (laughter), took no notice whatever, (not a word was said)? (voice drowned by laughter). So Narada looked a bit surprised, he sort of looked around, and saw nobody stopping. So he got up and he went outside quite ostentatiously to just wash his hands and rinse his mouth, which of course was quite impolite actually. So after he had gone out two or three of the older bhikkhus present, they just looked up, and they sort of nodded (imitates) (laughter), then went on quietly eating. So this sort of illustrates the difference between the sramanikaya bhikkhus, who didn't have to bother about public opinion, and the amarapura bhikkhus who did. But that is in fact quite a point. So I eventually came to the conclusion, sad as it may seem, that for a monk to be economically independent, you could say, actually did safeguard his spiritual independence. And that if you were in a position of economic dependence on the laity, in such a way that your spiritual independence was limited, how could you possibly lead a spiritual life? So I think it isn't such a simple matter as perhaps I did myself originally think.

Padmavajra: Do you think the Buddha could have possibly been mistaken to listen to the laity, or do you think the circumstances were the right thing to do in those days, but it should have been dropped later?

S: Well, one can't say that Buddhas are mistaken. But circumstances change. And in the case of the Zen movement they did, to a great extent, drop the practice of living on alms, and they formulated the slogan of "A day of no work is a day of no eating." I think to some extent Indian Buddhism was affected by, or influenced by, purely Indian ways of thinking, because the Indians, a bit like the ancient Greeks, regarded work, especially manual work, as somehow inferior. And just as among the Greeks there were certain kinds of work that a free man wouldn't do, in the same way among the Indians there were certain kinds of work, in fact most kinds of work, that someone who was on the spiritual path was not

expected to do. I think, whatever justification that might originally have had, in many ways it's been an unfortunate development. One can say that in the days of the Buddha, and during the centuries afterwards, before the canon was reduced to writing, perhaps it was necessary for the monks to be completely relieved of all other responsibilities because the canon had to be preserved by word of mouth, and they must have had to spend a lot of time learning it by heart, aurally, from teachers, and then reciting it among themselves [87] to keep it in their memories. And it could be that in the early days of Buddhism that responsibility had to be given priority, and therefore a total dependence, economically, on the lay people, was justified. One could look at it in that way. Also in India people were, on the whole, very willing to give, but when Buddhism moved to other countries and other cultures where they didn't necessarily think it was a good thing for people engaged in cultural and spiritual pursuits to depend upon the charity of other people, well, perhaps changes and modifications were called for.

Satyananda: Did monasteries vary in ... (unclear) ...?

S: Yes and no. They did have lands, which were given by the state (which means, in a sense, other monks...)? or (so, in a sense, are the monks...)? But the monastery was often a more or less self contained economic unit - I've talked about this on quite a number of occasions - with its own monk carpenters, its own monk cooks, and its own monk (or at least novice) agriculturalists, its own monk bankers and businessmen and so on. I personally believe that that was quite a good system.

Abhaya: What do you think nowadays, Bhante, about the dependence of the FWBO, in this so-called transitional period - dependence of the FWBO, economically, on the state?

S: Hmm. Well, it's not a very firm support, let us say. I mean quite apart from the ethics of it, from a practical point of view, things could be tightened up. I used to take the view that it wasn't very ethical to depend on the state, but over the years the situation has changed because there are so many unemployed now, and you cannot, realistically, be expected to go in search of work which isn't there. So the fact that you sign on nowadays, and are allowed to sign on, doesn't necessarily mean that you are really expected to spend all your time in pursuit of work. But I think if you do sign on you must be prepared to think in terms of accepting a job which is offered you if it is offered you. If you have the intention never to accept work which is offered to you, then I think it is not justified that you're on the dole. I think you are justified, the situation being what it is in England at present, in not actually going in search of work.

Abhaya: But surely that is the case with a lot of us, that there are a lot of people in the FWBO who are actually signing on, and they in fact don't intend - well, do their best not to - get work. I'm in that position myself.



S: I would say then it is a sort of ambivalent situation, because the fact that you sign on does in fact mean - I would say nowadays - not that you're actively searching for work, but at least that you want work. This is why you sign on. You are, I believe, allowed to refuse jobs once or twice, and no doubt one can exercise that (sort of) right, but I think if one has the fixed determination never to accept work, or any work that is offered to you, then I would say one doesn't really have the [88] right to sign on, because in signing on there's a (sort of) implicit agreement. Do you see what I mean? Some people have argued that by not taking jobs, well, you're allowing somebody else to take the job who perhaps needs it more than you (laughter). I'm not really convinced by that line of argument.

Baladitya: Are you including people that work full-time in co-ops?

S: Pardon?

Baladitya: Are you including people who sign on and work full-time in co-ops?

S: Oh people shouldn't sign on and work full-time in co-ops. I would say that is probably dishonest.

Baladitya: Because you can declare that you do volunteer work, which I have.

S: I don't know fully the rules and regulations, but if you declare that you're doing voluntary work, and you're open about what you're doing, and they accept that, well, presumably it is all right. But you certainly should not conceal anything that you're doing. If you're (sort of) working gainfully and conceal that, and at the same time draw dole money, well, that is certainly dishonest and is (I would say) clearly breaking the second precept.

Prasannasiddhi: What about the argument that by going on the dole, that frees you up to do useful work within the movement? Surely ...

S: Well, it depends whether it is honest or dishonest, because you can find yourself arguing that by doing something which is dishonest it leaves you free to preach the merits of honesty. So one doesn't really want to put oneself into that sort of position. So I think one has to ask oneself quite honestly in such cases what one's position actually is. I certainly don't rule out somebody's being on the dole, but I think if one is drawing dole money, it's only reasonable - or indeed even honest - that one should be prepared at some time at least to take a job if one is offered and if one continues to be on the dole, not necessarily take (one) immediately. And also I think it must be clearly understood that one's drawing the dole shouldn't involve one in making any false statement. Well, then you'd be breaking two precepts wouldn't you?

Aryadaka: Given the number of Order Members and the size of the movement, why do you think it's not self-sufficient?

S: Well, there are two sources of income: either one depends on the generosity of the public, or one creates wealth oneself. We have excluded the first possibility, though we do accept such donations as are freely given and we do get some, so that leaves us with the second alternative. We're not good enough [89] at making money, and I think ... my own view of that is that the main reason is ... well, there are two main reasons I think: first of all lack of capital, in most cases, and also lack of managerial skills. I think in most of the co-ops people do work quite hard and they work often quite long hours, but I think very often there are not enough managerial skills to deploy their energies in the most skilful and productive way. I think that is probably our weakest area, in the field of the co-ops, next to actual shortage of capital, or expansion and so on. Though it is a quite well worn thing to have in fact discussed these issues a number of times, perhaps even here at Il Convento. Anyway let's go on, but first I'm going upstairs just for a...

But going back to this question of the dole, I don't want to take a too (as it were) legalistic view. I think also a factor that needs to be taken into consideration is your relationship with your local - what do they call it now? They used to call it labour exchange...

A Voice: D.H.S.S.

S: Ah. Because the person or persons with whom you are dealing may never in fact offer you a job. You may be down as possessing a certain skill or possessing certain qualifications. They may be perfectly aware that, well, there are no jobs available in the area for people with those sort of qualifications. So it is not that you have decided (if you're the person with those qualifications drawing dole) that you are never going to take a job. In a sense you haven't got to that point, because you know, and the people in the dole office also know, that there are no jobs of that sort around. So if there is that (sort of, if you like) amicable agreement between you (you know, the drawer of the dole) and the people who are responsible for paying you the dole, then I would say that that is not an unacceptable situation.

Vajranatha: There are quite a few people in the FWBO who are quite well qualified, presumably they wouldn't have difficulty in getting jobs.

S: I don't know, because you don't necessarily have a better chance of getting a job if you're better qualified, it depends what the actual qualifications are. Also it depends where you are, in which part of the world. Well, you may be a (sort of) skilled machine-tool operator, but you may be living in a definitely rural area, there will be no factories employing those sort of skills in that area.

Vajranatha: Some people take the argument that in that case you ought to move to somewhere where you could get employment, if you're capable of being employed.

S: I don't think the official view is that you are expected to go anywhere in Britain where it is possible for you to get work. I think it is recognized that you have (so to speak) the right to remain in what may be reasonably regarded as your own area. I don't know whether that is formulated as any official policy, but I think that is at least understood and agreed. It is one of those (sort of) ticklish areas where the ethical slides into [90] the legal. Another point that occurs to me is that the dole is quite small, sometimes it isn't enough. And if people were supported by the movement it might be better in the sense of perhaps their needs might be more adequately met; assuming of course an economically flourishing movement. But I think it should be, really, a matter of self-respect that the movement does support itself, and does support its own full-time workers. I think it can only be regarded as a stop-gap measure if they're supported in any other way, especially by the state. It's only possible in a few countries like Britain, I don't think it's possible in the States to that degree. It's certainly not possible in India.

Aryadaka: Don't you think that if the dole wasn't there that people would tend to get on a little more and create situations where they would ...

S: I think that is true in the case of some people. I do believe that in the case of some people, I hope not so much within the FWBO, that the dole has a softening sort of effect. Yes. Again it's a tricky area because yes, one doesn't want disadvantaged people to suffer. But on the other hand one doesn't really want to sap and undermine individual initiative. I have formed the impression that the consequences of the welfare state have not been wholly desirable. Probably on balance desirable, but I think there are certain features, or certain consequences, that are not desirable. Anyway, let's carry on. Has anybody ever worked (by the way) in one of those offices? Ah, you! (laughter)

Abhaya: A long time ago.

S: Yes. I know other people too who've been (so to speak) the other side of the counter. I remember when I was staying at Castle Acre some of our local friends - I don't know whether Devamitra was among them - but there were two or three people who went with some trepidation along to the local Department of whatever-it-is-now in Swaffam, they went with some trepidation, but actually they encountered a very sympathetic and friendly response and were given no trouble whatsoever. They were paid their money without any difficulty at all. Was that so in your case?

Devamitra: It was for six months, then they got heavy.

S: In Ratnapani's case I think it went on much longer.

Kuladitya: We're finding around the LBC that the local dole office is very ... one or two people are very sympathetic to what we're doing.

S: I don't know how much sort of leeway local offices are allowed, it's difficult to say, I don't know how much discretion they have. No doubt they have some.

Baladitya: In the one in Hackney they have a sign for what to do in the case of someone turning up from Sukhavati. (laughter) [91]

S: "Just hand the money straight over"? (laughter) I think also with regard to the movement generally we have to be quite careful that through some giant (well, they're not even giant any longer) central computer someone doesn't realize that the state is subsidising the FWBO to a considerable extent, because if that was known and if it was publicized in a certain way in certain quarters, it could do us a lot of harm in the eyes of the public, even supposing we hadn't done anything that was wrong in any way at all. So I think that consideration also does need to be borne in mind. Anyway, we really must carry on now.

Vessantara: Susiddhi.

Susiddhi: At the top of page 41 you say, "There is no point whatever in taking a large number of precepts in the knowledge that one will not, in fact, be observing some of them." Could you give specific examples of the sort of thing you're referring to in that sentence? We couldn't think of...

S: I'm referring to the traditional situation, especially with regard, say, to bhikkhus. But it applies to lay people also in the East. Many precepts are taken which people, well, they take them (as it were) ceremonially, or even ritualistically, but have no definite intention of observing them, nor perhaps of ever observing them. And I think that is really very, very demoralizing. For instance, to just give you a very small example: Theravada bhikkhus aren't supposed to eat after twelve o'clock, I mentioned that a little while ago, but I remember an occasion, for instance, where I was again in Calcutta, staying at the Maha Bodhi Society, and I was sharing a room with a Mahathera from Ceylon, a cheerful friendly sort of chap, rather tall and rather well built, well, just a little on the solid side. He must have been about forty-five. So come the evening time he just (sort of) had a word with the servant boy, and that servant boy came back with a big egg-paratha. So he proceeded to lock the door and open the newspaper in which this egg-paratha was wrapped, and proceeded to demolish it. So I said ... (laughter) ... "Bhante, do you eat after twelve o'clock?" So he said "Sangharakshita, I've been ordained for more than twenty years, and not a single evening has passed that I have not had my egg paratha!" (laughter) Bhikkhus among themselves are often quite frank, you know, and they don't.... (laughter) It's only from the laity that things have to be hidden. The locked door, you see, because

the laity would be shocked, or at least they'd pretend to be shocked. Do you see what I mean? But actually if he was asked, by lay people, he would say that he did observe the precept. Yes. So that is a very demoralising sort of position to be in. I don't think he did anything which was ethically wrong, it's hardly an ethical matter, but certainly he had officially taken that precept and was supposed to be observing it. So I think it's demoralising if you just repeat or recite precepts which are not real precepts for you, and which you're not actually making a real effort to observe. I think it undermines the whole spiritual life, or ethical life.

Satyananda: What's the other alternative though, for an individual in a situation like that? [92]

S: It's very difficult, because the lay people, in some of the Theravada countries, are very un-understanding; though I must say, in defence of the bhikkhus, that the majority of them are quite sensible people, and left to their own devices would certainly make a few adjustments, and would be happy to do it quite openly. But a lot of them just go in fear of the laity. The laity in some cases - the orthodox laity - are (sort of) on the watch, you know, they watch the bhikkhus to make quite sure that they're not breaking any rule, and they're always reminding them about the rules. For instance, if it's half-past eleven some officious lay person will come along and say, "Oh, Bhante, haven't you eaten yet?" (half-past eleven, see?) to remind you that you've got to finish before twelve. Very often the lay people are much more insistent about the bhikkhus (you know) being strict about the precepts than the bhikkhus are themselves, in these minor matters. Do you see what I mean? The sort of underlying reason is that it's widely held - in fact deeply held - belief, in Theravada countries, the traditional belief, that if the laity make offerings to the bhikkhus, well, merit accrues from that. But the bhikkhu has to be a good bhikkhu. If the bhikkhu is not a good bhikkhu, if he's a bad bhikkhu, if he's a dussila bhikkhu, you don't get your money's worth. So in a way he's cheating you, so you have to be quite sure that he's a good bhikkhu, and you have to keep him up to scratch to make sure that the dana you give is a good investment. It really comes to that in the end. So I've really seen lay people bothering bhikkhus, and being very, very concerned that the bhikkhus should be really good bhikkhus, for that sort of reason. Whereas the bhikkhus very often are pretty sensible people who can be trusted to lead a reasonably ethical life, without all that surveillance. It doesn't have a good effect on the bhikkhus because very often they do what that particular monk was doing. They do break these minor rules, but they do it secretly and they keep it from the lay people. I mean, they don't attempt to hide it usually from other bhikkhus. They're quite open with other bhikkhus, but the fact that they have even to hide things from the lay people doesn't create a very healthy atmosphere, and sometimes you can see a situation in which, well, maybe a whole group of bhikkhus together - quite relaxed and quite friendly, and they're talking quite openly - but along come the lay people and everybody stiffens and there's a definite change in their behaviour. They have to become more reserved,

more careful what they say, et cetera, et cetera. Very often the lay women are worse than the laymen. They're really hot on keeping the bhikkhus up to scratch, though this isn't, again, a very healthy situation. So this is the main reason why, when the FWBO was started, I felt that we should have few precepts, but we should observe them all. So therefore I felt, well, let's have ten that are really observed and that people really make an effort to observe every single one of them, no exceptions.

Aryacitta: Do you think that the precepts the Buddha introduced were as a result of lay pressures?

S: Well, according to the Vinaya Pitaka, yes. I think also there's not much doubt that quite a number of the minor rules, or interpretations of minor rules, came along considerably later than the time of the Buddha himself. Some of them presuppose a very highly developed form of what we call cenobitical monasticism, which [93] almost certainly hadn't developed at the time of the Buddha, not even towards the end of his life.

Satyaloka: Last night in regard to ordination into the Western Buddhist Order you said that to change the ordination from Upasaka to Dharmacari would be to step outside the letter of tradition, but not the spirit; though you saw this step would eventually be taken, but you prefer not to take it up at present. You said that if it comes down to a choice between the spirit and the letter of tradition, one should choose the spirit. In the wider sense, why is the letter of tradition important?

S: Well, there is no spirit apart from the letter. The spirit has to find a concrete expression. Do you see what I mean? For instance, you have the principle of nonviolence, well that reduces itself in a way to a number of rules. All right; you should not take life. Then somebody asks, well, does that mean... or say somebody understands that as involving not taking human life - they think it's alright to kill animals. But then it has to be made clear that, no, that isn't the case, the principle of nonviolence also involves not killing animals. So it's as though you've got two rules: not to kill human beings, not to kill animals. But then somebody might think that, well, abortion is OK. So then it has to be made clear that, no, the principle of nonviolence involves not having recourse to abortion. So you've another rule. Do you see what I mean? So rules are really concrete expressions, or expressions in particular circumstances, of the principle itself. But what happens is that sometimes people try to observe the letter without really practising the spirit. And then of course, when that point come, you may be able to say, in certain cases, not with regard to all precepts, that if you happen to have a choice it's better to observe the spirit but not the letter, rather than the letter but not the spirit.

Vajranatha: How would that apply observing the letter of the ordination ceremony?

S: Well, one has to ask what is the letter and what is the spirit. The spirit is

that you go for Refuge and observe the ten ethical principles. If the actual ceremony ever (sort of) got in the way of people's actual Going for Refuge and actual observing of the ten principles, well, it would be better that it was dropped. But I hope that stage won't be reached, if it ever is reached, at least for many hundreds of years.

Satyaloka: I suppose there are degrees of tradition, there are degrees of things that are important. There's tradition that is perhaps tied up to cultural observances, and there's a sort of mainstream of Buddhist tradition tied up with spiritual realities. 'Cos in a study group it came round to the point that one shouldn't garland a rupa if it had a monastic robe on it, because to do so was to break the Vinaya. I must admit that I myself couldn't see the point of that. I was pointed out to me that that was the tradition and if you didn't need to step outside tradition, then one shouldn't do so, one should be trying not to do so.

S: Yes. Well, for instance there is another - it's no more than a custom, one might say - in Tibetan monasteries the monks themselves often eat after midday, in fact they usually eat after [94] midday. They know that that's breaking the rule, but they do it quite openly and (as it were) deliberately, because they feel that in Tibet they need that extra nourishment on account of the cold. But they don't make food offerings to the image of the Buddha after twelve o'clock. Do you see what I mean? Because at least they maintain tradition to that extent. They're quite aware of what they are doing. In the case of flower garlands, well, in a Buddhist country people wouldn't put garlands around the neck of the Buddha. In India they do that because that's the Hindu custom - they garland images of their gods. But visiting Buddhists, say from Ceylon, are often quite offended by this. But the Indian, sometimes the Indian Buddhist, who does this, means no harm - to him it's an act of devotion. He's not aware of that rule. So one can't be too (sort of) strict about it in those sort of cases. Another example I'll give you from my own experience was this: It is definitely a rule for bhikkhus (and you can see the sense of it) that they neither touch women nor allow women to touch them. That's a straightforward application of a principle in monastic life. And I strictly observed this for many, many years. But when I started working among the ex-Untouchables I found that people always wanted to touch me, including women. That is to say they wanted to come up to you and touch you or if they offered you something they wanted to touch you at the same time in a way that a Buddhist, especially a Buddhist woman, would never dream of doing. So I thought over this quite seriously. I came to the quite clear conclusion that I should not protest against this, because of this particular situation: They were Untouchables, or ex-Untouchables. So had I said, "No, I'm a bhikkhu and you mustn't touch me", on account of their centuries of conditioning they could not have taken that in any other way except negatively, and been hurt in their feelings. And they might even have felt: well even Buddhist monks observe untouchability. So I felt in that situation I could not say to those people that "you shouldn't touch me". So here's a clear instance of a situation requiring you to modify not

the principle but a specific application of that principle. Coming to England one could perhaps go the other way around and say even laymen shouldn't allow women to touch them, what to speak of monks! (laughter) The situation is totally different here. It's opposite here. If a woman comes along and starts patting you on the back: ah-ha, be careful, watch out! I can't believe that it's completely innocent, unless she's over eighty perhaps (laughter), and even then you can't be too sure (laughter). I remember a woman of about eighty-three or eighty-four saying to a friend of mine who was about seventy - a male friend who was living with her, I mean sharing the same bungalow - she said, "I may be eighty-three but I have my feelings!" (laughter) But anyway, the instance I've referred to just goes to illustrate how applications of principles can be changed, perhaps even modified, according to circumstances. One has oneself seriously and sincerely, well, what is the best, what is the right thing to do in the circumstances. It is not that one repudiates the principle or wishes to apply it or practise it to any less degree, but that one is sensitive to the situation in which you are actually living and working. Yes, to give you another example of this in the West again: quite a number of women I know from my early days at the Hampstead [95] Buddhist Vihara have been quite hurt sometimes when a bhikkhu refused to shake hands with them. Now you might say, well, in the long run, yes, you have to discourage women from shaking hands with bhikkhus. But if a woman who knows nothing of Buddhism, but that it's evidently full of goodwill, and is just doing what she thinks is the correct thing in offering to shake hands with the bhikkhu, you shouldn't just say, well, "no I can't shake hands with you" and draw back. One has to be (in a way) sensible in that situation. I know some Theravada bhikkhus - no doubt in some cases after sincerity, but perhaps not a completely intelligent sincerity - have given offence in that sort of way.

Manjunatha: Isn't there a point in keeping the letter of the tradition in the West, as a means of actually keeping some kind of thread with the tradition. In the case of, for example, this even: not putting garlands on rupas. For us, well, we can go either way...

S: I think where there's no reason why one should not, one should observe tradition, because it does maintain continuity, and after all our connection, historically speaking, is with traditional Buddhism. So I think tradition should not be changed or modified except for a very good reason. I'm assuming it's genuine tradition and not just some little local custom that has somehow crept into Buddhism in the East. Like monks walking on white sheets and things like that. (puzzled noises) We won't go into that now. (laughter) It's easy to laugh at these little stories but it's very easy to get into that sort of way of doing things, it's very easy to get into that sort of approach and just to be honouring the letter but not the spirit of an observance, or practice, or precept, or principle.

Satyaloka: I was wondering, Bhante, what your position, or status - I'm not sure quite what the right word is - is with regard to the Theravada Bhikkhu



Sangha.

S: Well, it differs from one country to another, apparently. Because in England I have very little contact with them at all, but in India I have quite a bit of contact with them, especially with some of my old friends. Because in a way there is no such thing as a (sort of) bhikkhu sangha, in a way, unfortunately. There are only sort of independent branches or chapters, and one's relations may be of one kind with one branch or chapter, and of another kind with another branch or chapter. And even sometimes it differs according to country of origin (so to speak). I must say that while I was in India, though I'd had my points of difference with them, I always personally got on very well with the Sinhalese bhikkhus. I found them, on the whole, especially when you got them away from the lay people, much more intelligent than either the Thai bhikkhus or the Burmese. I think that if the Sinhalese bhikkhus were not so much under the control of the lay people - and things may have changed a little bit by this time - I think they themselves would introduce quite a number of changes in practice.

Satyaloka: I actually meant in regard to the fact that, like you only wear robes on ceremonial occasions and that sort of thing... [96]

S: Well, Theravada bhikkhus regard this on the whole as out. They regard this as quite wrong, they regard it as breaking the Vinaya. Lay people, who don't really know the Vinaya very well, would take the view that if you weren't wearing the robes you couldn't possibly be a bhikkhu. Though that is not actually in accordance with the Vinaya. But there are bhikkhus who are changing their ways. For instance not so long ago - a couple of months ago - a young Dutch bhikkhu came to see me who'd just spent eight years in Ceylon, and he'd spent some time in Holland too quite recently. And he appeared to be quite orthodox, but talking to him it seemed that his views were quite liberal, and we eventually got round to talking about this question of robes, and he mentioned that when he was in Holland and happened to have to drive a van (he didn't mention why he had to drive a van) anyway, he mentioned he'd been driving a van for a while, he said he didn't wear his robes, he wore ordinary lay dress. He seemed to think nothing of this. And even in the thirties there was a case I remember of a Sinhalese bhikkhu who was living in London for a while, and teaching Buddhism, who in the evenings used to dress in civilian clothes and just go round sightseeing. News of this got back to Ceylon and was sort of indicted by some bhikkhus, but he managed to establish the point from the Vinaya that he had not in fact broken the Vinaya, and that was accepted. Again, during the war there was the case of Bhikkhu Thittila who worked as a stretcher-bearer (I mentioned this somewhere in my memoirs I think). And while he was working as a stretcher-bearer he used to wear a stretcher-bearer's uniform, and I remember myself being present at meetings and seeing Bhikkhu Thittila (who I didn't actually know at that time) coming along wearing civilian dress with a little suitcase, and he'd disappear into a room, and then he'd come out after

five minutes wearing his robes and give Refuges and Precepts. So I'm by no means the first, though perhaps I'm the best known, to act in this sort of way. He, again, was strongly criticized at the time, but eventually came to be regarded as a (sort of) pillar of orthodoxy, and was most highly regarded by everybody. People do get used to these things eventually, but if you're the first, or the first of a few people, who introduce certain changes, very often you do have to suffer for that. In India it would be foolish, because in India the situation is so different. Robes are so natural there, they're so part of the scene, and also in many ways more convenient. But I did get rather fed up in England when I used to go around in my robes and people used to think I was in some kind of fancy dress (laughter). That does not help you in communicating with the public. But in a way it seems lacking in imagination that Buddhists especially, Eastern Buddhists, can't see that it is no part of any serious person's spiritual life to go around in what everybody thinks is fancy dress (laughter). But again - this is a point I have discussed several times - you notice the tendency in all religious traditions to adopt archaic dress. Look at the Franciscans: the Franciscans at present wear what we call robes. But what did the Franciscans originally wear? What did Saint Francis wear? He wore a sort of tunic and a hood, which was the dress at that time of an ordinary working man. That was why he wore it, he wanted to identify with the lowest and poorest and humblest of the people. He did not wear any sort of monastic [97] robe. But religious people are conservative so his followers wore that same dress, naturally. I think in one of our tours we actually saw ...

Prasannasiddhi: It was in Florence.

S: ... a dress ( I won't call it a robe) a dress, that Saint Francis had worn. It was just sacking, brown sacking as far as I could make out, patched and very tatty indeed. So that's what he wore - that's what his immediate followers wore, - but then their followers wore. But by that time fashions had changed, and poor people no longer dressed in that way. Then they started making their Franciscan dress nicer, as things started relaxing. Made it a better cloth, but still the same colour, the same cut, then they added (you know) little bits and pieces. In the end it turned into a robe, with a (sort of) special aura of sanctity to it. So that now, in the twentieth century when fashions have changed really very much, you still find (well, you don't find so much, but you find some) Franciscan friars wearing this early medieval dress. It's just a survival. So it's just the same with clerical dress generally, it's just the same with bhikkhu's dress. It is really antique costume. This is what it amounts to. And the fact that religious people tend to wear antique costume I think tends to give the suggestion, or impression, that religion is something old fashioned and out of date. Do you see what I mean? But this is quite an interesting point. Why religious people and why spiritual traditions should be so conservative in this sort of way. It really has no (sort of) spiritual significance because the original significance of that dress is lost when it becomes a robe, and when it becomes beautiful, and expensive, as bhikkhu's robes sometimes are

nowadays. I mentioned this in the Survey even. In the Buddha's day the bhikkhu's dress was ordinary lay dress, but made of patches, and discoloured so that people were discouraged from stealing it. It wasn't a robe. To refer to a bhikkhu's robe gives a quite wrong sort of impression. But in modern times I've seen bhikkhus going about in (sort of) patch robes made of very expensive silk. So what is the point of that? Where is the sense of sincerity? Where is the spiritual principle? So I think there are a lot of questions to be asked about these sort of things. It's not enough to quote tradition. If you want to keep to the spirit of that particular tradition, again as I've said before, what it means is, whether in the case of Franciscan friars or Buddhist bhikkhus, you wear the simplest and cheapest dress of your time, even that kind of dress which is so shabby even, that no one is likely to want to steal it. And you have only one change. That's how it should be. If you stick really to the spirit of that particular observance that's what it should really mean. But that you should go around in (sort of) antique garb which conforms to the cut of previous centuries, but which is made of a much, much more expensive material, and which suggests a (sort of) social status in a way that it didn't originally, this would seem to be a betrayal of that particular tradition.

Prasannasiddhi: Although nowadays even the poorest people, or relatively low down in the social scale, they've probably got suits and...

S: Well, you can make allowance for that too. This is in a way [98] the whole point of Mahatma Gandhi's loincloth. I mean why did Mahatma Gandhi wear a loincloth? Originally he wore Western dress. There are many photographs of him as a young lawyer wearing Western dress - a dark suit, collar, tie, top hat and all the rest of it. Very smart he looked too. But he eventually changed. What he said - his reasoning - was this: He worked out that the average Indian consumed so many yards of cloth per year - he wore so many yards of cloth per year - and Mahatma Gandhi felt he had no right to exceed that average. Because if he did he'd be taking cloth, in effect, from somebody else. So I think he worked out that the average Indian used seven yards of cloth a year at that time, and therefore he concluded that he had to make do with seven yards of cloth a year. At that meant a short loincloth, two of those, and a shawl, and one or two other bits and pieces. He felt he had no right to have more than the average person had. So it's much the same sort of principle. And clearly that will differ - what that sort of average is will differ from one country - perhaps from one generation or century - to another.

Shantavira: Do you think it might be a good idea for Order Members to wear robes on, say, ceremonial occasions?

S: I'm certainly not against that. Because I think robes - a special dress if you like, something more colourful than usual - is all part of the ensemble, let us say. After all, you've got a colourful shrine (again I've said this before), you've got a beautiful gilded image, you've got (you know) beautiful flowers, everything is beautiful, harmonious; but there are you,

sitting there in your tatty old jeans (laughter). It looks out of place (as it were), you clash with the surroundings. You should include yourself in that (sort of) archetypal framework (as it were) , on special occasions. So I'm certainly not against people donning a special dress, call it robes if you like, for such occasions as pujas. I think probably it would be desirable if it was rightly done, if it was genuinely aesthetic and pleasing. And also on suitable occasions. Whether the robe should be yellow or blue or pink or ... I'm not saying. I'm speaking about general principles. You can all wear golden oriels if you like, so far as I'm concerned (laughter). I suspect there's going to be a very long discussion about robes because the Order's been discussing the possibility of mitras wearing green cords round their wrists for years now, five or six years. You lot were unfortunate, you missed your green cords but some future generation of mitras may be more fortunate. By the time they've finished the discussion it may not be a green cord any more, it may be something else.

Devamitra: I think you finally threw that idea out yourself...

S: I wasn't very... No, it's still being discussed I know, but I'm not too happy about green cords round the wrists. (laughter) If every single Order member and every single mitra was all in favour of green cords round the wrists of mitras, well, I wouldn't stand against the flood as it were, but I haven't been called upon to cast a deciding vote yet, so I'm not going to.

Devamitra: Where's it being discussed!?

S: I saw some minutes about six or seven weeks ago, just before coming here, and the discussion (it probably was in some chapter meeting somewhere), the whole issue had been revived.

Padmavajra: You're joking!

S: Oh yes, oh yes. (laughter) It's still a quite live issue. It's quite important (laughter). But it's interesting that the most intense and protracted discussions are very often about such things - and most emotive discussions, strange to say. There's never been a serious discussion about anatta or shunyata or anything of that sort, or even abortion, you know; but there have been very intense discussions about this green cord for mitras, and some people have got very strong views on the subject indeed, (laughter) both for and against. So it's quite interesting to inquire why this might be, why people do have strong views about such apparently trivial things. But anyway we won't go into that this evening.

Devamitra: Why not? (laughter)

S: I think it might take us too far afield. So let's take it as just an expression of a general irrationality of man. (laughter) Anyway, what else have we got? And is there time?

Vessantara: It's just about nine.

S: So perhaps we'd better leave it there. I just want to tell one little story - not a story, it's really just an incident in history - just to illustrate the importance of apparently small things - in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the seventeenth century there was a very scholarly patriarch that discovered that in the Russian Orthodox Church they'd been giving the blessing in the wrong way, they'd been giving it with three fingers whereas strictly speaking it should have been with two. So he issued orders that priests of all degrees were to in future give the blessing, at certain points in the liturgy, with two fingers, which was correct, and not with three. And this provoked the most violent reactions and led to the split of the so-called old believers. And people were executed by the authorities in Russia for refusing to conform. And the 'old believers' as they became were led by a very famous arch-priest called Avvakum, (don't know if you've heard of him, he wrote his autobiography part of which has been translated into English) and he led a very, very difficult life and died a very painful death on account of his beliefs and convictions. But I believe thousands of the 'old believers' were killed. But they (as it were) stuck to their guns, they would not give up their point. They believed that the official church had fallen into the direst heresy. Actually they took it that the three fingers meant the Holy Trinity, but this was just their own personal (sort of) folk belief: the three fingers stood for the Holy Trinity, but if you were blessed with two you were blessing with only two persons of the Trinity, you were denying one of the persons of the Trinity, so you were a heretic. So there were these sort of arguments - well more than arguments, almost wars, or even small scale civil war - over these sort of points. And even among Buddhist monks there has been in the past a good deal of difference on such points as whether you should expose the shoulder when walking about outside the vihara, and what type of umbrella you should use, and what sort of fan. These have been the subject of controversy, not I'm glad to say, of civil wars, but then that's just due to the general more pacific character of Buddhism. So this is something which at sometime perhaps should be investigated: Why people can get so heated over what would seem to be quite trivial issues, whereas major issues seem to leave them sometimes comparatively cold. Anyway, let's leave it there for tonight. What is today? Wednesday, so we meet again on Friday.

Session 6. 26th October 1984. Tuscany Questions on section 8 and first precept.

Vessantara: So today, Bhante, we started studying the first precept. We've about ten questions on that, but we've about half a dozen leftovers from the first half. So we'll take those first. Jnanavira, do you want to ask yours?

Jnanavira: I think it's in section seven, Bhante, there's just a short quote where you say (p. 40), "The Ten Precepts represent the norm of ethical

behaviour not only for all Buddhists (but) indeed, for all forms of self-conscious sentient existence." So I thought in the light of this, three points: Why then do mitras, as Buddhists, not take these Ten Precepts? And (two) as the movement is constantly upgrading itself, do you see in some years time, the possibility of mitras taking the Ten Precepts as part of their ceremony?

S: Perhaps I'll deal with those points in reverse order. First of all what does one mean by upgrading? You seem to suggest that upgrading, in the matter of precepts, consists in the addition of extra precepts. That is to say, yes, that one could upgrade the observance of mitras by adding the precepts which are not included in the five which they normally recite, to those five.

Jnanavira: I was thinking that the mitras themselves would be of a higher standard of commitment first, and in order to recognize this then you'd give them a further set of precepts, rather than the fact that just by giving them precepts that somehow elevates...

S: No. I still am concerned with this question of the nature of upgrading. Upgrading, I would say, is a question of (in a way) taking more seriously what you already observe, or what you already are. Now over the years there's no doubt been an upgrading, say, of the requirements for ordination. But ordination still consists in Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and taking the Ten Precepts. So this would suggest that upgrading consists simply in taking more seriously what you already take seriously to some extent, but not perhaps as seriously as you might. So therefore, if one was to think in terms of upgrading the mitras or upgrading requirements for being a mitra, or upgrading mitra observance, one wouldn't (I would suggest) think so much in terms of adding certain specific duties or certain specific precepts, so much as upgrading the whole spirit of mitra observance. You see what I mean? Because otherwise you can go on and on, because you do in fact almost envisage that possibility, because - alright, if you upgrade mitras by allowing them to recite the Ten Precepts, well, what difference does there remain between a mitra and an Order Member in respect of precepts? Presumably you'd have to upgrade [101] the Order members by giving them extra precepts. So I think I would personally prefer - if it is at all possible - to stay with what we've got in the way of Refuges and Precepts and other observances, and if there is any upgrading to be done, upgrade by trying to bring about a more serious and wholehearted and thoroughgoing observance of what we already have. Anyway, there was a question before that. What was that question?

Jnanavira: I just asked you why then did mitras - in the light of that quotation - not take the Ten Precepts.

S: Ah. In a way we're sort of saddled with a bit of tradition. Throughout the Buddhist world, especially the Theravada Buddhist world, the Upasikas

and Upasakas normally observe five precepts. So in the case of the Western Buddhist Order we observe ten. If, of course, you have people who are not Order Members reciting the Ten Precepts as well as Going for Refuge - or as well as reciting the Refuges - that could possibly lead to some confusion. Therefore in the case of - not only mitras, but anybody who comes along, as regards just reciting in a sort of ethnical, cultural way, we've simply remained with the five precepts. In a way it isn't very logical or very consistent, but that is because we're trying to some extent to function in a double way. In the first place in accordance with our own attempt to get back to the origins of Buddhism and to a situation closer to that which as far as we can see obtained in the Buddha's day, but on the other hand we don't want to break too drastically with existing traditions. Supposing Buddhists from other groups or from the Buddhist East were to come along to our meetings or functions of any kind, well, they're quite familiar already with the three refuges and five precepts if they find us chanting or reciting them - they'll be quite at home. But supposing we did actually have mitras and others reciting the Ten Precepts, then people from, say, outside the FWBO wouldn't know exactly where they were. So it's a bit of a compromise in a way between the old and the new, though of course the new being, in a sense, the old or even the oldest. But then there's this further point about the Ten Precepts being (what were my exact words?) ...

Jnanavira: "The Ten Precepts represent the norm of ethical behaviour, not only for all Buddhists" and then I've left a little bit out, and gone on to say: but "for all forms of self-conscious sentient existence".

S: Yes. Note the word represent. Not constitute. I didn't mean to suggest that the Ten Precepts, as those particular ten precepts, formulated in that way, as understood by Buddhists and ourselves, constitute such a norm. But that kind, or type, or that level, of ethical practice, or that standard of ethical behaviour, in reality, constitutes a norm for all human beings everywhere. In other words I'm not to be taken too literally, or too literalistically here.

Jnanavira: Do you think it would be a good thing to have mitras actually taking, from a leader, during their mitra ceremony, the five precepts? You stress, I think in an earlier section, how important it is, when you are taking precepts, you take it from a preceptor. It seems to make the whole taking-the-precepts a much more conscious kind of act. [102]

S: Well, it's a question of precepts and refuges. Again we come up against the old and the new. We have four requirements for mitras don't we? You'll notice those requirements don't involve Going for Refuge, because (you know) Going for Refuge means ordination. So those four requirements fall short of ordination, fall short of membership of the Order. Nonetheless we do allow mitras to join in recitation of the Refuges and Precepts. Sometimes I have wondered about that, because as I've said, it is inconsistent, except in the sense that you could argue it

represented a (sort of) ethical, cultural Going for Refuge and taking of precepts, as is the case in the East. And that is provided for in our way of looking at things. And then one might argue, well, when one is introducing (so to speak) Buddhism newly in the West, well, why should one even carry over, or carry along with one, that particular level, that sort of ethnic or cultural Going for Refuge, which in any case doesn't really exist in Britain except among Buddhists of Eastern origin? I can't really defend that as logical or consistent, but nonetheless it's what has (sort of) grown up out of our historical situation as I said a little earlier on, and of our not wanting to cut ourselves off too much from (let's say) contemporary Buddhist observance. And don't forget there is India, where we're working among the ex-Untouchables, all of whom have taken the Three Refuges and Five Precepts (you know, usually in a rather makeshift sort of way). So that when they become members of the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, or Western (except that it's not Western) Buddhist Order, well, clearly everybody can understand there's a difference. They understand it in terms of taking more precepts, but actually it goes further than that, because they've a much better, much deeper, understanding of the Going for Refuge, those who do become Order members. I suppose if we were to be completely logical (and this may or may not be possible) those who were not Order members should not in fact join in the recitation of the Refuges. That would be logical and consistent. Which means they wouldn't recite any precepts. That we do have things going in that way is in some ways a concession to existing Buddhist custom. I think one can't break with that too much, though I would eventually like to see us (it might take hundreds of years) adopting a more consistent practice. Do you see what I mean? So when I've spoken in terms of the different levels of the Going for Refuge, there's the ethnic or cultural, and then there's the provisional, and then there comes the real...

A voice: It's "effective".

S: Effective, yes, sorry, effective. Effective Going for Refuge. So effective Going for Refuge is the Going for Refuge of someone who becomes an Order member, though it could be a real Going for Refuge at the same time. But inasmuch as there is really no intermediate grade between (not in the West, not in England say) between an Order member and one who's not an Order member, in the West, in the absence of an ethnic Buddhist tradition, or cultural Buddhism, you don't have that ethnic or cultural Going for Refuge. You see what I mean? So perhaps in future (though I think it'll take a long time) we'll have to be more consistent in our practice. I can't see it happening just yet - I think it would probably separate us too much from existing Buddhist custom, more than probably was desirable, especially of course in India. I mean, in India you couldn't very well say to the ex-Untouchable Buddhists [103] who came along, well, you're not to recite the precepts because you're not genuinely committed. (Which is true, in most cases they're not, they've become converted in a very formal and external sense, though obviously that is a beginning and we have to work on that and work with that.) But if you



were to tell them to stop reciting the refuges and precepts because they hadn't come up to the level of commitment expected of a member of the Western Buddhist Order they'd be very upset and you'd alienate them completely.

Indrabodhi: Wouldn't it be more difficult as time went on to change it?

S: That's true. That is quite possible.

Satyananda: Do you actually see then no real value, other than the sort of cultural setting, in people taking the Refuges if ... (unclear)?

S: In most cases not, because I think it devalues the Refuges so greatly. And having seen them devalued so much in the East and just recited like a sort of slogan, it's a way of people in the East saying "I'm a Buddhist" much in the same way as, for instance, the people in Northern Ireland might say "I'm a Protestant" or "I'm a Catholic" - it becomes almost a communal kind of thing, a badge of a common allegiance in a semi-political, or almost entirely political, sense.

Vessantara: If you have mitras and friends taking the Refuges, then in a sense what separates them from the Order is then the different number of precepts, and ...

S: No, I don't accept that they take Refuges or go for Refuge, no, not really. I think that's an anomaly. Well, supposing they've only come along two or three times, they don't even know what it's all about, they don't even know what the words mean. Perhaps all these things require further thought. In principle I'm (in a way) in favour of restriction, because I do want to emphasize the importance and the significance of the Going for Refuge. It's not something to be even recited lightly, and that has come to be the practice almost throughout the Buddhist world. There's a sort of parallel in the history of Christianity. In very early Christianity - I'm talking of the first one or two centuries now - there was a grade of people known as Catechumens. They were people who were the Catechism (as we'd call it now) and who had not yet been baptised, they were not members of the Church. So there was a certain point in the ceremony, a certain point in (I suppose) what would now be called the mass, when they had to withdraw, and only those who were baptised Christians remained behind. But of course in modern times it's quite different because people are baptised in infancy now, which was not the original practice, the original practice was that you were baptised as an adult, after understanding what it was you were being baptised into, at least that was the theory, and to a great extent it was honoured in practice. But in modern times, except among the Baptists, all the Christian churches baptise infants. So anyone who's been baptised can attend mass or [104] whatever, and after Confirmation you can not only attend but you can take the sacrament, whatever your state of mind might be. Well, I suppose technically in some churches you have to confess and all that sort of thing beforehand, but in a lot of

churches you don't, you just automatically participate. So something like that seems to happen in all religions in a way, and it certainly happened in the case of Buddhism that originally to Go for Refuge was a tremendous experience. This is something I keep trying to draw out from the Pali texts themselves - someone is overwhelmed by the Buddha's teaching, even perhaps develops Insight, perhaps even his Dharma-eye opens, and then, out of the fullness of his experience, or at least his devotional feeling, he says, "To the Buddha for Refuge I go ..." et cetera. Those words which were originally so expressive of that tremendous change in that particular person, have just now become something that you recite as part of a sort of ceremony. So I think that needs to be really seriously looked at by the whole Buddhist world. It hasn't really shown any sign of wanting to look at it yet, but we've made at least a small beginning within the FWBO. But perhaps we ourselves are still to some extent going along with the old way of doing things. So perhaps the time will come when we shall need to reconsider that.

Padmavajra: Do you think that applies to (say) the mantras at the end of the puja inasmuch as they are mantras of yidams?

S: Well, you can say it about the whole sevenfold puja. Yes? In fact in India the sevenfold puja is only recited by the Order. We do not use the sevenfold puja outside the Order, partly because the puja includes ideas with which a lot of the ordinary 'Buddhists' (inverted commas) who are coming along are just not familiar and which would only confuse and bewilder them. But recently there's even been a discussion within the Order in India that they should not recite the sevenfold puja on retreats when they (the members of the Order) have their separate Order meeting, because if people hear the Order members reciting something different - and perhaps they can catch the meaning because it's been translated into Marathi - that would give rise to some disquiet in their minds - that the Order members were practising something different, and they might suspect it wasn't even quite Buddhistic et cetera, et cetera. So in a sense by having everybody recite the sevenfold puja you are not perhaps treating the sevenfold puja with full seriousness. This happens when you start upgrading, because one had to start somewhere with something. But as some people take it more and more seriously - whether it's the Going for Refuge formula or the sevenfold puja - as soon as you have a group of such people taking it all more seriously, then you are perhaps reluctant, or you become more reluctant to (in a sense) allow other people who are not taking it so seriously just to recite it. But then a question arises, well, what are you to do if you want to have some kind of puja? If you want people to be able to join in some kind of devotional practice or devotional observance, then what are you to have? Well, perhaps we shall have to write new devotional observances which do not involve the reciting of the refuges and the Precepts and the sevenfold puja. Who knows? On the other hand you can argue that (this is just the other side of the question) people who (say) come along to a [105] centre and (including mitras) in a sense recite things like refuges and precepts and sevenfold puja not

because they do actually express, in that way, what the refuges and precepts and the sevenfold puja are intended to express, but so as to begin to get some feeling for them. Do you see what I mean? And to begin to approximate to what those things mean when recited by an Order member. That's our present position, but in order to maintain some line of demarcation between the two we never have anyone except Order members at least reciting the Ten Precepts.

Shantavira: Perhaps people ought to begin with the basic puja.

S: In some places I believe they do. The basic puja was originally written, or composed, by me, for translation into Finnish, because a lot of Finnish people coming along to the centre didn't feel happy about the sevenfold puja which they used to use. Finns seem to take things very seriously and literally, and some people were quite upset that real gold lamps weren't actually being offered, when actually the verse said they were being offered, and some maintained that was actually telling a lie. (laughter) So I composed these verses to be translated into Finnish and they've subsequently caught on to some extent elsewhere in the movement. But in some ways one doesn't want to reform too much. Sometimes - as has happened in the West in connection with (say) Protestantism vis a vis Catholicism - sometimes a reform went so far it became (sort of) unsympathetic and you put yourself out of touch with a lot of people that otherwise you might have been able to establish a better contact with had you not been quite so uncompromising in the sort of way. But I think things will have to remain as they are for the present and probably for some time more.

Satyananda: How do you view the precepts outside the puja then? Are we talking about people chanting the precepts ... (unclear) ... the fact that we feel it's an important teaching... (unclear)... Do you suggest we still push the ten precepts or (unclear) ...?

S: No. I think one should push the idea of ethical observance, and the taking of the precepts should be considered more of the nature of a solemn pledging yourself publicly to the observance of those ethical principles. Do you see what I mean? So it's not so much that you encourage people to take the Refuges or encourage people to repeat the precepts; you encourage them to improve their ethical observance, and if at the same time they're faith (for want of a better term) in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, well, presumably a time will come when they'll not only want to formally - that is, openly and publicly - Go for Refuge, but also pledge themselves publicly to observe those ethical precepts which actually they have been trying to observe for a long time and which they now feel ready to pledge themselves to observe publicly. So it is more a question of encouraging people to understand what is meant by the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and act in accordance with that, and encourage them to improve their ethical observance rather than encourage them to recite Refuges and Precepts which actually signify a

pledging of yourself to those things in a particularly solemn manner, and which not even everybody who has attained a high, or a reasonable degree of ethical observance, is ready to do. Do you see the difference? [106]

Satyananda: But are you suggesting we use the form of the Ten Precepts to put across Buddhist ethics?

S: I think that can be done. Because I think it's good, if possible from the beginning, to relate ethics to actions of body, speech and mind - to stress the importance of right speech in all its forms, and also to stress the fact that there is a mental and (so to speak) intellectual element in ethical observance as represented by those three precepts.

Padmavajra: You could apply the different levels of Going for Refuge to precept observance, could you not?

S: You could do that too, yes indeed.

Padmavajra: You could have people who assent to the (book)? but they're not observing the precepts in the sense that Order members observe them.

S: Yes, yes. They're trying to practise those ten precepts, perhaps they succeed to a great extent, but they have not yet publicly pledged themselves to observe them as a direct consequence of their Going for Refuge.

Satyananda: So do you think that when we're talking to people about ethics it's better for us to use the ten precepts... (break in recording)

S: ... the reasons I mentioned. Of course in the five precepts you've got the precept to abstain from alcohol, and this falls (in a way) into rather a different category from the other precepts. I suppose in some ways it's almost an advantage that that precept is not included in the ten, although it's included in the eleven as I pointed out, because for people at the very beginning of their contact with Buddhism it may be a little bit of a stumbling block that they should either reduce or abolish the taking of alcohol.

Satyananda: I didn't actually mean a change in ... (unclear) ... meditation class, when we go through Buddhist ethics, base it on the five precepts. One never heard the ten precepts mentioned in a general class.

S: I wouldn't say that was wrong, but I think the ten precepts certainly gives a fuller exposition of ethics, and sooner or later - certainly in the case of those people who are thinking in terms of ordination - one has to get round to explaining the ten, rather than just the five, or in a sense just the four.

Padmavajra: The speech precepts strike me as hugely(?) practical. When I've played extracts to beginners, just the extract on Perfect Speech from the Eightfold Path, it's had a dramatic effect, because it's so relevant immediately to people.

S: Supposing newcomers were to ask, "Why is it that Order members observe or recite ten precepts, whereas when we all do the sevenfold puja together we only recite five?" What would you say? Or have you not been asked this?

Satyananda: I think a lot of people don't realize that any of us do take ten precepts. (next sentence unclear) ... [107]

S: Well, perhaps that's not a bad thing then, because then when you do start thinking in terms of ordination then it's explained to you what that involves, and then the Ten Precepts come in. But nonetheless I think it would be good if at a quite early stage people did understand the traditional Buddhist way of looking at ethics was in terms of observances, skilful actions of body, speech and mind, that it wasn't just a matter of body and speech.

Vessantara: I think that when we teach the five precepts, we always explain that kusala action is action dependent on skilful states of mind. There's always that emphasis in a way, the importance of mental state is underlined.

S: Right, yes. Though of course in the case of the last three precepts it's rather more than that because there's abstention from miccha-ditthi, and that involves quite a lot, that introduces a very definite sort of intellectual component. In some ways the position of a reformer isn't an easy one, because it isn't always easy to tell, you know, how much of the old way of doing things one should keep and how much one shouldn't - to what extent one should innovate and so on and so forth, to what extent one should abolish later accretions, to what extent one should insist on getting back to the way that things were originally done. Anyway, perhaps we should carry on.

Kuladitya: In the section of The Three Jewels on the Monastic Order you mention the four sramanakaraka-dharmas, or duties of an ascetic, to talk to a newly ordained monk before he takes the silas of the pratimoksa embodying "the principle of non-retaliation. Even when others revile, or become angry with, or beat, the sramana must refrain from acting in like manner." (p.215) I was wondering is it significant that these are taught to the monk before he takes the silas of the pratimoksa?

S: (pause) I really don't know.

Kuladitya: Only it struck me that might embody an attitude with which we

should approach the precepts. For instance this principle of non-retaliation.

S: One thing that one can say is this: that in the course of the development of Buddhism (and this especially applies to the Vinaya) things tended to be added on. One might even suggest that these four dharmas were what the Buddha's disciples observed in the very unorganised days before there was any pratimoksa in the one-hundred-and-fifty clause sense. That is a possibility, because in a sense they do embody the spirit of (for want of a better term) monastic life. And usually the process of development in Buddhism is that when there is an innovation, when something new is introduced, as say when the Mahayana introduced what seems to be quite a lot of new things, the old things were not (as it were) abolished or ousted or replaced. The new things were added on to the old. And the new things were observed in addition to the old, at least in theory. So that may have been the case here. It would need more careful looking in to, but it does seem at least a possibility. And clearly those four dharmas are much more simple than the [108] pratimoksa, and would seem to reflect very much the spirit rather than the letter of monastic life - of the way of life of one who had Gone Forth and was dependent on the alms of the public.

Vessantara: Vajranatha?

Vajranatha: This is a simple question: I heard that you thought that at some point the Western Buddhist Order would be renamed the World Buddhist Order, and I wondered why we hadn't already taken that step, as it would seem quite relevant to us to keep the broadest picture of our objectives.

S: This question has been agitated recently in India, although of course in India they don't actually call themselves Western Buddhist Order, they call themselves Trailokya Bauddha Maha Sangha. Trailokya meaning pertaining to the three worlds, in other words universal. The three worlds being those of the kamaloka, the rupaloka and arupaloka. I also gave various other interpretations. I don't remember all of them, but one of them was that it was the Third World plus the semi-industrialized world and the fully industrialized world (laughter), you could look at it like that too. But I have been a bit reluctant to introduce any change so far, despite various proddings from various people, because I felt that we weren't yet genuinely a world order. What I said was that I didn't think that we would be justified in calling ourselves a World Buddhist Order unless we had some centres in Africa, in other words in all five continents. We've got centres in Europe, we've got centres in Asia, we've got centres in Australasia, we've got centres - we've got a centre - in America (if you lump North and South America together). But we don't yet have any centre in Africa, so my own feeling was that we shouldn't think of calling ourselves a World Buddhist Order until we had at least one centre in that fifth continent. Lokamitra feels that we can disregard Africa (laughter). I'm

not so sure. Because, yes, certainly it is our aim to be a world order in the sense that the Order - what is now the Western Buddhist Order - is represented in all countries of the world. How many states are there in the world? It's a hundred-and-thirty something I think, at least a hundred-and-thirty odd members of the United Nations. I think we have Order Members from - if not in - twelve or thirteen countries, yes, it's thirteen now. And I think we actually have centres and activities in eight countries. Well, that's not really a very high proportion of a hundred-and-thirty-four or - five or whatever it is. So I wouldn't like us to declare ourselves a World Buddhist Order, and that claim (so to speak) be regarded with some amusement not only by other Buddhists but by followers of other religions. I think we need to spread rather more first. But yes, I would say that that is certainly our objective and it has the advantage that we don't change our initials, which will help.

Vessantara: At least in English we don't.

S: Well, perhaps in other languages - as we have done in the Indian languages - we can sort of remodel things completely. Anyway, what next? [109]

Jnanavira: You touched on .. (break in recording) ... more comprehensive. How much stress do you think we should give to the ten precepts outside their Buddhist framework in order to reach a wider audience who may be interested in such a new moral system, but might be a little put off by a sort of Buddhist framework (as it were)?

S: I think it's not going to be easy to dispense with what you call the Buddhist framework. Because why should you be ethical, whether your ethics consists in observing five precepts or ten precepts or one precept or a hundred precepts? The sanction (so to speak) for ethics would seem to reside in some kind of spiritual vision, or some kind of spiritually oriented philosophy of life, and I think that unless you can convince people of that vision or that philosophy, it's going to be very difficult to persuade them to be more ethical. So I think that it's very difficult to separate that ethical emphasis from Buddhism, in fact, in practice. I'm not sure quite what you had in mind by spreading the Ten Precepts in this non-Buddhistic sense. How would one do it? Whom would one be trying to address?

Jnanavira: I think what I had in mind was Order Members taking meditation classes, and they don't actually term it Buddhist meditation so you have people who've got an interest in meditation who might be put off by a Buddhist framework if they learn meditation and gradually over the weeks elements of Buddhism are introduced. I wonder how fair an approach it would be if (say) we could advertise courses in human ethics or something like that - you give it some such title and you'd present people who wouldn't come along to a Buddhist class, but would come along to something with a more... a safer kind of title, like what I

suggested. And you could present the Ten Precepts as a norm of ethical behaviour and gradually introduce more Buddhism as you go along. So that it's not such a shock to people (laughter) as soon as they get through the door ... (unclear).

S: I wonder about this. In a way you're trying to draw a parallel with the teaching of meditation, because we know very well that people often come along to learn about meditation, and they're not especially interested in Buddhism or in Enlightenment. They're just interested in peace of mind. That's the usual phrase. But then there is this difference in the case of meditation that after just attending a few classes, a few sessions, you can begin to experience some measure of peace of mind. And the fact that you do experience some measure of peace of mind will keep you going - sort of keeps up your faith in meditation - it keeps you coming along to the class. But what sort of comparable experience do you think would you be able to offer people in the case of a course that's in ethics? I mean what would people be coming along for? How would you attract them? Well, you could advertise non-Buddhist meditation, or meditation without the label Buddhism, by saying, well, come and learn meditation, it will give you peace of mind; but if you were to advertise a course in ethics what would you advertise it as giving?

Jnanavira: (pause) Er - I'm sure somebody could work out some (laughter) ... [110]

S: Well there are some people who can sell anything! (laughter)

Satyananda: I think there are a number of people around looking for a solution to the world's problems through a more ethical world, so to speak, outside religion.

S: I think perhaps that belies the mistake: "outside religion". You see? I think maybe that is a misunderstanding one should try to confront from the very beginning. Why do people want an ethical way of life ... (What was your phrase? Oh, an ethical solution) ... apart from religion? What does one mean by "apart from religion"? It seems to suggest that you want good conduct or you want ethics, without there being any reason to be ethical, from a philosophical point of view.

Satyananda: My experience is that my understanding of religion is Christianity, and I didn't have enough experience in philosophy to understand that anything that had the word religion, the same title as Christianity, wasn't necessarily a higher experience. For that reason I was looking for something outside of what I thought was religion, which obviously it was not.

S: Well, perhaps one should just use the word Buddhism then, making it clear that Buddhism isn't a religion. Otherwise it's as though people (for instance) want (say) a medicine, but they don't want any medical science.



You can hardly have medicine without at least some degree of medical science behind it. So in the same way I think you can hardly have ethics without some sort of vision of human existence behind it.

Satyaloka: Isn't there such a thing as a humanistic framework that doesn't contain...?

S: I don't think there is actually. I think the humanists, though they repudiate religion usually, are in fact just carrying on with the momentum which they derive from Christianity. One can see this very clearly in the case of the humanists and the agnostics and the freethinkers of the last century : they retained Christian ethics intact, and they thought that they retained the Christian ethics (well, they didn't even think of themselves as retaining Christian ethics, they thought of themselves as ethical ) because they were humanist; but we can see quite clearly that they were carrying over exactly the same attitudes, and even the same prejudices, that their Christian contemporaries had. I mean, Marx himself is a very good example of this. In ethical matters he seems to have been a thoroughgoing Victorian, even to the extent of a little bit of, well, not so very ethical behaviour (by his own standards) on the quiet! So I don't think the example of humanism can really be cited here. I don't think they have worked out a scientific basis for ethics. In a sense the whole idea of a scientific basis for ethics is absurd. Moore seems to have disposed of that one long ago.

Voice: Who?

S: Moore, G. E. So it would seem that whether people like it or not, or are prepared for it or not, if they want to be more ethical, well, they have to begin by thinking more deeply about [111] ethical issues. And they have to be ready, or they have to be open at least, to the possibility of accepting a philosophy, or a vision of life if you like to call it that, which makes ethical life possible, which gives it a solid foundation. There are some people who are able to lead ethical lives, apparently, without any sort of metaphysical underpinning, out of (sort of) sheer good nature (as it were), out of the sheer goodness of their hearts, so you need not bother so much where they're concerned. But what about those who are not leading an ethical life and have to be converted? Or what about those who are thinking whether to lead an ethical life or not, and want to be sure what is the best way, or the right way, to go about it? What are you going to do about them? Some kind of intellectual clarification is necessary.

Padmavajra: That would seem to be much more of an attractive and appealing thing: if you could present Buddhism (or philosophy or meditation, but let's say Buddhism first of all), because if you start with ethics then most people will be interested, but if you start with Buddhism....

S: People often regard ethics as very dry and dull and cold. Ethics has got

almost as bad a reputation as religion. What perhaps you could do is: supposing you have just a meditation class, and people are coming along to that just for the sake of peace of mind, and suppose it isn't under the auspices of any FWBO centre, and it's held on (sort of) neutral territory, and you don't talk to people about Buddhism - what you could do - you could introduce ethics gradually by pointing out that if you wanted to get more deeply into meditation, and enjoy greater peace of mind, well, you need to be more careful about your ethical life, your ethical observance, and you could explain and show exactly how and why that was. And then as you got more and more deeply into ethical principles then you might gradually be able to make clear to people the deeper philosophical basis of those principles. You could perhaps do it in that sort of way in combination with the teaching of meditation on a psychological basis. But I think it would be very difficult to simply expound ethics, or to interest people in ethics by themselves, divorced from meditation, divorced from Buddhism, divorced from philosophy. A lot of people nowadays are convinced (as regards ethics) of two principles: if it doesn't hurt anybody, well, it can't be wrong and, two, if you're not found out it doesn't really matter. (laughter) Anyway, let's carry on. Are these still left-over questions or ...

Vessantara: We've got one more left over, inasmuch as it relates to the first section.

Dipankara: Bhante, I've got a question about the rational principle. I'm taking principle in the sense of an attitude which exercises an influence on mindful behaviour. The rational principle would have a direct influence on our mental life in that I'm supposing it would conduce to clarity of mind. In the last session you talked about intense discussion being generated by minor matters, while subjects of crucial importance can be totally disregarded. And you said that this intensity was an expression of the general irrationality of man. No doubt [112] this condition could be overcome by developing clarity of mind. You do not specifically refer to the rational principle, but that seems to be the principle which underlies your approach. And I could give examples of this, such as our insistence on definition of terms, knowing what we want to do and not being swayed by circumstances. But to get down to my question ... (laughter)... A. Could you perhaps say something about the rational principle? And B. Do you consider it a central aspect of your teaching? And C. What are the limits to this principle?

S: Before trying to answer all that I'll just make an observation: One of the things I have said, in fact I think said quite often over the years is (well, I've said it in two forms: one) it's irrational to be too rational, or the other form is: it's illogical to be too logical. But do you see what I'm getting at? There's quite a lot to be said with regard to your question but I think before I start answering I'm just going to pay a little visit somewhere, and then I'll deal with it properly....

This whole question of rationality and irrationality is a quite important one, and a quite complex one, and I doubt very much whether I can deal with it finally and fully in a definitive manner on this occasion. But anyway let's see what emerges. First of all I'll make a couple of general observations, and then we'll perhaps go through Dipankara's question point by point. In the first place how does this whole question of irrationality arise, or how does this whole question of the importance of clear, or the importance of clarity in, thinking arise? It's not that one fine day I suddenly got the idea that I would be a good thing if there was more clear thinking in the world, or at least in the FWBO. But what tends to happen is that in one's contact with people, or if you like, in one's communication with people, one notices certain things, or even one experiences certain difficulties. Talking with people one finds from time to time, or even quite frequently, that it's very difficult to communicate with them - it's very difficult to come to an understanding with them, or to come to an agreement with them - just because their thinking is so woolly and so muddy and so muddled, one might say. So this forces upon one the realization that clear thinking is important. And I think if I do stress at all the importance of clear thinking it's because I've had quite a lot of experiences of this sort with different people at different times. It's not as it were for any a priori reasons. In the same way I believe I do stress the importance of emotional positivity - for the same sort of reason - because I have encountered so much negative emotion in people, and I've seen people suffering in so many different ways simply on account, or largely on account, of lack of positive emotional experience. So I've been led to stress the importance of these two things - that is to say the importance of clear thinking and the importance of emotional positivity - for purely practical reasons, or purely practical considerations. So that's one point.

Another is, on this question of people seemingly attaching great importance to very trivial things, and having very strong and definite views which they express in a heated way - I thought about this quite a lot because I've had experience of this sort of thing, sometimes quite unexpectedly. I can remember two examples of this sort of thing. One of them [113] was when I was in New Zealand, on my first visit (I forget when the second was, this was more recent, but as regards the first example) I happened to be at the Auckland Centre, which wasn't where it is now, and I think we were having a question and answer meeting, or discussion meeting of some kind, and there must have been about twenty people present, and the discussion went quite nicely, quite positively and quite smoothly and no one seemed to have any difficulty in accepting apparently anything that I said. I was talking about the usual things, you know, Enlightenment, Buddhahood, Anatta, Sunyata, all the favourite topics about which people ask questions. I don't know whether we came down to ethics or anything like that. (laughter) But anyway, people found it quite easy to accept whatever I said about all these topics, but (I don't know how it happened but) in passing I just happened to make some slightly disparaging remark about modern art. Oh, and that really set the cat among the pigeons (laughter). One woman I remember in particular

was very, very upset that I had made this slightly disparaging remark about modern art, and she leapt to the defence of modern art and then it was from several other people, who didn't seem to have any particular views at all about Sunyata and ... (laughter) but who had very, very strong views indeed about modern art, and so quite a heated discussion developed! So that was one experience.

Another was (as I said) much more recently when - again quite in passing, in the midst of other sublime topics (laughter) - to say that I thought metrification had been a great mistake. Again, I was overwhelmed! (laughter) People who had been listening with great passivity to all views about the world situation and so on, and Buddhist philosophy and the lack of proper Buddhist observance in the East, didn't turn a hair about all those things, but as soon as I mentioned that I thought metrification had been an unfortunate development, they were really up in arms - some were violently for and others violently against metrification (laughter). So... Instances of this sort really made me think. So the tentative conclusion to which I came was this: That people - well, to put it bluntly - people are very egoistic. Also they're very often aggressive. They like to give expression to their own opinion. They don't like to be wrong, or anything like that. But when it comes to something like Buddhism, something like the Void, Anatta, they don't really feel quite able - if I'm holding forth - they don't really feel quite able to disagree, much less challenge or have a view of their own. But when it is some quite ordinary matter they think that their view is just as good as anybody else's. So people assert themselves in this sort of way often quite egoistically and irrationally, where they feel that they have as much right to a view as anybody else. This is what it really comes down to. And when they don't do this they're held in check by their feeling that they don't really - not exactly don't have a right to a view, or don't have a right to express themselves - they're afraid that they might make fools of themselves, through lack of knowledge or whatever. So I think that one of the reasons, probably the reason, why people discuss apparently trivial matters, or even actually trivial matters, with such heat and vehemence, is that they feel that with regard to those particular matters their view is just as good as anybody else's. And so their basically egoistic attitude to their own views and [114] beliefs is able to come out. If they had actually more confidence and more knowledge you'd probably find them being just as heated and just as vehement on the subject of Sunyata and Anatta and Buddhahood and all the rest of it, as one does sometimes find people being. Subhuti and I have a correspondent who is always going on about non-duality - he writes quite unpleasant letters always bringing in non-duality, always bringing in Vimalakirti, and he seems to have a thing about Vimalakirti and about lay people knowing it all and monasticism not being necessary, and in fact monasticism or any type of ordinary type of Buddhist practice, such as is practised in the FWBO, being dualistic, especially about single-sex communities being dualistic (laughter) et cetera, et cetera. So he gets very heated about those things. But anyway those are just my one or two comments, so let's just go now through

Dipankara's question point by point. It might take us quite a long time but never mind.

Dipankara: Where shall I start?

S: The beginning.

Dipankara: I want to ask a question about the rational principle. I'm taking principle in the sense of an attitude which exercises a direct influence on mindful behaviour. The rational principle would have a direct influence on our mental life in that I'm supposing it would conduce to clarity of mind.

S: I think you mention later on that I don't actually use the word rational principle. It seems to suggest a sort of reification. But yes, I do just stress the importance of being rational and clear in one's thinking, and I suppose one could call that provisionally the rational principle.

Dipankara: In the last session you were talking about intense discussion being generated by minor matters...

S: Yes, well, I've commented on that. I haven't necessarily spoken the last word on the subject or given a complete explanation, but what I said I think is at least a very, very important factor in that business.

Dipankara: So although you didn't refer specifically to this principle, it seems to be a principle which underlies your approach. And I could give examples of this, such as your insistence on the definition of terms, knowing what it is you want to do ...

S: Yes, well, this in a way is all in the interests of good communication. Because if for instance someone isn't even aware of the sense in which you're using a word, and if you are using that same word, well, perhaps you are sufficiently aware of its meaning, how can you really come to an understanding? How can you really discuss that particular matter? So it would seem that the definition of one's terms, or agreement upon the meaning of the terms that you use, is absolutely essential to any discussion. I must say that I'm again and again astonished and flabbergasted [115] and amazed at the sloppiness of people's thinking. And I'm talking about people in the FWBO, I don't have so much contact with people outside, not personal contact, sometimes I just listen in to discussion programmes on the radio, and it's the same thing if not worse. You open a newspaper - the same thing there. Or sometimes in books one finds sloppy thinking. So it's as though one is surrounded by sloppy thinking. And the definition of terms is very important as a step towards clearing that up. Also I think - this is again an additional point, but a very important one - there must be a will to clarity. People must want to be clear. Sometimes I have got the impression with certain people they don't want to be clear, they don't want you to be clear, they won't allow you to be clear, they seem to have a sort of urge towards unclarity and

confusion. They seem almost to thrive on that. And so it's very, very difficult talking with such people, they always refuse to co-operate with you in clarifying the situation, in clarifying the discussion, in clarifying the argument. They seem, as I said, to thrive on unclarity and confusion, and to gain some kind of emotional sustenance from it. So there must be this will to clarity. You must want to be clear, you must consider clarity important, and that really means you must consider communication important. Without clarity there can be no communication. I'm not saying that clarity is the only thing necessary, but without a degree of clarity there really can be no communication, no effective or proper or full or deep communication.

Dipankara: The other examples I've got are knowing what it is you want to do, and not being swayed by circumstances. These seem to be examples of that particular approach.

S: Yes I do think it's important to know what you want to do. But this is more because I see people not thinking things out and being subject to all sorts of, well, very often contrary impulses. You know, now being more influenced by one, now being more influenced by another, and therefore not doing anything and not getting anywhere, just drifting, or hardly even drifting. I wouldn't like to be understood as maintaining that you need to have a very clear - in the sense of a very cut and dried - idea of what you want to do and then go after that in a wilful sort of way. Because human nature is very complex, it exists on many different levels, and it isn't really so easy to know what you do really want to do, or to make up one's mind what one really wants to do. That suggests a degree of integration and unification that a lot of people don't possess. So, yes, I do emphasize the importance of knowing what one wants to do, but I wouldn't like that to be understood too (as it were) literalistically or in too cut and dried a sort of fashion. Sometimes one can know what to do without being able to formulate it very well, there's a sort of - well, I think one of the poets calls it the master current of one's being - and that master current can be there and it can be very operative, and it can definitely be carrying you in a particular direction, but you may not be able to sort of formulate it and justify it to other people very, very clearly or very easily at first. They themselves may become aware of what that current is or in what direction it's taking you only after a while when they see what you're actually doing and how you're actually living. And sometimes you may even only become fully conscious of it yourself in that [116] way, by living it out. Not by having a very clear cut conceptual idea of it (?before) and then proceeding to put that into operation.

Dipankara: So could you perhaps say something about the rational principle? (You seem to have...) B. Do you consider it a central aspect of your teaching?

S: Well, I consider it a central aspect of Buddhist teaching. I consider mental clarity as one of the great characteristics of Buddhism, but also

emotional positivity. And emotional positivity, at its height, involves the experience of the dhyanas, and also the brahma viharas. So emotional positivity at its height corresponds to samatha. And in the same way clear thinking at its height corresponds to Insight, it corresponds to vipassana. So one could regard these as the two fundamental principles of practical Buddhism. So my approach in this respect, or to this extent, is thoroughly traditional. This emphasis on clear thinking, which we find in Buddhism throughout its career, and also on positive emotion, which we likewise find in Buddhism throughout its career, in all forms of Buddhism in fact, virtually. One might even say that to be clear in one's thinking and to be emotionally positive are the hallmarks of the true Buddhist, through the ages. So I wouldn't like to be understood as advocating a one-sided rationality, much less still of course a one-sided rationalism. Again another point that occurs to me is that, yes, rationality is very important, clear thinking is very important, but as I suggested in those little aphorisms a little while ago - that is to say, 'It's irrational to be too rational' and 'illogical to be too logical' - one can't - however clear in one's thinking one wishes to be, however rational one wishes to be - one can't leave out of account, one can't leave out of consideration, the irrational element in oneself and other people. I have also said quite often in the past, 'It's irrational to expect other people not to be irrational. You have to accept the fact that very often people are irrational and deal with them accordingly. There's the story about the monkeys. (This is a Taoist story, but it'll do for Buddhists as well!) It's called 'Three in the Morning and Two in the Afternoon' - I have told it on some other occasion. 'Three in the Morning and Two in the Afternoon'? Apparently there were some monkeys in a zoo, and the keeper (this was in ancient China) always gave them two chestnuts in the morning and three every afternoon. But the monkeys complained to the keeper that two chestnuts in the morning and three in the afternoon weren't nearly enough. They weren't satisfied with that arrangement. So he said alright then, I'll change it. So thereafter he gave them three in the morning and two in the afternoon. So the monkeys were quite satisfied. That was fine. They said they were getting quite enough chestnuts now thank you (laughter). So sometimes one has to adapt oneself to people's little irrationalities and make allowance for them or give some play to them, not insist on doing everything in a strictly logical way. Sometimes you can't account for things in a strictly logical way. Supposing for instance you go for a walk with somebody, and then you come to a fork, and he says, well, let's go this way, well, the proper thing usually to say is, well, let's go that way, as you like. But supposing you stop and say, well, why should we go that way? As though you want a logical reason for that. Well, that is really quite [117] foolish and even illogical. One must make allowance for these little illogicalities. I mean, the person may not know why he wants to go that way rather than the other, there may not be a definite clear-cut reason, there doesn't need to be, you don't need to have definite clear-cut reasons on every occasion in life, do you see what I mean? So it's a mistake sometimes to be too logical yourself or too rational and to expect other people to be too logical or too rational. You can have too much of rationality. And in fact some people

can be very irritating, demanding a clear-cut logical reason for everything you do, everything you say, especially everything you do. Anyway, anything left?

Dipankara: The other part was: What are the limits of the Rational Principle?

S: Well, I think that rationality, or to use your expression, the rational principle, is limited in two different ways, two different directions. It's limited by the irrational, by the sub-rational; and it's limited by the supra-rational. I think we shouldn't forget that there are really these three things, these three levels if you like: the irrational, or even non-rational, the rational, and the supra-rational, that which is above and beyond reason, like the higher emotions and purely spiritual experiences and of course eventually Transcendental experiences. So yes, as human beings we need to develop our rationality but we mustn't be blind to the fact that there other forces at work in us, and also there is something to which we can aspire above and beyond even rationality. I think this is (in a way) the traditional, or even classic, Buddhist attitude. I hope that nobody was feeling that Bhante was sometimes excessively rational or wanting everybody to be impossibly clear in their thinking. But where people purport to be clear they should actually be clear. If someone says, "I think so-and-so" well, then what follows should be a rationally intelligible (in a way) logical statement. And also people should be able to distinguish between making a logical statement and expressing simply an emotional attitude. Some people I find are unable to make that distinction, even in the movement. I dealt with this on some other occasion: that sometimes people think that because they believe something, with regard to some matter of fact, very strongly, it must be so. Well, this is a clear example of confusing the emotional with the rational, and they're very surprised sometimes that they can't convince you. They say, "But I feel that it's so" when their feeling is totally irrelevant. They might just as well say, "Well, I feel that two and two make five". This is what it sometimes amounts to. And you say, "No, two and two make four." And they: "But no, I feel it" (laughter) So what? In that particular context it's quite irrelevant. If you say, well, "I feel it's a beautiful sunset," nobody can argue with that. You can say "I feel it isn't" because you're entitled to your feeling as well, but you cannot say that logically it cannot be a beautiful sunset.

Prasannasiddhi: Unless it's cloudy. (laughter)

S: Some people see clouds as beautiful. Clouds are beautiful. [118] If someone says, "Those dark grey clouds are beautiful, and the rain is beautiful", you can't say that they are wrong (as it were) logically. It is simply that their feeling for the beautiful is different from yours.

Prasannasiddhi: But you wouldn't be able to see the sun set because of the clouds. (lots of laughter)



Satyananda: Do you think it's important, Bhante, to actually define "I feel". Quite often you could just say, "It's a beautiful sunset" without actually saying "I feel" or "I think", and actually what you're doing is you're asserting something...

S: Well, sometimes it's to be understood. If someone says, "It's a beautiful sunset" it is understood that you're not making a scientific statement, you're giving expression to your response, your own emotional aesthetic response, to that particular sight. You can't even begin to argue with another person. If you are unable to distinguish between your feeling that something is true and the fact of its being true or not true... I mean I've given instances before: Sometimes somebody says, "I feel you're very unfriendly towards me," and you say, "No, as far as I know I'm quite friendly, I feel actually friendly towards you, I feel lots of goodwill towards you and I'd like to be friends with you and get to know you better and do what I can for you". And the other person says, 'Ah, but no, I feel that you're unfriendly, I feel that you don't like me.'" This can result in some very odd situations. And sometimes the person who makes that sort of statement: "I feel that you're unfriendly" will create doubt in the other person's mind. He might even say, "Ah, you're unconscious of your unfriendly feelings," or even that you won't acknowledge them or even that you're not being open about them. And then we can get some very confused situations developing. And even sometimes the person who is told that really, without knowing it or without acknowledging it, he entertains these unfriendly feelings, well in the end almost tries to convince himself that he has got these unfriendly feelings because he finds it difficult to believe that the other person can be wrong because he's expressing himself so strongly. But actually he can be quite wrong. So it's very important in the interests of clear thinking to make this sort of distinction and to be able to see that the fact that you feel something strongly does not validate it as a statement about a matter of fact.

Anyway, does that conclude? So is this whole issue clear, or is it an issue that's troubled other people, or have other people wondered about this whole issue of clarity of thinking, or even of rationality, or the rational in relation to the irrational? You can't treat people as purely rational beings. And you certainly shouldn't treat them as purely irrational beings, because that would be not to treat them as human beings but almost as animals. But I think in the interests of good communication you should insist, from other people and from yourself, on at least a certain minimum degree or level of clarity. Otherwise you will find that you are not communicating. And sometimes you may not know that you are not communicating, it may be as bad as that, because you don't realize that he is unclear in his thinking, you don't realize that you are unclear in your thinking. You think that there has been communication because you make similar noises, but actually there has not been communication and you're not aware of that sometimes. Anyway, how's the time going? [119]

Vessantara: It's five past.

S: Well, that's quite an important topic in a way, so maybe we're justified in spending time on it. But we haven't got down to any new questions.

Vessantara: That's the last of the questions from the first section.

S: When do we meet next?

Vessantara: Tomorrow?

S: OK.

Satyaloka: I've got just a quick point. How do you know whether someone was being swept along by the master current of their being, or they're just being muddled in their thought, and they didn't actually know what they wanted to do?

S: Ah, yes. I think the main thing with regards to the master current of one's being is that there is continuity and development. And you can quite easily see whether a person is in fact jumping just from one activity to another, as he or she is moved by different impulses or conflicting impulses. Or whether they are in fact gradually bringing out into the open, in a more and more connected manner, a full and more expressive manner, a more complete manner, a single principle (as it were) , a single (what can one call it?) a single motivation. Sometimes you have to follow the course of someone's development for quite a long time before it starts to make sense. For instance if you study the life and work of a great writer, or a great painter, if you see it over a period of twenty, thirty, forty years, you can see a definite line of development. You can see (in the term that I used) what was the master current of that particular writer's or artist's being in a literary or artistic sense. It all begins to add up. You can see that he has some sort of ideal, you can see he has some sort of concept of life, or of literature, or of art, or of beauty, that he wanted to bring out, and which he did gradually bring out, little by little, and express more and more fully and successfully. So I think this is the difference: that if someone is genuinely giving expression to or following the master current of his being, there will be continuity and development in what he does, though may not be able to perceive this (so to speak) from the outside without knowing him, and also understanding to him to some extent, over a period of quite a few years. Also of course quite a few people do make sort of false starts - they do a bit of this and then they do a bit of that - and it's only after a while that (what I've called) the master current of their being starts really asserting itself, really (as it were) breaking through, and really directing them. Before that they can be caught up in all sorts of little whirlpools. That is quite possible. OK, let's leave it there then.

Session 7 - 27th October 1984 - Tuscany Questions on the First Precept.

Vessantara: So this evening we're moving on to questions relating to the first precept, and we'll start with Abhaya.

Abhaya: Bhante, in the course of a recent discussion I was involved in I was informed that you said that in traditional Buddhist societies, or at least in societies where Buddhism is the prevailing religion, the death penalty was upheld for certain offences, and that there never seems to have been any opposition to this law, as a contravention of the principle of nonviolence, by the spokesmen of the monastic community. Yet the monks did make it clear, apparently, that for someone to work as an executioner was definitely not right livelihood, in that it involves extreme violence to other human beings. I suppose I want you to say that this sort of contradiction is indefensible - logically it is, surely. But I'll just ask you to comment. And also when you've done that, if you've done that, what do you think our position should be, as practising Buddhists, in a violent world, with regard to this question of capital punishment?

S: Well, this really raises all sorts of difficult and complex questions, which I'm not going to dispose of this evening - it just isn't possible - but perhaps ventilate a little. I doubt if I can give many actual answers, but perhaps I can suggest the sort of questions that ought to be asked. Could you just go through it bit by bit?

Abhaya: It seems that in traditional Buddhist societies - or at least the societies where Buddhism is the prevailing religion - the death penalty has been upheld for certain offences.

S: This is so. For instance just to give you an example: it was upheld to the best of my knowledge in Tibet until the time of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. I believe it was the thirteenth Dalai Lama - the one before the present one - who abolished the death penalty.

Abhaya: ... and there never seems to have been any opposition to this law, as a contravention of the principle of nonviolence, by the spokesmen of the monastic community.

S: Let me comment on that a little bit - "No opposition from the..." what did I say or what was I supposed to have said?

Abhaya: The spokesmen of the monastic community.

S: This raises again all sorts of questions. From the very beginning, in some ways, the bhikkhu was in what one might describe as a quite difficult position. On the one hand he was a monk, and that usually meant that he was not concerned with secular life - not concerned with worldly life, that he didn't play any part in that, he didn't interfere in that. On the other hand he was regarded as the teacher of the whole community, and people expected moral and ethical guidance from him. Also of course the whole population was Buddhist, everybody professed to follow Buddhism,

the king was supposedly the upholder of Buddhism, but suppose a situation arose in which the king himself did something which was unethical. You see, the king is theoretically the upholder of Buddhism, the protector of Buddhism, but then the king himself does something unethical. What is your position? It would seem that in most Buddhist countries the monks tended to confine themselves to generalities [121] and were very reluctant to condemn any specific breach of the precepts on the part of the king. This was never actually worked out in specific doctrinal terms, but it was almost as though it was accepted that the king, in a sense, couldn't do any wrong. Do you see what I mean? You get something of this (let me draw a comparison) with monarchies in Europe: sometimes the clergy were very reluctant to condemn a monarch for immorality. It was almost as though the monarch was above morality, just as he was above the law in a sense. I remember reading some time ago about Louis XIV. Louis XIV was a notorious womanizer, he had many mistresses. To the best of my knowledge none of the clergy of the time ever rebuked him for that. Possibly one or two might have done in very distant and polite terms. But apart from that I remember one instance where a young lady in whom the king was interested, but who didn't respond to the king's advances, was herself rebuked, I believe by her spiritual advisors, for failing to do her duty and comply with the king's wishes. So that showed rather a different view of things. You get something like that in the case of the king when he's the upholder of the Dharma in a Buddhist country. You don't want to upset the king. He is after all, in a sense, protecting the Dharma. He is supporting the monks, sometimes literally supporting them - feeding them. So it's as though sometimes the monks thought that on balance it was better not to criticize the king, not to upset him, not to go against him, because if you antagonized him he could perhaps do great harm to the Sangha and to the Dharma in a sense. I remember (and this is something I've written about in my present volume of memoirs, so this is a little foretaste for you) I remember when I was staying with Prince Latthakin - when I was in Kalimpong I stayed with him for six months - he was married to the second daughter of the last king of Burma, King Thibaw. And he was very fond of talking to me about those days. I don't suppose he could really remember them because he accompanied Thibaw into exile - when Thibaw, after the annexation of the kingdom by the British, was sent into exile at Ratnagiri near Bombay. And he was then only two or three years of age, but he heard a lot about the old days from King Thibaw, who died about twenty years later. And Prince Latthakin always used to assure me that King Thibaw was a very pious Buddhist. Now King Thibaw, if you read the history books, did some awful things, mainly at the instigation of his rather awful wife (or queen, his favourite wife: the queen) Supayalat, known as the Cobra-lady (laughter). And he, at her instigation, massacred scores and scores of their close relations. They used to be trampled to death by elephants, that being the traditional way. Because royal blood must not be shed, they couldn't be executed in the usual way. So when Prince Latthakin used to be singing the praises of King Thibaw as a good Buddhist I used to sort of gently remind him about things of this sort. But

he's say, "Ah, but yes, he was a good Buddhist - he always fed the monks, he fed hundreds of them at the palace." You see? That still showed that (sort of) traditional attitude. Do you see what I mean? So there was, in a way, a real problem. I doubt if you ever get, in the history of Buddhism, certainly not in the [122] Theravada countries, a situation in which an outspoken monk publicly denounces the king for his misconduct. Now it's quite easy to take a sort of moralistic stand and say the monks should have been more outspoken, they should have been braver. But would it actually have done very much good? One can't really be sure. But this only begins to touch upon the problem.

Abhaya: I got the impression, from the point, that they weren't wanting to take a moralistic stand against it. They thought it was all right.

S: Well, this is what we're coming onto now. In the Buddhist scriptures (to start there) you have got the concept of the chakravatin-*raja* or the *dharma-*raja**, and he is represented as upholding the moral order. He is represented in some texts in particular as propagating the ten precepts. Nothing is said about the three refuges, but he propagates the ten precepts and it is made quite clear that he not only encourages people to observe these ten precepts, but also discourages them from breaking them, and even punishes them if they break them. And I think (so far as my memory serves) that that punishment extends to capital punishment. So that is as far as the scriptures are concerned. You could argue that the *chakravatin-*raja** in some ways is not presented as a Buddhist always, because the Going for Refuge is not mentioned. But it isn't even as simple as that. You can't even really get out of it in that way. Let's go back to what I was saying about the *bhikkhu* not interfering in secular life. The *bhikkhu* enjoys the support of the lay community (where there's a lay community and where there are *bhikkhus*), he enjoys their protection. In fact not only the *bhikkhu* but other people also enjoy the protection of the king, the protection of the law. So the *bhikkhus* themselves, say, observe the moral precepts very strictly. There's no question of them taking life, there's no question of them killing. But supposing a situation arises - let's say for the sake of argument a non-Buddhist state invades the state. A non-Buddhist state, a non-Buddhist army invades that Buddhist state, that Buddhist kingdom. It has always been understood that *bhikkhus* would not fight, that *bhikkhus* would not bear arms. Certainly this is the view in Theravada countries, though there have been exceptions elsewhere. That *bhikkhus* should not even defend themselves by violence. But the lay people have always considered it their duty to protect the *bhikkhus*, to defend the *bhikkhus*, even by violence if need be. So then the question arises: what is the position of the *bhikkhus* there? A *bhikkhu* is not supposed to speak in praise of violence, but on the other hand, traditionally, he has always permitted the lay people to use violence to defend him. Well, to defend in a sense the religion as such. So you might argue therefore that inasmuch as he permits that, he is to some extent participating in violence. You could argue that way. It's a little analogous to the Theravada position on the question of meat eating. The Theravada

position is: if you don't actually kill the meat with your own hands, or if it isn't killed by anyone specifically for your consumption, then there's nothing wrong with your eating meat. So in much the same way the Theravada bhikkhus, or the Theravada tradition, [123] seems to have maintained that bhikkhus should not defend themselves by means of violence, and secondly that they should not condone violence, but on the other hand they did actually permit people, tacitly, to exercise violence on their behalf. Now in a way that encapsulates the position of the person practising nonviolence. If you permit others to use violence on your behalf, in a sense you are participating in that. That would be my personal position. I would say that that was logically the case, whether the persons involved realized that or not. But then the question arises: what else are you to do? Supposing you are a pacifist in time of war. You do not yourself fight, you do not approve of fighting, but nonetheless the fact is that your life - along with the lives of others - is actually being defended by those who are willing to fight. And you are unable, actually, to do anything about it. So in a way you are involved, however reluctantly or however unwillingly, even though you don't actually give your consent. So the only situation in which you would not find yourself involved in that way will be if everybody practised nonviolence. You could certainly exhort others to practise nonviolence, but while you are doing that your life is still being protected by those who do not believe in violence. And some people of course would argue that you shouldn't allow yourself to be protected in that way by others who are willing to have recourse to violence when you yourself are not willing, you are just (as it were) reaping the benefit (they might even argue) of their self-sacrifice. So this is not an easy issue to resolve. This is what I'm trying to get at.

Abhaya. But how could you prevent them from defending your life? In a way that's out of your hands, you've done your best ...

S: Yes. You can't. But inasmuch as you are a member of that particular community or group, and don't opt out of it, to a small extent at least you share in the collective responsibility.

Abhaya. But haven't you done your best to divest yourself of that collective responsibility by becoming a pacifist? You've done as much as you can under those circumstances and that's it.

S: I don't think you can really, totally, dissociate yourself from the group to which you belong. I mean, this again raises (in a way) even deeper questions, because it's not possible for an individual totally to separate himself from a group, or even from a state nowadays. It used to be that you could go off into a forest, could build a hermitage, but now you have to be a citizen of a state - or a stateless person. You can't be (as it were) a state-free person (let us say) as distinct from a state-less person; you have to belong to a particular state. If you want to travel from one country to another you have to have travel documents which usually means a passport. You pay taxes. Even if you're a pacifist you may pay taxes, and

the taxes that you're paying [124] may go to support the war effort. So where do you draw the line? This is what I'm really getting at: whether it is really in fact possible for the individual to dissociate himself totally from the violence of the group or community to which he belongs in such a way that he's completely absolved from any moral responsibility for that violence. This is what I'm wondering.

Aryadaka: What do you think about the Buddhist monks that burned themselves in Vietnam? In a circumstance like that? That was a statement, that they removed themselves.

S: Well, what were they burning themselves for? We mustn't forget that. They were burning themselves originally, before it got a little out of hand, as a protest against the virtual banning of Buddhism at that time, by the Diem regime. I remember those early incidents because personal friends of mine were involved. The crux came when Buddhists in Saigon were not allowed to celebrate publicly - Buddhism was a majority religion. And in particular they were not allowed to fly the international Buddhist flag. And only a few weeks earlier there had been a big Catholic celebration, I think it was in connection with some anniversary of the brother of the president - that is to say, the brother of Diem - who was the cardinal of Saigon and the head of the Catholic church, and Vatican flags were flown all over the place. So this deeply upset the Buddhists, and one monk burned himself alive as a protest. That was the famous one whose picture one can sometimes see who set fire to himself after drenching himself with petrol. So he was protesting not against violence in the sense that we've just been discussing it, but he was protesting against the lack of freedom for Buddhists to practise their own religion. And there were I think six or seven monks and one nun after him who (as it were) committed suicide in that way. And of course there is a tradition of that kind of (so to speak) religious suicide in Mahayana Buddhism, going back to the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra. So one could say that that was one possible thing that one could do if one felt very, very strongly that the conduct of the government, or even the whole country, was wrong, and one wanted to register a protest - and also at the same time to opt out of that situation, withdraw one's support from it. Well, yes, one could burn oneself to death in that sort of way. That would be regarded as justifiable within the terms of Mahayana Buddhism anyway, though not the Theravada. The monk left a letter, left a sort of last testament. It was very clear that he didn't commit that act out of just an angry reaction or anything like that. His state of mind was clearly quite a positive and quite calm one. And one can tell that even from the pictures of the body burning. But that is of course a very extreme measure that not many people would be able to resort to. But I'm just trying to point out the difficulty of dissociating yourself. And sometimes you are involved even against your will. I think it's not so easy to dissociate yourself from the acts of your government, or your fellow countrymen, or whatever. I don't think it's enough to say, as the Theravadins do - though at the same time we mustn't blame them too much because they too are in a difficult position. We mustn't blame them

too much for saying, [125] "If I don't do it myself, then I'm totally free from any blame." I think that is a bit naive, a bit simplistic to say the least. But something came after that?

Abhaya: Yes. The monks did make it clear, apparently, that for someone to work as an executioner was definitely not Right Livelihood.

S: I'm not sure about that. I'm not sure whether the work of executioner was actually specifically mentioned. I would have to check that. I'm doubtful if I actually did say that.

Abhaya: I go on to say, I suppose that would be an indefensible contradiction to...

S: Well, it's well known that Christmas Humphreys did hold very decided views on these sorts of matters. I discussed them with him personally to some extent, and also heard him talking on the radio once or twice. He was firmly of the opinion that the whole (as it were) judicial system was an instrument of karma. I didn't agree with this. I felt he understood karma wrongly. But his view seemed to be - he used to refer for instance to the "iron law of karma" - that if you, as a prosecuting counsel - as he often was, even in murder trials before the death penalty was abolished in Britain - secure someone's conviction, and he is executed as a consequence of that, you are not morally to blame in any way, you have merely done your duty, in a Zen-like sort of way (he seemed to think). And you were the instrument of karma bringing about that person's punishment. And he seems to have held that not only the prosecuting counsel was an instrument of karma, but the judge also (and of course he was a judge later on in life). I didn't actually ask him whether he thought that the executioner was an instrument of karma, but had I asked him he might well have said that the executioner too was an instrument of karma. So that was his (in a way) solution to that particular problem. Because, all right, if you cannot be responsible for another person's death, and a bhikkhu for instance is not even allowed to bear witness in a court, if by bearing witness it'll result in the punishment of whoever is accused before the court. But if you cannot take any action which might result in someone being sentenced to death, well, if the death penalty still exists, it's as though you have to withdraw yourself from the whole judicial process. Can you be a policeman, because you might be called upon to arrest somebody who was going to be charged with murder and then possibly executed? Could you even be a typist working in the court and typing out the evidence? Do you see what I mean? These are not really very easy questions to solve. And what about your position as a tax payer contributing to the system?

Abhaya: I appreciate that you are to some extent involved in society, and if it's a violent society you can at least, as far as possible, you can make your voice known.



S: Oh yes indeed. [126]

Abhaya: But I go on to ask: what do you think our position should be, as practising Buddhists, in a violent world, with regard to this question of capital punishment? Isn't it clear that we should be against it? Or isn't it as simple as that?

S: In Britain of course capital punishment has now been abolished. [Treason and piracy remained capital offences in the UK until 1998 - Transcriber.] I think it isn't just a question of capital punishment, but it's a question of violence. Even if there is no capital punishment, there is violence in many other forms. Then the question arises: what is one's attitude towards them? Do you, for instance, believe in punishment, in the judicial sense, at all? Do you believe that it is morally wrong that people should be punished? If you do not believe that it is morally wrong for people to be punished, you must also believe that it is not morally wrong for someone to have the responsibility of punishing them. If you believe it is not morally wrong for people to be in prison, well, you cannot hold that it is morally wrong to be a prison warder or a prison governor. And therefore you cannot regard that work as wrong livelihood.

Abhaya: But that's a different thing from capital punishment.

S: But I would say, in a way capital punishment is a red herring, because capital punishment is just an extreme form of violence, and even if you settle that problem satisfactorily, you're a long way from having solved all the problems connected with violence in society.

Abhaya: Are you interpreting imprisonment as violence?

S: Yes, I'm just giving it as a hypothetical example of some other form of violence. You could even say what about caning children in schools? Well, if supposing you believe that that is necessary, and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to educate children without recourse to violence sometimes, well, if you do not believe that it's wrong to inflict violence in that way, then also you must hold that it's not wrong for a particular person, say a schoolteacher, to inflict punishment in that way.

Abhaya: So you don't draw a line, at all?

S: In principle I would say there's no difference at all between capital punishment and caning. In principle. Capital punishment is very, very much more serious obviously, but in principle, as acts of violence, there's no difference between them. So the problem that we really come up against - and here we begin to get into really deep waters, and again I'm only asking questions, I'm not giving answers - is it possible for society to function, even a moral society or a predominantly moral society, without an element of violence? And if it is not possible, well, what is your position as someone who believes in nonviolence? Are you not obliged (in a sense)

to condone that minimum of violence which is necessary for the maintenance of society itself, in dealing with a criminal element, let us say? Or do you allow the criminal element just to run riot? Do you allow it just to run amuck? [127]

Abhaya: No, obviously not ...

S: No, I'm only asking the question. I'm not really expecting any replies.

Abhaya: But going on to what you say in the text: you define killing as the ultimate violent act.

S: Yes, because you can't be more violent than that. But that doesn't mean that killing is something quite separate from other acts of violence. In principle they're all acts of violence.

Abhaya: In a sense it's more irrevocable, isn't it?

S: But all acts of violence are irrevocable. Because if you even just slap someone, well, you've slapped them for ever. And you can never undo that.

Abhaya: But there is the possibility after the slap to make it up, so to speak...

S: That's true, yes.

Abhaya: ...but if you chop someone's head off (laughter) it's not quite so easy.

S: Well, you can repent. You can repent personally. What difference that makes to him nobody knows.

Baladitya: There was a point in there when you said that the power mode should always be subordinated to the love mode.

S: Well, yes, this is what I've said, and this is all right in theory. But then the question arises how it works out in practice. Some people might argue that that wasn't possible; that you had either to opt for the love mode or the power mode, and it wasn't possible to subordinate the power mode to the love mode, and that would be a contradiction in terms. Some people would argue that way. But I did say some evenings ago that I personally would go along with that up to a point, that is to say subordination of love mode to power mode, say in the question of giving a child a slap to prevent it doing something which would harm itself. But I was not prepared (in a sense) to be logical, because I wasn't able to accept that it was possible to kill out of love. Maybe I'm being logically inconsistent, but I cannot (as it were) envisage myself doing that under any circumstances. And I can't really imagine anybody else doing that without, in a way,

almost deceiving himself - perhaps honestly and sincerely, but nonetheless deceiving himself. So yes, in a sense, or up to a point, love mode can be subordinated to power mode. But I think that when the power exercised is exercised in such a way as to bring about an extreme degree of violence it ceases really to be compatible with any exercise of the love mode. So although I have said that I recognize there are practical difficulties in working it out nonetheless. It would be very beautiful if we could operate the power mode in subordination to the love mode without any sort of tension between the two, in a way. I think [128] that's very, very rarely possible. Even in the case of parents: sometimes parents indulge in a degree of violence with their own children, but they afterwards regret, because they get a bit worked up, and maybe the child is particularly naughty. They give a particularly vicious slap, just out of momentary anger, and then afterwards they regret it, and they realize really they shouldn't really have done that, they did go a bit over the top, even with their own child. So how will you behave with other people sometimes? So what else was there? Don't forget I'm only ventilating this question. I'm only just trying to show that it's perhaps a little more complex than we usually think.

Abhaya: That's pretty well it.

Prasannasiddhi: What do you think of the incident in "The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava" where he apparently kills some prince or something. He sees his karma is bad. But he actually kills him, Padmasambhava kills the prince.

S: Well, in the first place of course "The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava" is very (as it were) mythic and legendary. It's very difficult to know how literally one must take some of those episodes. But even assuming that one can take that quite literally I don't think we can regard it as constituting any sort of model for ourselves. Even supposing you see that someone has got the results of some bad karma coming to him, can you, in a way, interfere in that way? Can the results of karma be baulked in that way? Is that really what that passage is saying? Or is it some sort of hyperbole with regard to some quality of Padmasambhava and you are not meant to take the incident very literally? One could perhaps argue in that way. But I wouldn't regard texts of that sort, so full of mythic and legendary elements, as authoritative for ethical behaviour. But anyway, have we aired this question sufficiently? Or no doubt there are other questions about violence and nonviolence. I wonder how it was that the question of capital punishment came up in discussion. So many countries have abolished this now, it is really a live issue? It certainly isn't in Britain.

Abhaya: Well, it's mooted in Britain, because of the IRA. There are lobbies who really feel quite strongly...

S: But it does seem that the government has decided not to bring it back.

I know that were some questions some time ago. It seems the government has definitely made up its mind, or at least it had made up its mind at that time, it was not going to be (as it were) pressured into bringing back capital punishment by its own right wing. I think the government realized that that would be counter-productive. But I think as I said you don't really get off the hook just because there's no capital punishment, because in principle violence is violence and no doubt society can survive without capital punishment, but can it survive without any sort of punishment at all? And if you believe that it can't, then (in a sense, in principle) you are condoning violence, but condoning it presumably in the larger interests of society, [129] and presumably therefore out of the love mode. At the same time of course one will want always to encourage oneself and all the people you have access to, or who will listen to you, to practise nonviolence to the fullest possible extent. It seems as though the history of civilization goes up and down. I was recently just reading something about Benevenuto Cellini, the great artist and also great ... (what?)

Abhaya: He was a goldsmith wasn't he?

S: No, I was thinking of his other activities.) .. gangster almost, of the sixteenth century. The picture that one gets from his autobiography of the prevalence of violence in Italy at that time is terrible. It's really terrible. There was almost no law and order, the private vendetta had almost replaced law and order. It was Cellini himself murdered several people, and was always involved in brawls and acts of violence, always threatening people. And on one occasion apparently he killed a man, and he took refuge in the palace of a cardinal who protected him and got a pardon and an absolution from the pope for him, and the next time the pope saw him (because he was doing some work for him) the pope said, 'Benevenuto, you had better look after yourself,' and that was all the pope said. And apparently homicide was nothing in those days at all. And the writer who I was reading comments that it seems that despite all the murders he committed, and all the acts of violence he committed, he never had anything to fear from any authorities. All he was ever afraid of was the relations of the people he'd killed or attacked. That was all he had to worry about. It seems that violence was absolutely endemic at that time, and no one seemed to bother, no one seemed shocked by it. No one from the pope downwards seemed to think almost that there was anything particularly wrong. Morality, in that sense, it seems, had completely broken down.

So things aren't as bad as that at present anywhere in Europe. So perhaps we shouldn't take too gloomy a view of the present situation - things have from time to time been far worse, in Europe at least. And perhaps something can be done by human effort. Since those days, in Italy at least, the situation has improved. And perhaps not only in Italy but in other countries too the situation can be further improved. There was quite a lot of violence on the streets of London in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, perhaps more than there is today, and it seemed to be in a sense more tolerated, more accepted. There is a lot of violence nowadays, in England, especially in the big cities, but it is still, fortunately, regarded by the majority of people as an evil, and the majority of people would like to see it abolished. (break in recording) ... and perhaps more effort should be devoted more and more towards the abolition eventually of violence in that sphere.

One of the things I have thought is a very important modern development is the urban terrorist. You know what I mean by that. This is potentially a very dangerous development indeed, because this can, in a way, almost oblige a government to take measures to protect itself and its citizens against terrorism, but measures which, in the long run, result in a more restricted situation for everybody, and centralized power more and more in the hands of government. But anyway, that's quite a big issue. Perhaps we shouldn't go into it more. But anyway the issues of violence and nonviolence are quite complex. Perhaps one shouldn't in a [130] way bother about them too much, but just be aware of them and concentrate on making sure that oneself is being as nonviolent in every way, on every level, as one possibly can, and is encouraging other people to be likewise. It's very easy to have recourse to violence in all sorts of subtle ways. I've mentioned emotional blackmail and fraud haven't I? These are forms of violence. It's very rarely that one has really sufficient confidence in another person, that one doesn't attempt to manipulate them in any way whatsoever. And to the extent that you're trying to manipulate them you are really having recourse to violence, because you're trying to do something to them of which they wouldn't really approve if they knew, or if they understood what you were really up to. Sometimes you slant information very subtly just to move a person in a particular direction, the direction you want them to go in. You don't give them the opportunity to decide for themselves or to make up their own minds. This is subtle violence. But most people are doing it most of the time. Anyway, any more questions about violence? Let's see. Or nonviolence?

Vessantara: Dharmamudra?

Dharmamudra: Bhante, on coming across an animal that's obviously badly damaged and dying, should one just leave it or kill it?

S: Well, what are the arguments here pro and con? Put it this way: you've said it's dying so it's going to die anyway. What is it that makes you wonder that you ought to hasten that process?

Dharmamudra: Pain.

S: But does one know that the animal is in pain?

Dharmamudra: Well, that was another part of the question, but often you can actually see maybe muscular reactions that might express that, but

whether their consciousness is actually there or not I couldn't say.

S: I seem to remember somewhere that in the case of animals, especially also perhaps in the case of human beings, that once pain has reached a certain point the animal just (as it were) gives up the will to live, or even doesn't feel anything much any more. I think it is known that when an animal is seized by another animal, say a mouse is seized by a cat, it sort of goes numb, as it were.

Dharmamudra: I've actually seen them lay still and not move, but taken away from the cat they move away fairly sharp.

S: No, I'm not referring to that, I'm referring to a sort of paralysis of the nervous system. Does anybody know anything about this?

Aryacitta: Yes, I think in hospital you get injections of some chemical that excites you and also makes you numb to pain. [131]

S: Yes, for instance you know that when you're very excited, as when you're fighting with someone, say when you're boxing, you don't notice even quite serious wounds that you may receive. You're just not aware of them. It's only afterwards when you've sort of calmed down that you realize that they're hurting. I'm only sort of raising these points to suggest that we shouldn't be too confident that we know that the animal is in pain and that therefore it's our duty to put it out of that.

Dharmamudra: I actually came across a rabbit that had myxomatosis, and there was somebody else there with a stick ready to take it from its misery. And I couldn't make the decision to say yes, I'll do that. In the end I left it, but it left me feeling unsure whether or not I did the right thing.

S: In a way you can't really know. Sometimes we have to act without definite knowledge. Even if you don't interfere that is still an action, it's a negative action. And it would be nice if we always knew exactly what the situation was so that we could act accordingly, but very often we just don't know. There's also the question of the effect upon you of doing that.

Dharmamudra: Or not doing that.

S: Well, let's say of you doing it. Let's look at that first. Because if you take the life of an animal you are taking the life of an animal, you know, with whatsoever motives. So what does that do to you? Do you see what I'm getting at?

Dharmamudra: I see your point.

S: Because normally it's a thing that you shrink from. You don't do it very willingly. You have to force yourself to do that. So one could perhaps argue that it was an undesirable thing for you to do bearing in mind its

effect upon you, that is to say the person (so to speak) putting the animal out of its misery. It could as it were blunt your natural feelings for compassion or whatever. You may have convinced yourself intellectually that you ought to put the animal out of its pain, but would that actually be how you were experiencing it? Could it not have a different sort of reaction upon you? One has to perhaps consider that as well. I'd be very reluctant to say that one ought to put an animal out of its pain or out of its misery partly for that reason. I can't say that I'd be prepared to be completely dogmatic about it. If someone actually did that I don't think I could feel that I definitely had to condemn that person, or say that they were definitely wrong. But on the other hand I certainly couldn't wholeheartedly support it or perhaps support it at all.

Dharmamudra: I know at this particular time this chap who was about to wield the stick - when I looked at it, I felt as if there wasn't any consciousness there. That's just the way I felt at the time....

S: You mean the animal or the person? (laughter) [132]

Dharmamudra: In the animal. And wondered, then, maybe whether there was actually any feeling involved.

S: That's very difficult to tell unless you (sort of) empathize. I think in these matters unfortunately there isn't any clear cut rule to guide one. One has to weigh up all the relevant facts and circumstances for oneself, and take what you feel is the right decision. It may be the right decision or it may not be, and possibly you will never know for sure whether it was the right decision or not. There are so many instances of this sort in our lives. We have just to genuinely try to discover what is the best thing to do and then do it, but we cannot be completely sure in complicated questions of this sort whether we have really done the right thing or not, objectively speaking. I'm sorry to be handing out so few solutions this evening, but these sort of issues are really of that nature. Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Aryadaka?

Aryadaka: I think the question's been answered, but maybe I'll... What do you think about the case of a prisoner on death row that wishes to die. Does someone have the right to be executed?

S: Well, I would say this: it's not really a question of right to be executed - right to commit suicide, except that you require the co-operation of other people. I must say my own position is a little unorthodox here. To begin with I don't really like to use the language of "rights". I think it's a quite unBuddhistic language. But I would say there are circumstances in which I would consider that it was not wrong for an individual to take his or her own life. I have discussed this on more than one occasion. For instance I've sometimes referred to the example of the teacher of one of my own

teachers, that is to say the teacher of Jadish Kashyap. His name was Dhammananda Kosambi, and he was a great Pali scholar. I remember Kashyapji telling me that as a very old man Dhammananda Kosambi was living in Sarnath and Kashyapji was looking after him. And he was seventy-two or seventy-three, and he was bed-ridden and so on and so forth, and he decided that it would be better if he died, because he felt he wasn't able to do any further work for the Dharma, he felt that he was a burden on other people, and there was no point in remaining alive. He couldn't do anything, he was completely helpless, he was also in pain. So he simply stopped taking food. And after three weeks he passed away quite quietly and peacefully. So my view is that that cannot be regarded as an unskilful action. I think it is important to add that the state of mind at the time is very important. But if you can be sure that you are going to die in peace, and if you're not (as it were) committing suicide out of frustrated desire or anger or rage or any other reactive emotion, if you can do it in this positive way, I would say, personally, that that is not unskilful action. So applying that to the person on death row, if his mental state is like that of Dhammananda Kosambi I wouldn't say that that was an unskilful action on his part. But I [133] don't know what the state of mind of such a person would be. Obviously it's a really dreadful situation to be in. It's not only the fact of dying, but being in a place like death row, being in a prison in that sort of way. That must add to the horror of it all. It's as though the concomitants of death are worse than death itself. It would be much better if one was allowed to go away like an animal and crawl into a hole and die there. That would be much better.

Satyananda: Is it actually suicide though, Bhante, if you've got to have someone else to actually push the button or flip the switch? Could you say that was suicide, because someone's got to be the executioner?

S: Again, it's exactly the same problem that we were discussing earlier on. If you do not believe in violence, can you help another person commit a violent action? In what sense is suicide, in that way, a violent action? Is it violent? I do say something here about violence being an act which is performed with relation to another person against his or her own will. But suppose someone wants to die, and you help them die, are you committing an act of violence in helping them to do something that they want to do? In the eyes of the law, of course, you're committing an act of violence, but that is another matter. Ethically are you committing an act of violence? Of course there are other considerations that arise: Are you sure that that person is in his or her right mind? And so on and so forth. From Pali scriptures it would seem that the Buddha did not condemn someone terminating their own life under certain circumstances. It is also quite clear that in a general way Buddhism does condemn suicide, it does regard suicide as violence, there's no doubt about that. Ordinary suicide which you commit because you're frustrated in love, or your expectations of one kind or another are disappointed. That is definitely a form of violence. But it's quite clear that the Buddha did not condemn the taking of one's own life in the sort of way that I've described. I think one has to



be quite clear about that. Traditional Buddhism seems to have regarded the two things as quite distinct.

Sarvamitra: While we're on the subject can you say more about the tradition of religious suicide you mentioned in Vietnam?

S: Well, the Saddharma-pundarika does refer (the context admittedly is a bit legendary) to examples of bhikkhus who soaked themselves in oil and then set light to themselves to make of themselves a sort of human lamp or torch in honour of the Buddha. That has always been a sort of tradition in China at least. Throughout Chinese history there are examples of monks offering themselves in this way, or sometimes doing it, as in the case of the Vietnamese monks, as a protest against some sort of act of injustice or immorality or something of that sort. Sometimes protest against the persecution of Buddhism. But here of course we're getting away from the Buddha's own personal teaching. We cannot be sure that the Buddha would have approved that. [134]

Satyaloka: Did you say in honour of the Buddha?

S: Yes. Because just as you offer a lamp to the Buddha, so you offer yourself as a living lamp, quite literally. You haven't read your Saddharma-Pundarika Sutra? (laughter) But, as I say, the context is definitely legendary, whereas in the case of the incidents I've referred to previously coming from the Pali canon, where the Buddha seems to condone 'suicide' (single inverted commas) the context is not legendary, but apparently quite historical. Anyway, I must pay my usual visit. You can collect your questions while I'm away....

Vessantara: Just as a slight side issue we've been looking at... there's an example in the Samyutta-Nikaya of a monk called Godhika who is "abiding diligent, ardent, self-resolute, and attains the freedom of mind which is temporary. Although he won this freedom of mind six times, six times he fell away from it ... (unclear) ... up to six times have I fallen away from this freedom of mind. What if I were to stab myself?" Then Mara goes to the Buddha and asks him to dissuade Godhika from doing it, and just as he's doing that, at that moment the Venerable Godhika stabbed himself. "And the Buddha, discerning that it was Mara, the evil one, who had spoken, spoke this verse to Godhika: Yes, so do the steadfast act, and do not yearn for life. Tearing out craving with its root, Godhika has attained complete Nirvana." It's a bit off the point, but it's quite interesting as an example of what we're talking about. But what would be the feeling of mind that is temporary, that he could fall away from six times?

S: Nobody seems to know. There is a difference of opinion about this. As far as I remember the commentators maintain that this is not vimutti in the sense of Transcendental Vimutti, but that it refers to rupa and/or arupa dhyanas. This is the usual view. If one takes that view (which in a way seems the more logical, because how can you have a temporary

vimutti in the strict sense?) then it would seem that Godhika actually gained emancipation, the real vimutti, the Transcendental Vimutti, at the moment of death itself, due to the absence of craving for continued existence. This would seem to be what the Buddha was referring to. This is one of the instances cited whenever this question of what I've called religious suicide is discussed. It seems as though - taking the traditional interpretation - it's as though Godhika was someone who had attained quite advanced samatha states, but had never been able to develop vipassana. So he was constantly falling down from those samatha states, possibly due to quite unskilful states, and he just got tired of this. So he decided to end it all. Perhaps he knew what would happen, perhaps he didn't. But at the moment he committed suicide. It's a moot point whether it was suicide in the ordinary sense, or not, or somewhere in between; the fact that he was prepared to relinquish life, which is not a small matter by any means, meant that he was unattached to such an extent that Insight did arise at that moment, and it was through that Insight [135] that he was liberated. That would seem to be the purport of the Buddha's comment. But some people do argue that samaya-vimutti mentioned there is a real vimutti, and that is in fact possible to fall away from the Transcendental attainment. There was a discussion about that in early Buddhism. That discussion is reflected in the Katha-Vatthu, the fifth book of the Abhidharma Pitaka. I think there was a discussion as to whether the arahant could fall away from arahantship; some schools believed that he could. Anyway, as you say, that's a little by the way.

Satyaloka: It's another one of these issues I'm afraid: You state that abortion is a breach of the first precept - a Buddhist shouldn't have an abortion or encourage others to do so. Would you extend this to the case of rape, where conception occurs as a result of rape? And (B) when it can be shown by a medical investigation that the child that would be born would be badly malformed?

S: Well, (1) the traditional Buddhist point of view is that abortion is a form of violence, that is to say of the most extreme type, i.e. taking human life. I don't see what difference the fact that the conception is due to rape really makes. I mean this might sound terribly (sort of) anti-liberal, but I don't see what difference it makes. I can see that there are all sorts of assumptions, unspoken assumptions, behind (I won't say the question, but) behind the ordinary point of view in this matter. I just want to question those. So perhaps they should be unveiled. (laughter) I mean, for instance, well I'll do a bit of it myself: for instance, the one view is the woman who has been raped doesn't want to have the baby, why should she have it? It's her right not to have it. That would be one argument, but Buddhism doesn't discuss things in terms of rights. It is true that through no fault of your own, that is if you've been raped, you've been put in that very unfortunate position. But does that (as it were) give you the right to perform what Buddhism (at least) considers to be an unethical action? In a way it's a very (what is colloquially called) tough position to be in, but does the fact that you've been put, through no fault of your own, into a

tough position, does that give you the right to resort to unethical means of getting out of it? This is really the question.

Padmavajra: I suppose Buddhism would also say: Do you, in fact, get out of it - through unethical means?

S: Well, yes. That's a separate question. But this is the first point that I want to make. The assumption is that if you find yourself in a situation of that sort, you've got the right (as it were) to get out of it - especially when it isn't your fault that you're in that situation (let's take it that isn't your fault for the sake of argument) - by performing an unethical action? There are lots of situations that people put us into in life which we don't want to be in. But have we got (so to speak) the right to get out of those by unethical means just because we've been put into them by the actions of other people. For instance, to give you another example: Supposing we have a debt to pay, and we've saved up the money, and then someone robs us. Well, we're in a real fix. Have we then got the right to go and rob somebody so that we can pay our [136] debt? You say, well, it's not my fault, I was robbed, why shouldn't I go and rob somebody else to pay my debt? It's much the same sort of argument. Yes, if you have been robbed of the money that you saved up to repay that debt you're in a real fix, but the ethical thing to do is to go and raise the money all over again, not to go and rob somebody else. So I would say that one of the assumptions behind the (sort of, let's say) liberal view that a woman who has been raped has got a right to an abortion is that sort of thinking, and I really question that. And then as regards the medical opinion, well (1) it's a question of how trustworthy is that medical opinion, and also - well - there are various other questions. First of all if the child who is born is not viable it won't continue to live. But sometimes a child can quite happily live that is handicapped from our point of view. Because it is known that very often handicapped children are very happy. They've only ever been handicapped - I've known some handicapped children. For instance they never, in some cases, have use of all their limbs, but they've adapted. They no more miss having two arms than you miss having three or four (laughter). We must be very careful how we look at this. For instance what about mongoloid [i.e. Down syndrome] babies? Mongoloid babies are well known to be very, very happy for some reason that has not been understood. So even if the pregnant woman was going to have a mongoloid child, what reason is there for her not having it? The mongoloid child would appear to be perfectly happy, even happier than most other people. Yes?

Satyaloka: Yes. I suppose one of my assumptions in the first case was that (1) the psychological effect of the rape situation, and then taking into account the way in which that affects the woman, the way she feels about what's been done to her. To actually then to have to bring the child of the rapist - to give birth to that child - wouldn't be...

S: But then there's another point to it you see. One may say the child of

the rapist, but it is also actually her child too. So in a way she's in a situation of conflict, and she isn't going to solve it just by getting rid of (say) that half of the child which is the rapist's. Because in doing that she gets rid of that half of the child which is hers. So she's in rather a dreadful double bind situation to which there's no easy solution. The fact that you are not responsible for the situation in which somebody else has put you certainly doesn't make that situation any easier, or give you an easier way out than if it had been your own fault, unfortunately.

Satyaloka: In the case of medical investigation, what I had in mind was scanning, which is something that they can do - they can scan and actually see what the child looks like, how it's going to be born. Would you extend the principle you say in regard to mongoloid children to cases where you can be almost certain that the child born will live as a vegetable (say) for the rest of its life - will have a very minimal quality... [137]

S: Well, one might even argue: why should one prevent vegetables coming into existence. Even if the child is a vegetable, well, so is a cabbage and you don't prevent a cabbage coming into existence (laughter). So there are all sorts of assumptions here. It's as though the assumption is that if the particular cabbage has the form of a human being, well then you ought not to allow it to live. But even if it's a cabbage, has it (to use the language of rights) not the same right to live as a non-cabbage? (laughter) It's as though you're saying that only higher forms of life have the right to existence.

Indrabodhi: It does seem a bit absurd when you have to keep something alive at great expense...

S: Ah yes. That's another question. This is approaching it from another angle: use of resources. Yes, alright, you've got a limited amount of resources, so then the question is where you can best expend those resources. I must say I sometimes feel quite outraged when I hear about these various transplant operations involving teams of doctors and costing tens of thousands of pounds. I sometimes think couldn't that money, couldn't that expertise, be used in better ways or more fruitful ways? So that also does have - I will grant that - that does have to be taken into consideration. But what were the exact bearings that would have on this particular case, I'm not sure. If it's just a question of straightforward rape with no abnormal child going to be produced, well, that is quite clear. But if the child is abnormal and is going to demand a lot of resources, well, that does rather complicate the situation, and one can't be quite so sure. But I do not believe that medical science is infallible. For instance reading Shabda last month I was really quite shocked by what Punyavati reported. She said that apparently women are able to have abortions - I think she said under the National Health - up to twenty-six weeks, where she has known babies to be born at twenty-four weeks and to be perfectly viable. That seems dreadful. Order Members didn't read that - those who were

Order Members then? Didn't it strike you as really rather shocking?

Devamitra: It's as if you can actually kill and murder while the baby is still in the womb, but as soon as it's out of the womb it's regarded...

S: Well, this would seem to be madness. Where is your logic? It's not a question of extinguishing something that has barely begun to exist, though even that is wrong according to Buddhism. But if it was to be born at twenty-four weeks, and two weeks later the mother was to kill it, she'd be had up at least for manslaughter, if not for murder. But if it was an abortion performed while the child was still in the womb, apparently you can have it on the National Health. So what is happening? Have people lost their sense of proportion in ethical matters? So you could have one woman murdering her child at the age of twenty-six weeks, two weeks after it was born, and another woman at exactly the same time having an abortion on a child of exactly the same age which was still in her womb. And one has it under the National Health and the other goes to jail perhaps for twelve [138] years. Is this not an anomaly?

Satyaloka: I'm a bit unclear what the difference is. Surely the principle is even up to that age it's still a foetus, it's still viable. Well, I'm not quite sure of the difference. You're still killing before that time. OK, it would be viable, it could live outside the womb...

S: No. I'm simply pointing out the absurdity of the law. I'm simply doing that. For what is in effect from a moral point of view exactly the same action, in one case the state will enable you to perform the action, or perform the action for you; in the other case it will send you to jail - for exactly the same action, from a moral point of view. Anyway, perhaps we had better not join in the abortion debate. It seems to be quite a complicated one. I think it should be quite clear, in the minds of Buddhists, where Buddhism stands in this particular matter. I think also it's undesirable to discuss it in terms of rights. People talk about the rights of the mother, others talk about the rights of the unborn child, and the rights of the state. I think that probably doesn't get us very far. Anyway, let's carry on. How is the time by the way?

Vessantara: It's five to nine.

S: How many questions left?

Vessantara: Nine.

S: Let's just have one more then.

Vessantara: Indrabodhi, yours in relation to the text.

Indrabodhi: Top of page fifty [1984 edition] you say, "There is no killing without violence, whereas there may be violence without killing. Therefore

the precept is best spoken of as abstention from killing." Could you clarify this as killing is just one example of violence?

S: Because the precept as a precept - in a sense almost as a rule - requires that at least you refrain from killing, even if you're not able to refrain from other forms of violence. Also as regards the actual wording in Pali, panatipata would seem usually to be understood traditionally in terms of killing, rather than what the literal meaning suggests, as violence rather than just killing. Simply that. As a principle you might say there's a slight tension here between the precept as a principle and the precept in a sense as a rule: if you take the precept as a principle - and you can certainly see it in that way, or eventually you should - well, it requires you to abstain from all forms of violence. But if you take it just as a rule, well, the very least you should do is refrain from killing, from actually taking life, even if you're not able (say) to refrain from beating or abusing. So technically (if one wants to indulge in technicalities) technically, as long as you haven't killed anyone or anything you haven't broken that first precept. But of course you might have broken it in spirit, if you look at it in that light, so many times without actually killing. [139]

Satyaraja: Isn't there a sort of incongruity here - if that precept's taken on that level, whereas some of the other precepts are much more subtle, like harsh speech and slanderous speech?

S: Well, I think in the case of all the precepts there is probably this sort of tension between the precepts taken as a principle and the precepts taken as a rule. Perhaps it comes out most of all in the case of the first precept. Well, in the case of the second precept too it comes out really quite clearly. I mean, you can take from other people without their being willing to give you, without actually committing theft in the legal sense. But that's not really enough if you're mindful of the spirit of the precept. It may be enough to keep you out of jail, but not enough really to make you a good Buddhist. But again, if simply the precept is taken as a rule, well, it's enough if at least you don't steal. Sometimes it's good to have understood a definite minimum below which you must not fall, if you're to be regarded as observing the precepts. That is the rock bottom (as it were); if you do that you have broken the precept completely. It's not that you're not observing it very well - you've actually broken it completely. So I think it probably is good that there is that sort of minimum requirement with regard to each precept.

Indrabodhi: So it's a sort of ethnic level of the precept?

S: Yes. You could say that. The ethnic level of the precept, yes. However unserious you are about Buddhism, even if you're not mindful of the spirit of Buddhism, if you want to call yourself a Buddhist in any sort of sense, at least you must not fall below that level. All right, Let's leave it there then.

Session 8 - 28th October 1984 - Tuscany, Questions on the First Precept.

Vessantara:... said today. But as yet they haven't produced any questions on the second precept so we've got about eight or nine questions left over from the first one. That's all we have. We'll start with Padmavajra.

Padmavajra: You say that the first precept is the most important and direct act of Going for Refuge. It almost seems as though in dependence upon Going for Refuge arises the first precept. If that is so could you say something about that - about the movement and the relationship between them?

S: I don't think I can say much except in very general terms, because it should be fairly obvious that if you are Going for Refuge to the Buddha, that is to say you take Enlightenment as your ideal; and that if you Go for Refuge to the Dharma, that is to say you determine to follow the path leading to the realization of that ideal; and further, if you Go for Refuge to the Sangha, that is to say you take inspiration and guidance from those who are following, or who have followed, that same path, well, it would seem obvious that that threefold act entails a complete transformation of your life, and a swing - to begin with (one might say, though it isn't just to begin with) - from what I've called the power mode to the love mode. It would seem that if you really are determined to become Enlightened and follow the path to Enlightenment in the company of others similarly inspired, the very first thing you will want to do is to give up violence and to lead a nonviolent way of life. It would seem that the act of violence goes directly against everything to which, through the act of Going for Refuge you've dedicated yourself. Or is that too general? I don't think I can be more specific unless the question is more specific.

Padmavajra: I think it really just struck me, noticing (?Buddhist terms) I don't think there's any more to say.

S: Well no doubt there could be a lot more to say, but it's as though one is having (as it were) to produce thoughts. Not that thoughts actually do arise in connection with or as a result of a particular situation.

Indrabodhi: It's a question on karate. Some people have expressed their reservations about the aggressive nature of karate. Although karate doesn't make me aggressive, in fact the reverse, it does seem incongruous that one is going through the motions of brutally attacking people. But I find this a very stimulating and central part of karate. But I don't find it very easy to convince people that karate's OK. I wondered what your thoughts were.

S: Now can we go through this bit by bit? Because I do have some thoughts or some ideas on the subject. (laughter) Only thoughts, only ideas (laughter).

Indrabodhi: Some people have expressed their reservations about the aggressive nature of karate.

S: Yes, I've had a lot about this from various people. But "the aggressive nature of karate"? In what sense is karate aggressive? I have talked about this with people who teach karate and they have, I think, one and all said that a lot of people who take up karate, who come along to karate classes, initially come along very definitely with aggressive ideas and aggressive intentions. They want to learn how to beat somebody else up or something of that sort. Karate teachers freely admit this - that ninety-five per cent of people come along in that sort of way. But they also insist that after a while they lose that, that they do actually change. And I must say that those karate teachers whom I've known - I've known just a few of them - don't seem particularly aggressive people at all. In fact if anything they seem slightly less aggressive than quite a few people who don't do karate. So it is as though one almost needs a sort of legitimate, actually nonviolent, in the sense of truly or genuinely nonviolent, means of expression for those aggressive instincts. They won't just go away. You're not a non-aggressive person just because you don't go along to karate classes or you don't commit overt acts of violence. You can nevertheless be deeply violent in your emotional state and your attitude towards life. So I think probably by giving people what one might describe as constructive outlets for their aggressive instincts karate in fact in the long run tends to make people - in their ordinary everyday life and behaviour, and even [141] perhaps their emotional attitude towards life - somewhat less aggressive. This seems to be borne out by the fact that at Padmaloka we have had several retreats combining karate and meditation. And I must admit - it was a little to my own surprise but I did find, or I had to acknowledge - that some people at least did find that doing karate went very well with doing meditation, and doing meditation went quite well with karate - which one would not quite have thought, but then one has to acknowledge the facts of the situation, one can't get away from those. And it does seem that karate - properly taught - does have that sort of effect. And therefore I might say, to sum up, that far from being aggressive, karate (again, rightly taught, taught by qualified people) would if anything tend to reduce aggressiveness. This is quite definitely the conclusion I've come to after discussing the whole matter with people involved in karate, and even observing people involved in karate. Was that the whole of it or...?

Indrabodhi: I think that was it.

S: I haven't missed any tricky bit at the end?

Indrabodhi: No, I don't think so.

Vessantara: Sarvamitra?

Sarvamitra: On the "Duties of Brotherhood" seminar you spoke of the



quantum of negativity theory. We had quite a lengthy discussion about this in our study group, and as far as I understand it the thinking goes as follows: In the case of a group member one's quantum of negativity has got an outlet outside the group, but in the case of the spiritual community the members don't have such an outlet and consequently the quantum of negativity comes to be expressed within the spiritual community itself....

S: I don't think it's quite as clear cut as that, but anyway we can come back to that.

Sarvamitra: ... and this would explain in some cases strong feelings of negativity between genuinely spiritually-minded people. And you recommended finding a creative outlet for that sort of energy - find something that's objectively wrong that we can feel for, and you gave an example of writing a letter to The Times. So my question...

S: Or I could have said going to a karate class.

Sarvamitra: .. was: Is there anything you could say about applying that principle in a retreat situation where you are enclosed from the outside world?

S: Let's go through that bit by bit. First of all what did you say?

Sarvamitra: On the "Duties of Brotherhood" seminar you spoke of the quantum of negativity theory. As far as I understand it the theory goes as follows: In the case of the group member one's quantum of negativity has got an outlet outside the group.

[142]

S: Ah. Let's just go into that a little bit. I can't remember the details of this discussion, but what I think I had in mind was this - it grows in a way out of my personal observation of people: one speaks of a quantum of negativity; one means by that a sort of stable quantity of negativity - that is to say an 'amount' (inverted commas) of negativity which does not change as one might have thought it would change in accordance with changes in circumstances. Supposing someone is by nature irritable, manifests a certain degree of irritability - well, one would imagine that when his circumstances improved, when they were more pleasant and congenial, he would become less irritable. That is by no means necessarily the case. When things are improved in one respect the irritability just transfers itself to something else and latches onto that. So it is as though the irritability isn't caused by any particular set of conditions but only occasioned by that set of conditions. The irritability is there, and whatever the circumstances is going to latch onto something. So I call this a quantum of irritability, a quantum of negativity. Do you see what I mean? This is the idea I was getting at when I spoke of that quantum of negativity, so that I hope is clear. So from that we move onto the question of a projection. See, very often one doesn't realize that the fault lies with

oneself, one thinks it lies with people or conditions, circumstances, outside. In that case one is said to project. Do you see what I mean? So what usually happens in the case of what you've referred to as group members, and what happens usually with people, is that negativity tends to be projected outwards onto some other group. This happens especially (one knows very well) in times of war; you project all sorts of negative qualities onto the enemy which in some cases are not actually there. So this one is doing all the time - onto some other tribe, some other group, some other political party, some other religion, some other culture, some other language, some other race - one has this tendency to project what are in fact one's own negative qualities onto the members of some other group. Now when one takes up the spiritual life one tries not to do this, one tries not to hate anybody, you try to treat everybody alike, you try not to distinguish between this nationality and that, this race and that, this religion and that, you try to have an attitude of metta towards everybody. But nonetheless you've still got, very often, this as yet unresolved quantum of negativity. And it can slip out and manifest itself where you least expect it. You may succeed in preventing itself, in projecting itself, way outside, but you might find to your dismay and consternation that it is projecting itself (and you may not realize what is happening for the time being) onto some other person within the spiritual community, within the spiritual group (so to speak). It's as though, well, the poor quantum of negativity has got nowhere else to go, you've cut off all these larger outlets outside; it can only manifest really near or close at home, and in connection with the people that you're actually living with and working with perhaps. And I've known quite a number of instances of this sort within the FWBO sometimes happening to the considerable distress of the person concerned. So this is what I was referring to. Do you see what I mean? So let's just go on. [143]

Sarvamitra: In the case of the spiritual community, members don't have such an outlet, and consequently their quantum of negativity comes to be expressed within the spiritual community.

S: Yes. There is that tendency, I don't say it inevitably happens, but certainly if that quantum of negativity (as I've called it) is there, if you block one outlet it'll try to find another. If you block those larger outlets outside the spiritual community, at least block them consciously, it may well find an outlet within the spiritual community. So I don't say that this necessarily has to happen, but it certainly does happen sometimes. So?

Sarvamitra: So you recommend finding a creative outlet for that source of energy?

S: Yes. It's a bit like karate being an outlet, a creative or at least a constructive outlet, for one's aggressiveness. And then you give an example I mentioned, I think it probably wasn't a very good one.

Sarvamitra: Something that's objectively wrong. Something that we can

feel for. For example write a letter to The Times.

S: Yes, some people wouldn't consider writing a letter to The Times very effective or very much of an outlet, but I just gave it as an example, for what it was worth. One of the things one can do is of course to try to direct one's negativity, one's aggressiveness or whatever, towards attitudes or qualities which are actually themselves negative. It's sometimes been said, well, you should hate hatred, for instance. I don't know how easy some people would find that. Some people of course can get worked up about ideas, and can have very strong negative feelings towards wrong ideas. Some people don't get stirred up about ideas very much at all! But it's good if one can find some (as it were) impersonal object for one's negativity, whatever that may be. Some people direct all their negative emotions towards spelling mistakes, some people are really irritated by spelling mistakes, and well, that's quite a good outlet for your irritability. They can sort of correct them with a lead pencil really viciously.

Manjunatha: When you say directing our irritability towards attitudes, or ideas, are you suggesting in other people?

S: Oh no. Not as associated with or entertained by, or embodied by other people but (so to speak) in the abstract, sort of hanging in the air. This is why I said that some people may find it difficult to do that, they may find it difficult to envisage ideas and attitudes and qualities - negative ones - in this sort of disembodied manner. Some people can. But I think one just needs (as it were) to take the hint or the general guidelines and just look around in one's own experience for something that you can genuinely hate (say) with a clear conscience - not any person, not any group of persons, least of all the spiritual community or anyone within the spiritual community, but something different, something abstract (so to speak), some quality, some attitude. [144]

Dharmamudra: Isn't sport good for that?

S: Well, this in a way comes under the heading of karate. I think it depends whether it's a participatory or a spectator sport. I think probably spectator sport doesn't have very much in this sort of way.

Dharmamudra: ... (unclear).. doing it yourself.

S: Yes, I suppose so. I suppose karate can just stand for that type of activity in general. Karate being apparently good at channelling one's aggressiveness.

Vessantara: By your saying that this quantum of negativity is stable, you don't mean to imply that it's irreducible?

S: Oh no. It's stable irrespective of the circumstances in which you find yourself, assuming you're not actually doing anything to reduce that

quantum of negativity. If you're working on it through meditation and so on that's quite another matter obviously. But the quantum does not change in accordance with changing circumstances. It merely finds a different object or manifests in a different kind of way.

Vessantara: Could you apply this idea of quanta to most negative, and perhaps even positive,...

S: Oh yes. I have applied it myself to positive mental states. There are some people that you find - they remain cheerful whatever the circumstances! They don't become less cheerful when, apparently, circumstances would warrant that. They just don't. It's as though they have an inner quantum of cheerfulness that is not affected by circumstances. If you put a beautiful meal in front of them they'll thoroughly enjoy it - they'll say, "Oh, it's a fine meal, a great meal," and even if you put a not very good meal in front of them they'll say, "Oh, it's great," and enjoy eating it. So their quantum of positivity and cheerfulness is just not affected by that. One knows or has known some such people. They don't go up and down in that respect in the way that a lot of people do. I think most people have a quantity - a quantum (well, everybody has a quantum, leaving aside their spiritual practice, in the case of those who do it) - of some kind of positive, or negative, or mixed (you know, positive and negative) attitude.

Kamalashila: So you don't think by releasing your quantum of negativity there's any danger of increasing your capacity for hatred? Is there any possible danger of that? Sort of developing more hatred through doing that?

S: We were talking about aggressiveness. And in the case of aggressiveness (as I said) karate does actually seem to reduce people's aggressiveness by allowing a legitimate, a constructive, outlet for that. That would seem to assume that the person concerned in this way is (so to speak) healthy - they've no more than a reasonable amount of aggressiveness. But if someone was to use (say) karate in a different kind of [145] way, and almost deliberately use it (I'm just taking the example of karate since it's to hand) use it not just to (as it were) release the aggressiveness that is already there, but even to build it up and intensify it, that would be quite another matter, and that would probably indicate some quite rooted neurotic disturbance in that person. And such a person might even speak in terms of getting into their aggressiveness, getting into their negativity, which really is a form of self-indulgence.

Kamalashila So in the case of someone releasing a quantum of negativity, that's exactly what they want to do. It's a more conscious thing...

S: There are people who seem to want to express their negativity, their aggressiveness, so as to be released from it, and there are others who want to express it for the satisfaction that they get from the experience of

it. I think these are two quite different things. And very often when people speak in terms of "getting into" this or that state, they mean I think experiencing it, or deriving satisfaction from experiencing it, in a self-indulgent sort of way. I think this applies very often to people when they speak of (say) getting into their sexuality. I think it's not that there's a certain amount, a certain quantum, of sexual energy which needs to be released, but they want to have the satisfaction of experiencing the expression of that energy for (very often) neurotic reasons. There's a very big difference between expressing a certain (let's say) negative state in order to be free from it, at least for a while, and expressing it because you want to enjoy a certain sensation, a certain frisson, from that.

Sarvamitra: In the past you have stressed that there is no excuse for expressing anger just in order to unblock your energy, so that would .. (unclear)..

S: Well, it depends on the kind of expression. If you're giving it (what I've called) legitimate expression, (say) in the karate dojo, well fair enough. But it's not fair (so to speak) to unblock your anger by expressing it at the expense of some other person. It may be unfortunate that you are blocked, but you have no right (to use that term) to inflict your anger on some other person so that you can be unblocked. You have to find some other way of doing it. If you're doing it in the dojo that's a quite different situation because you've agreed (as it were) to help each other just to do that sort of thing. You're ready for it, you're prepared.

Prasannasiddhi: It almost seems as if creative activity in general may well have an aggressive element to it.

S: Well, this would again depend on what one means by aggressiveness. One has to be careful here not to define the term too broadly or too loosely. But it has been pointed out that there is no creation without destruction. Now everybody saw that Dharmamudra was creating a head of me, but in order to do that he had to destroy a beautiful big lump of clay. He destroyed it as a lump of clay, do you see what I mean? So [146] in order to create something you have to destroy something else. So there is to that extent a destructive and even an aggressive element in all creativity - you have to attack the medium. You think of old Michaelangelo, when he really got going with his hammer and chisel the chips of marble used to fly - just like a snowstorm they said. I imagine that Michelangelo was in quite a mood at that time, and if you interrupted him in his work, well, it wouldn't have been a very pleasant experience for you. So one does sometimes find this, depending on the medium. I think if there is a medium like clay or like marble it's probably more likely to happen than if the medium was the comparatively more refined one of words.

Dharmamudra: Do most people have this quantum of negativity?

S: Well, yes. Most people have a quantum of negativity and they have a quantum of positivity too. You can perhaps strike a balance. What it really means is their emotional state, leaving aside questions of spiritual practice, tends to be basically stable, and to fluctuate with their environment and changing conditions only to a quite limited extent. It's as though people settle down in a certain positive-cum- negative attitude, especially after a while, and it's as though it takes a lot to change that. Something catastrophic will change it but the minor changes of everyday life will not change it very much.

Dharmamudra: I wondered in the spiritual community if you're conscious of that negativity whether that wouldn't in some way give you energy for your practice?

S: I think mere consciousness of negativity doesn't give you energy for your practice, but there are no doubt various ways in which some negative emotions - say aggressiveness - can be harnessed to one's spiritual practice.

Aryacitta: Do you think this quantum of negativity will always be there unless you change your life in order to absorb it or direct it?

S: Well it'll always be there if you don't do something about it. It won't just go away. And the only way that you can tackle it is through some kind of systematic spiritual practice or some kind of creative activity. It doesn't necessarily always have to be spiritual in the strict sense.

Dharmamudra: Does it exist in any way like the opposite of positivity?

S: Well it is a question whether negativity exists in its own right or whether negativity is frustrated positivity. I think that very often negativity is frustrated positivity, taking positivity in the very ordinary mundane sense.

Padmavajra: When you say positivity in the very ordinary mundane sense you mean healthy human desires and urges?

S: Yes. I'm not thinking of positivity in the sense, for instance, of metta, not in this connection. Anyway, let's [147] press on.

Vajranatha: This is a question arising out of .. (unclear).. a particular part of the text. There was just one sentence where we got a bit stuck. You said, "Nonviolence is said to be the highest rule of religion because violence is the basest rule of irreligion and - barring certain refinements introduced by the perverted imagination of certain monsters of iniquity - the most extreme form that unethical behaviour can take." That seems to suggest that there are forms of unethical behaviour worse than violence, and previously you defined violence as doing to another person what he does not want us to do to him. We couldn't really imagine what you meant

...

S: No, I just had in mind more 'refined' (inverted commas) of that same thing. For instance (I'll give you one particular example) during the Middle Ages there were some rather horrible cases of people murdering their enemies, but murdering them when they were in a state of mortal sin. So that they would not only kill them but send them to hell. That was the sort of thing that I had in mind. I didn't actually mention it because it just seemed too unpleasant to mention, but I mention it now just in response to the question. That would seem to go beyond violence in the ordinary sense. That would seem to be really perverted - that you could even want to send somebody to hell for ever and ever. What could that person have done to you - whatever he did - sufficiently bad to merit that sort of retaliation? So what sort of person would you be if you wanted to exact that sort of vengeance. But nonetheless that sort of thing has been done. You remember that Hamlet contemplates the possibility of such an action, but then he doesn't actually perform it, he draws back. I mean if he'd been as bad as that it would have spoiled Shakespeare's play, if you see what I mean. The play couldn't have contained such an enormity without ceasing to be a work of art.

Susiddhi: No, he draws back because Claudius is praying; Claudius would go to heaven if he killed him then.

S: Ah, that's right. Sorry, he did. But the thought occurs to him, he doesn't actually carry it out, but he does envisage the possibility of such a thing happening. But had he done that, had he caught Claudius in a state of mortal sin and despatched him, well, that action would have been so horrible that it would have burst the play asunder, it would have gone beyond the limits of tragedy. But anyway, that was the sort of perverted kind of thing I had in mind.

Vessantara: So it's almost as if in that quotation it's more as if killing is the basest rule of irreligion "barring certain refinements" rather than violence.

S: Say that again.

Vessantara: The way it reads it does seem as if you're contrasting violence with these other refinements, so that they weren't violence. It seems as if your point is that killing is the basest rule of irreligion because it's the worst of violence barring these refinements...

S: Yes, because those are killing plus something which is incredibly [148] worse. Was that all about that?

Vessantara: Kuladitya?

Kuladitya: This a bit of a small question: Would it not be less confusing, especially to people who aren't members of the WBO, if the positive

precepts were formulated to make ten instead of nine? So that there are actually ten positive precepts. In the front of the book it says "The Ten Positive Precepts" and then there are nine. I just wondered if it would be more...

S: Actually there are ten, but they're formulated in nine lines, if you see what I mean. I suppose it would have been better in some ways to have ten lines. It comes in the speech precepts doesn't it? How do they go?

Vessantara: 'With words kindly and gracious ... utterance helpful and harmonious.'

S: Yes, "helpful and harmonious"; there you've got the last two of the four speech precepts. So you've got them in one line instead of in four lines [sic]. Is that actually confusing or can it not just be pointed out?

Satyaloka: It's just because they're put against the negative ones.

S: Ah, I see, yes, yes. They're not usually printed like that are they? I think you probably have to have nine and you have to put then two numbers, don't you really. Where are they?

Satyaloka: Near the front, just before ...

S: Mmm?

Prasannasiddhi: Just after the Foreword.

S: Oh, after the Foreword. Ah, here we are. Ah, they haven't actually been given numbers. Yes. I would say probably it would be good if they were given numbers and then in the case of the ten positive precepts against that particular one, one put (what would it be) five and six.

Vessantara: Six and seven.

S: Six and seven. That would probably sort that one out. Yes, little things like this can confuse beginners quite a lot. One can always expand it to two lines, but that would require a moment of inspiration! We could have a competition if you like. (laughter) I'll give a prize for the best new line, or two new lines. The prize of course might be a copy of... (laughter). I don't in principle have any objection to expanding that one line into two if ever anyone does ever suggest a really good substitute in the form of two lines, I'm quite happy to consider that. OK.

Dipankara: With regard to the practice of paratmasamata and paratmaparivartana are these practices which we could undertake more fully? Because I know you mention in the Endlessly Fascinating Cry that one would expect a sensitivity and awareness of people, together with a lessening in preoccupation with self, to arise out [149] of our spiritual



practice. Did you mean by that the practice of metta? Could this making comparison take place in the metta bhavana, or is this sublime act only possible on the arising of the arising of the Bodhicitta?

S: Does this arise out of a passage in the text?

Dipankara: Yes.

S: Where is that? Let me just look at that.

Vessantara: Page fifty-two. Just after you produce the quote from the Bodhicaryavatara.

S: Ah, yes. Just before the Blake quote. Yes. I have talked about this on various occasions. What I have in mind in a sense is that one should use one's imagination more. This is what I think it really amounts to in practical terms, at least to begin with. It's not anything abstruse and metaphysical. You should do your best to imagine, to feel or to realize, what it is like to be in the other person's shoes. This is what it really boils down to. And very often, almost always, we find it very difficult to do this. We find it very difficult not just to see things from the other person's point of view, but to feel things (so to speak) from the other person's point of view, especially if for any reason we are in any situation of conflict with that other person. We know how it feels to be in our shoes, but usually we feel that so strongly that it excludes any other considerations. We're quite unable to imagine what it's like to be in the other person's shoes, and we therefore make no allowances for that, and we can become completely unreasonable and egoistic. So this is what is really called for: that we can just make an effort to imagine what it's like to be in the other person's shoes, to place ourselves in the position of the other person. It means to begin with no more than this, but this is a very great deal indeed. It doesn't involve (at least to begin with) reflecting on your ultimate metaphysical identity or non-duality; in a way that's almost a side issue, to begin with. But when you get angry with somebody, or you think they're really in the wrong, or just can't understand why they've done something, well, you should just try to consider, try to feel, what it would be like just to be in their shoes. Sometimes we just can't do that. Sometimes somebody might have had a great loss or a great misfortune, and they might be behaving quite unreasonably perhaps, because of that, or at least appear to be behaving quite unreasonably, but we can't seem to make allowances for that - we can't sort of empathize with them in that particular situation. We think they ought to be behaving reasonably and normally, quite overlooking that they've had a quite unfortunate experience of some kind or other. So this is something in a way that doesn't call for any specific exercise. It's something you need to remember and try to apply in all sorts of situations of life.

Vessantara: Can there be any real communication without that act of imagination?

S: One would have thought not. It's difficult to say just how much you need for how much communication. But I think if by communication you mean a sort of sharing of the other person's [150] life, or if it involves a sort of sharing of the other person's life, there must be a degree of empathy, and you must be able to place yourself in the other person's shoes at least to a small extent. If you're really unable to do that it would suggest that no communication could take place. It's sometimes very difficult for people to place themselves in the shoes of other people who are leading a different kind of life or in a different kind of situation, with different interests, different responsibilities. It's sometimes very difficult indeed.

Vessantara: So could you define a real communication as a communication which stems from and heightens a mutual imaginative empathy?

S: You could do that, yes. I mean, just to give an example, let's take the example of karate as it's ready to hand. A certain person may be going along to karate and getting quite a lot out of it, and somebody else may just not be able to understand why he's doing that, might consider it a sheer waste of time, and demand: Why is he wasting his time in that way? I thought he was supposed to be trying to lead a spiritual life... and so on and so forth. They're completely unable to place themselves in that person's position and try to understand why he is doing that, what sort of problem (perhaps) he's trying to solve in that particular way. They just see him going along to karate class (as it were) from the outside, and don't feel any sympathy, and perhaps condemn him accordingly or find fault with him accordingly. That's just quite a simple example. There are much more extreme examples than that, and more complex examples that one could think of. I mean people we know outside the FWBO find it quite impossible to understand why people (say) in the FWBO do the things they do and don't do the things that they don't do. Why they're vegetarians and live in single-sex communities and spend all their time in the shrine-room - don't seem to be having a good time. But it happens with practically everybody, in many many sorts of different ways - that you aren't able to enter imaginatively into the thoughts and the feelings of the other person. Somebody may feel very strongly about something, and you may just be unable to sympathize, or empathize, with that. You might say, "Why's he getting all worked up about that? It's nothing to get worked up about at all." But from his point of view perhaps it is.

Aryacitta: Do you think this can take place without actually experiencing the lifestyle that the other person can't sympathize with?

S: Well, I hope not, because that would limit the possibilities of empathy considerably. Because there are so many different kinds of lifestyle, and some of them are contradictory. I mean how can you be for instance married and unmarried at the same time? So does it mean that there's

going to be an unpassable gulf of misunderstanding between you and your married or unmarried friends as the case may be because of that? I think it is one of the characteristics of human beings, and especially the True Individual, that you can in fact empathize with somebody who is in a completely different position from you. I think it's easy enough to empathize to some extent with someone who's in the same sort of position, but to empathize with somebody in a completely different situation, well, it's much more a demonstration of true humanity or true individuality. [151]

Satyaloka: Would that be the key to developing it as well. Say you start a friendship with people who share the same sort of life as you, and work on that level. And then try and extend...

S: Well, clearly it is easier to empathize with people who follow the same lifestyle as you. But it isn't of course just in the case of people living in a community - it isn't just a question of the same lifestyle. You've chosen or you've opted for the same lifestyle for definite idealistic reasons. It would be difficult for you to empathize in the sense that I'm talking about with someone who was leading, actually, an unskilful life, following an unskilful life. You could empathize with him up to a point as a human being, but you couldn't empathize with him, say, if he was a slaughterhouseman, in respect of his actual lifestyle, because you would believe that that was morally wrong - unskilful.

Vessantara: Padmavajra.

S: Are we alright for time?

Vessantara: It's only twenty past.

Padmavajra: You've used the word existential (in the text) to describe the act of Going for Refuge. Could you (1) define the word existential, (2) say in what sense Going for Refuge is existential, (3) say if your use of the word has any reference to the so-called existentialist thinkers?...

S: I think all these three questions ... oh, four?

Padmavajra: ... and (4) What existentialist thinkers would you recommend to us for study, and why?

S: Oh yes, the fourth is a simple question. When I use the word existential in the text, I'm not using it in any technical sense of existential philosophy. When I use it in the text I mean pertaining to existence, pertaining to one's actual life and being, that is, pertaining to one's total being. Pertaining to the deepest level of man's existence. I'm using it in that sort of sense. Can you give me a phrase where. ..?

Padmavajra: "The ten precepts is the most direct ... manifestation of the

spiritual and existential act of Going for Refuge." (p.48)

S: Yes. Ah. Clearly I'm not satisfied with the term 'spiritual'. I feel that that could be misunderstood, I feel that it's a bit weak, it's not strong enough, so then I say "spiritual and existential". It's an act of your whole being, it's an act which involves your very existence. So the Going for Refuge has become (as it were) identical with your existence, you can't imagine your existence without it. It's existential in that sense, not in any technical sense of existential philosophy. So I think that answers the first three questions. (laughter) And then what was the fourth one?

Padmavajra: Well, you've said it doesn't really have any reference to the so-called existentialists.

S: Not consciously or deliberately. No. [152]

Padmavajra: Well then a separate question is: Would you recommend any existentialist thinkers for study and why?

S: Well, it would depend. It would depend what you had read. If you hadn't read a bit of Plato I wouldn't recommend the existentialists to you, I'd prefer you to read a few of Plato's dialogues first. If you'd read everything else in Western philosophy except the existentialists I'd probably suggest that you should read them. But some are more readable than others. If anyone just does want to look into them there are a few things which are more readable than others. I've always had rather a soft spot for Jaspers, and I've often recommended his "Way To Wisdom" as a very readable little book. I've got a copy of it at Padmaloka if anybody ever visits me there and wants to have a look at it. I've recently become very interested in Heidegger, but I wouldn't recommend him at all; he's extremely difficult, and he'd probably confuse you. Apparently some authorities consider him as one of the four or five greatest Western philosophers, along with Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Descartes; others consider him a complete humbug (laughter). So there seems to be a little obscurity somewhere. I personally find him quite interesting - I use the word interesting. I haven't read all that much of him - maybe four or five texts. But yes, not only interesting but quite stimulating in some ways, but not to be recommended to the tyro in philosophy, it might put you off philosophy for life - for several lifetimes in fact. (laughter) That wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing of course, depending on what else you did.

Vessantara: I think that's the end of the questions. Did you have one Aryadaka?

Aryadaka: I suppose, I guess. This is on abortion. Take the case of an unanticipated pregnancy occurring and the man refuses to assume the level of responsibility that the woman demands. So you have some emotional blackmail of sorts. So the woman decides because the man isn't going to support her, to have an abortion. If the man could have

prevented the abortion by giving in to the woman, would that have been the best action? At least for a time, he would have seen to it that the pregnancy was carried through. How much responsibility...

S: I would say that one should not permit anybody to shift their responsibility onto you. If you do that there's no end to it. I think it's one of the worst things that anybody could do - to try to shift what is their responsibility onto you, in this sort of way of emotional blackmail, saying if you don't do this or do that, then I will do something else. I think one must never allow that.

Aryadaka: Even in the case of the man being equally the cause of the pregnancy though. It's not his responsibility to see...?

S: Oh, yes. Well, one could (say for the sake of argument) take the view that it is his responsibility - let's agree on that. It parallels I think what I was saying yesterday. The fact that he does not accept his responsibility does not justify anybody else in committing any unskilful act. [153]

Aryadaka: But if he could prevent the abortion by taking another course of action, at least for a while, would that be better than if the woman had had the abortion because he had no responsibility?

S: You're speaking of responsibility for...?

Aryadaka: For the actual abortion.

S: No, I would say he has no moral responsibility, the moral responsibility is that of the person performing the action. You might say there is a causative responsibility, but not a moral responsibility. You cannot transfer moral responsibility in that sort of way. The fact that he did not agree to do whatever the woman wanted could be the cause of her actually procuring an abortion, but it would not be a cause in the sense of his being morally responsible, it would be a cause (so to speak) in a natural - or a neutral - sort of way.

Aryadaka: Because he's a man he doesn't have that responsibility.

S: No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying there is a difference between causing something and being morally responsible for it when you cause it. You can cause something without being morally responsible for it. And I think no one has the right to force anybody else into a position of taking what is in fact their moral responsibility. In other words if you (say) commit an unskilful action, you cannot say that you've committed it because of anything else that anybody has done. You have committed action - full stop. So one person in fact cannot prevent another performing an unskilful action. This is what it really amounts to.

Devamitra: In that sort of instance the woman may very well argue that

the man has made her have the abortion.

S: Oh yes, she may. But she'd be completely wrong. She would be confusing moral responsibility with natural causation. Well, yes, she probably would argue in that way, but this is what people very often do in all sorts of lesser situations too. They say, "You made me do this, you made me lose my temper - it's your fault, not mine." But you cannot shift moral responsibility in that way. The responsibility is with you, it's really a very unpleasant form of blackmail. If you say to somebody else "If you don't do such-and-such, well, I will have to do so-and-so." The "have to" indicating some unskilful action. I think you should never allow yourself to be put into that position.

Vessantara: So it would be better in that position not to succumb to emotional blackmail, even if that meant that an abortion would take place?

S: But you have to be careful here what you mean by better, because to begin with in any case, you don't know, for sure, that the woman, in this particular case, is actually going to carry out that threat. But if she does, you are not responsible. Because people can do this in all sorts of ways. She might say if you don't agree to marry me I'm going to throw myself over the cliff (laughter). Or someone might come to me and say, if you don't ordain me I'll kill myself. People have practically said that once or twice. It didn't move me in the least, (laughter) because I refused to be put into that sort of position. But one needs maybe a little bit of strength of mind not to allow oneself to be put into that sort of position. [154]

Vessantara: In the discussion that we had in our study group, some people seemed to feel that the preservation of life and prevention of the woman taking that unskilful step of having the abortion, was of paramount importance to the... For instance someone argued that if they were put in that position of a woman emotionally blackmailing them, the woman saying, "If you won't support the child when it's born, I'm going to have an abortion," it would be a good thing to do if need be to lie to the woman and say, "Oh yes, I'll support you," so that she didn't have the abortion, and then when she had the child not necessarily to support her.

S: Well, that would seem to lead to a very complicated situation because suppose she said, "Well, if you don't keep your promise I'm going to ill-treat the child". Because actually some mothers do this - it may sound a very dreadful thing but they do this - sometimes semi-consciously, they don't do it with a full conscious deliberateness - but they do take it out on the child to get at the father. So then it's almost as though the best thing to do would be to get the state to intervene and take away the children. This goes back a long way - is it Euripedes' Medea kills the - is it in the play or is it just in some other version of the legend? - but in some version (but not the version by Euripedes) she kills her children by Jason to punish Jason when he leaves her and goes off with some other woman. But from

another (say) purely practical point of view, if you start giving in to people's emotional blackmail there's no end to it. You cease to be your own master, you cease to be an individual, you become a slave. Then what can you do? What good can you do for anybody, whether yourself or anybody else? You need to maintain your freedom and responsibility as an individual. I think probably with ingenuity you could find some way around the sort of conundrum that has been propounded.

Manjunatha: In this case of the woman having an abortion, ultimately there is some responsibility for the man who actually...

S: Oh, yes. I'm not saying that, that's not the point. But if he doesn't accept that responsibility, that does not justify the woman, or any person in a similar position, in performing an unethical action. Perhaps he has behaved unethically to begin with. One can grant that for the sake of argument. But even so, that does not constitute a justification for a second unskilful action on the part of the other party to the transaction. But again I cited yesterday the example of theft. Somebody steals from you - that doesn't justify you stealing from somebody else. (But people reasoning this one they use)? this expression: "In that case I shall have to...". There's no "have to" about it, there's no compulsion really. I'm sure that there are all sorts of other ways of dealing with a situation of this sort. I think probably with ingenuity you could not give in to the woman's demands, but at the same time, make sure that she didn't have an abortion. I think one would have to perhaps be very determined that one would find a way out of that situation. But I think what one must not do is to allow oneself to be emotionally blackmailed by anybody. If one tries to emotionally blackmail another person in that way, what you're trying to do is to get them to surrender their moral responsibility to you. And you're trying in fact to enslave them. Of course it may be - let's go a little more deeply into this - supposing you refuse to be emotionally blackmailed, and supposing the woman does commit abortion, you do have some responsibility. [155] Because yes, it was you who did get involved with her in the first place. So yes, you do not actually commit the act of abortion yourself, nor are you in favour of it, but nonetheless there is some measure of responsibility, moral responsibility, with you inasmuch as you did get involved with the woman in the first place, and without proper thought perhaps. So this would of course lead one to think that one ought to think very, very carefully about possible consequences of one's actions. After all, alright, it's very difficult to speak in a general sort of way, but you should know what sort of women you're getting involved with. Are they likely to have recourse to emotional blackmail if that sort of situation developed? Are they emotionally unstable and neurotic? And why should you get involved in that sort of way with an emotionally unstable and neurotic person in the first place? All these sort of considerations arise too. Very often you can't do much, or your freedom of action in a situation is limited, just because you yourself have taken, already, a number of steps the end result of which is that your freedom of action is limited. It's a very difficult and unpleasant position to be in if you're emotionally

blackmailed by somebody, but on at least some occasion you yourself have contributed to putting yourself into that situation. In this particular case, by making the woman pregnant, you've delivered - well, not exactly delivered yourself bound and gagged into her hands, but pretty nearly. You've made yourself very vulnerable to any attack that she might wish to launch, or any attempt she might make to bring you under her control. So you should have thought about that before. So in such a situation even agreeing that you shouldn't allow yourself to be emotionally blackmailed, and even agreeing that if you don't allow yourself to be emotionally blackmailed and the woman does go ahead with the abortion, even agreeing that you are not responsible for that act of abortion in the same way that she is, nonetheless some measure of moral responsibility for the situation as a whole does rest with you, which you cannot really escape, and which you should perhaps have foreseen in the first place.

Vessantara: ...

S: Before you ask your question maybe I should just harp on this particular string a little more (laughter) because it does seem... we touched on this question of imagination and trying to imagine, trying to realize, what it was like to be in the other person's shoes. But also I think one should use one's imagination in envisaging possible consequences. Very often people just don't do that, they engage in this or they enter into that blithely, without thinking (almost) that there are such things as consequences in the world. So here also perhaps, when people do that sort of thing, there is a failure of imagination. And imagination in a way does link up with the whole notion of self-awareness and self-consciousness. Someone defined emancipation - I think it was Dr Johnson, though he was thinking of imagination in a rather negative sense - as the capacity to emancipate yourself from your present experience, and to project yourself into the future or into the past. But it's through imagination that you can rise above your present limitations. Through your imagination, say if you read a history book, you can project yourself way beyond the twentieth century, back into the fifteenth century, back into the fifth century BC and so on. You emancipate yourself from the order of space and time. This is all through the use of your imagination. In the same way you can emancipate yourself from your own bodily experience, project yourself into the bodily experience of some other person. In the same way through your imagination, emancipate yourself from the present, project yourself into the future, and foresee what will be the consequences of your present action. All these things involve use of one's imagination. In some ways it's as simple as that. So there is this connection between these two points: in both cases one needs to use one's imagination more. Both in empathizing with the other person and envisaging possible consequences of one's own actions. Very often you're blinded by the present experience. When you're unable to empathize with another person, you're blinded by your own experience, it gets in the way, you're so obsessed with it you can hardly think of somebody else's experience, hardly imagine them as a separate person, with needs and feelings, and attitudes of their own. And in the



same way when you're carried away - as usually is the case with sexual passion - you're so much in the present, you're so much into that particular moment, you're so absorbed in it and crave after it so strongly, that all thoughts of past, present and future, this world and the next, completely disappear, and you wake up afterwards as though out of a dream. And you think, "Oh my God, there might be consequences," or you might realize all sorts of other things: "Oh, what would her husband think?" or... (laughter). At the moment you were completely oblivious of those things perhaps. Most of you know, at least to some extent, what I'm talking about. But it's all lack of imagination. And this is one of the reasons I think why Shelley, in a passage that I've quoted, speaks of morals in terms of imagination. Imagination means going out of oneself, not being limited by the present mode of one's being. It's as simple as that. Suppose you're generous, you can forget your own needs, satisfy the needs of another person, you're generous, you're practising dana. Why is that? Because you've got imagination. Dana is a matter of imagination. You can feel the needs of the other person as much as you feel your own need. So it's not a question of (say) being good or being moral or being ethical. Maybe one should drop that terminology - just be a bit more imaginative. Be a little less bound by the present time and the present place and the present situation and your present body, your present needs, and all the rest of it. You can easily imagine that a cold selfish person isn't an imaginative person. Can you imagine for instance a poet who is cold, narrow, selfish, mean? Is it imaginable? Poets were usually warm, open-hearted, generous people who got into all sorts of scrapes and difficulties, but who usually could not be accused of meanness or narrowness or coldness. If they erred, they erred in other directions. I mean, think of poor Burns on his knees in the kirk doing penance for fornication, but he had imagination. (laughter) You can't imagine any of the Holy Willies of his day, about whom he wrote, writing Burns's poetry? Can you imagine a Holy Willie writing poetry of that order? It's unthinkable.

Padmavajra: John Donne? Was he perhaps mean, narrow?

S: Oh no. He was a very unholy Willie! (laughter) before and after his ordination, according to the book I've been reading recently. Yes that little book was quite an eye-opener.

Devamitra: Which book? [157]

S: A biography - a critical biography - of John Donne that Padmavajra gave me. I was formerly under the impression that John Donne's life (this is by the way) could be divided into two periods: a first profane period and a holy period, and the profane period ended when he became ordained and eventually became Dean of St Pauls. So whereas before his conversion (as one may call it) he wrote very secular poems about love, and after his conversion he wrote very holy poems about God. Oh no, I was completely mistaken, or maybe it was just a general picture which I latched onto,

which was wrong. No, this particular book makes it quite clear that basically there was no change in his attitudes throughout the whole of his life! But in the earlier part of his life they took (as it were) secular form, and during the later part of his life they took (as it were) religious forms. It was really the same John Donne, or the same Jack Donne, as he was known in his younger days. There wasn't really much of a change, not deep down.

Vessantara: That's all the questions on the first precept. We've got one on the second. Sarvamitra.

Sarvamitra: This is about taking the not-given in terms of time and energy.

S: Hmm. Hmmm. (laughter)

Sarvamitra: Well, we talked about this in the study group and if someone was doing this to you it was said that you were perfectly justified in just cutting them off at the moment, or altogether.

S: Sometimes you are, I think in sheer self-defence. I don't know what experience you all have of this sort of thing but some people can be remarkably demanding, exhausting, and draining. Almost like vampires; I think I use the word vampire in this connection don't I? And it isn't a very pleasant thing to have to do to, after all, another human being. But sometimes, at least for the time being, in sheer self-defence you have to do that. But perhaps you should be more skilled, or more skilful, in seeing the thing coming. Perhaps you need to develop ways of handling the situation. For instance one of the things you can do is look at your watch in a marked manner, in such a marked manner that they cannot but pause. And then you can say, well, I'm very sorry, I really have got something to do now, I'll see you some other time. Sometimes you can do that. But I think if there is a likelihood of your being brought into contact with them from time to time you have to try to see what it is that is making them behave in the way that they are behaving, and either try to counteract it or to open up the topic with them, so that they can try to understand their own position and do something about it. Or you can even speak to somebody else and ask them to tackle that person if you feel that you are not able to. I mean, they may be demanding attention for quite neurotic reasons. Well, perhaps you, or perhaps somebody, will have to go into that and try to help them sort it out.

But some people are very difficult in this respect. I've met in my time some very, very compulsive talkers and people who latch onto you in a really vampire-like sort of way, and they're often quite difficult to deal with. In my younger days I tended to be the victim of these sorts of people to some extent. I used to think, I think now probably wrongly, that as a bhikkhu it was my duty to be very, very patient, and put up with everything, [158] and bear everything. For quite a few years I genuinely

believed that, but I think now it probably wasn't always a good thing to do, that one (as it were) owes it to oneself not to allow oneself to be used in that way, because it doesn't, actually, really help that person. If it's just a temporary thing, they just temporarily want a shoulder to cry on, fair enough, but there are some people who do this persistently, and who go on doing it, for deeply neurotic reasons. You don't help them by listening to them for ten hours - that's sometimes done. They're no better after that ten hours of your listening than they were at the beginning - give them half a chance and they'll go on for another ten hours, and again be no better at the end. So if you have to cut them short, well it's a pity but sometimes in your own self-defence you have to do that. But if you possibly can, help that person, or see that they get help in resolving the problem that they obviously have. Sometimes there is of course another relatively innocent time-wasting person who hasn't got much to do and wants a bit of company and a bit of chat. Maybe he's not especially neurotic but he just doesn't realize that you're busy. Maybe he likes you, maybe likes your company - in that case you can probably just take him ... I was going to say by the hand, but maybe you shouldn't... but anyway just take him aside and say, well, "Look, I like to talk with you, and I like your company," if you can in fact say that, but say, well, "look, I'm busy and I've got work to do. Let's make arrangements to meet on some other occasion when I can really be with you and give you my attention, which I can't do now."

Dharmamudra: I've always found it quite handy to give people like that something to do. (laughter)

S: That's true, if the situation permits that, yes.

Dharmamudra: 'Cos then if they get fed up they don't come round (laughter)

S: But if they're really neurotic in this sort of way, they're not so easily put off.

Dharmamudra: They'll probably work harder. (laughter)

S: But the question was whether in extreme cases of this sort, you've got the right (though I don't think you used that expression) to just break off. I think in some cases you've no alternative, but you should let them down as lightly as you can, and if you can help them in any way, well, certainly do that. I think you're under no obligation to allow yourself to be vampirized indifferently.

Vessantara: Do you think there's any way you can tell except just by experience the difference between someone who neurotically seeks attention and when they get it it's not going to help them, and somebody who seeks attention because they need attention?

S: I personally find (this may be due to experience - but I can tell almost instantly, because) as soon as someone who is really neurotic starts talking to you, there's a completely different feel to it than there is in the case of someone with a real need. I found that if someone comes to you with a real need, which they're really trying to sort out, however much time and energy and attention you have to give them, it is not draining. And this is perhaps in [159] a sense quite interesting, even remarkable. It is not draining if there is a genuine need that you're attending to and with regard to which you're trying to help that person. If it's a real crisis - maybe they've been bereaved or something of that sort - that is not draining in the way that these other things are.

Sarvamitra: I was wondering how far you could be justified in using just your own subjective experience, whether you're being drained or not, to cut off...

S: Well, if you feel drained, you feel drained. That's your experience. Perhaps you should be stronger. But if you actually do feel drained, well, you'd better be careful.

Dharmabandhu: Is it not in certain situations like that, you might be drained because you've just don't want to give to the demands of the other person?

S: Oh yes, that is quite possible. Sometimes you can be drained by resistance to being involved in that person's troubles and difficulties. Oh yes, you can be drained because of conflict within yourself. You feel, or you know, that you ought to be interested in them, ought to be helping, but actually you just don't want to know. That's the truth. So there can be a tremendous conflict, and where there's conflict of that sort, yes you will feel drained always. So sometimes that can happen too. But then what are you to do? You can't really do very much on the spot, you just have to work on yourself generally and develop your imagination, and be better able to enter into other people's situations and other people's needs. I think sometimes a person may have a need and it would be very good if you could meet that need. But I think you have to be careful not to force yourself too much because in extreme cases you can even end up almost hating the very people that it looks as though you're trying to help, or you can be going through the motions of helping them and talking to them nicely and making all sorts of suggestions, but deep down you may be bitterly resenting the whole situation, and that isn't good for you and probably isn't good for them. So don't try to act the Bodhisattva before you really are a Bodhisattva. Yes, you can stretch yourself a bit, but not to the extent that it becomes counter-productive. Anyway, that's all I think.

Session 9. 29th October 1984 Tuscany Questions on the second and third precepts.

Vessantara: ... ten or eleven questions on the second and third precepts.

Some groups have got a bit further than others.

S: Before you ask those questions, I was just wondering how people got on with Shakespeare, with that poem or with that part of it which I've quoted: The Phoenix and the Turtle. I expect Abhaya's group did rather well (laughter).

Abhaya: I'm afraid we didn't actually.

S: I just thought of making one little point, it seems really absurd, and you probably didn't misunderstand. But just in case you did, turtle here means turtle-dove. Yes, you got that? (various noises) If you didn't realize it was turtle-dove, you had the idea at the back of your mind of this strange relationship between a phoenix and a turtle! Yes, it's a turtle-dove. But the language is very condensed, and it needs quite a lot of study, and perhaps some day we'll have to do that. For instance, the word "property", that needs to be properly understood.

Abhaya: The word "right" too.

S: Yes. Anyway, no need to go into that at the moment.

Vessantara: We'll start with Satyananda.

Satyananda: What was it about?

Vessantara: You were talking about changing the ...

Satyananda: Ah. In the text later on, Bhante, you talk about generosity not being a suitable word for the precept on covetousness, and love not being a suitable word for hatred, and give two substitutes. Just to carry on from last night when we were talking about changing the .. (unclear) . . if you're considering changing the ...?

S: This point has been raised already and has been discussed by some Order members back in England, but I must say I haven't yet got around to considering it. But I don't see in principle why the wording shouldn't be (so to speak) brought up to date or brought into line with later usages that we've developed. I think didn't I suggest that compassion would be a better counterpart for hatred, and wasn't it contentment?

Voices: Tranquillity.

S: Tranquillity would be a better counterpart for...?

Voices: Generosity.

S: Yes. I just haven't had time to think about it systematically. One would just have to consider any other possible implications, but on the face of it I

don't see why we shouldn't change, if the change doesn't produce inconsistencies in some other area. Because I think that, yes, compassion is a more accurate positive counterpart for - I mean emotionally and spiritually accurate counterpart for - hatred. And tranquillity a more accurate counterpart for greed, though even tranquillity isn't quite right. We don't really have, it would seem, a completely appropriate English word. Contentment covers part of the meaning, but only a bit, because contentment can suggest a sort of self-satisfaction, even complacency, which tranquillity of course doesn't. So yes, I think I've got letters about this on my desk back at Padmaloka, so I shall be giving some consideration to this, and maybe we shall change some of these wordings.

Vessantara: In talking about the second precept, you say, "Within the Order itself, that is to say between Order members themselves, whether individually or 'collectively', there can be no question of taking that which is not given, and therefore no question of [161] indebtedness in the ordinary sense, since although members of the Order do not hold their property in common, it is widely accepted that, within the Spiritual Community, common ownership is the ideal." (p.61). As that stands, if you just take it logically, it implies that if two people hold an ideal then they can't break that ideal...

S: Give me the page number.

Vessantara: Page sixty-one, bottom.

S: Sixty-one. Hmm. Yes, when I say within the Order itself there can be no question... I'm talking about in principle. And ideally if the Order is really functioning as it should, if Order members are functioning as they should, if they really are members of the Spiritual Community, if there is that sense of community and common ownership, or if you like common non-ownership, between them or among them, then the whole conception of indebtedness in the ordinary sense isn't really strictly applicable, is it? But it's as though what I'm saying is that's the ideal, but at present we have a situation which falls somewhat short of that. So we don't want to have relations of indebtedness between Order members in exactly the same way that people have them outside the spiritual community. On the other hand we can't but acknowledge that we haven't been able yet to live up to the ideal of spiritual community fully in this respect. That's why I say "...and no question of indebtedness in the ordinary sense, since although members of the Order do not hold their property in common..." I'm recognizing that, yes, we haven't yet succeeded in fully living up to the ideal of spiritual community, "it is widely accepted..." I'm not saying even widely practised, it's widely accepted; it's agreed, at least in principle or in theory, that within the spiritual community "common ownership is the ideal". So we're trying to work towards that. So it's as though we're in a sort of uncomfortable half-way position. We don't have full common-ownership within the spiritual community because in most cases it just isn't a spiritual community really in the full sense yet. On the other hand

we don't want to think in terms of indebtedness between Order members, in the way that we think of other people outside the spiritual community. Do you see what I'm trying to get at?

Vessantara: Yes. I just felt it did need a bit of qualification, because if it's not clear that you're saying 'ideally' then if you took an extremely bad case, one Order member could borrow something from another and claim that he was under no obligation to give it back because it was agreed that we held everything in common, so he might just as well have it as the person who owned it.

S: Well yes, the question would have to be raised, well, was that person himself actually, genuinely, making an effort to live in that way. I think it would soon be obvious whether that person was or wasn't. I think it'd be very difficult within the spiritual community, however imperfect, to bluff people in that sort of way very successfully. After all they might come along and borrow your records if you'd borrowed their books. But you see the sort of position I'm envisaging? We're sort of poised halfway between full practice of the ideal and conducting our affairs in the way people usually do conduct them in the group. So there must be (as it were) some modification of the idea of indebtedness as usually practised within the spiritual community, [162] at least some modification of that. I think very often there is.

Vessantara: How do you envisage that ideal of common ownership functioning in practice, say in how many years time (if) we are working towards a spiritual community?

S: The only definite thought I've had in this connection so far has been that I think if common-ownership is to be introduced in a spiritual community, it must begin in a spiritual community which is quite small, and the members of which all know each other quite well, in fact very well. And in fact in which the people are all quite close friends. I don't think you can have a large community and have a sort of chapter meeting or community meeting or house meeting and decide that from tomorrow we're going to hold everything in common. I don't think that would work. I think it has to be in a sense a sort of natural development, just as very often, to give that sort of analogy or comparison, usually husband and wife hold everything in common, maybe not always legally, or maybe they don't always do that. But quite often husband and wife do hold everything in common, just because of the intimate nature of the relationship which exists between them. So if you've got say three, four, five people, living together very closely and intimately in a spirit of spiritual friendship, there will be that tendency to share to begin with, and eventually actually just to own everything in common, perhaps even in the legal sense. But I think (this is my idea at present) that this is the way in which common ownership within spiritual communities will tend to develop. It's not going to be an easy matter, for all sorts of reasons that you can probably think of. There is also the question to be considered at some time: the extent to

which personal property is even necessary for some people , at certain stages at least, as an expression of their individuality. There are some people who argue in that way. That you almost need property, something that is yours. You can feel quite sort of helpless or at a loss without that. So I think that is something that would need to be understood quite thoroughly first. I think people who do live holding things in common would need to have attained quite a high degree of psychological maturity, and even to some extent spiritual maturity. I don't think it's something that can be (as it were) enforced like a sort of rule that has been made - something to which you have to conform - or even to which you decide you will conform. I think it has to grow and develop in a much more natural way than that. But certainly in the case of all living within a spiritual community, whether officially in a common property situation or not, the sense of ownership, the sense of mine, that this is mine, it's not yours, should progressively diminish. Some people don't like lending their records - I'm not referring to lending them to people who don't look after them, but some people just don't like lending things which belong to them anyway, however careful the borrower might be going to look after them. Alright, carry on.

Vessantara: Dipankara?

Dipankara: Yes, this question actually follows on quite nicely. Let's see where do I start, because you've covered some of this. You say it's by observance of the second precept that Order members are imbued with the spirit of sharing. And you seem to be encouraging the idea of sharing as the equivalent of generosity. And this is just what I wanted to get your comments on. To me it seemed that [163] there were certain distinctions between sharing and generosity. Firstly that there wasn't the sense of loss involved in sharing which you might get in the practice of generosity, so the idea might be more acceptable from that point of view. And also, more practically, that the sharer remains nominally the owner, and so is in a position to take responsibility for the maintenance of the item shared or loaned, which does seem to be quite necessary. I'm thinking of things like tools, cars, that sort of thing. Things where the items actually require maintenance. And so what's actually in this case given away is the depreciation of the item - we know that things being impermanent they do wear out, so that there was actually something given away in the practice of sharing. I'd just like your comments on that.

S: Do I suggest that sharing and generosity are the same thing?

Dipankara: Well, you talk about the principle of generosity or sharing.

S: I don't mean to suggest that generosity and sharing are exactly the same thing, though clearly they're connected. Because generosity is giving, and usually when you give something you no longer possess it, whereas you can share something with another person and it doesn't go out of your hands (so to speak) in the same way. Though when one



speaks of sharing it isn't (as it were) just sharing in general or in the abstract. It isn't necessarily in the sense that you share something which belongs to you with somebody else. You can share in something that belongs to another person, or you can share equally (as it were) in something which doesn't actually belong to any of you. But anyway having said that let's go on to your particular points. Can you just go through them one by one?

Dipankara: Well, first of all with sharing there wasn't the sense of loss experience, and because of this...

S: With giving it isn't necessarily a sense of loss, but yes, objectively, if you give something, in the sense of giving it away, then you no longer have it. If you give someone a pencil it's no longer in your pocket - it's now in his pocket, you don't share the pencil. Sharing means he uses it for a while and then you use it and so on. But when you give you usually give away, so in that sense, yes, there is a difference.

Dipankara: I think here I was thinking of sharing in the sense of declaring something that I might own as being for common use.

S: I would say that if you say that somebody else can use what belongs to you, you're not sharing that thing, you're sharing the use of it with them. I would make that distinction, because it does remain yours, you are allowing them to make use of it, you're not sharing the thing itself (I would say) with them, or with others, so much as the use of that thing while retaining ownership of it yourself - which is fair enough, that is a sort of intermediate stage, if one decides to do that. Very often one shares books with people in that sense - you lend them books. They remain your books, and eventually they return to you, but you've shared the use of them, you've shared the benefit of them, with other people, without them ceasing to be your personal property. [164]

Dipankara: So this seems to be more the level that most of our communities are at.

S: This is true, yes. This is true.

Dipankara: I was wondering if sharing in this sense, if it was more acceptable as an ideal for this reason...

S: Well, I think the point is that one has to go step by step, and I think in the case of people who formerly have not only had things which belonged to them, but did not allow anybody else to use them, this is clearly the next step. So I think that when you move into a spiritual community you should usually, given that other people in the spiritual community are responsible people, you should be prepared to allow them to use things which, still, actually do belong to you. That is to say your books, your records, your clothes, or whatever else you may have. That does seem to

be the next step. I certainly don't think it possible, as I suggested before, that people should go straight away into fully fledged common-ownership or common property. I doubt if that's psychologically possible. So yes, this represents the next step up.

Dipankara: What's the step beyond that, and how's that accomplished? Say between sharing the use of an object and sharing more in the sense of common ownership?

S: I think common ownership is the next step. But common use - let's call your step the common use step - even that's quite a big step for a lot of people. I think one should be quite clear about that common use, and have established that principle effectively, and that should be working before you even think of common- ownership, even within the small intimate community situation.

Dipankara: I know we found the next step was if something was held in common no one actually owned it, therefore no one was taking responsibility for its maintenance, and the thing ...

S: Well, we know that that happens. That happens inside spiritual communities, outside spiritual communities. So what is important is if you have a situation like that, those who share in that particular item, and who own it in common, need to get together among themselves and decide and agree who is going to be responsible for things like maintenance, otherwise it is not going to happen. So this is part of setting up the common ownership situation. When you set that up, simultaneously there must be an agreement amongst you as to who is going to be responsible for whatever maintenance of the item is necessary. Suppose it's a car - alright you decide that one particular person is going to be responsible for maintenance (say) for one year, even though the car is the property of all of you. So I would say that that sort of arrangement, that sort of agreement, is an essential part of the setting up of the common-ownership situation itself. Without it the common-ownership situation, in practice, is pretty meaningless. I remember hearing quite a bit about how things functioned in Tibetan monasteries. They're very well organized in this way, because in Buddhist monasteries traditionally there are certain items which a monk can possess personally, everything else belongs to the whole community. In other words it's owned in common. So over the centuries Buddhist [165] monks in Buddhist monasteries have developed ways of dealing with this common property. For instance, just to give you an example, in every Tibetan monastery there are certain office bearers who are elected every year or every two years. Let's say that one of them is the sacristan, as he would be called in the West. That is to say he's in charge of the images and the puja bowls and things of that sort. So all those things belong to the monastery, they belong to the monks (as it were) collectively, they belong to the community. But for one year that man has charge. When he takes charge an inventory is drawn up. All the items are checked, that all these items are actually there. So he signs the

document to the effect that he has received all these items. And he is now responsible for looking after them. At the end of the year, when somebody else is elected (and these offices usually go by rotation) that document is produced, and whatever he received and signed for, he now has to hand over. If anything is short, if anything has been broken, or mislaid, he is responsible, he's got to replace it, because it is the property of the whole community. So in this way within a Tibetan monastery, as in fact within other Buddhist monasteries, there are these very definite concrete arrangements made for the actual care or maintenance of different kinds of common monastic property. And it works very well. Otherwise nobody knows who's going to polish the bowls or who's going to check the china, or who's going to see to the cultivation of the fields, well, if there are hundreds of you and nothing is organized the result would just be chaos. And their chaos would be chaos in the same way in a community of five if there isn't a clear understanding as to who is responsible for what in respect of the maintenance of or care for property which you hold in common. So therefore I say that it's not enough to agree that we're going to hold such-and-such in common. Where it requires maintenance you have to agree also who is responsible for maintaining it on behalf of us all. Was there anything else? I've an idea there was.

Dipankara: That covers it. Thank you.

Jnanavira: You remark, just before quoting Shakespeare and just after already having quoted Walt Whitman, Shelley and Wordsworth, that before preparing the paper you didn't realize the poets would have so much to say on the topic of ethics. Do you think you could say why you think this is so, and why you found that poetry accords more with your views on ethics, that you express in the paper, than examples that you could have culled from, say, Western philosophical tradition?

S: I won't say that I couldn't have found quotations in the Western philosophical tradition. I probably could have done. But the quotes from the poets just (sort of) came into my mind. I wrote this very quickly and didn't spend much time on research or anything like that. But having said that I think the answer to the question is to be found in something I said the other evening, I think with particular reference to Shelley. I said something to the effect that there was really no morality without imagination, and that the poets, some of them at least, seemed to be (as it were) authorities on ethics just because they had imagination, and they could enter into the lives of other people, they could empathize with other people. And unless you can empathize with other people, unless you can feel what it's like to be in the other person's shoes, you can't act towards them with that consideration, which [166] would seem to be of the very essence of ethics. So I think the poets come close to morality, or ethics, where they do, just through their imagination. And I think what we usually think of as a good person, but don't particularly admire, is a person who (sort of) keeps all the rules - you can't fault them - but they've no imagination. It's not that they are able to place themselves in the shoes of

the other person, they're just afraid to step out of line. I think that's the short answer to the question, that the poets have imagination, and you require imagination to be an ethical person. Not that the poets were invariably ethical persons themselves. Though I think they probably didn't fall noticeably below the real general level of morality of their time.

Jnanavira: Do you think you could say that somebody like Hitler had imagination as to what the German race could do - what he could do as an individual. He had a very definite vision (you could even say) of himself. But certainly he had no real moral sensibility behind him whatsoever.

S: Someone did ask that question some time ago and it's dealt with in a Mitrata. I think this comes back to the definition of imagination. It can be defined, or the word can be used, in two very different senses. I think this is illustrated for instance by Dr Johnson's use of the word imagination. I don't know how many of you have read Rasselas. You ought to have read it, every one of you. Maybe we should have a study group on Rasselas. It would be very very good. But anyway there is a chapter in that - a short chapter entitled "The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination". Dr Johnson saw imagination, as he usually used the term, (sometimes he used it in a different way) but he saw it in the sense in which he usually used it, as something very dangerous, something to be guarded against. He identified it, using it in that sense, more with what afterwards came to be called fancy, in the sense in which fancy was distinguished from imagination by such people as Coleridge. Johnson thought of imagination as that which enables one to emancipate oneself from one's actual present condition in a negative - what we might even call a neurotic - sense. According to him it was imagination that enabled you to indulge in daydreams. For instance indulge in daydreams in a Walter Mittyish sort of way, and also to indulge in what we would now call nostalgia for the good old days. So he saw imagination as representing, in that sense, a sort of flight from reality, a flight from the present real situation. So he usually used imagination in that sense, and he felt that imagination in that sense was something dangerous and something to be combatted. Sometimes, though more rarely, he used the word imagination in much the way that Coleridge uses it - as a sort of higher visionary faculty. Now if one speaks of Hitler as having imagination, it would be more in that first sense. In other words he was able to project into the future this vision - the Aryan race lording it over the rest of the world, which seems to be based on his own sort of neurotic feelings of personal inadequacy, which were shared by many German people at that time, and so on and so forth. So one couldn't speak of Hitler's imagination or vision in the sense in which you speak of the imagination and vision of great poets. One can speak of his imagination, using that term in the sense in which Johnson used it. One might say that in his case there was certainly a "dangerous prevalence of imagination", and one can perhaps distinguish two kinds of vision in the same way. I have in fact done that. I think I've called the lower kind envisagement, and [167] the other kind vision. So I'd make that sort of distinction.

Jnanavira: Do you think there's a dangerous prevalence of imagination in the Order, in that sense?

S: A getting away from the present? Flight into the future? Regression into the past? I don't think so particularly. I mean escapism, using the word in the sense in which it usually is used, is something of this sort. Distraction is something of this sort. You could probably say that there's a certain amount of escapism within the Order, escaping into maybe a bit of social life outside the movement - escaping sometimes into unhealthy relationships, one could say that. And also distraction of one kind or another, as when people go to (say) see a film for no particular reason than that they somehow feel restless and they'd like to see a film. They don't particularly care what. So perhaps it's more prevalent more in these sort of forms. But in each case one is for some reason or other not content to stay with the situation that you're actually in, or to face up to its demands, or to face yourself as you are in that particular situation.

I mean Johnson seems to have a very lively sense of the tendency of human beings to what we'd now call escapism. He was very much a victim of it himself and was painfully conscious of the fact, so he knew all about it from the inside, as it were. He didn't spare himself, but he wasn't able actually to do very much about it, which he was constantly regretting and repenting of. But that enabled him to analyse this sort of diversion, this sort of situation, this sort of mental state, probably as well as it's ever been analysed. Not so long ago, having acquired a complete set of Johnson's works (well, not really complete, because it was the first edition which wasn't quite complete) I re-read all his essays, which are mainly moral essays - mainly moral, with some essays of literary criticism and social comment. But his capacity for psychological analysis - very deep and thoroughgoing psychological analysis - is really quite amazing, and he is still very much worth well reading. If one does read him, I suggest don't just automatically pick up a volume of selections, because the people who make the selections have their own criteria, which are not necessarily ours. They often leave out the most interesting essays. In particular - well, we were talking the other day about capital punishment - there is an excellent essay by Johnson about capital punishment, on the subject of capital punishment, which he is strongly against, he's strongly opposed to it, even at that time. At that time, as you know, you could be executed in Britain - I think there were more than two hundred capital offences - you could be executed for stealing a sheep. And he commented that to level sheep stealing with murder was to level murder with sheep stealing. That was the sort of (in a sense) common sense way in which he approached it. But he was opposed to capital punishment.

Padmavajra: Do you think that Johnson was in some ways frightened of imagination in the sense of the ability to empathize? I was thinking of when he was a child, apparently when he read Shakespeare he really... I believe one of the plays he almost... he was very... Was it Lear? [168]

S: No, it was Othello. He didn't read it when he was a child. He read it quite early, and he did comment later when he was editing Shakespeare, that he was glad that he'd finished the revisal of this frightful play. He meant frightful in the sense of terrifying. Because the experience of reading it (even) had shaken him emotionally to such an extent. I think this is something different. He did possess the capacity to empathize. This is a very, very noticeable feature of his life. Despite his rough exterior he was a very kindly and even compassionate man, who took a lot of trouble with other people, even - well, especially - people whom everybody else neglected and wouldn't put up with and wouldn't put themselves out for. He even maintained very difficult and troublesome people in his own house year after year, and looked after them all despite all their squabbles and bickerings. So there was a very strong streak of compassion. But I don't think he was afraid of strong emotion. He was very afraid of unreason. He had a personal fear of insanity. He was even afraid of going insane. So anything in literature that seemed to be going a bit over the edge sometimes caused him to panic a bit. It is generally believed that his very rough, not to say savage, treatment of Swift - I mean in his life of Swift - was due to this, because I mean Swift ended up not exactly mad, but he went very much into his dotage and was very strange and odd in his behaviour the last few years of his life, and it does seem that Johnson was very afraid of ending up in that particular way, which of course actually he didn't.

Padmavajra: That seems to be a common feature of that period - I was thinking of Christopher Smart and Gray and Cooper - they all seemed to be quite melancholy or mad. Could you comment on that?

S: Well, I think it's very difficult to generalize, because in every period there are people who are melancholic and mad, there are plenty of them in the twentieth century. But it does seem that there were certain strains to which all those people were subjected. There was the big strain, as there must have been, in that whole transition from pre-industrial to post-industrial. And usually people like poets pick up on these things, or feel them, or respond to them before other people. And then there was the religious predicament. Johnson had been brought up as a strict Christian by a mother who seems to have been Calvinistically inclined, in a very strong sense of sin and unworthiness. He was ridden with feelings of guilt. And it seems that Cooper was in much the same sort of situation, and probably Christopher Smart as well. Not so much is known about him. And there were other cases too, So perhaps one can say if one can generalize in this way about those particular individuals, that on the one hand there were the strains inherent in the whole transition from pre-industrial to industrial, and again the strains of the religious situation, especially in the case of those who were influenced by Calvinism, you know - a strong sense of sin and guilt. I think probably more than that one can't say. One would need to go very much into detail, investigate those lives thoroughly and see what influences were actually at work in that century. But reading

about Johnson, reading the life of Johnson, one is conscious of a lot of very great tensions, which were [169] behind (of course) some of his best work in some cases. But certainly in the essays which I've mentioned - he wrote a series called The Rambler, a series called The Adventurer, and a series called The Idler. The Rambler, which is the longest series and the best known, came out twice a week. It was just a little twice-weekly paper, consisting of just this essay by Johnson, he brought them out twice a week for two-and-a-half years and ended the series. And then there was The Adventurer to which he contributed, and The Idler to which he contributed. But those essays are well worth reading and are quite notable examples, many of them are very acute psychological analyses, and very vivid pictures of contemporary social life, and types of people. These are not usually anthologized. He had a very keen insight into different ways of life, different lifestyles. He was very interested, in fact quite fascinated, by the lifestyles of different people. And he consorted with people of all sorts. In his earlier days - the period which is not covered by Bosworth in any great detail - he seems to have led a thoroughly Bohemian sort of life, mixed with some very strange - not to say questionable - characters indeed, and even to have made quite close friends with some of them, like Richard Savage whose life he afterwards wrote. Anyway that's all by the by.

Vessantara: Dipankara?

Dipankara: In the case of the Bodhisattva, you've said generosity reaches the point where "the giver, the gift, and the recipient of the gift, cease to be distinguishable". In the White Lotus Sutra Akshayamati offers Avalokitesvara his pearl necklace, which Avalokitesvara will not accept, till finally the Buddha asks him to do so for the benefit of all living beings, and having compassion on Akshayamati. I couldn't understand why he didn't take the necklace in the first place. Could you relate the event to an application of this precept at the Bodhisattva level?

S: Who was giving and who was receiving?

Dipankara: Akshayamati, having gone through his hymn of praise, offered his own pearl necklace - took off his pearl necklace...

S: Yes, I remember the incident, I'm just trying to get the names right.

Dipankara: Oh. Akshayamati.

S: Akshayamati gave to...?

Dipankara: Avalokitesvara.

S: Ah. That's what I wanted to check. Well, Avalokitesvara, I would say, was giving the Buddha the opportunity, or the occasion, to make the nature of the occasion fully explicit. After all there were lots of people

present, some of them perhaps unenlightened, so here was Akshayamati offering a valuable necklace to Avalokitesvara. Had he accepted it on the spot some of those present might have entertained doubts about him - that he was accepting it out of greed. So to [170] guard against that he refused it, and gave the Buddha the opportunity of thereupon inviting him to accept it for the benefit of all living beings (as it were). Whereupon he accepted it. It was therefore made clear to everybody that he was not accepting it out of greed, but simply for the benefit of all living beings. I would say that some such was the explanation.

Dipankara: What made me think of that example was when you were talking about generosity in the case of the Bodhisattva and the gift, the recipient, and the giver being indistinguishable. What did you mean by that?

S: Well, it's not exactly me; it's the sutras. (laughter) Well, I meant exactly what I said, or the sutras, rather, mean exactly what they say. Well, if it isn't (as it were) clear instantly there isn't really anything one can say to make it clear. The only way in which I can even begin to make it clear is by means of an analogy that I sometimes use - that of the person (say) playing a musical instrument. That when you're playing a musical instrument, when you're performing that particular piece of music, you're so absorbed in it that there is in fact no difference between you, the musical instrument, and the music that you're producing. It's as though (let's say) the instrument is a part of your own body. It becomes like an extension of your body like another limb. And you're so absorbed in the music that the music is you, it's what you are producing, it's your expression, so in a sense there are three things there. Yourself, the instrument, and the music, but in a sense there aren't three things there. One can only say in a sense that there's only one thing there. So that's the best analogy that I can think of for this sort of state referred to by the Mahayana sutras, in which the giver, the gift, and the recipient, are (so to speak) one. For instance - you can perhaps approach it in another way - supposing you give something, and you give something to someone of whom you're very fond, who's very close to you. You don't really feel that you're giving something, because you identify with that person to some extent. It's as though it's going from one pocket into another, not from you to him. But if for instance you give something to someone you don't particularly like, you're very conscious of actually giving something, you're losing it and they now have it, and maybe you're not completely pleased that they should have it, there's a very definite sense of duality which there isn't, not to the same extent, in the first instance. (pause) You seem to know what I'm talking about.

Vessantara: All the rest of the questions relate to the third precept.

S: So how is the time going?

Vessantara: It's twenty past eight. We've about half-a-dozen questions.



Indrabodhi?

Indrabodhi: This is a question on Buddhist cosmology. In the lecture you gave to the Wrekin Trust...

S: Ah. Before you ask your question could I point out that [171] at the top of page 64 a couple of words have been left out [1984 edition] so that it seems that the human world, those two words have been left out, they're not enumerated. The animal world, comma, and then should be inserted, the human world, comma, and after that, and the world of the lower gods. Just in case someone asks why they've not been enumerated. OK.

Indrabodhi: The question is to do with page 64. In the lecture you gave to the Wrekin Trust on the Bodhisattva, Evolution and Self-Transcendence you speak of three planes of existence. The worldly plane - the realm of people who have sensuous desires - which is the wheel of life, the spiritual plane - the realm of archetypal form and no form...

S: Which is the wheel of life? The worldly plane isn't completely identical with the wheel of life. Anyway, we can go into that in a minute.

Indrabodhi: It doesn't actually affect the question. (laughter) The spiritual plane - the realm of archetypal form and of no form - these constituting states of existence up to but not including Stream Entry, and then (3) the Transcendental or Nirvanic plane - Stream Entry and beyond. On page 64 of the Ten Pillars you talk about the realm of archetypal form as being inhabited by non-returners, whereas in the other formulation, the archetypal realm and the realm of no form are beneath the realm of Stream Entry.

S: I'm not sure that I quite got that. But anyway, just let's start in the middle (laughter). When I speak of the archetypal... what do I call it?

Indrabodhi: The realm of archetypal form.

S: Perhaps I'd better make it clear first of all that though there is a threefold division in the two papers, it's a different threefold division in each case. In the Wrekin Trust lecture there's the division of the worldly plane, as I've called it - that corresponds to kamaloka or world of sensuous experience or plane of sensuous experience, then in the Wrekin Trust lecture I speak of....?

Indrabodhi: The realm of archetypal form and of no form.

S: Yes. So I've lumped (as it were) two planes together there, as the second plane for the purposes of that lecture. These comprise planes two and three of the Ten Pillars, that is to say the rupaloka and the arupaloka. And then in the Wrekin Trust lecture the third plane there, which really in terms of this lecture would be a fourth plane, is the plane of the

transcendental, yes. That is to say of the (so to speak) unmitigated transcendental.

Indrabodhi: Yes. But in the Wrekin Trust lecture you say that the second plane, the archetypal one, goes up to the point of Stream Entry, but not including Stream Entry.

S: Ah. Well, I'm taking Stream Entry as a transcendental experience. So if one takes the rupaloka and arupaloka [172] planes as mundane, which is how they are usually described in the tradition, then whatever (as it were) occurs after them, or whatever state arises after that, is transcendental. Do you see what I mean? In the case of the Stream Entrant, he has entered the Stream, he has entered upon the transcendental path, but he is not completely transformed in the way that the Arahant is. He doesn't completely belong to the transcendental world. He still has (as it were) one foot in the mundane world. He will be reborn, but he is nonetheless bound, in a sense inevitably, for eventual Enlightenment. So the Stream Entrant is transcendental to the extent that he is on the transcendental path. I mean the Stream Entrant is called an Ariya-Puggala, as the Arahant is.

Indrabodhi: The question is really that you say in the Ten Pillars that the realm of archetypal form is inhabited by non-returners, whereas in the other lecture you quite definitely say the archetypal form is everything below Stream Entry.

S: Ah. I think the key term here is inhabited. The non-returner doesn't return to this world at all. He (as it were) after death 'inhabits' the summit of the rupaloka. There are five (what are usually called) heavens there. They're the suddhavaśa - the pure abodes. They are classified as existing at the summit of the rupaloka, though of course the rupaloka is mundane. But the anagamis themselves are transcendental, with the exception of a few remaining very subtle klesas. But they (as it were) inhabit those pure abodes, they're not (as it were) like the Stream Entrants having gross physical bodies, inhabiting the earth, but mentally inhabiting a higher plane. The anagamis are in the position of having (as it were) a subtle (what one might call) spiritual body, which inhabits the suddhavaśa, their minds being, at the same time, predominantly transcendental. Do you see the distinction? So one might say that the Stream Entrants, in respect of their bodies, belong to the kamaloka; in respect of their minds, partially to the transcendental path. The anagamis, in respect of their bodies, to the rupaloka, and in respect of their minds even more so to the transcendental path. In a sense you've got in respect of the suddhavaśa (the five pure abodes) a sort of overlap. They are included in the rupaloka (cosmologically speaking) but they are inhabited exclusively by transcendental beings. In a sense there's a sort of anomaly. I've tried to (as it were) resolve that by speaking of them as having subtle bodies that belong to the rupaloka, even though their minds are (as it were) predominantly transcendental. This raises the sort of questions I touched

upon some evenings ago when I think I said one needed to re-evaluate what was actually meant, originally, in early Buddhism, by the arupalokas. I suspect it has got something to do with that, but it's something that has still to be sorted out. So is there any actual apparent discrepancy left?  
(pause, laughter)

Indrabodhi: I'm not sure. (laughter) I thought I had a clear cut case here.  
(laughter) [173]

S: But there may be. There may be a discrepancy in the tradition itself. In fact to some extent there is, because, yes, cosmologically speaking the suddhavasas are included in the rupaloka, but at the same time tradition says that they're inhabited exclusively by anagamis. So in what sense do anagamis inhabit a subdivision of the rupaloka? That isn't really explained, to the best of my knowledge, in tradition.

Padmavajra: It's not that the whole of the rupaloka at the summit is inhabited by anagamis?

S: Yes. I mean the rupaloka consists of a number of subdivisions. But then right at the top one of those subdivisions is again further subdivided into five. Those five are known as suddhavasas or pure abodes. It is those which are inhabited by anagamis. I'm not sure whether the term exclusively is used, but that is clearly the implication - that they're inhabited only by anagamis. It also ties up, or connects with, the fact that in very early Buddhism, as far as we can see, the anagami was almost the key holy person, the key transcendental person, and even the Stream Entrant was added to the list afterwards. And sakridagamis and anagamis in the later Hinayana sense, sometime subsequently. That neat fourfold division, or even eightfold division, of holy persons that we have now, in the Hinayana, seems not to have been there at the very beginning.

Vessantara: So what was the original...?

S: The original concept seems to have been of the anagami, the person who on death did not return to this world, but who continued his spiritual progress after death, without ever coming back. This sort of person was referred to as uddhansota - the one who has gone upstream. I have referred to him sometimes. But you would enter that stream, leading to the condition of going upstream, of course during this lifetime, and that was your Stream Entrant. But these seem to have been the two key terms originally. And then the once-returner was later interpolated between the Stream Entrant and the non-returner. And the arahant was the person who had (so to speak) reached the end of that stream, or one might say the source of that stream. The term arahant seems to have been upgraded - originally it meant just a worthy person, but it was upgraded to a technical term meaning someone who had gained full Enlightenment, in a sense almost as the Buddha had gained it. But it does seem that in very

early Buddhism, the concept of uddhansota was the key one. But I've yet to investigate all this systematically - I've been gathering notes and references over the last so many years - I hope one day to put something together. But it's a very complex issue, needing quite a lot of research.

Vessantara: Are there any other writers who go into this at all?

S: The only person who's even thought of trying to uncover very seriously what early Buddhism really did say was Mrs Rhys Davids. I've referred to her more than once before. I don't think anybody's really done much work, with any [174] imagination, of that sort, since - which really seems amazing. There are a few scholars who've examined the Pali texts with a view to their stratification, like Pandey, I quote from him quite a lot. I forget exactly where - oh, it's in my book on Buddhist canonical literature. I've gone into these things a little bit there. But it's as though what in the West, in relation to the Bible especially, one calls the higher criticism, has hardly been embarked upon with regard to the Pali canon and Buddhist canonical literature in general. Buddhists in the East, and even Buddhists in the West still, take that literature in a naive, fundamentalist sort of sense, in the very same way that we criticise Christians for taking the Bible! Ourselves, very often we're just unconscious fundamentalists, we just don't realize what we're doing. Our approach to Pali texts and Buddhist scriptures generally is usually completely naive. Maybe it has to be to begin with - one can't do everything all at once.

Padmavajra: Could you just say what the higher criticism is? Is it a technical term?...

S: Oh dear.

Padmavajra: ...what sort of approach that would be?

S: The higher criticism began at the time of the Renaissance. It was especially developed by German scholars, with regard particularly to the New Testament, for obvious reasons. To begin with the higher criticism looks at different manuscripts. It has for instance a number of different manuscripts of the same texts, and it sees that these manuscripts aren't all the same, that there are different readings, as they're called, because in the course of copying one word might be mistaken by the copyist for another word. So you have to sort out these different readings. If you read an edition of a Pali text that is a more scholarly edition, you'll see at the foot of the page dozens and dozens of variant readings are given for many, many words - as with classical texts, Greek texts for instance. And then you have to sort out the relative ages of the manuscripts. You might think the older the manuscript the more reliable, but it's not so simple as that - it's much more complicated than that! But anyway you have to try to establish the best reading of the text as you can. But when you've done that you might find that different parts of the text don't quite fit together, you might find the language is slightly different, the terminology... Then

you try to sort out different levels of accretion - you might find out that, well, this particular chapter was the earliest and then chapters were added on subsequently at the beginning and at the end, and then you might think, or you might discover, that at a later date the whole text was revised in accordance with a certain set of ideas - to make it conform to a certain way of thinking. So this is the sort of way in which the higher criticism proceeds. It's a vast field - there are hundreds of books now - well, no, sorry - thousands, tens of thousands - written from the standpoint of the higher criticism on the books of the New Testament. For instance one of the results of the higher criticism has been that in the gospel according to St John certain verses which refer to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are a later interpolation. I believe it's the only reference [175] to the Trinity as such in the whole of the New Testament. So clearly to discover that that sole reference to the Trinity in the New Testament is an interpolation, has quite important theological consequences if you take that fact seriously. This is generally accepted by Christian scholars now, that that verse, or I think it's two or three verses, are an interpolation. For instance, the higher criticism has especially examined the relationship between the four gospels, because they don't agree. This has been known of course for centuries. There are discrepancies between them, quite important discrepancies. So the higher criticism has more or less agreed, for instance, that Mark's gospel is the oldest, and that Matthew's for instance is later, and that the gospel according to St Matthew was aimed more at the Jews - at possible Jewish converts - hence the very strong attempt which is made in Matthew to represent Christ's mission as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy, as one of the special features. But then most scholars involved in this field maintain that there is a text which they call the Q-text, which does not actually survive, it's a hypothetical text. They believe that many of the sayings in Matthew especially, say in the Sermon on the Mount, were drawn from this Q-text, which no longer exists, part of which (was) also produced by the other synoptic gospels. To begin with they distinguish the three synoptic gospels from the one non-synoptic gospel, that being St John. So in this way they go on - it's remarkably complicated, but this sort of research has been going on for a couple of hundred years now quite systematically. A good book you can read if you're interested in just knowing roughly what's been happening - it's a quite old book, but it's not too old, and it's a classic, and we have it in the Order library - is Albert Schweitzer's "In Quest of The Historical Jesus". And he reviews the attempts of famous scholars, during the previous hundred years, to find out who Jesus actually was and what he actually did say. And it's a very interesting book. Schweitzer, by the way, was one of those who believed that Christ himself personally believed and taught that the end of the world was actually very near, and he taught therefore what these scholars called an "interim ethic". Do you understand what I mean by that? Supposing you knew that the world was going to end in twenty years time - you'd behave very differently from the way you'd behave if you thought it wasn't. Or suppose it was going to end in five years time - would you bother taking out a life insurance for instance, would you bother to get a mortgage? You wouldn't.

So the fact that you believe that the world is going to end quite soon changes your whole way of life, and Christ is supposed to have believed this and to have taught this "interim ethic", hence the emphasis on just giving away everything, giving it away to the poor, not taking a thought for the morrow, because there wasn't going to be a morrow. So Schweitzer was one of those who accepted this particular view of Christ's teaching. It's called Eschatological Christianity. So if you read this book: "In Quest of The Historical Jesus" you'll get a very good idea of the sort of work that German scholars have done on the New Testament, on, that is to say, the materials we have, the oldest and in a sense the only materials we have, for the life and teaching of Christ. But Buddhist scholars, apart from Mrs Rhys Davids, have not really begun to tackle the Pali texts in that sort of way, [176] which really we have to get around to sooner or later.

Devamitra: Maybe I'm mistaken, but I don't get the impression that there's very much work been done on the Pali texts in the Buddhist world. Is that the case as far as you're aware?

S: Well, texts are being edited, texts are being translated, there are excellent dictionaries and (what's the term? What do you call it, not a thesaurus, concordance) yes, there is a concordance. So I think gradually the materials are coming together and perhaps work will start, perhaps Mrs Rhys Davids was even a little bit premature, who knows? But I think what it is - that a lot of those who work in the field of Pali studies, have no spiritual concern. They don't ask themselves: Why did the Buddha teach such-and-such doctrine? What was he getting at? How does that relate to your own spiritual life? They don't ask those sort of questions because they're not trying to lead any sort of spiritual life. They're not existentially involved. They edit a Pali text like they might edit a late Latin poet or something of that sort. It doesn't involve them emotionally and spiritually. Whereas Mrs Rhys Davids to some extent seems to have been gripped in this sort of way. For instance her main follower and pupil, Miss I. B. Homer, she seems not to be gripped in that sort of way in the least. She is (or was, she's dead now) a real sort of dry as dust scholar. One of my friends, another lady Pali scholar, described her in a letter to me years ago, describing I. B. Homer that is, as "the last ounce of dust in desiccation" (laughter). That's one lady Pali scholar commenting on another (laughter). That was my friend Mrs A. A. G. Bennett, who translated out sevenfold puja for us.

Padmavajra: Is she still living?

S: No, she died quite a few years ago.

Abhaya: But do you think that these Christian critics of the higher criticism, that they're all spiritually involved to that extent? Aren't they just really interested in the detective work of sorting out...?

S: There is that element. Schweitzer himself is definitely spiritually involved. He is of course the famous Schweitzer who went as a medical missionary to Africa...

Abhaya: Played the organ.

S: ... and who played the organ. He was distinguished in these three fields: as a doctor, as a musician - he edited the organ works of Bach - he wrote a great fat two volume work on Bach, and of course he was a theologian and student of the higher criticism - a very gifted man. And he wrote in later life books which became world famous, like *The Decay of Civilization*. Was it *Decay*? No, it was something more - *Decay and something of Civilization*. I think it was *Decay and Restoration of Civilization*. He was a great critic of course of modern civilization, and I think he was an advocate of nonviolence, at least to some extent. So quite an interesting personality. We've got one or two other books of his in the Order library. We've one called, I think, *From The Edge of The Primeval Forests*, [177] something about his life in Africa. He was a great authority on organs, on the actual building of organs. A very gifted and versatile person. But I think if one is a modern person and wants to be intellectually and spiritually honest, you can't escape, you can't avoid, the sort of problems that are raised by textual criticism and historical research. Buddhists so far seem to have more or less - with the one honourable exception of Mrs Rhys Davids - blithely ignored. So Buddhists on the whole, especially Theravadins, remain in the position of being sort of good natured fundamentalists. They're not sort of fanatical, quite in the way that Christian fundamentalists are, but nonetheless they are fundamentalists. They believe that the Pali canon, in the case of the Theravadins, sets forth the life and teaching of the Buddha, well, word for word as it all just happened. They really do believe that.

Padmavajra: Do you think that if one could apply this sort of criticism to the early Pali texts, et cetera, do you think that would radically alter our picture of the Buddha's teaching?

S: Well, whose picture? And how radically? How radical is radical? Do you think you might find that the Buddha did believe in God? (laughter)

Padmavajra: All right, let's say - er - (laughter), well, let's say for argument's sake the Theravadin.

S: I would say very broadly that all my own investigations suggest that the nearer you get, the closer you get, to the Buddha and what he actually taught, the more you approximate to something that seems, in spirit at least, to resemble the Mahayana more than the Hinayana. I would say definitely that. Though it doesn't have the intellectual elaboration, and in a sense sophistication, of the Mahayana. But anyway, I have it in mind to possibly produce something on these themes, at least sort of summarizing a few tentative conclusions, and pointing in a few directions which

perhaps others may have to follow. Ideally I would like to write a sort of large, systematic work. I don't know that I will have the time to do that. It would be a full time work taking about five or six years to do it properly, even within quite definite limitations.

Padmavajra: Do you think there might be elements in that original teaching which were perhaps even more appealing for us, perhaps, than the Mahayana?

S: Yes and no. More appealing in the sense that, I think, it would give one a certain satisfaction, if that is the right word, to know that the Buddha's actually did personally, historically, teach something like that. Do you see what I mean? But possibly - no, perhaps I couldn't say more than that at the present stage. Yes. I think it would give one satisfaction to find a form of Buddhism which appeals to one, i.e. the Mahayana, but which was usually presented as a later development, in spirit, actually, was quite close to what the Buddha himself, as a historical teacher, actually taught. But I can't really say more than that. I've been looking into all sorts of things. Well, for some years I've been following this line of thought and I have found out some quite interesting [178] things and come at least to some tentative conclusions. So perhaps when I get time I should at least try and give a few pointers, maybe in a paper like this, even if I can't do anything more than that. I've dropped hints from time to time, especially in the course of study which I took once at Sukhavati. There's quite a lot of material there, but in a rather scattered way, but I thought at least I'd make those points, even though I couldn't substantiate them, just in case I'm cut off (as it were) and the ideas are sort of lost, at least if I dropped those few hints, well, somebody might later on follow them up. I know Sagaramati was very, very interested in what I was saying. He was the one I think most able to follow in that particular group. Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Do you remember what that group was studying?

S: I think if I'm not mistaken, I may be wrong but I think it was some chapters from the Three Jewels. I believe so.

Prasannasiddhi: Are there any non-English, in the sense of (say) non-English Buddhists in the sense of Asian Buddhists, or maybe Sanskrit or Chinese texts, where they've done much of this criticism?

S: The only people in the East who have carried Buddhist scholarship to quite a high level are the Japanese. They've got the Pali canon into Japanese for instance, and a lot of scholarly work has been done on that. I think some of them may well have delved into the Pali canon in the sort of way that I've been talking about. We just don't know what they do because it's all done in Japanese, they publish in Japanese. Occasionally you get a summary in English of an article or a book, and that's all. It's a (sort of) very self-contained world, which is rather a pity. What I have



heard is that the scholars who are engaged in this sort of work are mainly drawn from the Shin School, the Shin Shu. I think you know what the Shin Shu is. The Shin Shu is what I call, or what Dr Conze calls, Devotional Buddhism. It's that school of Japanese Buddhism which is based on the three pure-land sutras, and the teachings of Honen and Shonin. I was told, or I've been given to understand, that why scholars of this school took up historical research was that formerly - well, as they became aware of what Buddhist studies were doing in the West and became aware of (say) Theravada Buddhism and Pali texts, they became aware that the pure-land sutras couldn't really have been taught by the Buddha himself in that particular form. Formerly they had taken them as actually taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. But they became aware that that couldn't be the case. So they had to do some kind of scholarly investigation, in a sense to justify the position which those texts held in their particular tradition. So in this way they were led to make some quite extensive investigations and researches. So I've been told that it's mainly scholars of this school, at their different universities - the school or the sect has its own universities - were carrying on with this sort of research. They're trying to find some sort of foundation, in Pali Buddhism, for the teaching of these three sutras.

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Prasannasiddhi: That's in a relatively long time?

S: Oh, yes. That's in the last hundred years.

Prasannasiddhi: What about going back to Sanskrit scholars, you know, the Mahayana, say like Vasubandhu and all those?

S: I think it's probably not sufficiently realized that historical sense, as we call it, is a comparatively recent development. The only people in the world who seem to have had a very strong sense of historical tradition are the Chinese. They, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, were discussing questions of textual authenticity and so on. They were very familiar with those questions. I think there it arose out of a (sort of) historical context - one of the Chinese emperors burnt, or tried to burn, all the previous literature. He wanted everything to start with his reign, so he had a great burning of the books, and scholars were even executed for concealing books. But some were concealed, and when after he died the scholars all came out of hiding, texts started to be produced. But some people started being doubtful whether those texts were actual original texts of those titles, and some clearly were forgeries.

So in this way it seems Chinese scholars developed habits of historical research, technical criticism and so on. They were quite able to distinguish a forgery from an authentic work. But with that exception, historical criticism is a comparatively modern invention, or discovery. And certainly the ancient Indians, including the Buddha, seem to have had no historical sense at all. They did perceive there was some difference between the

teachings of the different sutras, especially between the Hinayana sutras and the Mahayana sutras, but they all purported to be taught by the Buddha, and therefore everybody accepted all those sutras as actually taught by the Buddha. And subsequently they just arranged them in different groups according to what they thought were the different stages in the Buddha's own historical preaching. And that sort of treatment of the sutras found its culmination in China in the works of the founder of the Tendai school, with his five periods of preaching and (I think it was) five different types of sutras, and so on. He taught for instance that the Avatamsaka was taught immediately after the Buddha's Enlightenment. That was too much for people so the Buddha then taught the Mahayana sutras, so that wasn't quite enough. And then as a sort of transition to the full Mahayana he taught the Perfection of Wisdom, and so on, culminating in the Saddharma-Pundarika Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra. So that was how they tried to solve that sort of problem. It was sort of critical, but not critical enough. Another scholar whose name I should have mentioned was Ivor Jennings. There's a big fat volume of translations by him, which again we have in the Order library - an interesting place this Order library (laughter)... a look sometime. It's called The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha - a very misleading title, good heavens! It'd probably put you off! But anyway it's a volume of about six hundred pages, nothing to do with Vedanta really. There's a very interesting introduction in which he compares Buddhism with Stoicism. It's very interesting indeed, that part of the introduction. But anyway, he's firmly convinced that anything of a mythological, magical nature, supernatural nature, just could not have been the Buddha's teaching, so he just cuts it all out. So it's not really very scholarly because he doesn't advance any arguments as to why all that sort of material should be excised. He just treats it as just obviously not the teaching of the Buddha, obviously a later addition. So he'll give us some excellent translations, and a sort of mosaic of texts, because he's cut out all the - what I call the mythological bits. If a deva is referred to - oh, he cuts that straight out. But fortunately he usually tells you what he's cut out! (laughter) So it is a quite interesting volume, and he's done a lot of work, he spent about twenty years producing this volume. He's quite a good scholar in a way. But you can see his limitations, it's rather painful in a way. (break in recording)...

Padmavajra: ... statements would you recommend to...?

S: All of them. They're all quite readable once you get used to her style of English. She lived at a time when there were some people like William Morris who thought that English had got onto the wrong track. There were too many words of Latin and Greek origin in it. They wanted to get back to words of Anglo-Saxon origin, and they didn't hesitate to coin words which were needed. If you read for instance some of Morris's later works, even News From Nowhere, it's written a bit in this 'Ye Olde Englishy' type of language. But Mrs Rhys Davids seems to have been a follower of that school, and her English is very striking - it's very individual, but sometimes distinctly odd (laughter) from the whole point of view of modern English.

It's almost as though - I mean sometimes it's almost like Caxton (you know) writing on these sorts of topics. So you have to get used to this English. And some of her later works it's quite extreme. But once you get used to it she's got a lot of very very interesting things to say. She knows a lot. She's really (sort of) gone through the Pali texts thoroughly and she sometimes brings out some very interesting bits of information. So read any... If ever you see in second-hand bookshops any work of hers, buy them up, or buy it up, because they're all out of print and difficult to get, and all worth reading. I've been collecting them over the years, I've got nearly all of them now in the Order library, in fact I've got two copies of some of them.

Padmavajra: What about the other Rhys Davids?

S: T. W. That was her husband whose student she was. He's very good, very sound, very scholarly, very balanced, but he's not as adventurous as she is by any means, not as imaginative. But he's very good still, and very useful in his own way, especially his introductions to the volumes of Digha-Nikaya translations. There's a short introduction (or sometimes there's a long introduction) to each sutta. Some are written by him, and some by her. They're all very good. At that time she was much under his influence so even in the prefaces she writes there, she doesn't develop any of her later ideas. Those she developed mainly after his death.

Padmavajra: Did she consider herself a Buddhist?

S: I don't think she really did. I think she was a practising Anglican. But I think she took Buddhism very seriously as a spiritual teaching. Her life in a way was rather sad. She and her husband had an only son who was killed in the First World War. And this it seems upset her very deeply and she took up [181] spiritualism and Buddhism also, and it seems awful that though she was in a sense a practising Anglican she was always trying to find something in Buddhism which would satisfy her sense of loss on account of her son's death. There's no "Life" of her unfortunately, I've only picked up bits and pieces of information about her here and there. But she seems to have been a very interesting character, very well read, very well educated, quite formidable in that sort of respect, and someone ought really to write her biography. Quite a blue-stocking in a way. Almost like a (sort of) Buddhist Beatrice Webb, if you know what I mean, those of you who know Beatrice Webb. Anyway, we're digressing. Is there any time left? (laughter).

Vessantara: It's about five-past-nine.

S: Oh. Then I think we'd better leave all the other interesting questions until tomorrow.

Session 10, 30th October 1984, Tuscany; second and third precepts

Vessantara: Nearly all the questions we have tonight are related to the third precept. Just before we go onto those, on the second precept you dismiss Proudhon in a few lines with an argument that isn't exactly ... conclusive (perhaps). (laughter) Do you think that the anarchist position does deserve more serious consideration?

S: What do you take that position to be? There are different versions or different interpretations of anarchism.

Vessantara: Broadly speaking, that if individuals do take responsibility for themselves, you don't necessarily need either the apparatus of the state, or a system based on the ownership of property.

S: Well, that's a very big "if". Philosophical anarchism, as it's sometimes called, maintains that government is unnecessary. And as you say, it goes on to say that if people were to take responsibility for themselves and their affairs, government wouldn't be necessary. I personally think that is rather simplistic, because if a number of human beings want to undertake some enterprise jointly, then some kind of organizational apparatus is necessary. Also it seems to me that philosophical anarchism does depend on a sort of Rousseau-istic (that is to say over-optimistic) view of human nature. The influence of Rousseau has been very good in many ways, but I think in certain respects it's been absolutely pernicious, inasmuch as Rousseau was responsible for the spread of the idea that man was fundamentally good - which he might be in an ultimate metaphysical sense, but Rousseau meant it in the sense that it meant man was good in the sense that if only there was no such thing as government, if only he removed all the kings, priests, officials, and so on and so forth, and just dismantled (so to speak) the whole hierarchical governmental apparatus, well, you'd just have man in his perfection. Rousseau almost suggests man as he was before the Fall. And then you would have a heaven [182] upon Earth. We know now that it isn't as simple as that, but something of that Rousseau-istic way of thinking underlies philosophical anarchism.

Therefore I think we have to make two serious reservations about anarchism. That is to say that it does presuppose a very simple kind of life with (as it were) small groups of people just living together; it also therefore, I think, presupposes a very primitive sort of life, because all the conveniences and comforts of modern life spring from vast industrial enterprises which are only possible when a number of people not only co-operate but are very highly organized indeed. And secondly of course it's based on this rather Rousseau-istic view of human nature. But having said that, one must admit that in some ways anarchism does have a point: That many of our difficulties in our social and political life come from the fact that people do not take responsibility for themselves. And obviously the more people can take responsibility for themselves in (let's say) an enlightened sort of way (enlightened with a small E), then clearly the less of government will be necessary. Only that amount of government will be required which is objectively necessary (so to speak). So to that extent

one can admit that anarchism does have a point. But I think in view of these other two objections that can be brought against it, philosophical anarchism, as it has been generally understood, is impracticable to say the least. So when I speak about Proudhon here, I'm just being (what shall I say) not completely serious. But I do think the idea that property is theft needs a bit of looking at - it's one of those slogans that needs to be examined. He no doubt is in some ways a serious socialist thinker. Some people regard him as the most serious of all the socialist thinkers. I think he's regarded usually as a socialist rather than an anarchist, isn't he?

Lalitavajra: He's spoken of as the father of anarchism. 'Cos there was a split between him and Marx quite early on, about what later became Marxism. And the followers of Proudhon later became anarchists.

S: Well, Marx of course is against property - that is to say private property, but I suppose you could say this of Marx, you can certainly say it of later Marxists - he wasn't against government. Communist states tend to be over-governed if anything. So yes, no doubt there was a parting of the ways between the state-socialists (one might call them) and the anarchists (or maybe non-state socialists). In this connection I think what really opened people's eyes in this century was the rise of Nazism. I think that particular phenomenon (sort of) put paid not only to all naive ideas of progress and the progressive improvement of the human race, but also to the idea that if you just scratch the surface of man you found an almost angelic being beneath. So I think partly on account of our historical experience in this century we can no longer believe that the dismantling of government will automatically bring about an ideal - or even a better - state of affairs. We no longer have I think, quite rightly, that touching faith in the goodness of human nature which Rousseau and his successors had.

Dipankara: Do you think this would undermine people's confidence in idealistic views? [183]

S: What do you mean by idealistic views?

Dipankara: Well, I can't think of any off hand, political systems, but I know sometimes when talking about Buddhism, people who don't know much about it, they (sort of) write it off as just another form of idealism. And they seem to assume that idealism is impractical.

S: Well, one would have to ask what they meant by idealism. If you mean by idealism, that man, bad as he is, or bad as he can be, can be made better, then Buddhism is a form of idealism. One might say that Buddhism follows a middle path in this respect between what one might call Augustinianism and Rousseauism - Augustin holding that man was sinful and corrupt by nature, and could do nothing of himself, a view of course that was resuscitated very strongly by Luther, one might say also Calvin - and Rousseauism: the belief that man is innately good, and that all you have to do is to remove him from his repressive social and political

conditions, and everything will be all right. So Augustinianism says simply that man is bad, Rousseau-ism that man is good, Buddhism that man is pretty bad but he can be made better, even, better by his own efforts; it is idealistic in this sense. Augustin is (so to speak) theologically pessimistic, Rousseau is (one might say) non-theologically optimistic, and Buddhism (one might say) well, has its feet firmly planted on the ground but perhaps it does at the same time have its head among the clouds. So it's realistic and idealistic. I did, some time ago, say that one could borrow that term which George Eliot coined: meliorism - and say that Buddhism was melioristic - it believed that things could be made better. I don't think Buddhism takes a Rousseauan view of human nature. Buddhism is fully aware of all the unskilful mental factors present in human make-up, in fact it's catalogued them (laughter). So it knows exactly what's there. But it doesn't despair. It believes that man does possess the capacity for self-improvement, if only he goes about it in the right way, that he can even completely transcend his present human condition. I don't think human societies can get by without governmental apparatus, not if they grow beyond a certain size. That size being actually quite small. Even the sangha, even the bhikkhu sangha, the original spiritual community, had a sort of (one might say) governmental or administrative apparatus to control its collective proceedings. I think there's nothing wrong in that, one just has to remember it's an instrument, it's a means to an end and not an end in itself. So I don't personally take the slogan that "property is theft" seriously, and I just in a whimsical sort of way showed how absurd it is if you take it literally.

Vessantara: Aryacitta?

Aryacitta: This is just a small point I think. On page 64 you list the worlds of the kamaloka in ascending order, and you've got the asuras as lower than the animals. Is this... usually I tend to think of animals as being lower than the asuras, because they're fighting the gods, so...

S: It would seem that originally, in the oldest texts we have, and this is where we come back to our higher criticism, asuras [184] were not mentioned. It was hell-beings, pretas, animals, and gods. Asuras seem to have come in later and tradition seems to have been just a bit uncertain just where to put them. So sometimes they were put rather lower down and sometimes they were put rather higher up. It has been suggested in a general way - not quite in this connection but another, but it's applicable here - that one can think in terms of two hierarchies, or one can think of one's hierarchies as ordered in accordance with two different principles: a principle of happiness and a principle of power. And this might explain (though it isn't actually explicitly applied in this way, but it might explain) the different ways in which the asuras are placed, because if you give them their place in the hierarchy in terms of happiness, they probably rank quite low, because of their lifestyle, but if you rank them in terms of their power, well, they rank considerably higher, because they're fighting the gods. That may be the reason for the difference, or it may be possible

to explain the difference in this way. But tradition itself is not consistent, with or without reason.

Aryacitta: How did they in fact get introduced into Buddhist cosmology? Is that rather a different question?

S: They seem to have been inherited from the old India-Iranian cosmology. Because in that cosmology you get all sorts of stories, all sorts of legends, about the battles between the gods and (let's call them) the anti-gods. Those battles appear in the avestas, in the Zoroastrian tradition, in the Vedas, and in Buddhist literature. There are references here and there in Buddhist literature, in the Pali canon, to the battles between the gods - the devas and the asuras. In, of course, the Iranian tradition, the terms are reversed, and the asuras, or ahuras, are the goodies and the devas are the baddies. It just goes to show how relative it all is.

Prasannasiddhi: On that animals and asuras, couldn't you say that the animals weren't self-conscious and the asuras at least had some degree of self-consciousness, so therefore they would be placed higher in the hierarchy.

S: Well, it depends (as I say) what principle of hierarchy you use, because with or without self-consciousness, on account of their lifestyle (as I've called it) the asuras are less happy than the animals who live in the present. One could look at it in that way. Therefore in terms of happiness they come lower, even though in terms of power they come higher. Maybe you'd better meet an asura and ask him (laughter) exactly where he comes.

Satyananda: How do we actually see them? Do we see them as gods? I mean, we use the word anti-gods, are they actually gods in the sense of...

S: I use the term anti-god, which is used by some scholars, taking asuras as meaning a (that is non-, or anti-), hura or sura (sura being a god). This is not a strictly scientific etymology, but it is one which is known to tradition and some scholars have adopted it. Because to translate asura as Titan, because after all the Titans did war with the gods, is a bit misleading, it brings in all sorts of associations of Greek mythology. And [185] some Titans in Greek mythology, like Prometheus, were very noble figures, and the asuras of Buddhist and Hindu mythology are not really quite like that. When depicted in art they're represented as rather grotesquely ugly beings, quite unpleasant looking.

Aryacitta: Would you relate to them as spirits that you get in Tibetan mythology - Padmasambhava out to conquer...

S: Oh dear. Possibly. It's very difficult to tell, in a way. I mean, what is an asura really like?

Prasannasiddhi: A politician?

S: Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Satyaraja.

Satyaraja: Bhante, on top of page 64 you talk about the gods that control the creations of others. I was wondering if you could say a little bit about them.

S: I wish I could. I've been giving thought to this matter for years (laughter). I've come, provisionally, to the conclusion (there's no help from tradition - tradition doesn't help us at all here) that it's got something to do with the arts. There are two kinds of gods - these are within the kamaloka, it's important to remember that - the gods that control their own creations and the gods that control the creations of others. The second being higher than the first. But as I said, it's within the kamaloka. It's not within the rupaloka, you haven't yet reached the dhyanic level. So you could say it represents the higher human level. Do you see what I mean? So there is this idea of creation - the word here is nimitta or nirmitta - so I suspect the only way in which I can make sense of it is by thinking that these gods correspond to those who produce and who enjoy works of art. But that leaves us with a bit of an anomaly, which I haven't yet succeeded in solving, which is that in the hierarchy of the gods those who enjoy the creations of others come higher than those who enjoy their own creations. In other words it's as though the audience comes higher than the composer or the author. But that needs further thought. One might even argue that perhaps, in the course of centuries, those two grades had been reversed. But then one might even say that in some ways somebody who enjoys (say) a work of art, thoroughly enjoys it, is in a higher state from a spiritual point of view (or at least from a psychological point of view) than the person who originally produced it, because he produced it due to some kind of psychic stress (you might say) to resolve a conflict, to solve a problem. But perhaps the person who (sort of) fully enjoys it, after it's been... doesn't have that sort of conflict to resolve. And so therefore if he does in fact fully enjoy it, fully appreciate it, if it isn't just appreciated it in a dilettante sort of way, does in fact stand higher. Though that would be a rather (sort of) unusual point of view. But if one interpreted those two kinds of gods in the way that I've suggested, and if you accepted that one grade was higher than the other, as maintained by tradition, this is the only (sort of) way, as far as I can see at present, in which one could explain [186] that. But I'm still giving it some thought.

Satyaraja: Does that mean that you could speak of someone who was enjoying a work of art fully as being in a god state, in that sense?

S: This depends what you mean by a god state, or who are the gods? I do say, I believe in this section, that when one is in the dhyana states, yes,



one is a god, one is a deva or a brahma, one is a sort of angelic being. So in the same way when one is creating and enjoying works of art, in a sense then also one is a god - but it's a god of a lower kind. The gods of the arts (so to speak) don't rank so high as the gods of meditation, though they belong to the same hierarchy and are tending in that direction. This is how I personally have come to think of it, though I realize the need to give it some more thought and maybe research more into the Pali texts. To the best of my knowledge the names of these gods are not found in non-Buddhist tradition, they're not found in the Vedic tradition, they're not found in Hinduism, they're distinctively Buddhist to the best of my knowledge so far. But as I said I've been pondering on these things for some years.

Prasannasiddhi: So was it the gods who controlled the creations or the gods who enjoyed the creations?

S: I think it's both. I'd have to look up the original Pali to be sure about that. But sometimes it's rendered in one way and sometimes in the other. I think it's bhasin is the term. It can mean control, but there's probably a root which also means to enjoy. I would have to check that.

Prasannasiddhi: If it was control it would explain one who controls the creations of others. In a sense he could be more effective than if he only controlled his own creations.

S: I think one has to ask here in this context what exactly was meant by control. It might not be control in the ordinary sense.

Sarvamitra: Could it be taken to mean inspire? Inspire the creations of the lower gods.

S: It might be. It might be. Yes, that is a possibility at least. I think one can't guess, or one shouldn't guess. I think one would have to look into the roots of all these words. Anyway, let's go on.

Vessantara: In your paper on The Journey to Il Convento, you speak of the arupaloka not just as the plane of no-form, but also as the plane of exceedingly subtle form. I've never heard you talk in those terms before. Would you like to say why you've introduced that way of speaking of them?

S: I think it's because I wanted to convey something positive. Not that those levels were merely (as it were) negative or states of privation. There is also the point that those levels are described usually in the scriptures in terms of light. But in a sense light that doesn't have any form. Though again one could [187] say, well, if it's light in a sense it has form, hence very subtle form. It's as though in the kamaloka there is form, but it is gross form, or you might say it's opaque form. In the rupaloka there is subtle form. Sometimes rupaloka is translated (by some scholars like

Nyanatiloka) as "fine material form"; that's all right. So that fine material form is (as it were) luminous. You could say it's luminous because it's sufficiently subtle, sufficiently refined, to reflect the light of the even higher levels, that is to say, the arupaloka levels, the levels of the brahmalokas. But on the levels of the brahmalokas one doesn't even have that subtle material form. Therefore there is nothing to reflect the light, but one has the light itself. So inasmuch as it is light (it's something and not nothing) in that sense it may be spoken of as having form, but not form in the sense that form is present on the rupaloka. It's not a fine material form. You might say it's a form which is a non-form, it is just light itself - not just nothing, but light which is not reflected from anything. So I wanted to convey that element of positivity by speaking of very subtle form, rather than no form which is (of course) the literal translation.

Vessantara: In quite a number of visualization practices, you visualize the subtle, luminous form of the Buddha or Bodhisattva. Very often at the end of the practice it then just dissolves into light, and then that light finally dissolves back into the blue sky. Could that be seen as a recapitulation of the process of ...

S: Yes. That could be. Because the form of the Bodhisattva is (so to speak) a rupaloka form. When it's dissolved into light, and there's only light, without any form, or you could say with a very subtle form, then that is the arupaloka, the brahmaloka. That is what one means by brahma. Also (incidentally) there are some suttas where it is said that when a brahma appears in an assembly of the gods, he has to take a relatively gross form in order to be visible to them, which is significant. But anyway to get back to the visualization practice - when you dissolve the light into the blue sky, well, the sky then represents the Transcendental element. It represents the Incomposite.

Padmavajra: Could you say something about the significance of the gods taking a relatively grosser form, why that is significant?

S: Because otherwise the gods wouldn't be able to perceive him. They can perceive the light (as it were) which is the brahma, only to the extent that that light is reflected from a comparatively gross object. Quite a number of suttas speak of the appearance of a brahma as being like the dawning of a light, or the appearing of a light in the distance, and coming gradually nearer. It's also interesting that in mystical traditions everywhere mystical experience (that is to say, rupaloka level experiences) is often accompanied by the experience of light, and the terminology of light is very common in this connection. There's some quite extraordinary stories about the mystics of the Eastern Orthodox Church in this connection, especially the Hesychasts, even some comparatively recent ones. Not necessarily [188] Hesychasts like Saint Seraphim of Sarov. (I don't know if anyone's heard of him?) He's a quite famous saint and stareta, that is to say spiritual director, in the Russian Orthodox Church at the beginning of the last century, and there are some quite extraordinary accounts of light

which manifested itself in connection with him, and which was even perceived by others. The Hesychasts call this the Light of Mount Tabor, and they identify it with the light which was seen surrounding Christ at the time of the Transfiguration by the three disciples. There's quite a tradition of this in the Eastern Orthodox Church. So this also goes to show, from a quite independent source, that the experience of light is often associated with rupaloka level type mystical experiences. OK.

Dharmabandhu: In the Vajrasattva practice, I think at one time you dissolve the light of Vajrasattva back into the blue sky. But in the practice as it is now you finish with the white light, and not dissolve back into the blue sky. Can you say why this is?

S: I'm not sure about this. Anybody else throw any light? Or have traditions started diverging?

Kamalasila: Apparently you have said that at the end of the practice you can stay with the white light...

S: Ah. Stay with the white light in the sense of staying with the last phase of the practice, instead of dissolving everything back into the blue sky. This I certainly have said. And I've also said that there are certain conditions under which one should or should not do this. I've said for instance that if you do your visualization practice in the morning and (say) when you are going to have a busy day in your co-op, you should definitely dissolve everything back into the blue sky - as it were finish with it for the time being. Whereas if you are (say) on retreat, and especially if you're on retreat (say) at Vajraloka, well, then you need not dissolve everything back into the blue sky, you can stay with the (sort of) culminating phase of the practice and try to keep that with you during the day. And in that way continue your practice. If of course you were to try to do that in the midst (say) of a busy co-operative situation, the strain would be far too much for you, would be almost a schizophrenic situation, so you shouldn't do it in that sort of situation. That's what I was talking about.

Vessantara: We've got a few questions about androgyny. Before we go into them you talk in the text in terms of androgynousness as opposed to androgyny. Is there a...

S: Androgynousness as opposed to androgyny? I didn't intend to. No. I use the two words but I certainly didn't intend to make a distinction by using those two grammatical forms.

Vessantara: I mean opposed to in the sense that you could have used androgyny, which I would have thought is a more common noun derived from androgynous.

S: Yes. I was referring to the state of being androgynes. There's no

significance to be attached to the use of those two different forms. [189]

Vessantara: Right. Satyaloka.

Satyaloka: I was wondering whether other traditions that have equivalents of devas or the rupaloka within their cosmology represent their nature as being androgynous or stress this.

S: Well this is certainly so with angels in the Christian tradition. They are usually represented in a sense as young men. This is (as it were) for the purposes of art, but theologically speaking it's quite clear that they are neither male nor female, that they're regarded as (so to speak) sexless, even though one doesn't speak of them as "it" but of "him" or "he".

Satyaloka: The point you made about mystical traditions' common experiences. I was thinking that in the common mystical traditions the experience of dhyana is certainly possible, so to some extent people must experience androgyny.

S: It's a question of trying to see what are the major mystical traditions of the world, apart from Buddhism. To the best of my knowledge there are really only two (what I would regard as) major mystical traditions, as distinct from isolated mystics apart from the tradition, and those are the one I've already referred to - that of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and to Sufism. No doubt there have been mystical schools and isolated mystics in many other parts of the world and in other religions, but not the fully fledged mystical tradition. Within Buddhism itself I think one might say that there are (what shall I say?) really two major traditions (as it were) mystically speaking, one being that of the Vajrayana, and the other being that of Zen. I don't think any of the others could really compare with them. And yes, it is to be expected that those who did have a rupaloka level type mystical experience should show certain common characteristics. In (of course) the Eastern Orthodox Church mysticism of the type I've referred to was usually practised by monks and even by hermits. Mount Athos of course was the great centre of Hesychasm, though it's sadly decayed now. There are very, very few monks left there, though there used to be thousands. Mount Athos in Greece, that is to say that whole peninsular. And of course in the Sufi tradition there are in fact many traditions within Sufism - traditions of meditation and mysticism - some of them seemingly with Buddhist connections. This is something that is still to be investigated. But I have noticed a quite interesting thing in connection with the Sufis. One might say that exoterically they're Muslims, esoterically they're Sufis. And sometimes 'orthodox' (inverted commas) Muslims are not favourably disposed towards the Sufis, though many Sufis consider themselves as completely orthodox Muslims. But Sufism is in some respects like an esoteric tradition within Islam, or at least a not very public tradition, even though, when conditions permitted, Sufis talked very openly and propagated their ideas. But inasmuch as Sufis, exoterically speaking, were Muslims, there was no question of

monasticism, no question of organized monasticism. There is in fact a saying of Mohammed, it doesn't come in the Koran, it comes in what are called the Hadiths, or traditions, to the effect that he didn't want any monkery in Islam. He wasn't favourably [190] impressed by the Christian monks whom he had met, so he didn't want any monkery. So there's never been any monasticism in Islam in the way that there has been in Buddhism and Christianity. Also Islam, exoteric Islam, has never valued celibacy. There is no requirement of celibacy in Islam, that is to say what I call exoteric Islam. Celibacy is not regarded as a virtue. If anything the attitude or view is that it's your duty to marry and have a family, and so on and so forth. But nonetheless, despite the fact that although from the side of orthodox Islam there was no pressure on Sufis whatever to lead a monastic life or be celibate, it's really astonishing the number of Sufis who do seem to have led a celibate and sort of monastic life, and who do therefore seem to have resolved the whole question of sexual dimorphism and polarity in a quite natural manner. Not that they did it as a discipline, but that (as it were) by the sheer momentum of their spiritual life and their meditation they just ended up in that sort of state. Quite often married Sufis (because most Muslims marry when they're quite young) moved into separate establishments. They moved into what they called Kangars (they usually rendered it as convents). But a lot of Sufis, even though they had families in many cases, lived in what we would describe as single-sex communities, and they were their headquarters. And they led, many of them, a completely celibate life, in a natural way - not because Islam required it, not because Sufism required it, but because that's just the way it happened. So this would suggest that they had reached that sort of androgynous condition, and that because they had reached this androgynous condition, even though their religion did not require it, they lived in a celibate sort of fashion.

(break in recording) ...

S: That's very difficult to say. In many parts of the Muslim world the Sufi orders have been broken up and destroyed or suppressed, in much the same way that some religious orders were suppressed in Europe at the time of the Reformation and during the Napoleonic period. For instance in Turkey they've mainly been suppressed. A lot of them have been suppressed in Egypt. I don't know what the position is in Persia, which in some ways is the fountainhead of Sufism, because the ayatollahs are in charge, and they're not Sufis, they very definitely represent exoteric Islam of the strictest, legalistic type. Iraq has got a Socialist regime. There were quite a lot of Sufis in Afghanistan, what's happening under the Russians heaven only knows. So Sufism in Muslim countries is not in a very good state. I have heard that there are some flourishing Sufi centres in North Africa, in Morocco and places like that. But I also understand that those Sufi teachers who function in the West are, more often than not, not the genuine article at all - they've (sort of) cut loose from their traditions and have mixed just a little bit of Sufism with liberal Christianity, and a few things of that sort - produced a sort of sweet smelling pot-pourri, and they

offer that to the great British public and the great American public and so on. I think people like Inayat Khan are regarded as being of that type. But anyway that's by the by the by. But I mention [191] this, just an example, to show that it does seem that people following that particular path did end up, very often, in a sort of androgynous condition, even though there was no encouragement to lead a celibate life (or non-married life) from their particular tradition, whatever. That is perhaps quite significant. I think it was much the same (though I don't have much information about them) with some of the Taoists, because after all in China, apart from Buddhism, celibacy wasn't encouraged, single life wasn't encouraged, it was frowned upon, but a lot of Taoists we do know lived as hermits, and led, as far as one knows, celibate lives in a natural sort of way. Not because it was a requirement in any kind of way. I'm personally quite dubious about celibacy being a sort of official requirement. I think this puts (so to speak) an undue emphasis on that particular aspect of life, especially within the Christian or ex-Christian context, where sexuality is often accompanied by feelings of guilt and so on. But I think the experience of the Sufis shows that even if one doesn't recommend celibacy as a discipline, if one is sincere in one's spiritual life/practice of meditation sooner or later you end up in some such androgynous condition. Not that you're incapable of functioning sexually, but that there is no compulsion do so whatever.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you say a few things on the difference, say in the Christian... the Western Christian tradition. You said that the Eastern Orthodox was the only fully fledged mystical tradition. I was just wondering to what extent, because there are lots of angels in the Western tradition. I was just wondering what you actually meant, or just what difference there was.

S: Well, angels are one thing and human mystics are another. But it would seem that in the Western church, that is to say the Latin church, the Catholic church (say) down to the time of the Reformation, there were definitely mystics, and certainly there have been mystics since, but the Church as a whole (you know), the ecclesiastical authorities, weren't too happy about mysticism. Because mystics, inasmuch as they had their own personal experience, tended to think for themselves in religious matters, and in that way to deviate into heresy. So even though there were mystics in the Western church, it doesn't seem (or at least as far as I am aware) that there were no sort of schools of mystics or a living continuous mystical tradition developed. You got an exceptionally gifted person here or there - he might or he might not gather a few disciples - or he might just write a book and leave that. But there was no sort of recognized, acknowledged, and even officially supported (sort of) mystical tradition. What was stressed, of course, was the sacraments, having recourse to the sacraments. I mean, many of the monks in the West were not content with this. Some were scholars, some were choir monks - they spent most of their time in church repeating the offices of the church, even performing masses for the dead, and so on, There weren't very many contemplative

orders. There were some. And of course a lot just engaged - those who were more spiritually inclined - in ascetic practices. Not what we would describe as meditation.

Prasannasiddhi: So an actual mystical tradition would have to [192] set about visualizing angels and....

S: No. It wouldn't necessarily have anything to do with that at all. One might say a mystical tradition would certainly be involved with the practice of meditation, or contemplation as it's usually called in Christianity. And that was the case with the Eastern Orthodox Church, but in the case of the Western Latin church anything like meditation or contemplation was a much more sporadic thing, and there doesn't seem to have been any continuous living tradition ever established.

Dharmabandhu: In your book *The Bodhisattva Principle* you said that Buddhism is not mysticism. Here you just said in Buddhism there are mystical traditions, i.e., Zen and the Vajrayana. Could you...

S: Yes. In the case of the Bodhisattva lecture you mustn't forget the venue. Here was a conference of scientists and mystics, and the people calling the conference had their own perhaps rather woolly ideas about mystics and mysticism. I just wanted to dissociate myself from those, as well as from the scientific stance. So therefore I did that by saying that I was a Buddhist and didn't consider myself a scientist or a mystic. But leaving aside that venue and that particular situation, one can use the word mysticism in a loose sort of way in connection with experiences of what we would call a dhyanic type. This is the sense in which I use the word when I do use it, positively. It's a very vague word, it's not a very satisfactory word. Etymologically it has nothing to do with mystery; very often people think that it does have.

Satyaloka: : What do you think of William James's work in that area?

S: You mean in *Varieties of Religious Experience*? Well, he doesn't use the word mysticism, at least not very prominently. His work, of course, is a standard work. It's an old work, I think it's nearly a hundred years old now, but it's still very useful and stimulating. The standard work on mysticism (of the old type let us say) is Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*. That is the title. It's a very big, thick book, and that's quite a standard work, gives one quite a lot of information about Western Christian mysticism, mainly, with copious extracts from mystical writers.

Satyaloka: You don't think there are advantages then, in stressing that common experience with other mystical traditions?

S: I think if one stresses the similarity too much you end up with a sort of woolly universalism. But nonetheless, when one is talking with sensible people, whether inside Buddhism or outside Buddhism, there's no reason

why one shouldn't acknowledge quite frankly whatever common ground there happened to be. And I'm quite sure that there are people outside Buddhism who have had experience, maybe quite extensive experience, of dhyana states. I get the impression, for instance, that Saint Teresa of Avila definitely had dhyana experiences. She seems to have described them very clearly in some of her writings. And similarly with some of the Sufis. I was just thinking about (say) Christianity in England. The English are supposed to be a very non-mystical people. A [193] mystical Englishman is almost a contradiction in terms. I was just trying to think, well, how many well known English mystics have there been? After all, England was a Christian country - or is a Christian country, let's grant them that (laughter). It's been a Christian country for fifteen hundred years. But how many mystics has England produced? There's just a handful. You can say, well, there's a woman mystic who's attracting a certain amount of attention nowadays, though she's always been fairly well known, and that's Julian of Norwich, who wrote Revelations of Divine Love. And then of course there was the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing and a few other treatises. Then there was John Hilton. Then there was (somewhat later) Augustin Baker. And perhaps Margery Kempe, although she was a bit unbalanced? That's all. Unless you include (sort of) semi-mystics, like William Law, who was a disciple of Jacob Benn I mean - those are the English mystics. So you can't really - if you get one appearing in the thirteenth century and one in the seventeenth century - you can't speak of an English mystical tradition, or a school of English mystics. You've just got a very sporadic appearance of mysticism. Yes, it's a very genuine mysticism, very authentic, but it is very much the exception, and there's no question of mystical schools. Do you see the difference? Whereas in the case of Buddhism, in the case of Sufism, in the case of the Zen people especially, where you get a great Zen master - let's say a mystic for want of a better term - a super-mystic - and he's got scores of disciples who are also great mystics who practise meditation and write books on it and poems - they've got hundreds of disciples. And it goes on for centuries on centuries. There's a vast school involving well known people, well known in their own day. That is a quite different phenomenon. This is what I mean by a mystical tradition. So there hasn't been a mystical tradition in England, though there have been a few mystics, there hasn't been a mystical tradition, I think, in any of the Western countries. A little bit. There is in some cases a tradition that persisted for a generation or two. You could say that Saint Theresa of Avila did start the tradition ... (unclear) ... like mysticism, that did continue for a while. Then there were the Rhenish mystics, the mystics of the Low Countries. They did hand something on for a few generations, but nothing like in the way that happened in the East in Buddhism and Sufism and in Hinduism too, even in Taoism. So perhaps we need to remember that. That our religion in the West has tended to be organizational, legal, philosophical, theological, but not mystical. Yes, ethical, puritanical, but not mystical. It seems that there have been quite a few mystics produced by Spain, quite a few produced by France, and quite a few produced by Italy, and of course Germany and the Low Countries. But nowhere a sort



of fully fledged mystical tradition. The Church was always quite suspicious. Saint Theresa had a lot of difficulties, but she was very circumspect and always submitted herself to the Church. And her disciple John of the Cross, he of course was imprisoned for twelve years, suspected of heresy. Though of course nowadays regarded as a pillar of orthodoxy, but even pillars of orthodoxy could get into trouble in their own day, before they were safely dead. The Franciscan Spirituals got into difficulties, some of them were even burned at the stake. [194]

Satyaloka: So what could be described ... (unclear) ... the alchemical tradition, with the Rosicrucians ...?

S: That isn't a mystical tradition. That one might be described as an occult tradition, which is something rather different. It has its own value no doubt, but it isn't a mystical tradition.

Devamitra: I was quite surprised when you singled out two traditions within the Buddhist tradition as being specifically examples of mystical tradition: Vajrayana and Zen..

S: Maybe when I say Vajrayana, perhaps I should be more specific and say the Nyingmapas. There's a very strong tradition of meditation, or at least there was, within the Nyingmapas. I'm not thinking so much of Nyingmapas today, but if you read for instance Roerich's translation of the Blue Annals I think you'll get an idea of what I mean: when you see generation after generation the tradition of a particular kind of spiritual practice continuing, being handed down.

Devamitra: And this didn't happen (say) in the case of the Madhyamikas or Pure Land schools?

S: We don't know much about the spiritual side of the Madhyamikas, but the Madhyamikas as such were much more of a sort of - I won't say intellectual tradition - I'd say a more noetic sort of tradition. They didn't stress the dhyana side of things so much. That was done more by the Yogacarins. Though you could say that the Chan people were in some ways the Yogacarins in practice, the Yogacarins intensified. It's said for instance that Chan started in China among (historically speaking) a group of students of the Lankavatara Sutra.

Prasannasiddhi: I think in one of your Tibetan lecture series you went into the monks in Tibet - the way they would sort of go away on a three year solitary retreat and they would have many visualization practices, which they seemed to spend all day doing, these various visualization practices.

S: Not that they necessarily had a number of practices - some just had one, and did one the whole time, their main practice, their yidam.

Prasannasiddhi: I was wondering if you could comment on the difference

between actually doing a visualization practice and more (sort of) just meditating, in the sense of not doing visualization, more in the sense of just waiting for something to come up.

S: That isn't meditation. We might require a useful phrase. When I speak of meditation, using the term quite loosely, I'm speaking of anything pertaining to the dhyanas. Speaking more technically, well, there's meditation in the sense of dhyana experience, for which I sometimes appropriate the term mysticism, and meditation in the sense of Insight experience, which usually supervenes upon the dhyana experience, broadly speaking, or one might say strictly speaking, meditation comprises these two things. [194A]

Prasannasiddhi: I was sort of thinking of the just sitting.

S: Well, as most people do it, it's just sitting. Or at it's best it's just sitting. In the case of some people if you practise meditation and have achieved suitable dhyana experience, well, when you just sit you are, without any effort, in a dhyana state. But I don't think that very often happens, not with most people.

Padmavajra: You mentioned the Nyingmapas having a tradition of meditation. As opposed to the Kagyupas?

S: No. I wasn't opposing them to the Kagyupas. In a sense, they share many practices. They share most of the advanced Tantric practices, one might say. But the Nyingmapas are certainly more numerous than the Kagyupas. In some cases, of course, there's been a sort of coalescence between the Nyingmapas and the Kagyupas.

Dharmabandhu: Could you say we've started up a Western tradition now of mysticism?

S: Well, one ought to have done. But whether one has actually done, that really remains to be seen. A tradition means something that has been kept alive over quite a few generations, so we haven't even exhausted one generation yet. But the best way of ensuring that something is handed on is to make sure that you have got something to hand on. Anyway, let's go on.

Vessantara: Lalitavajra.

Lalitavajra: Within literature are there any figures who embody this principle of androgyny? In William Blake's works the principle of androgyny is recognized, but due to the Fall the androgyny is actually separate to the emanation of (unclear). I wondered whether there are perhaps figures in Shakespeare or any other sources of literature in which the figure as a whole is androgynous.

S: Well, an androgynous figure would have to be almost a sort of angelic figure. There are a few such figures I think in literature. I'm not sure whether you mean authors, or whether you mean creations of authors.

Lalitavajra: Creations.

S: The one that springs to mind most readily, not from English literature but from French literature, is Balzac's *Seraphita*. There is at least one copy of that work, in the English translation, in the FWBO, because I gave a copy to Padmaraja years ago, so if you want to read it you'll have to ask him to lend it to you. But it is a quite impressive, very lyrical, sort of work, in many ways. I could probably think of some if I had more time. I can't say that I can think of any, I can't say there are any that sort of spring to mind at a moment's notice so to speak. I doubt if they'd be presented as literally androgynous, that concept has not been very common in the West, or in English literature. But you might get a figure or a character that did in fact [195] embody the characteristics of both sexes, that is, the spiritual characteristics (so to speak). It might be interesting to do a little research and see what one can dig up. Something that does occur to me is that in Shakespeare's plays Shakespeare sometimes makes considerable use of the fact that in his day women's parts were taken by boy actors. So in one or two of his plays, I'm sure someone will supply me with the details and necessary references, there are cases in which a woman disguises herself as a man, but actually it is a boy actor pretending to be a woman who is disguising herself as a man. And that creates a very odd sort of emotional resonance (one might say). Something faintly androgynous perhaps? It's as though there's a sort of oscillation (almost) between the masculine and the feminine. Do you see what I mean? Because in the first place you've got a boy actor, he's got to be pretty young to be able to impersonate a woman, and he's playing a feminine part, a female role. And then that woman in the play then disguises herself as a man. So you have the situation of a boy pretending to be a woman who is pretending to be a boy. So I'm sure there's a bit of androgyny lurking there somewhere (laughter). And of course, yes, now that we've got onto Shakespeare, what about Shakespeare's sonnets? There is a sonnet where he says, "A woman's face with nature's own hand painted, hast thou the master-mistress of my passion". So here master-mistress means man-woman, so clearly the friend whom he is addressing exhibits both masculine and feminine characteristics. He is (as it were) androgynous. So one could cite that as an example. But I think it's quite unusual and I think some of those sonnets of Shakespeare have raised a few scholarly eyebrows. And a few not so scholarly eyebrows. But anyway I can't off-hand do better than that. I'm sure somebody has written a learned work on androgyny in English literature, you'll have to try to find it.

Vajranatha: A question concerning the state of celibacy and the sleep state. Quite a few people on this retreat have been practising celibacy, and quite a large proportion of us experienced awareness of the fact that

we were practising celibacy during sleep, either by actually maintaining it or by realizing that we'd (?broken it). So I've got a few points which I wanted to ask you about. First of all why should that be so? Why should that be such a common experience that people should experience awareness that they're practising celibacy in sleep?...

S: All right. Let's deal with that first. Why should one not be aware of it? Why should one not be aware of any spiritual practice while you're in the sleep state? Because if you are trying to practise it intensively, it is very much in your mind and on your mind, the chances are that some kind of awareness of it, even though minimal or sporadic, will be present in the sleep state too. This applies to meditation, it applies to study. I think probably some of you will have had the experience, when you were students and reading (sort of) day and night, had the experience of continuing your studies in your dreams even. I know some of my students in Kalimpong who were preparing for exams, used to tell me that they dreamt [196] that they were studying when they were asleep. So if one is trying to practise celibacy, as a spiritual practice, it's only to be expected that something of that effort will continue into the sleep state.

Vajranatha: It's just that it seemed particularly common experience, and not so many people who experience of meditating(?) (unclear) ... some people do that but...

S: Well, perhaps to some people celibacy is a relatively unusual experience. Less usual perhaps than meditation, so that may have something to do with it. I don't know if anyone is dreaming of angels, if so it's a very good sign. (laughter) The real angels.

Vajranatha: Yes. So secondly I was wondering if you could use that practice, sort of becoming aware of it, as a door to being able to practise in the sleep state more...

S: Well, any form of awareness which is present in the sleep state is a quite valuable starting point. And sometimes one can know that one is dreaming even while one is dreaming, and even guide and direct the dream. So in this way something at least of the awareness of the waking state persists into the dream state. I think it is not that one is sort of half wakeful. I think it's important to realize that, that you are physiologically asleep. You are resting. But nonetheless there is persistence of awareness, at least to some extent or from time to time. And one obviously can develop this. But what usually happens is that one finds it's difficult to develop it without actually waking up. If you become aware in the sleep state you become wakeful and you wake up, and in a sense that isn't what is wanted, because you do, no doubt, need your night's sleep. But there's another point which is of course that in dreams you're always aware. But it's as though there's no connection between the awareness of the dream state and the awareness of the waking state. Most people have had the experience, perhaps quite often, of waking up and you find a

dream just slipping away from you. And you can't grasp it. But nonetheless, that dream represented a whole world of conscious experience which has now escaped you. In itself it is conscious. So I've sometimes compared a dream to an underground chamber which is brilliantly lit up from within, but there's no window, there's no door, and when you (as it were) break into that chamber you just (sort of) open it up, just for an instant, well, that's like it is when from the waking state you get just a quick glimpse of your dream. But it's not that in the dream state you're unaware, it's more that there is no link up between the separate spheres of awareness, as we can call them. But that does happen when you become what we have been calling "aware" in the sleep state, or aware while dreaming. Actually you are always aware while dreaming, but it is your dream consciousness (let us say) that is aware of it, not your waking consciousness. So a lot of people, in fact most people, everybody, lead double lives. Your waking self doesn't know what your dream self does, but your dream self can be leading a very rich and active life of its own all the time, a life that's got nothing [197] to do with your waking, or that doesn't touch it at any point, and it can be completely different. occasionally you get a glimpse of it but usually you're ignorant of it. Sometimes of course you become a bit aware, vaguely aware, of what is going on, when you wake up and find yourself in a particular mood for which you can't account. It may be a very good, a very pleasant positive mood, or it may be a comparatively negative mood. That represents a continuation of the dream experience into the waking state without any actual recollection or knowledge of the content of that dream state. I think everybody's had that sort of experience. You wake up feeling really good, and it's not just that you're rested, it's because you've had a particular experience in a dream, the emotional benefits of which remain with you, even though you don't remember what it was you actually were dreaming about.

Satyaraja: Would you say that writing down dreams would be a valuable practice then? To bring awareness into the dream state?

S: Possibly. If you write down dreams I think the chances are that as you write them down you remember more and more. And to the extent that you remember more and more of your dreams, your waking state in a sense encroaches on your dreams. They start overlapping. So perhaps there is a chance that because of that the dream state itself will become - I won't say more conscious but - there will be more of a link-up, there'll be more channels of communication between the two states. The sleeping state and the waking state.

Indrabodhi: Why do you think we do cut off so unconsciously from our dream world?

S: I don't know whether there is a sort of clear cut answer to that, apart from the fact that we have to live. And we live in the world of the senses. We have to survive in that world. How's the time going by the way?

Vessantara: It's about eight minutes to nine.

S: Right. Let's have at least one more question then.

Vajranatha: I've got another couple of points.

S: Oh, you've got... well, you carry on then. We can stay with dreams or whatever it is.

Vajranatha: The next point was I was wondering if there's a correlation between the archetypal realm and dreams, and the archetypal realm of the devas. If there's any correlation between them. That's my first point.

S: I have said before, and I'm quite sure that there are such things as archetypal dreams. I think I touched upon this some time ago. That dreams don't simply represent residues, you know, rearranged or reshuffled residues from ordinary waking experience. It is as though in the dream state or from the dream state you have access to other realms or other regions altogether. Realms or regions which we may call [198] archetypal. And you may have therefore what one might call an archetypal dream. But it isn't a dream in the strict sense. It's only a dream in the sense that you have the experience while you're waking. It can be very profoundly significant. It can affect you emotionally very very deeply, and even affect you spiritually, even modifying your waking consciousness to a considerable extent. So one might say that an archetypal dream experience (to call it that) of that nature was very much an experience of the archetypal realm, corresponding perhaps to dhyana states. I do know cases of people having these sorts of experiences.

Vajranatha: So would a non-archetypal dream just correspond to the normal kamaloka state?

S: Yes, one could certainly say that. Either derived from one's experience of the objective, or just originating (one might say) subjectively from one's own lobha-dvesa-moha. But over and above that, yes, it is possible to have these (sort of) archetypal dreams as we may call them, though they're not strictly speaking, dreams at all.

Vajranatha: The last one: I was wondering if you personally had made any particular practice of carrying spiritual practices into the dream state?

S: I certainly have done this. So I do know that it is possible. Otherwise I wouldn't recommend it so strongly. But yes, I do that from time to time. It's not really so difficult. There are two things that one can say. One is that, yes, this can be done as a practice, but on the other hand, if you are very intensely interested in something, very intensely involved with something, something of that will filter through, to say the least, to your dream experience. Well, people when they fall in love et cetera, et cetera

- doesn't something of that come up in your dreams? Don't you dream about that particular person? So if that can happen why should you not dream about the scriptures that you've been reading or the lecture that you've listened to? Or the meditation that you've been doing? I do know that some people (maybe this is a relatively common experience) do have dreams of performing pujas, and that is a quite positive sign, a quite positive sort of dream. I don't know whether people's dreams are any different at Il Convento? From usual? Or perhaps you've just got time to think about them, or time to remember them. Well, perhaps we can have one little one? If there is a little one.

Vessantara: When you said that archetypal dreams aren't strictly speaking dreams. What did you... can you. ...?

S: Because usually by dream we mean something (sort of) left over from the waking state. So what I meant was that it was not a dream in that sense. That it did represent a sort of means of access into a (so to speak) higher realm.

Vessantara: Sarvamitra? [199]

Sarvamitra: On page 65 you distinguish vertical and horizontal counterparts of abstention. Do these relate to the light and dark sides of the pillar, or not. If not, what.

S: Oh dear. I think I'd probably have to read that whole section again before answering the question. Let's leave it till tomorrow. I'll read the section carefully and see what I meant (laughter). That'll be better than my just trying to answer from memory as it were. Though I do remember the light and dark sides of the pillar, but just a further refinement, so to speak, of that particular symbolism. But I'll answer that properly tomorrow. No. The day after tomorrow. Oh, I'll have plenty of time to read that.. (laughter)

Questions and Answers on The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, Session 11, 1st November 1984, Tuscany, 3rd & 4th precepts

Vessantara: Most of our questions are about the third precept, and we've got a few on the fourth, and even one, I think, on the fifth. On page 66, talking about the third precept, you say, "for those who wish to develop as individuals, and to progress on the path to Enlightenment, meditation and single-sex situations of every kind are, in the absence of Transcendental insight, absolutely indispensable" [1984 edition]. When you say single-sex situations of every kind are absolutely indispensable, by that you don't necessarily mean to imply that one should be in single-sex situations of every kind ... every situation you're in should be a single-sex situation?

S: No. I'm saying that there are single-sex situations of various kinds. One kind for instance being when you live permanently in a single-sex

community. Another being a single-sex retreat, or even a single-sex study group. I'm saying that some participation in single-sex situations of these different kinds - that is to say in one or another of them, or any combination of them, or at least one of them - is absolutely essential.

Vessantara: I just wanted to clarify that. Abhaya?

Abhaya: The first one is really a joint question from Lalitavajra and myself. I recently came across an interesting quotation by Paul Valery which goes, "We love ourselves in love, It is the self that we desire, The self that we long to encounter." This seemed to me a very apt description of the experience of falling in love. When one is with the other person it seems that it is a fullness of experience of oneself that one really enjoys, not so much the so-called loved one. This fullness and intensity of emotional experience seems to be necessary to us, and a good thing, but it obviously needs to be stimulated by experiences or practices other than falling in love. Technically one should be able to get this sort of satisfaction from meditation and/or devotional practices. Do you think that most people are in fact capable, or likely, to get such satisfaction from meditation? If not, what other course of action would you recommend?

S: The case of meditation is rather different from falling in love, inasmuch as it does not involve any element of projection. Certainly not in that way. And obviously it is the fact that in the situation of falling in love, something which is basically something of oneself is projected onto another person so that one can experience it, or as you say, experience oneself, accepting that sort of analysis. So there is a sort of principle in psychology - I think it was Jung who first formulated it - I've quoted it elsewhere: What is unconscious tends to be projected. I think we find it difficult to project unless we project onto other human beings, or aggregates of human beings. So that it would seem to be difficult to project onto something abstract, even onto an ideal in some cases, or maybe in most cases. So it would seem that an experience of the intensity that one usually encounters in the experience of falling in love, or being in love, can be had only where there is an element of projection, and therefore where other people are involved to some extent. To some extent I'm thinking aloud here, so follow (as it were) the direction of the thought without necessarily looking for the answer (if you see what I mean). Why is it that what one might call projective experiences are of such an intensity? I think they're of such intensity because of the very gulf, one might say, the gulf of unconsciousness which lies between one's conscious personality and them, as representing something projected from one's unconscious self, so to speak, or unconscious psychic contents. One often finds that when one experiences something of importance newly, for the first time, as for instance when one goes on a beginners' retreat, it makes a tremendous impression, it has a tremendous impact. Maybe the second time one goes it doesn't have the same impact. Well, of course, it isn't the same retreat, but anyway let's disregard that. Let us assume that objectively the second beginners' retreat you go on is exactly



as good as the first, and also that you're in, at least, a good a state of mind. Nonetheless it doesn't have the same impact. Possibly the third has even less, perhaps to your surprise. But what is the reason? The reason for the greatness of the initial impact was that then there was so great a difference, so great a discrepancy, between you and the retreat, that you could experience it all the more powerfully, just because it did represent something so different. But maybe by the time it came for you to go on the second one, you'd become more familiar with all those ideas and practices. You were closer to them. So, when again you went on that beginners' retreat it didn't have the same impact.

So it's much the same, I think, in the case of these projected contents. Inasmuch as they're projected it means there's a discrepancy between them and your normal conscious state. If there wasn't you wouldn't be unconscious of them and they wouldn't be projected. It's because there is that sort of band of unconsciousness, that level of unconsciousness, between your conscious mind and the level from which you project, that you experience them with such intensity. So if you're to experience something with similar intensity presumably it's got to be - within the normal range of human experience - it's got to be something of that sort. It's got to seem to come from completely outside you. Even though, perhaps, it doesn't come from so completely outside you as you think. So quite clearly you're not going to be able to have [201] (at least to begin with) a meditation experience of that kind of intensity. Because what happens when you meditate: You start off from your conscious mind and you start very gradually start feeling your way into something which is just a bit better. Maybe with a lot of effort and struggle. So you're not going to have that intense kind of experience that you get in the case of falling in love. You're only going to get an experience of that degree of intensity when you've got quite far into meditation and are experiencing perhaps a dhyana state. But even then it is not going to have that kind of impact unless you (as it were) jump into it; And it comes (as it were) quite suddenly, as sometimes. occasionally, it does. So I think it isn't very easy therefore to suggest some kind of situation where you can experience a degree of emotional intensity comparable to the emotional intensity that you experience in the projective falling in love type situation. Perhaps the only parallel is when you have some very positive new experience of some kind. Maybe when you come across a new poet who appeals to you very very strongly indeed. Well, why does he appeal to you so strongly? Because he makes conscious suddenly something within you, something of you as it were, that you weren't conscious of before. And he can help you to become conscious of something other that you had no inkling of at all and your conscious mind hadn't even thought about, in which case the experience will be of an intensity analogous to the experience of falling in love, or it may just be something you had often thought about but never expressed so well. "Oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." It may be of that sort, in which case the impact will be very less, or the intensity will be very much less. Or it can be a piece of music or a picture. It can come as a sort of revelation, in much the same way that a person can

come as a sort of a revelation when you fall in love with that person. But clearly in the case of people there are all sorts of complications which don't arise in the case of works of art of any kind. But I would say broadly speaking, for the reasons I've mentioned, I doubt whether there is an analogous projective situation. Therefore I doubt whether there is a situation within which you could have that kind of experience to that sort of intensity, apart from the somewhat analogous cases of a sudden encounter with certain great works of art which speak to you in a way perhaps that other works of art don't.

Manjunatha: Is it possible to have that projection towards an archetypal Bodhisattva?

S: It is possible, but I think it's quite rare, because you would have, almost literally, to fall in love with them. Some people do manage this. They see a really beautiful icon of some sort and they really do (as it were) fall in love with that, or they fall in love with - I won't say that particular ideal, that seems too abstract - but that particular image, also one might say. It does appeal to them very strongly, and that also can be a sort of falling in love. But I think it very rarely has the intensity of actual human falling in love. In some sort of devotional schools they try to cultivate that. In India it's the Vaishnava school, especially the Krishna worshippers, that try to cultivate this. They try (as it were) to fall in love with Krishna. They're always singing Krishna's praises and praising his beautiful hair and beautiful eyes. But sometimes it's a bit forced. And sometimes the pictures of [202] Krishna with which they profess to fall in love are not very attractive really. Apart from the fact that he's blue (which you might overlook) he just comes over as a plump, you know, rather effeminate youth with a rather arch expression, you know, and wavy hair (laughter) rather coy in fact, and playing on the flute, and sort of eyeing you or winking at you (laughter). Not the sort of thing that would appeal to everybody (laughter). He seems to appeal to quite a lot of Indians and some no doubt manage even to fall in love with him. It can be done but... I was going to say it has to be spontaneous but perhaps it doesn't. I think that just as you can (as it were) prevent yourself from falling in love, so you can encourage yourself to fall in love. But when you encourage yourself to fall in love, clearly it has to be with the right person or the right object or the right ideal, or whatever. Otherwise there would be no point in encouraging yourself to do that. I think it's a question of trying to see what it is you're really attracted to in this sort of way. What sort of quality, at least. And then just try to encourage your emotions to cluster around this. It may be to begin with a sort of abstract ideal. It maybe a particular ... well, to give an example, Bodhisattva figure as represented in a particular painting. Or it may be a sort of literary description of an ideal or an ideal figure. You may feel very inspired by that. But you can cultivate that feeling. You can go back to that picture or that text again and again, and try to encourage your feelings - your more positive or idealistic feelings - to cluster and even constellate around it. In that way you would develop a sort of relationship with that figure or that ideal,

which was of a sort of projective nature. Maybe not projective in the same unconscious way that happens when you fall in love, but at least projective to some extent, and therefore enabling you to get in touch with something deeper within you with which your conscious mind isn't usually in touch, of which you're not usually aware.

There are stories of people falling in love with pictures and sculptures. There's a famous one of Pygmalion who fell in love with a statue that he himself had created. And I think the gods brought it to life or something like that. Anyway perhaps that sheds a little indirect light at least on the whole business. Again another point is one should study really the workings of one's own mind. Very often people ask me questions involving the mind and its workings. It's almost as though they hadn't got a mind of their own which they could study. (laughter) Do you see what I mean? As though I had a mind and could report about how the mind worked, but they couldn't - apparently they didn't have a mind. So one's only got to study one's own mind. So perhaps people should do this more. You can see very easily in the case of people how you begin to be attracted. How it's quite unconscious, or almost unconscious. Or it's unconscious in a dishonest sort of way: you know what's going on actually, but it's almost as though you pretend not to. You see somebody, maybe let's say for the sake of the example it's someone on a beginners' retreat. And I know this sort of thing has happened. You happen to see someone, and maybe even without realizing it you like that person in the sense of preferring perhaps their company to somebody else's. And so you find that you happen, rather frequently, to be sitting next to that person at mealtime, or you find you tend [203] to queue up with that person for lunch or whatever it is. Or when you're strolling around the grounds you find yourself actually quite near that person. And eventually you find yourself exchanging a few words with them and you get to know them and then you start maybe making arrangements to go out for a walk with them afterwards, or maybe even to meet them after the retreat. And then you find you're dating them, and then you find you're living with them, and then you find you're married (laughter). But isn't that how it happens? It all begins with something in that person which perhaps you can't identify to begin with, that you somehow find attractive So one can do that (say) with regard to paintings and works of art in general - with regards to literature... You know, as it were keep an eye open for those higher, more spiritual qualities which attract you, and even fascinate you, and (sort of) encourage yourself, encourage your emotions to go more in that direction, to cultivate those particular things, to spend more time on them. I mean for most people the attraction exercised by such things cannot compare with that exercised by human beings. Works of art usually don't stand a chance in comparison with human beings. But you can modify your emotions, you can gradually nudge them in the right direction. Or if it is a question of human beings, well, be very careful who you fall in love with. Be very careful to fall in love - if you have to (sort of) fall in love - only with those who are going to be really good spiritual friends to you. Not with those who are going to lead you astray and perhaps drag you right

off the path, and right up the altar steps.

Padmavajra: Do you think that the arts are a sort of intermediary between, say, the position of falling in love and meditation? That you can't sort of lead direct from falling in love into meditation - you need an intermediary like the arts. Do you think that's inevitable?

S: I think actually you'd need to do more than like the arts. I really do feel that the arts in a way are (sort of) intermediate between our ordinary emotional experience and the very much higher type of emotional experience that we get in connection with the dhyanas. I think that was implicit in what I said the other evening about those particular gods of the kamaloka, those that control or delight in their own creations and the creations of others.

But I think it's important to emphasize that you (as I said) ... it's not enough to like the arts, you've got to have a real passion for them. It mustn't just be a sort of little bit of almost trifling with the arts when you've got nothing better to do. There are not many people who really care for the arts passionately. There are not many people who really enjoy works of art. Probably most people enjoy music in one form or another, more than anything else. And perhaps it's interesting that that is the case - you know, might be a discussion sometime. But it does seem that when you're just listening to music (I'm not speaking of playing it) you're in a quite passive state, you don't have to do anything, just lie back and enjoy it. It doesn't involve any kind of intellectual activity. I'm using the word intellectual in a quite positive sense. Intellectual activity is necessary when you're reading poetry, certainly great poetry. And it's even necessary to some extent in appreciating visual art. But you can allow your intellect, your mind (for want of a better term) to be completely in [204] abeyance while listening to music. Unless of course you're a trained musician and can appreciate the subtleties of counterpoint or something of that sort, but there are not many people who can do that. So it is perhaps significant that music is the art that we enjoy the most, but then since you're purely passive, you're not energizing as it were, well, you can be in this sort of state one minute, and a completely different, even quite negative state, the next. And it's much less likely to happen if you're in a dhyana-type state. But anyway the point I'm really trying to make is that yes, I do believe that aesthetic experience comes (as it were; halfway between ordinary mundane experience and higher spiritual experiences, but aesthetic experience must be a real experience, and for it to be a real experience you've got to be very devoted to the arts - very keen on them, take them very seriously and be able to get a lot out of them, have a very keen enjoyment of them in a way that very few people nowadays seem to do.

Manjunatha: It is always the case that you will feel attracted to something which is unconscious in you, or can you just feel attraction to something which might be relatively conscious?

S: Oh, yes. Oh yes. But it would seem that the most powerful attractions, and those which you are least able to handle and control, are those which happen as it were unconsciously, and in which therefore there is this strong element of projection. That's why falling in love is so different from making friends with someone. You can make friends with someone and that's a very different experience ... just liking someone as a friend and just wanting to spend more time in their company, get to know them better. That's a quite different experience from violently and dramatically, not to say traumatically, falling in love with someone in a matter of minutes. I think I heard from somebody not so long ago who had this experience... Oh yes, somebody told me that (I think it was about three years ago) he'd fallen violently in love with someone he just saw passing in the street. He said really violently in love, not being able to get this person out of his mind ever since. Yes it can happen, even today. One reads in literature of people falling in love instantly and I think it can happen. Some people take quite a few minutes to fall in love but ... it can happen very quickly indeed. And of course another factor, usually, is the sexual factor which very often (as it were) underwrites the emotional factor as represented by falling in love. It reinforces it. Then again maybe you get the longing for companionship, even comfort, consolation, emotional support where clearly a potentially quite (what shall I say, not demanding but) binding situation is likely to arise. Anyway, let's pass on.

Abhaya: Well, I don't know whether it really is passing on. You've answered most of it. It's about projection...

S: Before you do, I was just making the point before I diverged that people should study their own minds and see what happens when you just try to detect yourself at the moment when you're moving towards someone, and you can feel something (as it were) beginning to be projected. And study your own mind. Ask yourself what is happening, try to see what is happening, and try [205] to make sure that it's directed in a skilful sort of manner, towards a quite positive object.

Abhaya: It's possible to experience androgynousness by way of meditation, according to the text, for short periods at least. Although technically it is possible then to achieve total integration by way of meditation, don't you think that for most of us some degree of objectification beyond the conscious polarized element of the psyche is necessary, before full integration can be experienced, at least by way of dreams if nothing else?

S: Well, so long as there is an unconscious mind, you will tend to project. So it isn't a question of whether it's necessary or not. You'll just do it. You'll tend to do it. One can only hope that as a result of your general sort of lifestyle, your general way of life, that you'll be able to guide that projective process to a greater extent than we usually do. Also of course there is no doubt that through the experience of the arts and meditation

you can be put actually into contact with (so to speak) those deeper levels within yourself which will then become conscious, or at least more conscious - become more integrated into overall conscious (?attitude) so that they will tend not to be projected as before. But until that process is complete - and that will take a long time - I think some element of projection will always be there in one's life, and usually onto other people. One just has to ensure that it is of as positive a nature as possible. That is to say, to put it perhaps briefly and even a bit crudely, encourage yourself to fall in love with spiritual friends and people who represent some sort of spiritual ideal - if you can't actually fall in love (in a manner of speaking) with poems and pictures and pieces of music. And also I think you have to be very careful about falling in love where there's also the element of sexual attraction. That makes a very formidable combination.

Aryadaka: Don't you think that to fall in love with works of art that one needs to actually learn quite a lot first? Whereas falling in love with people in something that you grow up with.

S: Well, you can grow up with paintings. This is just something which comes to my mind just as I'm speaking; it's from my own experience. I hadn't thought about it before in this way but since it's just come into my mind in connection with what you've said I'll mention it. I grew up with several paintings. I can't say that I grew up in a particularly cultured home, but nonetheless there were a few paintings - various reproductions of paintings - on the wall, put there I believe by my father, who did have some aspirations after culture, though they were never really fulfilled. And they both had to do with Dante and Beatrice. And I remember there were these two very small reproductions which hung in the passageway. So I passed them a dozen times every day. I'd look (and I was accustomed to seeing these ever since I was born) and I always looked at them. And one of them was this famous painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti of Dante's dream. I don't know if you know this? All right, I'll explain a bit about the other painting first. The other painting was of [206] Beatrice refusing her salutation to Dante, which is by one of the Pre-Raphaelites, not by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, I forget who it was by. Anyone know? [Henry Holiday, tr.] Anyway it doesn't matter. That was the famous occasion (might have been by [F. G.] Stephens) when Dante, who of course had fallen in love with Beatrice at a very early age, happened to meet her in Florence as she was walking along - whatever the young ladies of Florence did used to walk along, by the river, - and he greeted her but she ignored him. Apparently there was a sort of convention at that time that a lady had the right not to return somebody's salutation. It wasn't considered impolite. But if she did, it meant a definite step forward in your (as it were) relationship. It was a very definite step that she took that she actually acknowledged your salutation. But on this occasion she didn't acknowledge it, and that was a major experience of Dante's life, according to his biography, and I think according to the Vita Nuova which he wrote partly about this. But anyway there was that painting of Beatrice refusing her salutation to Dante.

And then there was a painting of Dante's dream. I think he's recorded this dream in one of his canzoni, one of his poems. Where's Devamitra? I'm expecting you to quote it for me. Anyway, he describes how he has a strange dream. Apparently (and I'm not going to be able to remember it properly, but anyway) Dante dreamt that Beatrice had died, and he dreamt that a figure of love, whom Dante Gabriel Rossetti as a sort of angelic figure with wings, took him by the hand and led him to Beatrice's bier. And she was lying on this bier and two ladies were holding a sort of canopy over her. And there was something also to do with Dante's heart being taken out of him, or something like that. Also the figure of Amor had a sort of flaming arrow in his hand. I can't remember any more than that.

But anyway, these two pictures were on the wall in that corridor in our house, and I saw these from when I was a child, so I think I can say that at least I grew up with those paintings. There were a few others, but I think these must have made a very strong impression on me because I can (as it were) remember them even now, and I also remember that a few years later, when I started taking an interest in the arts, I was very drawn by Rossetti's paintings, and quite a number of his paintings illustrate themes from Dante. There's a drawing of Dante painting the angel, for instance.

So I think that one can grow up with paintings or one can have paintings around that one hasn't necessarily grown up with but are around for quite a number of years, and your emotions do (sort of) get associated with them. So then one can (sort of) take that as a sort of starting point and ask oneself, well, what are emotions associated with? For instance in the case of those two pictures which I've mentioned, I could (as it were) say to myself, well, why did they make that sort of impression on me? All right, let me find out something about Dante (assuming I don't know anything about him), let me find out what the subject matter of those pictures actually is, and follow it through in that way. And try to develop more and more of a (sort of) emotional connection with them or with what they represent, with the subject matter of them. Do you see what I mean? I know this has happened with some people in some cases. I mentioned a few weeks ago that painting of Tobias and the angel. Well, some people have felt quite drawn towards that, for obvious reasons. It represents [207] kalyana mitrata. And some people have been very strongly drawn towards the figure of David - Michelangelo's David. Personally it leaves me rather cold. But some people are drawn by it quite strongly, perhaps for rather mixed reasons, but never mind. If one is drawn by something one is drawn by it and one can sort out the skilful from the unskilful as time goes on. It's very unlikely that we'll be drawn or attracted to anything in a completely skilful way, whatever it may be. But I give that as a sort of illustration of the sort of thing I'm talking about. So yes. One can grow up, I think, with pictures. Unfortunately we don't usually grow up with reproductions of great works of art. Lots of people are just surrounded by pin-ups and things of that sort, (laughter) which in some cases might be works of art but not the best from a spiritual point of view.

Dharmamudra: Perhaps painting retreats would be an idea.

S: Painting retreats. You mean retreats for the appreciation of painting?

Dharmamudra: Well, you could do both maybe.

S: The other being...? (laughter)

Dharmamudra: You could look at pictures in books and you could also paint them.

S: You mean copy the pictures in books or paint pictures of your own?

Dharmamudra: Both. (laughter)

S: I'm not sure that I feel happy about people painting their own pictures. I think there's a lot of nonsense talked about everybody being creative and all that sort of thing. But I think it would be perhaps a good idea to have some sort of group (whether you have a retreat or some other way) for the actual appreciation of the arts. Because I think some people have got a (sort of) natural understanding of these things, but there are a lot of things you need to learn, or even need to be taught. I think there are two extremes here. One is sort of the pseudo-professional art criticism, which is usually absolute piffle. I remember when I did visit and as it were said hello to Michelangelo's David I must confess my attention strayed from him for a bit. And I couldn't help listening to a lecture which was being given in English by one of the guides. And it was really most awful stuff - I'm afraid it was a woman giving the lecture, and she didn't seem to have any feeling for art at all. She was chock-full of art history and theories and so on and so forth, but she didn't seem to have any sensitivity to art, as far as I could make out.

But anyway I think that's one extreme. And the other is people just going by very general sort of likes and dislikes and that sort of thing, but not really studying a painting. So I think there's a middle path to be pursued, and I think it might be a good idea if sometimes one had a (sort of) group which just hung up a painting of some kind and just talked about the painting. Maybe someone who did know a bit more about it [208] than the others, could point out certain things, which perhaps you'd need a little training to understand. But it would be quite good to make the painting a focus of your attention and discuss it. I think you'd need to have something which was discussable. I think an abstract painting probably wouldn't be very good. You wouldn't find there was anything to discuss, or somebody might say, well, I don't like paintings that are all blue, or something like that (laughter). But I'm thinking especially of things like - start with something easy in a way. One of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Because often there's a lot in them, a lot of detail, and there's also a moral, not to say a story, which is terribly out of date nowadays. But



anyway, it does give you something to catch hold of, something to latch onto, something to involve yourself with, some sort of means of approach to the painting. So it's quite possible that we could do something of this sort, in the same way that we do, say, for poetry.

Dharmamudra: I was thinking about painting because people tend not to look at things.

S: That's true. It would be an exercise in looking. Yes. Just to observe...

Dharmamudra: And then the two put together, it might achieve something.

S: Yes, first of all you have to look. You have to see what is really there. And then if it's a sort of subject painting what is it about? Unless you understand that you very often can't really understand or appreciate the painting fully. So perhaps we could do something like that. It might be worth trying. Not on this occasion but on some future occasion. It might be that one gets quite interesting reactions from people. Different people no doubt will react differently. Some people may be able to see certain things in a painting which you might have completely missed. You might find that people do start (in a way) projecting onto the painting, which would be a quite interesting sort of thing, and no doubt quite positive, well, depending on the painting. One would have to select it properly.

Dharmamudra: Yes, I wondered whether it would marry up with meditation as well.

S: I don't know about that. One would have to see. I don't think one should sort of jump to any sort of conclusions. You might be able to do it alongside meditation, or combine with... But what sort of real relation there'd be between the two I think would perhaps be not so easy to find out, to discover... (break in recording)

Dharmamudra: ... just that people - their creative side sometimes is just a bit stuck.

S: I think very often they're just lazy. They sort of expect it all to be done for them. Anyway, let's pass on. I can see Subhuti having to take weekend retreats in art appreciation! With a bit of help from down the road no doubt! [A reference to Dharmamudra, tr.] [209]

Dharmamudra: Down the road? (laughter)

Abhaya: One of the most sought after - if not, for most people at least, the most sought after - sensuous delight is the experience of sexual orgasm. I was wondering if, after achieving spiritual androgynousness, one would experience periodically inner, non-physical orgasm, as an integral expression of that state. Or does the orgasmic experience ... is it a

relatively crude emotional experience? And is it perhaps covered by the priti experiences in the early stages of...?

S: I don't think there is a sort of androgynous counterpart of the physical orgasmic experience inasmuch as that experience usually involves a larger element of tension release. And of course it is interesting that tension release is the term which Guenther uses to translate priti. So I think that in the androgynous state there is no polarization, certainly not any inter-sexual polarization, so to the extent that there is no polarization, and to the extent that orgasm represents release of tension, and to the extent that tension necessarily implies a situation of polarization and even conflict, to that extent one cannot expect there to be a spiritual experience on the androgynous level corresponding to orgasm on the physical. Do you see what I mean?

Abhaya: I thought there might be a sort of small polarization, and tension that one experiences. It's not completely split off and projected, but just an easing apart of the two elements...

S: One could well say that, but I would say that is something very different from orgasm as we normally experience it, just because it would be (as it were) so gentle. And there would not be any question of any release of any sort of pent up energy or tension. I don't know whether anyone's familiar with Reich's Function of the Orgasm? I think Reich makes the general point that, according to him at least, (and I think this is to some extent accepted now) that in the case of orgasm in the ordinary sense, one of the things at least that happens, or is involved, is a release of general tension. That is to say people who lead very hectic lives and very tense lives seem to feel a greater need for that sort of experience as a means of discharging all the accumulated tensions, not necessarily sexual. So clearly someone who is spiritually developed, and who is in a sort of androgynous state, is not going to have tensions of that sort, and therefore is not going to need an orgasm to discharge them, and is therefore not going to have that sort of (as it were) tension-laden orgasm that is what most people usually have. So I really don't think - even though, yes, one might say that the androgynous state is not just something static and (as it were) inert, even though it is not like that, and even though there may well be life and activity within it (so to speak) - that it would not be that kind of polarized, therefore tension-ridden, kind of activity that one finds in the case of physical orgasm. But a more general point is that we tend to think about our higher experiences very much in terms of the lower. We think of something dramatic and powerful. People use a lot of those sort of expressions, but actually, by its very nature, it [210] isn't powerful in that sense. You experience something as powerful when there's a great discrepancy between it and you. But on the higher spiritual levels that isn't the case, you can't have that sort of experience.

To take an example: if you're (sort of) wallowing on the kamaloka plane,

and suddenly there supervenes a (sort of) dhyana type experience, you experience that as (sort of) dramatic or even powerful, because it is so different from your normal state. But if, say, while you're in the third dhyana you experience the fourth it doesn't have that sort of impact because there isn't that sort of discrepancy between the third and the fourth dhyana. You experience a sort of accession, a certain heightening, but it doesn't come as it were from the outside. There isn't such a (sort of) difference between your state before and your state when that happens. So it doesn't have the same impact. But that doesn't mean it is (as it were, more objectively) 'less' (inverted commas) powerful. You experience it as less powerful. So what a lot of people are after is (as it were) the powerful type experience, that is their model for a (sort of) valid or higher experience, something that really (sort of) knocks you off your seat almost, knocks you off your feet, something violent almost. This is how they think of it. But actually the more advanced you become in spiritual life, the less likely you are to experience things in that sort of way. You have a (sort of) Road to Damascus experience only if you're Paul and if you've just been persecuting the Christians! (laughter) if you see what I mean. Good Christians (so to speak, you know, take the spirit of what I'm saying) don't have Road to Damascus experiences. But I have been rather interested, not to say rather amused sometimes, by the extent to which people talk of powerful experiences. They've almost a hankering after powerful experiences. And (you know) in Tibetan Buddhist circles one sometimes hears people saying things like, "Oh, it's a very powerful initiation" or "such and such lama gives very powerful initiations" or "he belongs to a very powerful line" et cetera, et cetera. I think this is quite revealing. It's as though they don't want to rise above their present level, they want to just be as they are or what they are, and then (sort of) have the experience (sort of) come along from outside and just hit them, and give them some sort transcendental shock. This seems to be their sort of model of spiritual experience very often. Do you see what I getting at?

Kuladitya: Like taking drugs.

S: That's right. Yes. They think of it in terms of a sort of kick that you get. But if you follow the path of regular steps, the chances are you won't have any powerful experience. And you can take that as a sign of progress, provided you really are following the path of regular steps in a regular, systematic manner.

Dharmabandhu: Although at other times I think you have mentioned that there are big changes and breakthroughs and...

S: Oh yes. You may have those from time to time. But I think it is very unlikely that if you're actually on the spiritual path, and practising regularly, that these will come with the [211] (sort of) shock value (as it were) of the sort of experiences I've been mentioning.

Dharmamudra: Is that because you're more able to absorb it?

S: More able to absorb it. That is another way of putting it. yes. You're more prepared to absorb. There isn't such a discrepancy between you and what (as it were) is coming into you, in a manner of speaking. But to go back to the question that you were asking. On (what one might call) the level of androgyny or androgynousness the experience will obviously be very, very positive. But that element of (as it were) pleasure that comes upon discharge of tension, as such, will not be there. For most people, if they think of androgyny in those terms, it seems almost sort of dull. But that is just because they associate what I can only call powerful emotions with those sort of experiences. They don't seem to have any model of a powerful experience (again to use that term) which is calm, or which is equable, or deep. Do you see what I'm getting at? I mean their models for (again) powerful experiences, strong experiences, are all (as it were) models of violence and shock and impact.

Satyaloka: They'd rather talk about intensity than depth.

S: Yes. Even intensity suggests a sort of...

Satyaloka: Yes, intensity is power but....

S: Yes, right. But people don't think of a positive emotion as being... they say, she's very very serene, or very calm. They'll use the language of power and strength and shock and impact and all the rest of it. Maybe that does require pondering upon.

Aryacitta: That means that the androgynous experience doesn't happen on a physical level, doesn't happen on the first dhyana state? It's more of a higher...

S: No. It begins to happen in the first dhyana state, because as I mentioned, I think I mentioned it here, in the rupaloka (put it in terms of Buddhist cosmology) there's no distinction of sex, no sexual dimorphism, so as soon as you reach up to that level you begin to experience a state of spiritual androgyny. You feel (as it were) balanced. And people know. You may not think of it in terms of androgyny, but sometimes you get into a state where you feel very balanced. There's nothing outside yourself which you need. You're complete within yourself. You're not a half of something which has been polarised. So you're not drawn outside yourself. You're very calm. It's as though instead of having your centre of gravity outside, which is how we experience things when we're polarized, you have your centre of gravity inside, at the centre of your own being. And that means you feel very calm, very content, you don't feel like going out towards anything. But at the same time it is a highly positive state in the sense that it's not dull or inert or lifeless. You see the difference? So this can be thought of as the androgynous-type state. Whereas usually we think in terms - or usually our experience is [212] - of being ourselves polarized and going out towards the other pole. And any happiness or

satisfaction or content we experience consists in uniting temporarily with that other pole, whatever it happens to be. But that union can't last, obviously, or at least it's very imperfect. And that is a quite different sort of experience from ... that sort of satisfaction is a quite different sort of satisfaction from being (as it were) more poised in one's own self, and content therefore within one's own self in a positive way, and in a calm or tranquil way. But not calm and tranquillity in the sense of any sort of deadness or lifenesses or dullness or boredom. Usually people think of those sort of experiences in those sort of terms. One's usual experience is of being a half looking for its other half. Except that you're not just one half, oh no. You're a collection of halves of all sorts of things, and all those halves are looking for their other halves. So clearly the state of androgyny is quite different from that. But as you approach the dhyanas you tend to resolve these sort of conflicts and dichotomies. So therefore the dhyana states are states of balance and serenity and contentment and all the rest of it.

Devamitra: Would you say that the excessive use of superlatives in speech is perhaps rooted in that polarization? For instance say even within the movement a lot of people use very excessively words like "brilliant" and "inspiring". Do you think there's a connection there?

S: I think one tends to attach importance to what one hasn't got, and to value what one hasn't got. Or to emphasize what one is in fact deficient in. And I think that if people excessively use terms like "brilliant" and so on and so forth they're not really feeling that very much. It's almost as though they're trying to feel it, they're trying to work themselves up into feeling something. It's an expression not so much of what they feel, but of what they would like to feel, or even what perhaps they think they ought to feel. Well, to take that a step further, (perhaps what I've said isn't very clear) very often the things that we emphasize most are things in which we're lacking. To give you a very crude example: Christians are always talking about love, there's quite an emphasis on love, all right, in the FWBO there's a great emphasis on communication. But perhaps one can say, well, why is there this tremendous emphasis on communication? Maybe because there's not as much of it as there ought to be. Whereas if there was lots and lots of communication, we'd take it so much for granted it would be very rarely mentioned. So this is a quite useful guide, perhaps, to what is actually lacking sometimes. So people who talk a lot about, oh, this is brilliant and that is brilliant and whatever else it was you mentioned, are perhaps in a way unconsciously drawing attention to something that isn't there, or that they don't experience, rather than something that is actually there.

So just to go back for a minute to this question of communication. Yes, in the FWBO there's lots of talk about communication, but one should not be so naive as to think there's a lot of talk about communication in the FWBO because there's a lot of communication in the FWBO. No. It's much more likely to be for exactly the opposite reason. Someone did mention to me

not so long ago that they were [213] very surprised to find a number of people around the LBC in London living in our Buddhist village who admitted to feeling lonely and not having any friends. Oh yes, oh yes. This is only a couple of months ago, someone told me that he had found that there were people like this. And these were Order Members, that they felt lonely and that did not have any friends. So clearly communication is not something that can be so easily achieved, and the fact that one talks a lot about something does not necessarily mean that there's a lot of it about. So I think we need to watch that.

Padmavajra: Can you take that the other way too? That...

S: No you can't assume that ... (voice drowned by laughter) that there's lot of it around!

Padmavajra: I was wondering from the point of view of Buddhist texts. Reading through them I can't find a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff, written on (say) kalyana mitrata.

S: That's true.

Padmavajra: It does sort of come out at every page. I wouldn't assume that it was...

S: Perhaps it was very much taken for granted. I can certainly say that my own experience in the East, when I was in contact with other bhikkhus, was usually very positive indeed. They may not have been a very highly spiritual bunch usually, but they were usually very, very friendly. And it was as though it was a quite natural thing for them to be friendly. They were usually much more friendly than the lay people, or in a different sort of way. And perhaps it was just because something of the old spirit of kalyana mitrata still lingered, even in the modern sangha, despite its relative - I won't say exactly degeneracy, because it never became degenerate in the way that monastic orders became degenerate in the West at least - despite its rather relaxed attitude towards the spiritual life, let us say. At least they were all practically pervaded by friendliness. But they didn't talk about it, it was just something taken almost for granted, not even thought about. Just as with the Indians very often - hospitality. Hospitality's not something they talk a lot about or insist is a great virtue. It just happens. People are hospitable. And there are many things in different countries where... things which people take for granted which people coming from other countries notice about them, both positive and negative. Sometimes you are as unaware of your good qualities as you are of your bad qualities. But certainly I think one can say that the fact that you talk about some positive quality a lot doesn't necessarily mean that you have it in any great degree, whether individual or (so to speak) as a group.

Padmavajra: You mentioned loneliness in those people - that they didn't

have any friends. Do you think that the reason why we don't have friends and we don't make friends is again because we want a powerful experience like falling in love, and friendship is a completely different...

S: Yes. It's a much more sober thing, or at least it seems [214] like that. I think there is something in that. Also I think very often people think in terms such as "Oh, I don't have any friends, no one is friends with me, nobody likes me". They don't think in terms of "Let me be a friend". It's always the other way round. They (as it were) automatically carve themselves in the passive role and expect other people to take the initiative and be friends with them. It doesn't occur to them that they could perhaps try being friends with other people. I mean, when you fall in love, especially when it's with an attractive young lady and you have marriage at the back of your mind, you take all sorts of steps to get to know her, to win her good graces, ingratiate her mother (laughter), get on friendly terms with her younger brother, you do all sorts of things. You plan and you plot and you scheme. When it's a question of making a friend you (sort of) sit back and expect it to happen. Do you see what I mean? If it's an occasion of falling in love, well, bunches of flowers, boxes of chocolates, evenings at the cinema and theatre. Well, you lay it all on. You know exactly how to go about it, but you don't deal with your friendships, your budding or your would-be friendships in the same way. But perhaps you should take them more seriously, and don't expect them just to happen, don't expect other people to take the initiative. Very often the person without friends is the person who isn't a friend. So if you do find in any way that you are deficient in friends apparently, well, just take the initiative with people. A few people have got at the back of their minds a sort of idea "Well, who'd want to be friends with me? I'm so dull and uninteresting. I'm so unworthy, I'm not bright, I'm not brilliant, I'm not good looking, I'm not witty anything like that, I'm not the life and soul of the party". Sometimes there are people like that, but as you get to know them better they sort of grow on you because you realize they have got (you know) quite sterling qualities, but they're not on the surface. They don't sparkle. They're not, as I said, the life and soul of the party. They're not good at repartee or witty remarks and that sort of thing. So usually it's people with more showy qualities that have more friends, and that's rather a pity.

Padmavajra: Do you think that another thing that we perhaps... you know, sometimes one can think, well, "I don't have any friends", but actually there's a lot of people who are friendly to them within the FWBO. Perhaps we should think of that more.

S: That's true. Yes. Again I think it's true to say that people are looking for that more dramatic experience. And that is perhaps because they are still functioning at a relatively low - that is to say a kamaloka - level, and are still quite polarized. Anyway, how is time going.

Vessantara: It's twenty-to.

S: That's OK.

Aryadaka: Do you think that lack of friendliness is partly the results of industrialization, and maybe part of the culture of Northern European peoples?

S: I can't say that one can say that.... [215]

Aryadaka: Are people friendlier for example...

S: I mean for instance I'm told that among people up north, in England that is, there's a lot of friendliness. There's a lot of friendliness in mining communities and they're well within the industrial framework. There's a lot of friendliness, at least of a kind, among people working in factories.

Dharmamudra: Perhaps it's something in common.

S: Usually people who work together develop friendships. One might consider them not very elevated friendships, but then the lives of those people generally aren't on a very elevated level one might say. I mean their friendship consists in their going to the pub together, going to football matches together, discussing politics, talking about women, and helping one another out sometimes, standing by one another in a scrape. That too.

Aryadaka: But you kinda see like people from India seem much warmer, and from Italy - Italians seem much warmer and sorta more outgoing...

S: They are more demonstrative, but whether you could rely on them more in an emergency? I don't know. I don't know. It may be your undemonstrative person actually, if it came to the point, would stand by you more. Perhaps you could rely on them more, than on the more demonstrative person. No doubt it's good to have a certain amount of demonstrativeness, but I think demonstrativeness by itself doesn't necessarily indicate genuine friendship. It can be just almost a mannerism. Like some people always slap you on the back, or put their arm round you - in some people it doesn't really mean anything. It means perhaps a certain amount of animal in-touch-ness, but not really much more than that. Do you see what I mean? So I would say that - to put it more logically - if you're genuinely friendly, and are free from inhibitions and negative cultural conditionings, the chances are that you'll actually express your friendly feelings even physically, in a warm and demonstrative way. But the fact that you are demonstrative does not necessarily mean that there are genuinely friendly feelings behind the demonstrativeness. Anyway, perhaps we'd better press on.

Vessantara: Lalitavajra.



Lalitavajra: This is a question in connection with the imagination. In William Blake's "The Four Zoas" you have the fourfold aspect of man. During the past few years you've spoken about imagination as a faculty or aspect that the individual must develop. Firstly does Blake's use of imagination correspond to the faculty of imagination about which you have spoken? And secondly, I wondered whether you have considered the True Individual in a fourfold, or more, aspect. And whether there was a correspondence to Blake's "Four Zoas" within your own mythology. And thirdly, I wondered whether the quartet, bodhisattva and the Buddha figures, that you have suggested that seem to hang together - Manjughosha, Tara, Padmasambhava and Vajrasattva - bear any relation to a fourfold aspect of the True Individual? [216]

S: I've an idea that I've actually gone into this in my little article on Buddhism and William Blake.

Lalitavajra: Oh.

S: Yes? I'm a little, say, out of touch with William Blake at the moment. I haven't read any Blake or even thought about him much for a few years now. But I wrote that little article, which though short I think contains a lot of material, after I had been reading about him and thinking about him for quite a bit. And I wouldn't like to say that there is a sort of complete parallel, but certainly an analogy. I think one can say that. And I think it is quite interesting that Blake thinks in those sort of terms. And also prizes the imagination so highly. The imagination isn't a very easy term to define in the positive sense, but Blake seems to think very highly of the imagination. He seems to regard the imagination as being (so to speak) identical with the total integrated person, with what he calls the Divine Humanity. In, at least, Jerusalem (I won't be too sure of this because it's a long time since I looked into his words, but) I think in Jerusalem, the hero of which in a way is Jesus, but Blake's (?)senses of Jesus. I think he does say there that Jesus himself represents the imagination. So if one thinks of imagination in those terms, well clearly one is thinking of imagination in the highest terms. Not even thinking of it as a faculty but even as the whole human being at the highest conceivable level. So there's a little hint of that in my paper "The Journey to Il Convento", where I say that the imagination is not so much a faculty as the man himself. It's not so much that imagination is something that you have; it's more that imagination is something that you are on a certain level of your being. But perhaps, being as I said not very much in touch with Blake at the moment, I can't say any more than that. But I can perhaps refer you to that little paper. I'm afraid it is probably out of print, perhaps we ought to put it back into print. It appeared originally in the Newsletter, then we had a few - not exactly of offprints (or perhaps they were offprints, I don't remember) - they looked rather Blakean with black and red. Does anyone remember them?

Padmavajra: Kamalasila did them.

S: Ah. Was it so. Ah, right, yes. That's right, yes. And it isn't in print then?

Kamalasila: There's been another edition since then, with a proper cover.

S: Ah. No. That wasn't really good enough. No. I think that is out of print, or as far as I know it's out of print. So maybe we should put it back into circulation - in a Blakean sort of way, you know, a page of type just all cramped up together! Anyway, let's carry on. Is that all, or have I missed some out?

Lalitavajra: Well, I was wondering about that quartet of Buddha and Bodhisattva figures.

S: Well, Bodhisattva figures obviously exist on a very high [217] plane indeed. I'd be quite cautious about assimilating them to other figures. But one can perhaps - though again I'd be inclined to be very tentative - speak of an analogy. Presumably you see the difference between an analogy and a resemblance? Analogy is when you get a resemblance between things but it is (as it were) a resemblance between things which are on different levels. The fact that there is resemblance does not imply that they're on the same level. Just as you might get an analogy between ordinary unenlightened reason and, say, wisdom, and ordinary unenlightened kindness and compassion. The reason and the wisdom, and the kindness and the compassion are not the same thing by any means. One is unenlightened and the other is Enlightened. But they are analogous. They are the same thing on different levels. Of course the difference of levels makes all the difference. But it could be - sometimes, you know, Bodhisattvas are very remote. It's very difficult to get a feeling for a Bodhisattva. But if you get a feeling, say, for one of the four Zoas, or for some sort of archetype that you can relate to or connect with a Bodhisattva, well that can perhaps give you a means of access to it emotionally. Otherwise you can understand... "yes, Manjusri is the Bodhisattva of wisdom and Avalokitevara is the Bodhisattva of compassion..." but that's not nearly enough; you have to make some sort of emotional connection. And perhaps you can do it through some (as it were) inferior figure. I have heard, I think, of someone who couldn't make any sort of connection with Samantabhadra, but they had very strong feelings for Samantabhadra's elephant (laughter). Yes, you might have very strong feeling for elephants, well OK, cultivate it and keep reminding yourself: well, the elephant is Samantabhadra's vehicle. So if the elephant is around, well, Samantabhadra can't be very far away. Maybe say to yourself humbly, "Well I'm just not ready for contact with a Bodhisattva, if I can just contact the elephant I'll be doing fairly well (laughter). That's my sort of level". (laughter) Most people want to be introduced to the Bodhisattvas straight away, as though they're ready. It's not such an easy matter.

Padmavajra: In traditional Buddhism do you get sort of intermediary

beings, as it were...

S: I think in practice you do. You get all sorts of minor gods and goddesses who are supposed to be the emanations of this or that Bodhisattva. The connection is made in that way. Perhaps they might be to you dreadful fetish-like looking objects, but people have got an emotional connection with them. You think of figures like Ekajati, or you think in the case of Japanese Buddhism of the whole systematic assimilation of Shinto deities to both Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because people had the emotional connection with those Shinto deities which they did not have, to begin with, with the rather refined, almost abstruse, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. How can you have a feeling for a Bodhisattva - really? You need to be on that sort of level. Even to have a feeling of reverence is difficult enough. But if you can develop an emotional connection with a figure that you believe to be an emanation maybe of an emanation of a Bodhisattva, well, it does provide you with a link. [218]

Abhaya: Do you think one could invoke intermediaries?... Like to ask the intermediary to introduce you - someone who knows the Bodhisattva very well, so to speak.

S: Well, in a way ... well, of course in the Vajrayana technically that is the function of the guru. But - leaving that aside - one does have that in fact in some practices. For instance if you take the Tara practice: You start by visualizing the green TAM in your own heart and that radiates light and that rainbow light issues from the crown of your head. At the end of each ray there is an offering goddess, and the offering goddesses go up to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It's as though the offering goddesses are the intermediaries. Do you see what I mean?

Abhaya: In something like the Manjughosa practice, Manjughosa takes you up to the five Dhyani Buddhas. You might say, well,...

S: Right. Yes. Well, you need a Bodhisattva so to speak to introduce you to the Buddhas. And perhaps you need a deva to introduce you to the Bodhisattva.

Abhaya: That's what I mean. Could you recommend certain devas? One could invoke, say, Amitabha...

S: Well, to begin with you'd have (as it were) to believe in devas and have an emotional feeling for them. Because something which you did not have an emotional feeling for couldn't introduce you to something which again you didn't have an emotional feeling for. You've got to have the emotional connection. And it might be - I speculate or think aloud a bit - it might be that in the West, if (say) we have the feeling for (say) angels, or maybe for the gods of Greece or Rome, they might provide us with a sort of point of departure. I remember Subhuti talking about this, and I think he's even written about it, or whatever. Because apparently he's always had a

strong feeling for Pallas Athene and one or two other figures of that sort, and one might, say, have a strong feeling for Apollo. And then one can ask oneself: What does that figure represent? What quality? Then try to (sort of) see that figure as a sort of lower manifestation of some more ideal figure, say a Bodhisattva. Do you see what I mean? And then you guide or lead the feelings that were hitherto associated with that lower figure towards the higher figure.

Abhaya: So in a sense you have got to find your own intermediary?

S: Yes. I can't say, well, this should be an intermediary, that should be an intermediary. No. You've got to find something within your own experience, which you actually feel for, which can function in that way. It maybe, since we're brought up in such an untraditional kind of society and unspiritual culture, that there's nothing of a positive nature that you can find. And of course I'm sure that's the case with a lot of people. And that makes things quite difficult.

Prasannasiddhi: I remember from my reading of Keats, he used to invoke the spirit of Shakespeare.

S: Yes. Some people have very strong feelings for heroes of the past. Well, we've all got our own little heroes. Some [219] people have got a strong positive feeling for Oliver Cromwell. And Nelson. Again Subhuti, apparently, has a strong feeling for Nelson. Others might have a strong feeling for Keats. So yes, very often these sort of figures, important creative figures especially, can act as a sort of focus for our positive emotions. I think it's very good in a way to encourage - it's a bit out of fashion or out of vogue now - a sort of hero worshipping tendency. I think the hero worshipping tendency has been misled. If you start talking about hero worshipping, although a lot of it goes on unconsciously and unacknowledged, people will think at once of someone like Hitler or Mussolini or something like that, and that's a great pity because there are in history many very worthy people who deserve our admiration and who can arouse our very positive emotions when we read the story of their lives. So I think, yes, this is a very useful sort of thing that we can do. We can cultivate a very strong attitude of emotional appreciation towards even literary figures that attract us and inspire us. You may remember in ancient times, in classical times, they used to keep busts of poets and great philosophers and garland them periodically and have sort of feasts in their honour. One can do that sort of thing. Or one can go on a sort of pilgrimage to their birthplace. Well, even in a place like London there are lots of places you can go on pilgrimage as it were. Some people have done that. A whole group of people, I think, from Sukhavati went to Bunhill Fields where Blake is buried, and there are various other people buried there by the way. I think Defoe is buried there, because it's a Nonconformist burial ground, dissenters' burial ground. And there's Doctor Johnson's house in a turning off Fleet Street. I believe even Milton's house, or one of Milton's houses....

Abhaya: In Buckinghamshire.

Padmavajra: Chalfont St Giles.

S: Chalfont St Giles. And of course there's Keat's house. To actually go and see the places where these people lived can make them more real to one and help one to develop strong feelings about them or towards them. So these are also things that we can do. Some people do develop a definite passion for a particular writer. You know, they're always trying to persuade you to read him or her, or always talking about him or quoting from him. And that's a good thing. Even if he perhaps isn't in the first rank, always. (laughter) I didn't have anyone in particular in mind, but I mean any such literary figure. It could be Barbara Cartland for all I care (laughter). I often bring in Barbara Cartland talking to women's events, but they don't seem to appreciate her as much as I understand she's appreciated in the world at large. Anyway, we must press on again. Is there any time?

Vessantara: It's nine o'clock.

S: How many questions do we have left?

Vessantara: Three.

S: Let's have one.

Vessantara: Baladitya

Baladitya: This arises out of the sentence "Vows of perpetual silence are not permitted in Buddhism as hindering the propagation of the Dharma." It seems to me, given the absolute importance of imparting the Dharma, to be the most important of communication not to be implicitly covered in the Ten Precepts.

S: Say that again. The last bit.

Baladitya: Well, about the... It seemed to me, given the absolute importance of imparting the Dharma, to be the most important element of communication to be not implicitly covered in the Ten Precepts.

S: Which one are you referring to? Which aspect are you referring to as not covered in the Ten Precepts?

Baladitya: Vows of perpetual silence are not permitted in Buddhism.

S: This is not actually covered by the Ten Precepts. I don't quite see why it needs to be. There is as far as I ... a Vinaya rule to the effect that bhikkhus are not permitted to take vows about silence. Clearly silence is

encouraged, but not that one should take a vow of perpetual silence as Hindu sadhus sometimes did and as they still do, some of them from time to time. I don't know why that isn't included. I think one doesn't have to include everything explicitly. If it can be deduced from some particular principle that's enough. The fact that you have four speech precepts assumes that people are going to be talking, are not going to be silent (laughter). So they're then telling them how they should talk and how they should not talk. The fact that you do not take a vow of perpetual silence seems to be assumed. Otherwise it makes nonsense of those four precepts. Or is there another reason why the question came to your mind?

Baladitya: Well, there seem certain situations where people involved with Buddhism they go to meditate in caves like Milarepa. And you could possibly get a situation where people just don't have any communication with anybody else.

S: Yes. But that is a different situation from taking a vow of perpetual silence. Because if you just happen to be silent because you're living in a cave and nobody else is around, well, that might continue for years. But if someone was to turn up at the mouth of cave you'd be quite happy to teach them the Dharma. But if you've taken a vow of perpetual silence you couldn't do that. So there is a difference between not speaking and taking a vow that you are never going to speak. So if you took a vow that you were never going to speak that would permanently preclude the possibility of teaching the Dharma, at least by verbal means, and Buddhism doesn't want to do that. But the precepts, as I said, presuppose speaking and not non-speaking, so perhaps it's for that reason that it isn't necessary to mention the fact that vows of perpetual silence should not be taken.

Prasannasiddhi: You could say that it's quite strongly implied in the seventh precept. Harmonious speech. That which promotes concord. So if you're in a situation when speaking wouldn't promote concord, well then you wouldn't speak.

S: Yes. Because as I said, every speech precept assumes that (as it were) speaking is (perhaps) the rule, and certainly assumes that there isn't a vow of perpetual silence, otherwise you wouldn't need any speech precepts. So the fact that there are speech precepts would suggest that the possibility of a vow of perpetual silence isn't even envisaged. Perhaps the explanation is as simple as that. Anyway, let's leave it there. And we've got two to carry over to tomorrow. No doubt you'll produce a few more in the meantime. Otherwise the two will have to be very good ones.

Questions and Answers on The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, Session 12, 2nd November 1984, Tuscany, the speech precepts

Vessantara: Nearly all the questions we've got tonight are to do with speech in one way or another. We'll start with Dipankara.

Dipankara: Bhante, I've got a question coming from the fourth precept. You mention there that speech is only vocalized thought. And we were having a discussion about silence, and we could see that this applied in the case of an impulsive person, but we were wondering how it applied in the case of someone who was quite reticent.

S: How what applied?

Dipankara: This thing about speech being only vocalized thought.

S: But how is speech not vocalized thought in the case of the reticent person?

Dipankara: Well, there being... looking at harmonious speech and kindly speech that the ... that it be thought as well as the emotions. We were thinking also in terms of group situations. The fact that it seemed possible to think faster than one could talk...

S: Well, that often is the case. (pause) (laughter)

Dipankara: I think that ...

S: The fact that speech is vocalized thought does not of course mean that thought is always successfully or fully or adequately vocalized. Also of course I was giving a definition of (what shall I say?) normal speech, or representative speech.

Dipankara: What do you mean by that?

S: One might even say ideal speech. I'm referring to the fact that in the case of some people speech does seem to be just vocalization. But that is of course exceptional and more ideal. As in the case of the lady I sometimes refer to who when asked why she was always knitting said she needed something to think about while she was talking! (laughter) But let's take that as exceptional. And therefore I said that speech is vocalized thought. What it is more truly (so to speak). But it's as though you still haven't produced your question. There's something you're trying to get at which isn't quite emerging. Something to do with reticence. How does reticence come into [222] the picture? Yes, some people are reticent - they don't speak very much, but nonetheless when they do speak their speech is vocalized thought.

Dipankara: Maybe my question is: is there any virtue in reticence? Reticence in the sense of reserving ... not saying all that you might know.

S: Well, clearly it all depends on the situation. I mean there are some situations, surely, in which perhaps reticence is appropriate and desirable. Other situations in which it is not. I don't think one should be either of a

reticent character in the sense that one is reticent in all situations and under all conditions, or that one should be the opposite in the same sort of way. You very often do find that people are either reticent or - what is the opposite? Communicative? Verbose?

Padmavajra: Garrulous.

S: Garrulous? Reticent or garrulous. Not quite complementary because reticent does suggest that you're holding something back, doesn't it? A bit reserved.

Satyaraja: Outspoken?

S: Outspoken. Yes that's a corresponding term. You can of course be overly outspoken just as you can be overly reticent. Sometimes reticence is appropriate, as I've said. Sometimes outspokenness is appropriate. One shouldn't be attached to either. You should be able to function according to circumstances. Is that all or was there any further question about reticence?

Dipankara: No, I don't think there's any more.

Devamitra: We were discussing harsh speech and we got on to the subject of curse. Curse in the sense of invoking a supernatural power to bring about evil to somebody. This seems to be quite a strong theme in myth and drama, that is the working out of a curse. And you have a sort of institutionalized curse in excommunication in Christianity. Maybe it's not quite the same thing ...

S: No it's not, though there is such a thing as banning, but I don't think excommunication is the same as actual cursing, but anyway, leave that as it's not important.

Devamitra: No. But it seems certainly in the exploration of this theme in literature that there are quite often two things at work. There's the original evil act, and there's the force or the power of the curse itself.

S: When you say evil act, you mean the act on account of which the curse was laid?

Devamitra: Yes.

S: But it may not of course have been an evil act in itself, but only from the point of view of the person responsible for the curse. [223]

Devamitra: But it seems that the curse brings an additional force of evil to that original act. It seems to me that curse...

S: When you say brings a force of evil to that original act, what exactly do



you mean by that? Presumably the original act is performed by one person and the curse is laid by another person.

Devamitra: Well, the fact that someone's been cursed for a particular act does seem to have quite a strong effect...

S: Presuming they know about it. So it doesn't actually have any effect on what they originally did, but on them, as the doer of that particular action.

Devamitra: Anyway, (laughter)...

S: What was the question?

Devamitra: Well, it seemed to me that curse is the extreme of harsh speech, and I wondered if you had any thoughts about it. Because it seems to me it's more than just swearing, it's more...

S: It does seem a very interesting question, but I must admit I haven't so far ever given it any thought. Though I am familiar with curses in myth and literature. There is of course the curse in the Lady of Shalott, isn't there? "She left the web, she left loom, she made three paces thro' the room, she saw the helmet and the plume, she look'd down to Camelot." But she shouldn't have done. "Out flew the web and floated wide; the mirror crack'd from side to side;" a very bad omen. "'The curse has come upon me,' cried the Lady of Shalott." The curse is being fulfilled. And then isn't there a curse in the Ring cycle of Wagner? Doesn't a curse play a very important part there? Isn't there a curse laid on the Rheingold? So yes, this is a theme in folklore, and in myth and legend. I don't think I have anything to offer on the subject at the moment, but no doubt it will repay further thought.

The only thing that occurs to me to say at present is I wonder whether the curse is to be always taken literally. It's as though the curse is a piece of machinery invented almost to account for or to explain a certain situation. It's developed because of a curse. A Buddhist might say, well it's due to very bad karma. Within another sort of ideological context it might be said, well it's due to a curse. This is the only thing that occurs to me at the moment. But if you take curse in a literal sense, well it's certainly the very antithesis of right speech, or perfect speech, and especially the antithesis of affectionate speech or loving or kindly speech. It does of course imply an idea that we do find in Buddhism, of the sort of efficacy of the spoken word. And this sort of belief is very very powerful in all primitive cultures and even in some more highly developed cultures. That if you (as it were) say something with force, because you've said it, with force, it will tend to come about. In this connection what I'm thinking of as far as Buddhism is concerned is the asseveration, the solemn act of truth. Have you ever come across this? I've referred to it before. An act of truth is when you say, well, "If this is true then may such and such happen." There's an example given, I believe in the Jatakas, [224] to illustrate this. I know I've

related this story before. You all ought to know it. Very clearly a lot of you don't. Apparently a party of travellers were crossing a river in a ferry boat. And the ferry boat ran aground. So the ferryman was unable to move it so he appealed to some of the passengers to make an act of truth. So apparently a merchant made an act of truth saying, "If I have never cheated my customers then may this ferry boat move," and it didn't move. And then apparently a priest made an act of faith, a holy man, a monk, made an act of faith. No, nothing happened. And then of course last of all there was a prostitute on board. So she made an act of truth saying, "If I've always tried to satisfy my customers and give value for money, may this ferry boat move" (laughter). And it moved. So this story is supposed to illustrate the power of the act of truth, in a way independent of other moral considerations. I mean, the point of the story is that an act of truth, if it is a genuine act of truth, even when made by a person like a prostitute, well it works, it is efficacious. So this is a very basic human belief in a way. For instance some people don't like referring to the possibility of somebody's death. They think that it's almost as though it will help to bring it about. There are all sorts of beliefs, superstitions, taboos, of that sort. You can almost talk something into existence. And it's true, in a way, in a more rational sense. This is going off the track a bit but it just goes to illustrate the power of speech in a way. Because if you start talking about a thing, to some extent you are helping to bring that thing into existence. So I've certainly found within my own experience if you want to do something start talking about doing it. The idea will spread and other people will start talking about it. And in the end you'll get so many people talking about it that one day they actually start doing something about it. And then it does actually come into existence. So speech is in fact a very powerful thing, whether for good or for evil.

But to come back to the original question: cursing somebody is certainly quite incompatible with Buddhism, whether one actually believes objectively in the power of the curse. But nonetheless it's a very very unskilful mental state to get into. That is to say that state of wanting to curse someone or feeling like cursing someone.

Aryacitta: In some stories they say that the effect of the curse is broken by an act of love or something.

S: You're probably thinking of the Flying Dutchman.

Aryacitta: No.

S: The love of a good woman, wasn't it? Or the love of a pure woman. Sometimes of course it is said the curse rebounds eventually on the person who curses, and this illustrates the law of karma one might say.

Dharmamudra: That's that really wanting something again isn't it?

S: Yes. It's really wanting something. And it is as though if you want something and you actually express that in terms of [225] speech, well, you've almost sort of let a kind of force loose in the world which will work itself out, as it were, in its own way. So one can't completely dismiss curses, any more than one can dismiss blessings, on (sort of) rational grounds. Maybe it should make one all the more careful not to express any negative thoughts about people, in an emphatic and violent manner which you get in the case of curses.

Dharmamudra: Do you think there is much difference between thought and actually vocalizing something. I was thinking about...

S: That is certainly the traditional belief, and I think, yes, inasmuch as you are body, speech and mind. If you express something through speech and through mind it has given it greater reality so to speak, than if it remains in your mind.

Dharmamudra: 'Cos it's almost like if you think it, it's almost enough...

S: Well, if the thought is very powerful, but then if you express that, the thought acquires an additional dimension as it were. And very often by saying something you concentrate your mind in respect of what you are saying. Just as if you perform the appropriate action you concentrate in your mind more on what you're thinking.

Satyananda: What about prophesy and revelation like in the Bible? Is it the same sort of thing .. (unclear).. Do you think because they'd been talking about it for so long that it...

S: Hmm. Well, yes, I mean, I don't think prophesy is that. Prophesy in the usual sense of the term (which is not necessarily the Biblical sense) presupposes a sort of foreknowledge, a sort of precognition. But again as I sort of mentioned and touched upon when I gave my talk on Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War, if you start regarding something as inevitable, well, the chances are that it will be more likely that that thing will come about, than if you did not regard it as inevitable. But that is rather a different thing from prophesy.

Manjunatha: It seems to be formalized thought, speech, but there is a stage in between where you don't actually make the noises....

S: Ah. Well, that is usually called subvocal speech. That's speech which just (as it were) goes on in your head. You can almost hear yourself talking. That's what we call subvocal speech. 'Cos sometimes you have a thought in the sense more of a sort of vague feeling or idea or attitude, but in the case of subvocal speech that is actually articulated into words which you hear in your own mind, but which you don't actually express outwardly so that others can hear. Sometimes of course people don't know which they're doing, that is when they talk aloud. They think they

sort of talking to themselves, but actually they're talking aloud.

Dharmamudra: You can see people doing that walking down the road.

S: Sometimes the other way around too. (pause) (laughter) I've known this happen on retreats in the past, but anyway I've given so many instances I won't give any more. [226]

Aryadaka: Is telepathy when somebody's like subvocalizing, and you pick that up? Is that a form of speech if you can hear what they're saying telepathically?

S: Well, telepathy is usually considered to operate on the mental level. You can pick up what somebody is thinking regardless of whether they're vocalizing it or not. If they're not vocalizing it, and are present, you can pick it up. If they are vocalizing it and are not present you can pick it up, not because you can hear them but because you are picking up what they are thinking. Anyway, that's getting a bit away from this interesting topic of the curse, which probably does have all sorts of implications, but as I said I haven't so far given it any thought. Perhaps I will do sometime. What I think would be more interesting as a beginning, especially with those who are going back to Padmaloka, look up "curse" in Hasting's Dictionary of Religion and Ethics. There's sure to be an article about it there. And also in Frazer's The Golden Bough. There's sure to be quite a lot of anthropological material about it there. And that might give one some sort of starting point for a proper discussion.

Manjunatha: You said that there's thought - it maybe an evil thought or a good thought - and then it's spoken out and that gives it more strength.

S: Yes. I think it tends to reinforce it. Yes.

Manjunatha: And could you add further if you act, and you do something with that thought in mind, say, just imagining it all, that when something (?) occurs you actually do things too?

S: Well, this is the general Buddhist view. Because if you have ill will towards someone and you would like them to die, even like to kill them, well that unskilful mental state is bad enough, but if you put that into speech it's even worse. And of course if you carry it out, well it's worse still. Because then you've committed murder. So these are as it were successive stages. It's not as though your thought is ethically or karmically neutral, but nonetheless as you express it, first in speech and then in action, the thought itself, as it were, is, one might say, condensed or solidified and becomes karmically even more significant.

Manjunatha: I was thinking in terms of, say, imagining that you actually do the act when you're not doing it, you're just almost performing it ...

S: Unless you get dangerously near to action in that case. And certainly some untoward karma will accrue for that, but not to the same extent as it would accrue if you'd actually put your thought into operation and performed that particular action. What made you think of this question of curse? How did it come into your mind?

Devamitra: It came into my mind because we were talking about swearing, and I just thought, well what's the extreme of that? And it seemed to be the idea of the curse. And suddenly there was just a whole rush of associations, particularly from drama actually, particularly from Greek drama. I can't remember any specific instance, but there does seem quite a lot of cursing [227] going on in some of the tragedies.

S: Well, there was a curse laid by Nessus on Hercules wasn't there? When he gave him the poisoned shirt.

Devamitra: Wasn't Jason cursed as well by Medea?

S: Probably. (laughter) She said a lot of unpleasant things about him when he left her.

Devamitra: I was also thinking about Oedipus...

S: It's not exactly a curse though is it?

Devamitra: No. It's more like evil fate working itself out. It wasn't anything specific that I had in mind. Just these associations came into my mind. One was Oedipus, and Teiresias, I think, at some point does curse Oedipus when Oedipus gets angry with him, but I'm not sure about that. And the other thing...

S: He rails at him rather than curses him. Warns him.

Devamitra: The other thing was Henry the Second and Becket. Becket excommunicates Henry the Second and this incident I associated with Teiresias and Oedipus. I wondered whether there was a particular myth about a priest cursing a king. The power of the priest as opposed to the power of the king. That sort of thing.

S: There are many instances of curses in Hindu mythology. Of angry rishis cursing. For instance I think it was the rishi Ahalya cursed Indra for committing adultery with his wife. And we're told that this is why Indra has all these eyes all over his body as a result of the curse of the rishi. No, Ahalya was the name of the wife, sorry, I think it was Agastya. But anyway he cursed his wife and she remained shut off in an anthill for thousands of years until released by Vishnu in his avatara as Rama. There are many Hindu stories of curses. It is quite a definite theme in Hindu mythology.

Devamitra: Something else we discussed in our group was Kuladitya had

been reading Julius Caesar, and there's Marcus Antonius's curse after the murder of Julius Caesar. He curses Brutus (I believe you said). That's what we were actually discussing, and the subject came up.

S: Well, clearly primitive man, and to a great extent even modern men, believe in the power of the spoken word, for good or for evil. And there are I think all sorts of echoes and reminiscences of that even in modern times. Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: Indrabodhi.

Indrabodhi: This is rather a lighter question. Sometimes one finds children find rude words, and they become fascinated by them. It's usually a quite innocent word, but they find it really amusing. It's as if they're discovering something in it. I was wondering what that fascination was, as it didn't seem entirely negative. [228]

S: Again, this is something I've not thought about. I can only give you what occurs to me at the moment. I think what happens is that children quite quickly pick up on the fact that they're not supposed to use these rude words, and adults react in a certain way. So they rather enjoy getting the adults to react in that particular way. Just like jerking the string of a puppet, you get a fair bit of fun out of it (laughter), the puppet just jerks when you jerk the string. So adults tend to fall for this. So the child often plays a little game. Saying the rude word, you know, the child knows that it can produce certain effects and create a little commotion. Of course, it mustn't go too much... if it's a very, very rude word of course the child might get spanked and then it probably won't say it again. I think it's probably no more than that. That's all that occurs to me at the moment. (pause) In a more general way, the child enjoys increasing its command of the language. (laughter)

Indrabodhi: I notice it where parents are particularly (sort of) prudish then they find words like that. But the child just gets fascinated with certain parts of anatomy. Like his bottom. And they just giggle about that.

S: Well, he may not have realized he had one before (laughter). No doubt there's an explanation of language, you know, corresponding to exploration of the person.

Dharmamudra: Is it not just sort of secretive as well? Because it is separate from the parents and they do get maybe scorned for it?

S: Separate in what way?

Dharmamudra: Well, I mean if a child does get told off for using a... say swearing, he just doesn't do it when his parent's are there, but the word obviously becomes more because they can't say it in the open. So it becomes secretive. I've watched children going through that, when

there's been no parents around, because they have this secret, this word, which means...

S: Whereas if they know that adults disapprove they just (sort of) say it among themselves. It doesn't usually last very long because children very quickly get tired of things and turn to something else.

Padmavajra: Bhante, as we're on the subject of language to some extent, do you think an impoverished vocabulary actually restricts one's ability to experience the things that words refer to? Do you think you need an extensive vocabulary to enable you to experience a wider range...

S: I wouldn't put it quite like that, but there's no doubt that inasmuch as a wider vocabulary indicates a wider possibility of experience; where the vocabulary is limited, the experience tends to be limited too. For instance, take the question of names for colours. If your knowledge of the names of colours is very limited the chances are that you haven't really noticed difference of colour to any great extent. The point has sometimes been made that language is, so to speak, way ahead of us. That is to say, [229] language is way ahead of the individual's use of language. There are all sorts of fine distinctions made in language, to which we haven't yet woken up, because our experience is not sufficiently subtle and not sufficiently refined. Do you see what I mean? So I think that if you have a limited vocabulary the chances are - I don't think one can make a necessary connection here - but the chances are that your experience at least of certain aspects of reality is quite limited. I'll just give you a little example from my own experience. When I was in Kalimpong and picking up Nepali, the Nepali language, I always tried to learn the names of different trees and flowers and birds. I used to get quite exasperated when if I was out for a walk with one of my Nepalese students, and I asked, well "What do you call that flower?" It was either sato pul or rato pul, it was either called white flower or it was called red flower. I never managed to get any other name for a flower out of them! And clearly the flowers were absolutely different. But yes, broadly speaking some were red and some were white. Yellow ones they usually called red if they were very, very yellow, and white if they were not so yellow. I don't think we saw any blue ones. That might have stumped them. They'd probably have called them black flowers (kalo pul). But anyway, this illustrates ... well, there very likely were names in Nepali for those flowers, but they didn't know them, and they never noticed anything more than - well, there were red flowers and there were white flowers. Do you see what I mean?

So limitation of experience does tend to go with limitation of vocabulary, and vice versa. In those areas where your vocabulary increases, your perception always increases. For instance, if you're a carpenter (I speak of course here subject to correction) you will know the names of different kinds of wood. You will say, well, this is oak and that's deal, and that's mahogany and so on and so forth. Whereas to someone perhaps who's not a carpenter wood is just wood, and he actually doesn't see any

difference in a sense. And in the same way with different tools. Not only a carpenter but all sorts of other artisans and craftsmen have got dozens and dozens of different tools, which look more or less alike to the non-artisan or non-craftsman, but they've got (you know) separate names and even different identities to the person using them. In the same way the colours that the artist uses. Or different kinds of leaf. To most people a leaf is just a leaf. But a botanist will tell you that there are hundreds of different kinds of leaves. They're classified and described in all sorts of different ways. But you may not notice that as you go for your walk you just see leaves. You won't notice particular kinds of leaves. So yes - to reinforce the point again - your vocabulary tends to be as large or as small as your experience, and vice versa. Though it doesn't necessarily follow that is you've got a small vocabulary your experience is necessarily limited in that particular direction. You may be quite observant and see things, but not put names to them or be able to put names to them. I think that is comparatively unusual. Usually there is the sort of correlation that I've suggested.

Padmavajra: You could have the case of, say, a painter, an artist. They don't in a sense have a language, it's the language of colour. And they presumably... (unclear) [230]

S: Well, if for instance an artist wants to use a particular colour, he's got to have a name for it. It may not be a colour that he can mix. He may have to order it. So at least it's got to have a name or a number, if you see what I mean.

Padmavajra: I wonder if there's a connection with things that have been said yesterday about the use of superlatives, and creating the notion of jargon as well. I read some time ago an essay by Herbert Read called The Resurrection of the Word. And one of the points he was making was that it's not that we just use cliches - there are just words which are cliches - but actually our life is a cliché, because of our use...

S: Well, that's a cliché. Well, I'm just joking. Well, yes, you could say that metaphorically speaking our lives are clichés, yes. That's true.

Padmavajra: But he was saying that that was because of language that if we could actually learn more, you know, get beyond labelling something as brilliant or something like that, and look at it more...

S: I mean there are these words that people use again and again sort of all-purpose words. It used to be "nice" and - what other words of this kind?

Padmavajra: Amazing?

S: Amazing, super, incredible. I really sort of wince when I hear people use these sort of words. They don't really mean very much at all. Anyway, let's get back to our questions. The official questions.



Vessantara: Vajranatha?

Vajranatha: In the text you say, "One of the principal forms of kindly speech is what is known in Buddhism as rejoicing in merits". And when we read that it struck me that for someone in little contact with the Dharma, the phrase "rejoicing in merits" wouldn't actually convey what was meant by it, wouldn't be understood by them. So I wondering if there was an English verb which would correspond to that. The only examples which we could come up with were appreciation or eulogy...

S: What, expressing appreciation?

Vajranatha: So I was wondering if you thought there was a more expressive term...

S: I'd probably have to think. But yes, offhand, just expressing appreciation. It's not really quite so strong as rejoicing in merits but it might do to begin with. The term eulogy or eulogizing is not in very general use, and it seems that it has come to acquire a sort of connotation of insincerity. An official eulogy. Or the poet eulogized the king on his birthday. Or something like that. But rejoicing in merits... it's more than just expressing appreciation. What do you express your appreciation of? You rejoice in merits. What do you rejoice in? Merits. So what do you appreciate? What do you express your appreciation of? We need some very good positive term there, a very appropriate [231] noun.

Satyaraja: Qualities and virtues.

S: Good qualities, positive qualities? Appreciation of positive qualities. That's probably about as near as we can get. Virtues nowadays has a quite ambiguous ring unfortunately. It's a very good old English word. Expression of appreciation of positive qualities. It's a bit cumbersome but it does convey fairly accurately something of the meaning of punyanumodana.

Kuladitya: Couldn't you keep the rejoicing, having changed the merit to good qualities?

S: Rejoicing in good qualities. It's not quite idiomatic is it? It's even a little stilted perhaps. But people could get used to it.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe rejoicing in merits is OK. Maybe people could get used to that. Because merit is quite a positive thing.

S: Some people say that it has associations with merit marks, or merit stars, at school. But all words are tainted to some extent. We can't expect to have any pure pristine Buddhist words in this language or perhaps any other language. But yes, we do have to be careful not only not to use

jargon, but also to use such Buddhist expressions as are currently within the Friends in a way that people outside the Friends can actually understand them when we are in contact with such people. Sometimes just translate them or use equivalent expressions.

Dharmamudra: It's quite good having to sometimes translate what a word means to somebody outside. It's quite a step in really if they ask, "What does this mean?"

S: So merit is not just a good quality, it's more than that. It's a good quality which brings about a definite change in you, or by virtue of which something of a positive nature accrues to you. So it's more than just a positive quality. Anyway, all this serves to underline the importance of words and the importance of using words correctly, and not indulging in clichés or jargon or slovenly talk or expression of any kind. I think there's a lot of room for improvement here without being pedantic or hair splitting or anything of that sort.

Aryacitta: What about talents? Appreciation of talents?

S: I think that's a bit too highly specialized. Because a talent doesn't necessarily have the association of something which is good or positive in an ethical sense, which of course merits does have, and punya certainly has. One could say someone is talented but wicked. You couldn't say that someone was meritorious but wicked. I've mentioned this before but I'll mention it again: One of the things which we should always do is look up the meaning of words in the dictionary. Sometimes that can be very enlightening, and you can become aware of the existence of fine shades of meaning that you weren't aware of before. So I would say that every Buddhist ought to have a pocket dictionary, because it is as important as that. [232]

Dharmamudra: Do you think it improves your memory as well?

S: I really wouldn't like to say. I'm doubtful whether it does. It certainly exercises your mind, but whether it thereby increases your memory I'm not sure. I tend to think that memory depends upon interest.

Dharmamudra: Is that so?

S: I think so, at least to some extent. One of the reasons why you don't remember things is that you're not interested, if you're very very interested in something you won't forget it.

Dharmamudra: Well, that's an awful lot of things to be interested in.

S: Well, some things are more interest-worthy than others.

(break in recording)

Indrabodhi: ...use words in a very clear way you'd be more likely to remember things?

S: I wouldn't say completely so, because very often what helps you to remember something is the intensity of your emotional associations with something. For instance, my memory goes back a longer way than I think the memories of anybody else here, even though it doesn't go back all that far. But I can remember a lot of things that happened say forty or fifty years ago, but I find if I want to remember the details of something, I sort of try to tune into the mood that I was in at the time, my emotional feeling (as it were) at that time. And if I recapture that - that is usually quite easy to recapture - then all the other associations will come back. If I can remember for instance the sort of feeling I had living in a particular place with certain other people, and as I said, that is particularly easy to recapture, I can then start (as it were) remembering all the things that happened in that particular place and with those particular people. I think that's the way to go about it. Because if you are interested, well, that emotional element is there - the interest will be there. So I think the recapturing of your original emotional experience is very often the key to remembering certain things.

Dharmamudra: It's like association.

S: Yes. But it's a particular kind of association because emotional associations are very powerful indeed. They may of course be pleasant or they may be painful. This is why, in Gurdjieff's system, pain is encouraged as a means of learning. This is why Gurdjieff made people suffer when they were following his system, because he believed if you suffered, the suffering that you experienced while learning something imprinted what you were learning on your mind - or if you like, put it in your memory - in a way that you couldn't possibly lose or forget.

Dharmamudra: That's like a first impression.

S No. It's rather different, it's a question of strength of [233] impression, whether positive or negative.

Abhaya: Strength of association. Apparently one of the.... You have these booklets on how to improve your memory - one of the main techniques is to have a really strong association with a particular article, like an energy, which is a really strong energy, even quite ridiculous, and you're more able to remember the actual item.

S: So sometimes it's not easy to make those sort of associations arbitrarily. But if you're trying to remember something of the past, if you can actually latch on to a strong emotion that you experienced at that time, or in connection with that particular thing, you're much more likely to be able to remember various sorts of things about it.

Abhaya: But the underlying theory is that memory is based on association.

S: Oh yes, there's no doubt about that. Memories based on a whole sort of network of associations. But it is as though, if you speak in terms of a network, there are some (as it were) threads in that network which are thicker and stronger and more powerful than others. And one of those, perhaps the thickest and strongest and most powerful of all, is that which is emotional.

Abhaya: Have you changed your thinking on this?

S: On memory? I don't think so, no.

Abhaya: I seem to remember you saying once you thought memory was very strongly physiologically based. Some people have good memories, other people don't. It's as though you were endowed...

S: I don't remember saying that. There must be a physiological basis because to some extent you can interfere with the memory through plain surgery. But nonetheless, leaving that aside, there is no doubt that if your memory is in normal working order one of the ways in which you can strengthen it, or one of the ways in which you can recall to mind things that you want to remember, is by (as it were) latching on to the strong emotional associations of those things. If there are no strong emotional associations it's rather doubtful whether you will be able to remember very much, or remember very clearly.

Abhaya: So you would say that a person with a bad memory has very weak emotional associations?

S: That could be an explanation, though I'm not prepared to say that's the only explanation. But yes, in some cases that can be quite an important factor. Sometimes of course they don't want to remember, even though they may not realize it, because in some cases the emotional associations are so painful. Then you get of course well known cases of amnesia, forgetfulness. There's a saying "none so forgetful as those who don't want to remember".

Devamitra: People often ask how it is that actors can learn quite long parts apparently easily. Even learning a very large part, [234] very often you don't sit down and spend that much time with the book. You just pick it up in the course of rehearsal. And I think it's through just associations and trying to create a general feel for the...

S: It's also practice. It's also practice. Because I've been told for instance by Dhardo Rimpoche that he as a young monk used to have to learn umpteen pages of text a day, and recite them to his teacher in the evening. And he and other young monks did this every day, day after day,

for months and years together. He did say that after some time if he didn't repeat the texts they tended to fade. But especially when you're young you can commit a lot of things to memory, especially if you get into the habit of it. Because in the case of these very young monks, and children generally could learn things by heart, they don't understand the meaning very often, and there's no emotional association. It is almost mechanical. But they're able to do it more and more through practice. There's also the case, the rather different one, of the photographic memory, such as Macaulay had. But I think for most people, with normal powers of recall, it's important to try to tune in to the emotional associations of whatever it is you want to remember. And you'll tend to be able to remember more easily those things which are emotionally meaningful for you. Presuming that they're not painful things and that you wish, unconsciously at least, to forget them.

Vessantara: In the Satipatthana Sutta seminar you said something to the effect that an individual is one who remembers the past and takes cognisance of the future. In reading that I suddenly found it very clear to see why an individual has to take cognisance of the future because he has to be aware of his goal; I was less clear about the extent to which it was necessary to spend time trying to remember the past.

S: No, I wasn't speaking so much in terms of trying to remember the past. What I was saying really was this: That an individual was one who was emancipated from - one who had risen above - sense experience. That is to say the experience of the present or experience in the present. An animal is only aware of sense impressions in the present. But the more you develop awareness, and especially the self-awareness, or self-consciousness, the more you emancipate yourself from the present sense experience. And that takes the form of course of being able to remember - that is to say to call to mind - impressions of which the objects are not actually immediately present. And also to (as it were) imagine impressions of objects which have not actually come into existence. In that way you (as it were) rise above the limitations of the sense-bound present. So that is an essential part of your development as an individual. In that particular context that was all that I was getting at. Memory as a sign that this process of emancipation from the sense experience of the present had begun to take place.

Vessantara: Given that there are a number of different directions that you can jump off from the present into, what would be the particular spiritual value if any of going into the past?

S: Well, that would depend. First of all there is a general value [235] of going into the past and (as it were) going into the future, inasmuch as you are emancipated from the limitations of the present, and in animal terms the sense-bound present. The advantages of going back into the past could be various. For instance you could go back into the past in order to trace the course of some particular action and its consequences, and you

could (as it were) remind yourself, well, I shouldn't do that because when I did it before that's what happened then, it had a deleterious effect on me, it held me back. So using memory in that sort of way, going back into the past in that sort of way, could be useful from a spiritual point of view. As (so to speak) illustrating the workings of the law of karma, or at least cause and effect in the present life. Or there are all sorts of other ways in which it could be used probably. For instance you could remember all the occasions on which you've been helped or benefited by other people. And in that way you could develop feelings of metta, gratitude, rejoicing in their merits and so on. Any more questions?

Vessantara: Abhaya.

Abhaya: A small point. I've noticed during the question and answer sessions over the past few weeks you've sometimes talked about how difficult it is for us to contact the Bodhisattvas. And the overall impression I get from your remarks is that we're so remote from them spiritually, we'd be better advised to concern ourselves with more accessible figures or goals. You've also often, in the past, been quoted as saying that Stream Entry is a realizable achievable spiritual goal for all Order Members in this lifetime. Since, as you have explained, Stream Entry is the achievement of the transcendental path, and the same spiritual attainment as the arising of the Bodhicitta, I was wondering why in that case you seem to consider the Bodhisattvas as so remote as to be hardly contactable for most of us.

S: I won't say more remote than Stream Entry, because one could certainly say that when one enters the Stream one at the same time made contact with the Bodhisattvas, or with a Bodhisattva if you prefer, so as at that moment (in a sense) the Bodhicitta arises. So, yes, I would certainly not say that the Bodhisattvas are more remote than Stream Entry. But I think it's only at the point of Stream Entry that one makes real, actual, if you like live, contact with the Bodhisattvas. Until then you are in contact either with mental images of Bodhisattvas derived from your reading and study of iconography, or at best some reflection of the Bodhisattva onto those mental images, which is a genuine reflection perhaps, more or less clear, but still only a reflection and not the object itself. Do you see the difference?

S: But you did say the other night that it was a good thing in the visualization practice to contact the real Bodhisattva. It's like the visualization is just a photograph, what we need to do is to contact the real person. When you said that it seemed to me to be a sort of encouragement - oh yes, maybe the Bodhisattva isn't all that far away, in a way.

S: Hmmm. If I'm (as it were) to bring all those different statements together, without (sort of) withdrawing whatever previous encouragement I seemed to give, the Bodhisattva is no [236] more remote and no more near than is the Stream, let us say. They're different expressions, really,

for the same thing. Of course in the case of the Bodhisattva and the visualization practice, you can have very vivid and very meaningful experiences which aren't so to speak actually experiences of the Bodhisattva himself, but only of what I've called in this case a reflection of the Bodhisattva himself in the mental image that you'd formed of him, or of her. So one could even speak of three levels. It's difficult to speak of Stream Entry in these terms for obvious reasons. This is in a way a more abstract concept. But you can speak of Bodhisattvas first of all in the sense of the idea of a Bodhisattva, derived from reading and all that.

And corresponding to that idea you may be able to produce, if you have the knack or the faculty, an idetic image. Some people seem to have the natural capacity to do that. That's not the Bodhisattva himself, it's not even the archetypal image, it's an idetic image, but it's good that you can produce it, it is quite helpful, it is a focus of concentration. But after a while (as it were) this particular (what I call) mental image, or even your idetic image, can function in this way, sort of reflects the Bodhisattva - one can't put it really any more clearly than that. There are certain qualities which it (sort of) acquires, certain spiritual qualities, which are not the actual qualities of the Bodhisattva, but in a way somehow are kin to them on that particular level. They're analogous to them, to use the expression I used the other evening. And that is certainly a further stage of development. But then again the time comes when you're able to (as it were) proceed from those reflective qualities to the qualities themselves and to the Bodhisattva. So perhaps one's got here a threefold division analogous to the threefold Going for Refuge? I haven't yet sort of worked it out in those terms, but I have a feeling it could be worked out in those terms. It's as though you've got a provisional contact with the Bodhisattva, an effective contact, and a real contact. And the real contact, which is synonymous with Stream Entry, is no nearer and no further than Stream Entry itself. And inasmuch as I do believe that Stream Entry is within the grasp of every serious minded Order Member, and clearly there should be only seriously minded Order Members, in the same way real contact with the Bodhisattva is also possible.

Abhaya: So does that mean, Bhante, that an Order Member, apart from yourself, could not pass on, say, visualization practices or Bodhisattva practices, without having entered the Stream? Is it as clear cut as that?

S: It's also a question of what does one mean by pass on. In a sense nothing is passed on. In the literal sense. So if nothing is sort of passed on in the literal sense, what happens? There is a communication, but it's not as though something in the literal sense is sort of handed on.

Abhaya: Well. I thought you'd understand what I mean.

S: I think perhaps it would be better to speak of it in terms of sparking off. It's very difficult to say what the limits of the individual are, perhaps because it's difficult to know what the individual brings over from previous

lives. And also it's difficult to know what are the resources of the individual even [237] from the question of past lives. I wouldn't like to assert categorically that supposing you're given a practice by a certain person, you can go no further with that practice than that person himself has gone. I certainly wouldn't like to say that. Because there is such a thing as a momentum which is inherent in your own practice after a while, and will carry you further, even in spite of the limitations of your own knowledge, or even despite yourself.

This has sometimes happened with Christian mystics. Sometimes they've been rather surprised at the direction which their spiritual life is taking them, because it's seeming to take them beyond the limits proscribed by the Church, even into heresy and so on. That's the inherent momentum of the spiritual life itself. So you could be a monk and be given, in extreme cases, a mantra by a person who had not even practised it himself, and not even taken it seriously, but if you practise that mantra, as it were with full seriousness, you could still get a very great deal out of it. So when you're given a mantra or any other practice by somebody else, you can certainly get more out of it if the person from whom you receive it has some experience of that himself and can advise you and give you hints and so on and so forth, and even inspiration. Sometimes you can derive inspiration from the thought that, well, I haven't got very far with my practice but at least that person's got quite far. That shows it's possible to get very far. That can inspire you. But nonetheless, in the last analysis I don't think you are limited by the limitations of the original person from whom you received the practice. I mean, there are many classic examples of that sort of thing. But nonetheless, of course, in a movement like the FWBO the more (as it were) Stream Entrants and so on, the more that are in it, the better for all concerned undoubtedly. And broadly speaking the more Stream Entrants there are around, the more chances there will be of even more Stream Entrants being around. I mean, there is a saying, "A stream cannot rise higher than its source" but then the question is what is the source. In the case of the Dharma your ultimate source is the Buddha himself. I must say I've been quite surprised sometimes in the past the effect that words spoken by a certain person without very much reflection have had on other people, in a very positive sort of way. I have known examples of people being made to think and even change their lives after listening to a very poor lecture. You see? So sometimes one must remember this. One feels: Oh, my lectures are not very good, I don't know much about the Dharma. Well maybe, but there is something of the Dharma in your lecture. However badly your lecture may be delivered, however badly your material may be presented, there is something of the Dharma, which may, if the person listening is in the right sort of mental state, have profound effects and profound consequences. So you can sometimes have the case of someone who is quite a poor speaker, in the technical sense, actually doing quite a lot of good. He may only do harm in the case of those people who attach too much importance to the technicalities of a good speech, and cannot distinguish between a good talk in the formal sense and really valuable spiritual content. So if you've



got something of the Dharma you shouldn't be afraid or ashamed to (sort of) give a talk on the grounds that you are not a particularly good speaker and you're not fluent and your vocabulary is [238] limited. If there is something of the Dharma in you, and even if you can enumerate in some cases the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, even that actually bowls some people over - just the mere enumeration of those things.

I can remember - just going back to my own experience - a very simple example. I can remember giving a talk on the five precepts among the ex-untouchables on many occasions, just the five precepts. And I've known occasions when people have been absolutely bowled over by just the mere enumeration of the five precepts in a ten minute lecture. One said, "We never heard anything like that, how wonderful, no one ever told us about anything like the five precepts, about not taking life and speaking the truth. We've never heard these things before." So one might think what a dull, routine little lecture, you've just done your duty, you've just reeled off a few words about the five precepts, but no. Sometimes these things can have tremendous consequences for certain people who are in the right sort of receptive mood. So it's much the same even with a spiritual practice. Someone might teach you the metta bhavana in a meditation class. He may not be on form. He may not have wanted to take that class. He may even have done it in a quite mechanical fashion. But it may be that a certain person is just ready for that, and it really hits them as it were. It's as though the Dharma has its own force (as it were) which is sometimes quite independent of you, so to speak. Though obviously it's better if you can actually present and set off the Dharma in a more advantageous light. But even if you're able to do that, the real work is done by the Dharma and not by you. You only provide the setting for the jewel as it were, but the jewel is still a jewel, even if the setting is rather tawdry. And of course one might say that even the best setting will only enhance the beauty of the jewel; it will certainly not be able to take its place, and certainly doesn't have equal value. Anyway, how did we get onto that?

Vessantara: Via the question of whether one would have to be a Stream Entrant to pass on the visualization practices.

S: Ah yes. So clearly, if one was a Stream Entrant, that would be so much the better because one would then be able to explain so much more, inspire that particular person more. But if one isn't, well yes, one can still teach - I won't say pass on but - teach and explain those practices to other people in such a way that they will benefit and perhaps even, before long, go further than you have gone yourself. I did hear a saying some years ago - I forget where it came from - that you weren't a real teacher unless your disciples went further than you had gone. Because if in every generation disciples go a little less far than their teachers, what's going to happen after a few hundred years? There's going to be practically nothing left. So it is sometimes said that a real teacher is one whose disciples go

even further than he's gone himself. That is really what one has got to aim at. It's not enough that they go as far as you - that's the minimum. They should go even further. Unless of course you're a Buddha, when it's rather difficult to go any further!

Padmavajra: Presumably the disciples got to be aware of that too.

S: But not doubt there were certain respects in which some of the Buddha's disciples were better at certain things than he was himself. [239] He said, one day, "Well, some of my disciples are more ascetic than I am myself. That perhaps wasn't a question so much of attainment than, you might say, lifestyle.

Shantavira: I think he said that Padmasambhava would be a greater teacher than he was, didn't he?

S: This is according to Tibetan sources (laughter). But even if we don't accept that as historically accurate - in the sense that the historical Buddha actually said it - it does nonetheless illustrate this point. Nyingmapas are very fond of telling you this. They say, well, "Clearly Padmasambhava was superior to the Buddha Shakyamuni, great though he was. After all, Shakyamuni was born from a woman, whereas Padmasambhava was born from a lotus". (laughter) They tell you this in all sincerity. And it's true: someone who is born from a lotus is certainly superior to someone who is born from the womb. We'd much rather be born from a lotus wouldn't we? (laughter) Than from a dirty old womb. (laughter) A nice clean, beautiful, sweet-smelling lotus flower. What could be nicer than that? Just to have its petals opening around you and there you are, you're eight years old already!

Prasannasiddhi: You could say it was a greater act of compassion to be born from a womb.

S: Well, you could say that too. Anyway, have we any questions left, and what is the time?

Vessantara: It's a quarter to nine.

Susiddhi: Should a Buddhist right-livelihood printing co-op do work for a Christian organization?

S: Well, it depends on the nature of the work; it depends even on the nature of the Christian organization. If the Christian organization is doing some perfectly worthwhile work, I don't see why one shouldn't do the printing work on behalf of that organization with regard to that particular work, just because the organization was Christian. But one would have to look at that quite closely and make quite sure that by doing that work one wasn't furthering principles that one didn't actually believe in. I don't think it just applies to Christian groups, but groups with all sorts of ideologies.

We did have this example down at our own typesetters in London, didn't we? They were given a feminist pamphlet to compose. The feminist pamphlet was the pamphlet produced by the celebrated Valerie Solankis who shot Andy Warhol, and it was on cutting up men. So this was given to Windhorse Photosetters to compose. I got wind of this, (I somehow do get wind of things usually) so I called for a copy of this (I think the work had already been done) anyway I called for a copy and I was really quite astonished because I don't expect extreme feminist literature to be very nice, but this wasn't at all nice - I won't go into details. But anyway it did quite seriously call for... well, it was a plea for homicide, directed against men. And it was being reprinted by a local feminist group who felt that Valerie Solankis's ideas ought to be taken more seriously. So the work was given, in a sisterly sort of spirit, to Windhorse Photosetters, because it was a women's business. So I made the point that we just shouldn't do that sort of work. And, yes, eventually they did take the point that we shouldn't do any work where the breaking of any of the precepts was in fact advocated. We shouldn't print anything which advocated violence against other human beings. But I was interested to ask whether the person actually doing the typesetting had felt that there was anything wrong with what she was doing, and apparently it just didn't register at all. She'd read it and she knew perfectly well what it was saying, but it didn't even occur to her that perhaps Windhorse Photosetters ought not to be facilitating the circulation of that sort of material. She seemed a bit surprised when it was pointed out to her, though on reflection she tended to agree, she wasn't too sure. But I give this as a sort of example. What I said actually was, well (I think I said it to this person, or else to some other women) I said supposing a men's organization handed in a pamphlet advocating the raping of women, would you do the typesetting? "Oh no, of course not" - But you seemed willing to do the typesetting for a booklet advocating the murder of men. So this is what I call the double standards. (laughter) But you see the general principle? If a Christian organization wants a Buddhist printing press to produce material which is against Buddhist principles, well we can't do that. But I think if that is not required of us, the fact simply that it is a Christian organization should not put us off. I think we can examine each particular case, each particular item, on its own merits.

Sarvamitra: It's on this horizontal and vertical counterparts of abstention, on page 65. I brought the question up two nights ago.

S: Oh. So you did. Repeat it please.

Sarvamitra: I didn't quite understand clearly what the vertical and horizontal counterparts of abstention from sexual misconduct referred to. Whether it was the dark and the light side of the pillar...

S: Ah. In the case of the vertical counterpart I was referring I think to the state of androgyny, because that is something (as it were)... it's not a counterpart in the sense of being a complement, whereas in the case of the horizontal equivalent what you get is a sort of counterpart. Where is

the actual passage?

Sarvamitra: Page 65.

S: "Since a state of sexual dimorphism is a state of polarization, tension, and projection, it is also a state of discontent. The state of spiritual androgynousness, on the contrary, is a state of harmony, relaxation, and content. Observance of the Third Precept, therefore, does not consist simply in abstention from the various well known forms of sexual misconduct, but also, and more importantly, in the experience of Contentment, the 'vertical' as distinct from the 'horizontal' counterpart ..."  
Yes. That's the vertical counterpart. And simply abstention from sexual misconduct is the horizontal counterpart. Maybe these expressions 'horizontal' and 'vertical' are misleading. Let's see if I can put it in another way. You've as it were got sexual misconduct, you've got abstention from sexual misconduct, and then you've got a state of androgynousness in which abstention from sexual misconduct is natural. So that [241] state of androgynousness I call the 'vertical' counterpart of the original state of abstention from sexual misconduct. And that abstention from sexual misconduct constitutes the counterpart (as it were) on the horizontal level. Is that clear or not clear? Perhaps it needs another sort of working out.

Aryacitta: Does that mean that abstention is psychological; androgyny would be spiritual?

S: Ye-e-s, except that doesn't really help us very much, because the spiritual is still not the transcendental. Perhaps I need to make a little diagram. I'll try to do that perhaps. Ah! Perhaps we can look at it in this way - pretending in terms of a diagram - suppose you think of a triangle with only two sides (let us say). So what does that mean? - You've got something like that: [demonstrates a triangle with only two sides, see printed transcript] You've got one, two, three points. So let's say here, at this point, you've got sexual misconduct. Here you've got abstention from sexual misconduct. And there you've got androgynousness which is the vertical counterpart of abstention from sexual misconduct on the.. (unclear).. level. Does that make it clear? You've got the original reference point in the form of sexual misconduct, and then you've got the counterpart in negative terms, then you've got the counterpart in positive terms, in other words in terms of androgynousness.

Sarvamitra: It also occurred to me that maybe... or whether... this vertical as distinct from horizontal counterpart of abstention could be applied to all of these precepts all of the time...

S: Yes. You could (as it were) arrange them in that sort of triangular fashion. Yes. Someone might like to work that out (as it were). Yes, one could do that. It's thinking in terms of what somebody called the higher third - this synthesis which transcends - and as it were unites - the original

thesis and antithesis. One could put it in that way.

Vajranatha: What would be the thesis and antithesis in this case?

S: Well, it depends what your starting point is. If your starting point is sexual misconduct, well that becomes your thesis, and your abstention from sexual misconduct is your antithesis, and your practice of androgynousness is your synthesis.

Prasannasiddhi: Sorry? The sexual misconduct is the thesis?

S: Yes. Given that as a hypothetical starting point. Because abstention from sexual misconduct negates sexual misconduct. In that sense it is the antithesis. You can of course do it the other way round.

Prasannasiddhi: In a way you'd hardly think that a combination of the lower two factors would produce... [242]

S: It's not a combination. It's not a combination. That's the whole point. A synthesis is not a combination, it's a resolution of the (as it were) antithesis by rising to a completely higher level. I think one needs a little reference to Hegel here. But that is (as I said) the wrong factor. The synthesis does not represent any combination of the previous two factors - of thesis and antithesis. Is there anything else?

Vessantara: It's just about nine o'clock.

S: Let's just have one then. Preferably a little one.

Kamalasila: If I remember rightly it's been quite a number of years since we've been trying to get correct chanting, but still we have dirge-like Avalokitesvara mantras, and people going om-ah-HAA-hum in the Padmasambhava mantra. In fact I think over those years things have got worse. As the movement increases in size, do you think that new measures are required - do you think we need to do something about this - to both maintain and establish standards of pronunciation and other aspects of chanting?

S: Well, in theory, yes. But it's also a question of who's going to bell the cat, and how. (laughter) And we do try on these Tuscanys I believe. First of all people need to know the correct pronunciation, and they need to be mindful so that they maintain it, and also pass it on to other people on those occasions where they do, say, lead chanting of mantras and so on and so forth.

Dharmamudra: Are there tapes available?

S: This I'm not sure about. There are tapes, I know, of me leading pujas, assuming that that is the sort of norm, to some extent, but yes. Whether

they're generally available I don't know.

Kamalasila: Well, I can ask then, do you think it's important?

S: I think it would be certainly better to be correct than incorrect. I don't say that it's of absolute spiritual importance to be correct. The Tibetans themselves are far from correct in their pronunciation of Sanskrit mantras.

Kamalasila: But I think you think that these things should be standard, don't you?

S: Well, it's not a question of standard; it's a question of correct or incorrect. There'll only be deviation to the extent that things are incorrect. The standard is what is correct. So it's not as though I think things should be standardized, I simply think they should be correct, if at all possible.

Vessantara: There are some variations in tunes, say, which would...

S: Well, I'm talking about pronunciation. There may be a legitimate variation in intonation or rhythm and so on and so forth. But clearly any chanting should be positively inspiring, certainly not dirge-like, depressing. [243]

Kamalasila: It often is, and it seems very very difficult to change things.

S: Well, I think it probably needs just a lot of thinking about. It could be that we haven't yet hit upon or devised the right sort of tunes. On the other hand sometimes on a Sunday I happen to get a church service on the news for a few minutes - I'm always struck by the dirge-like nature of the hymn singing. It's very very rarely bright and cheerful. It is usually, more often than not, dirge-like. So it could be that that's a general characteristic of group singing, especially in the West, of that sort. Especially where you've got say a line of a verse of the same length, and you're repeating that over and over again. Perhaps you can't help producing a dirge-like sort of effect. Perhaps that will have to be investigated. Perhaps we need a proper trained choir to be able to do anything else. On the other hand (this is the other side of the argument) I've also tuned in once or twice to (I don't know quite how to describe it) let's say provisionally describe them as West Africans - Christians singing Christian hymns. It's quite different. That is not dirge-like, it's quite cheerful. So, ... (unclear sentence) ...

Devamitra: I must say I can understand the dirge-like Avalokitesvara mantra to some extent, but I don't think I could ever apply that criticism to the Padmasambhava mantra. That has never struck me as dirge-like. And I wonder therefore, perhaps, if in the case of the Avalokitesvara mantra it's to do with the tune.

S: It doesn't have to be dirge-like. I've certainly heard occasions when the

Avalokitesvara mantra chanting has been far from dirge-like. Though maybe some mantras lend themselves more to a dirge-like manner of chanting than do others.

Devamitra: I think that's basically what I'm trying to get at.

S: I sometimes have had the experience, when I've been leading chanting myself, or leading the recitation of the puja, sometimes I've felt that the other people doing the responses are quite sluggish. But if I try to inject more life into the situation they just wouldn't respond. And in the end a sort of battle develops - and you have to give up in the end, because you can't win in that sort of situation, however lively you are yourself. It's as though they want it to be dull and to drag along, they just don't have much life. Well, then one has to enquire: why is that? It could be that they're tired, because we tend to have pujas late in the evening, but it could be that they're just generally lacking in life, inspiration, and all the rest of it, and that comes out in the puja. I think pujas are perhaps quite significant in this respect. I think there's no easy solution. I think we have to give it more thought. OK, let's leave it there for now. Ah. One little news item. I shouldn't perhaps be giving you news items from the outside world, but I'll just give you one, and that's that our new puja book is on point of publication, you'll be glad to hear. It's probably actually published by now. So you'll all be able to go back to a brand new puja book. [244]

Questions and answers on The Ten Pillars of Buddhism - session 13, 3rd November 1984, Tuscany

Vessantara: So we have a fairly miscellaneous selection this evening. We'll start with Vajranatha on the speech precepts.

Vajranatha: This is about the speech precepts generally. Quite a lot of people express how important they feel the speech precepts are, and yet there hasn't been as many questions and discussion on these precepts. So I was wondering if this might be because people had experienced the negative effects of breaking the precepts, but have not yet experienced the fruits of practising the positive counterparts. That was the first part of the question.

S: It seems to me it's quite possible that the reason why there haven't been so many questions on the speech precepts is that they are relatively uncomplicated, relatively straightforward; whereas the first precept, the second precept, raise all sorts of complicated issues, both theoretical and practical. So it may be simply for that reason that there haven't been more questions on the speech precepts. Let's go on to the rest of your question and perhaps come back to the first part.

Vajranatha: Well, the only other thing I was wondering what conditions you thought would bring about more widespread practice of the positive speech precepts within the Order.

S: Well, to repeat something I did say once already, one has to want to practise those particular precepts. Not simply think it would be a good thing if one did practise them, but really want to. And of course one needs to cultivate mindfulness. Unless you can become aware of the occasions on which you break the precepts, it's very unlikely that you're going to be able to correct yourself and gradually practise the positive counterparts of those four speech precepts. Perhaps that isn't very original, but I don't see how one can really say very much more. One could even say that possibly the tongue does more mischief than any other part of the human body, with one possible exception. (laughter) The tongue is always ready, always available. All you have to do is to open your mouth and speak. The Buddha says in the Sutta Nipata that every man is born with an axe in his mouth with which he chops down the tree of his merit. So people are constantly using that little axe, that little chopper. It is after all our principal medium of expression. So sooner or later whatever is in us will find its way out through the medium of speech. You probably have had occasion to notice, in the course of your lives, quite often that you get together with a group of friends, and you may start off talking in a quite positive, constructive, even creative sort of way. But if you carry on long enough it very often happens that the level of discussion just becomes lower and lower, (I'm not speaking now specifically of what happens within the FWBO) and that you end up on a quite low level indeed. You end up maybe just gossiping or talking in a quite idle, foolish, empty, frivolous sort of way. Because it is as though those elements are there within you, and they gradually, if you're not mindful, find an outlet through the medium of speech. As you relax you tend to become unmindful, and as you become unmindful you tend to become unskilful in this way or that. [245]

But to come back to the first part of your question, what was your hypothesis - about this relative absence of questions on the speech precepts?

Vajranatha: I wondered if it was because people had experienced the negative effects of breaking the precepts, but had not yet experienced as much the fruits of practising the positive counterparts.

S: I don't see how that accounts for the lack of relative lack of questions, because if they've experienced only the negative effects of breaking them, and not the positive effects of keeping them, one might expect more questions as to how they could keep them and so on and so forth, which appears not to be the case.

Vajranatha: I think perhaps I had in mind perhaps not so much the fruits of keeping them, but actually being able to practise them positively but just at the stage of not actually breaking the precepts without really being able to do very much ... (unclear) ...



S: That may be so. Maybe the paucity of questions is due to a feeling of helplessness (laughter) with regard to the practice of the speech precepts.

Devamitra: Something that just occurs to me on the basis of what you said a few moments ago about there being certain things within you that just find an opportunity to come out through negative speech which perhaps might not otherwise. Isn't there a positive aspect to that as well, insofar as one can speak negatively, and express a certain amount of negative emotion, but it acts as a sort of safety valve. I had a specific example in mind from literature, and that is the case of Billy Budd in Melville's story. He's not able to express what he feels and in the end the frustration builds up to such a point that he actually kills a man. And I think also...

S: Unintentionally.

Devamitra: Yes. But I think also at Padmaloka not very long ago you were talking about the sort of safety valve that men have in relation to making jokes at the expense of women to vent their frustration against women, and this being a sort of useful safety valve in a way.

S: I think safety valves have only a provisional value, because sooner or later one must resolve the negative emotion that the safety valve provides an outlet for. No doubt sometimes yes, one does need a safety valve, but I think one should be very careful not to allow that to become a plea (so to speak) for self-indulgence; indulgence in those negative emotions. Perhaps something could be said on this subject of people not having yet fully experienced the positive effects of keeping the speech precepts. Perhaps they haven't realized how enjoyable it is to keep them. Not in the sense of satisfaction derives from the idea that you are keeping precepts, but the positive nature of the experience you get when you are actually able to speak the truth. I have (sort of) touched on the difficulty of speaking the truth more than once over the years. I've emphasized that it's sometimes a great relief to be able to speak the truth. I've emphasized that very often it's very very difficult to speak [246] the truth, because very often people are not willing to listen to the truth, and there's no point in just speaking the truth into the empty air. So even objectively, very often, there are opportunities for speaking the truth and observing that particular precept in a positive fashion are very much curtailed. It doesn't mean that we have necessarily to speak untruths, but to refrain from speaking untruths, or to be able to refrain from speaking untruths, is a rather poor substitute for the satisfaction or enjoyment of being actually able to speak the truth, to be actually able to say what you really do think and really do feel.

I think quite a few people within the Friends find that they're in this sort of situation with regard to, say, their families and their former friends, because they aren't able to say how they really do feel about the Dharma or their involvement in spiritual life, or aren't really able to say what they

feel in some cases about Christianity and so forth. I had a discussion and in fact correspondence with an Order member recently on this particular topic. He came from a Catholic family, and he'd never been able to make it clear, hadn't been permitted to make it clear to his family, especially to his parents, that he rejected Christianity. His parents apparently, whenever he went home, refused in effect to recognize that he was a Buddhist. They no longer insisted that he went to mass on Sunday morning, but they didn't really accept that he had become a Buddhist. So he could not really speak to them truthfully on this particular topic, until one day some months ago there was quite an outburst, and he was able to tell his father, at last, what he really thought about Christianity, especially about Catholicism and the effect it had had upon him, his life. How it had (you know) distorted and warped his life in certain respects. And what he said had quite a shattering effect on his father, at least for the time being. So this is just an example of the sort of thing I'm getting at.

So perhaps, yes, very often due to no fault of our own, we don't really know what it is like to keep the speech precepts in a really positive fashion. In this particular case perhaps we don't often have the opportunity of speaking the truth in the fullest sense, and therefore perhaps don't value it. If for instance someone asks you, "Do you take sugar in your tea," and you say no, well, that's a truthful statement, but you're not speaking the truth in the fullest conceivable sense of the term. Do you see what I mean? We're very rarely in a situation where we can speak the truth in that fuller sense. And the same with regard to the other speech precepts. I mean how often do we really speak with genuine kindness? It's not always our fault. You can't just go round speaking kindly to people ... or perhaps you can: but certainly it's helpful to have a situation which conduces to your speaking kindly to people, or which invites your speaking kindly to people almost. And then you don't often perhaps have an opportunity of speaking in such a way as to bring about concord and harmony between people. So it's as though when we are able to practise the positive speech precepts (and perhaps we're very willing to) usually we're able to do so in a very limited, very trifling, almost footling sort of way, that is not very impressive and not very inspiring. Do you see what I'm getting at? I didn't mention one particular precept - speaking in such a way that your speech is conducive to people's good. Well, we can often make useful remarks, but that doesn't exhaust the possibilities of the observance of that particular precept in a positive form. [247]

So it's as though it's very easy to break the speech precepts but it's really quite difficult to keep them, especially in that fuller and deeper sense. It's almost as though our lives are so restricted and so mediocre that they hardly allow us scope for the practice of the speech precepts, so to speak on a more heroic scale. This reminds me of something - it just comes into my mind - in connection with saints in the Catholic church. I've just referred to the Catholic church in a slightly uncomplimentary way, so let's

just make up for it with a slightly positive reference. You probably know that in the Catholic church there is such a thing as the process of canonization; that is to say someone being officially declared a saint. And apparently one of the requirements is that the person in question should not only have practised the virtues, but should have practised them on an heroic scale. "Ingradus heroicus" I think the term is. And that is really quite significant. So you can apply this within a Buddhist context. It's not enough to practise the precepts, it's not enough to practise the paramitas, (in the case of the paramitas it's more obvious) you've got to practise them (as it were) on an heroic scale. It's not enough to say that "yes, thank you, I take sugar in my tea" or "I don't take sugar in my tea". That is not really the practice of the precept of speaking the truth. You've got to practise it (so to speak) on an heroic scale. But modern life doesn't offer, it seems, many opportunities for the practice of heroism. Or perhaps it does; maybe one has to look for them all the more closely. You could say that when you're explaining the Dharma, you're speaking the truth. Well, in a sense you are in the sense that you've assimilated the Dharma, but you need a situation within which you can really speak about the Dharma as you really think, as you really feel, as you really believe. You need as it were, almost, a sympathetic and receptive audience, or a sympathetic and receptive ear, otherwise how can you speak the truth of the Dharma fully as you actually perhaps experience it? So what is the solution? I suppose it is that one must understand the matter more clearly, theoretically so to speak, and make a much more determined effort not to rest content with one's present rather mediocre level of performance. One has to try to see that there is actually more to the practice of these speech precepts than perhaps at first sight appears.

Satyaloka: What do you have in mind when you say that modern life doesn't really provide you with the opportunities for this heroism, as contrasted with...

S: Well modern life, talking about life in Britain anyway, is very safe and very secure. You're not challenged very much. Your life is not very often put in danger. You're not often really threatened. You aren't called upon to declare your principles in such a way that it constitutes a risk, perhaps to life and property, freedom and so on.

Satyaloka: So are you saying we should perhaps go to Russia rather than going to places where telling the truth can...

S: Well, you'd have to learn Russian first (laughter) otherwise they wouldn't understand what you were doing. And you'd have to get in of course, which apparently isn't easy. But people do tend to prevaricate, to avoid the issue. I think the English are [248] probably very good at that. Perhaps it's a weaker aspect of their famous spirit of compromise.

Satyaloka: It's just that I was thinking that there are quite a lot of situations in Britain that we could... if we were more outgoing, if we were

more outspoken, we'd be in a position to...

S: I don't mean that one should go out of one's way to give offence or to be difficult or over-argumentative. That would be very counter-productive. But yes, to be more outspoken in a positive and friendly way. It did just occur to me that there has been a great improvement over the last fifteen or twenty years within the Buddhist movement generally, that is to say since I've been back, maybe to some extent due to me, at least to a limited extent. But I can remember - and I often refer to these instances - when I came back in '64 people who were coming along to lectures and classes, and who considered themselves (in a way) as Buddhists, prided themselves on never telling anybody that they were Buddhist. I remember one woman telling me (this is my classic example) that she'd worked in the same office, or with the same firm, I think it was for thirteen years, and she said with an air of triumph and satisfaction "but none of the people with whom I work know that I'm a Buddhist". She said if she was ever asked about her religious beliefs (and of course that didn't happen very often) she sort of indicated, or sort of suggested, she said, that she was "inclined to the Quaker persuasion" (laughter). That was her very expression, I well remember it, "inclined to the Quaker persuasion", to avoid saying that she was a Buddhist. Well, things have changed somewhat since then, and not only within the FWBO; even within other Buddhist groups in Britain I'm sure. People will now say that they are Buddhists. It is becoming more possible to say also. Whether even that is enough of course is quite another matter, because it's all right to tell somebody that you are a Buddhist, but there's also the question of what they understand by the term - to what extent have you communicated what you really believe and what you're really trying to do - communicated your ideal, simply by saying to somebody that you are a Buddhist. It's only a step in the right direction, no more.

Another thing that occurs to me - this has just come to mind: perhaps we aren't sufficiently aware of the fact, or perhaps we aren't sufficiently convinced, that speech is something that we can change, that it is something that we can work on. We tend to think in all sorts of ways, well, as we speak, well, we speak. We apply it usually to our accents, or we apply it to our use or misuse of grammar. We don't usually think that we can learn to speak better than we usually do, whether in conversation or giving a talk or something of that sort. Do you see what I'm getting at? I have at the back of my mind what some people have lamented as the decay of good conversation. At certain periods in history, say in England in the eighteenth century, people made a conscious effort to speak better, to communicate more effectively, even to speak elegantly. But that all seems to have gone out of fashion. It's as though people don't make any effort with their speech, in a general sort of way. And perhaps that is at the back - or perhaps that is one of the things that is at the back - of [249] our failure to do better where the speech precepts are concerned. We don't think of our speech in terms of something on which we can work. Something which we can improve. It's as though we feel we're landed with

the way that we speak and that's that. I remember in this connection a little episode or incident from the Life of Doctor Johnson. I think someone asked him - it might have been Boswell - once how was it that he'd attained to such an extreme and unusual facility of expression. And Johnson replied (these aren't his exact words, but he replied to the effect that) from a very early age he had always set himself out, in whatever company he found himself, to express himself in the very best possible way that he could; to be as clear, as precise, even as eloquent, as he possibly could. And he said by dint of continued practice it had become natural to him to speak in this way. And people were often amazed, especially foreign visitors to London, in the days of Johnson's celebrity, amazed at the way he spoke, because they said he spoke on every occasion as though he was reading it all out of a book. His extemporary talk was better put together, better composed, better structured, than most people's writing. So it shows that it can be done. You can train yourself to speak accurately, you can train yourself to speak effectively, you can train yourself to speak in a structured way. I found it very, very instructive when I started editing the transcripts of seminars, because I found people - some of my interlocutors - speaking in a most extraordinary way. I had to edit these things so I found tangles of sentences - people saying things like "well, it's supposed that, well, you know, the Buddha... well, the Dharma, and then of course" (laughter). I'm not exaggerating. This is the sort of stuff I had to edit and make sense of so... Talk about "with stammering lips and insufficient sound" (laughter). So I think, again, one of the reasons why we don't do better, more positively, with the speech precepts, we don't regard our speech as being (as it were) raw material on which we must work. We almost take pride nowadays in slovenliness and sloppiness of speech, just sort of muttering a few words out of the corner of your mouth, maybe they get it from some of these American films, some of them (laughter). Some of them. (laughter)

Padmavajra: It's sometimes difficult to do that because people think you're being pretentious if you try...

S: That's quite true. That's quite true.

Padmavajra: Because you might even be a bit false if ... (unclear) ...

S: But then that is a sort of miccha ditthi on their part. Unfortunately in Britain different kinds of speech are socially linked, and broadly speaking to speak in a better sort of way - more effectively, more accurately - is generally associated with a better education, and to some extent with a higher social standing. So if you start trying to speak more carefully your old associates may well think that you're putting on airs, in a social sort of sense, or that you regard yourself as belonging to a higher class than you actually do belong to or that they belong to. But nonetheless one has to persist, in the interests [250] of good communication.

Lalitavajra: That was also a feature of the eighteenth century as well - the art of good conversation.

S: Yes, indeed.

Padmavajra: Didn't Johnson distinguish between conversation and something else? He had two words - there was conversation which was more like our communication, then there was another word (I can't remember it) which was just useless...

S: I'm sure he had a word for it and I'm sure that word is in his dictionary. I can't think of what it might have been. But are people conscious of actually making an effort to speak better? (Speak better is not quite the phrase I want, but it will do.) To improve their use of the faculty of speech? Or are people usually content with such faculty of speech as they happen to possess, that their educational lack has left them with?

Dharmamudra: I think maybe because it's with you all the time - speech - it's harder to see. You need to work with more than yourself.

S: I think you need to be corrected. I think mistakes need to be pointed out. And this is not done at school. I mean, the most extraordinary things happen in schools nowadays. Apparently... I've been reading that there are some educationalists that believe that a child's mistakes in grammar, and so on, and it's inadequate communication, constitute a special form of English which must be nurtured and encouraged (laughter) and even sanctioned and given (sort of) government grants (voice drowned by laughter)... And if you try to correct the child's grammar, you're imposing your middle class values on their ethnic culture. Well, when I read about this I was quite flabbergasted. It seemed extraordinary. No doubt dialectal variations are permissible, and also variations of accent and intonation and all that sort of thing. But there is such a thing as bad English, and one doesn't want to permit and encourage and foster bad English under some pretence of educational liberalism. Yes, now apparently teachers have been instructed in some areas not to correct their pupils' grammar and idioms, because that's their speech, that's natural, and they're to be encouraged to write their stories and essays in that particular form of speech with which they're familiar.

Dharmamudra: It's a very difficult thing to control. In the school I taught in there was Asian, West Indian, Irish, and I mean it was just a real shambles really.

Padmavajra: But if they encourage that, Bhante, surely that is going to undermine the possibilities of communication.

S: Yes. Because usually these other forms of English (let's call them that) are very limited - impoverished in vocabulary and so on and so forth. Occasionally you might get a vivid idiom, but I think that's quite

exceptional.

Padmavajra: I think as well if one wants to improve one's [251] speech, it's important to have an example - actually have people around who can speak.

S: I think also reading is important. If you read the classics, take them at all seriously, then something of their style, something of their idiom, will rub off onto you - you'll pick it up quite naturally. But this is perhaps quite an important point, because people think in terms of training their bodies, - well, most of you do some kind of physical exercise, you go off running or you do karate or Yoga or Ta'i Chi or whatever - and people think in terms of training their minds - with Dharma study and meditation and all the rest of it. But one doesn't think in quite the same way about training one's speech. So one might say, well, what does speech training consist in? It presumably includes things like elocution, learning to speak in a grammatical sort of way, which means of course to begin with that you have to know your grammar; it means speaking clearly. That of course implies thinking clearly to begin with. You might say it includes speaking in a pleasing sort of way. Some people speak in a very unpleasant sort of way, in a harsh, discordant sort of way. Some people don't enunciate properly, they mumble or they mutter, they speak out of the corner of their mouths. There are certain people, even Order members, whose remarks on tape can never be transcribed because they mumble into their... I was going to say beards, they don't usually have beards but it sounds as though they had and that they were mumbling into them. (laughter) And also speaking out. A lot of English people are very bad at this. The Americans are much better, to give them their due, they speak out. You can hear them the other side of the hall sometimes. But English people often speak - especially more educated people - speak in this subdued, apologetic way, swallowing their words all the time, so you have to listen carefully to know what they're saying. They don't speak out. They don't enunciate properly. So speech training would include all these sorts of things. Can anyone think of any more things?

Aryadaka: Confidence. People won't speak out because they're not confident, and also grammar would be confused if they.. (unclear)..

S: I suppose you can't really do anything effective if you lack confidence. Of course people do get a little bit of speech training in the speakers' classes don't they, because if they don't project their voices properly they're told that, or if their sentences aren't very well put together presumably they're told that.

Padmavajra: Perhaps we need more elementary speakers classes where, just from the point of view of speaking they could read a text or a piece of literature...

S: Yes, I have said in the past I think - though we've never really taken this

up - that it would be good if there was more reading aloud. We do have of course reading aloud in the context of puja. I'm afraid I sometimes wince as I sit there and hear some reading, not on Tuscanys but certainly on other occasions, because you have a beautiful passage perhaps, and it's mangled. And very often - and I'll mention this just in case anyone's ever guilty of this - often what happens is that just two minutes [252] before the puja there's a scamper of tiny feet and it's people rushing around to find somebody to do a reading, or even to find a reading. So that someone's got it just half a minute before the puja, and they have a quick look at it. So the result is that when he comes actually to read it out he stumbles over the Pali or Sanskrit words, sometimes he stumbles over English words of more than two syllables (laughter), and sometimes he can't see properly because he hasn't provided himself with a candle, he's forgotten that in the hurried rush (laughter). So you get a very, very poor reading instead of something inspiring and uplifting. Do you see what I mean? Sometimes, especially when it's a translation, the structure of the sentences is a bit awkward, sometimes it's complex, so you need to go over those sentences a few times, you need to get the hang of them to understand how they're put together, so that you can give the necessary emphasis, so you can pause in the right places. Very often that isn't done. There are very, very few really good readers in the FWBO. One of the best, if I may say so, is Mallika. Not many people will have heard of her but she's exceptionally good because she has trained in elocution, and I believe even taught elocution, so she reads really beautifully, and there are only two or three who read anywhere nearly as well as she reads. So perhaps reading should be cultivated much more as an art. Perhaps people should take readings they do in the context of pujas much more seriously. Preferably ask someone beforehand to listen to them, to hear them read it aloud, and offer any suggestions, because sometimes you need to place the emphasis correctly, and it isn't always clear at first reading where that should go. Very few people can sight read effectively. That's very, very difficult because your eye has to be a line or so ahead of where you're actually reading from.

Indrabodhi: Intonation's an important part of speech isn't it? Some people speak very flatly which makes it difficult to...

S: Yes, you must vary the pace according to the sense. You must use your voice in a flexible sort of way, not speak or read in a sort of dull monotone. So perhaps we're much too unconscious in our use of speech on all occasions, and much too (as it were) automatic. And this is perhaps one of the things at the back of the fact that we don't fare better with the speech precepts.

Dharmamudra: It's just habitual.

S: Yes, we are habitually slack and slovenly when it comes to using the speech principle.



Satyananda: Giving a lecture in something like the FWBO don't you set up a sort of peer group, or group to involve yourself with, and you get an accepted level. It's only when you ..(unclear)..

S: Yes. Also you should want to give of your best; to communicate in the most effective way that you can. That means there must be some sort of human communication going on, otherwise if you're just working with someone and never say much more than "pass the screwdriver", well, (laughter) that doesn't really leave much scope for the cultivation of better speech, what to [253] speak of communication.

Indrabodhi: Do you think drama would be a good thing for people to experiment in in order to practise putting emotion and feeling into speech?

S: I'd say work on those puja readings. (laughter) But yes, I think drama and speech therapy and elocution - all these things do go together don't they? I think with reading from drama one needs to put much more expression into what one is saying; it is, obviously, dramatic. But probably to get together with people and read a play and that sort of thing is quite a big enterprise, quite demanding, so perhaps that can't be recommended for everybody. Anyway, perhaps we should pass on. We have dwelt at some length on that, and maybe something relatively new has emerged.

Lalitavajra: The English language is expressed in terms of subject and object. Is the use of language as metaphor the means to liberate consciousness from a literal and rigid conditionality imposed by this structure of language?

S: Say that again. The very first point.

Lalitavajra: Well, the English language is expressed in terms of subject and object. Is the use of language as metaphor...

S: When you say subject and object, are you speaking philosophically or in logical and grammatical terms?

Lalitavajra: Well, I was thinking more or less the whole of language is structured in such a manner as to be... I mean it doesn't speak unless you speak in terms as metaphor, that that bridge of subject and object is actually crossed.

S: I'm still wanting to know whether you're using subject and object in the sense of the subject as distinct from the object philosophically, the subjective world from the objective world, or are you thinking it terms of subject and object in the grammatical sense?

Lalitavajra: It was more in terms of philosophical sense.

S: Well, yes, clearly all language, like all thought, all experience, operates within that subject-object duality. But it does seem at the same time that in metaphor language in that sense transcends itself. Because it does seem, as I illustrated the other week, that in metaphor one of the things that happens is there is a sort of fusion of - I won't say subject and object but at least of one object with another. So it could be, as I was sort of suggesting the other week, that the metaphor is a sort of clue almost to the nature of reality, or something like that. Yes. Because obviously if there was an absolute barrier between subject and object, or one person and another let us say, well, there would be no communication possible at all. So perhaps metaphor does have its special significance in this sort of way. Metaphor is essentially synthetic, one might say, rather than analytic. But this brings us to the question of the figures of speech. Perhaps we need to learn more about figures of speech, and study them. I used to teach, when I was in Kalimpong, a subject which was called (now what did they call it?) but it consisted of rhetoric and prosody mainly, and [254] under rhetoric, which included figures of speech... I suppose in England people used to have to study that. I don't think they do now, but they were still studying it in India in the early fifties, at least under the University of Calcutta, for the matriculation examination and their intermediate arts examination. And I was coaching students in logic also, which goes together with grammar, and prosody and rhetoric, especially in the form of figures of speech. And this is very, very interesting study which I think is largely neglected nowadays, except perhaps by people who specialise in English literature, or the English language. But it's a quite fascinating subject, that of rhetoric, which is really the art of effective speaking. And it includes a detailed analysis of various figures of speech.

It was Aristotle who really settled all this, more or less once and for all, as he settled, apparently, so many other things. There is a book by Aristotle called simply Rhetoric. I did read this many many years ago and most traditional accounts or treatments of rhetoric are based ultimately on Aristotle. But it's quite illuminating to study the different figures of speech; metaphor and simile are only the two most common ones, there are all sorts of other abstruse and even complicated figures of speech that are quite interesting to study, even if you don't always use them. You may find, to your surprise, that actually you do use them without understanding that you use them, just like the character in one of Moliere's comedies, who was delighted to be told that he'd been speaking prose all his life! (laughter) I remember some of these terms; I'm sorry that I can't remember all the definitions. That's something I'd have to brush up. But yes, the study of rhetoric used to be considered very, very important didn't it? The art of effective speaking, not in the sense of effective sales talk, but effective speaking in the broadest sense.

Abhaya: In the secondary school I went to the fourth year was called grammar, the fifth year was called syntax, the sixth year was called poetry, and the seventh year was called rhetoric, although in fact we

didn't study those subjects. But that's what each form was called.

S: This seems a quite logical arrangement doesn't it? Because originally grammar schools in England, and presumably elsewhere, were schools for the teaching of Latin grammar, because once you knew Latin well, that was the key to all the classics of various studies written in Latin. So no doubt the forms were organized in that sort of way. You exercised yourself not just in Latin grammar, but reading Latin authors and Greek authors, and doing compositions in those languages. But people don't take language nowadays, it seems, as seriously as that. There are some very good writers, but they mostly seem to be self taught and self trained. I believe in France they are much more concerned about the correct use of language than they are in Britain. This is what I've understood. Much more attention is given, within the educational system, to the correct use of the French language. So that I gather every educated French person is able to use their own language effectively, whether in its spoken or its written form, to a much greater extent than is the case in England.

Aryadaka: Haven't they outlawed "franglais" officially? [255]

S: Yes. They've officially outlawed it, but whether that is going to help them is very, very doubtful, because "franglais" is so pervasive, so popular with the younger generation usually. It usually finds its way in through films or pop-songs and all the rest of it. But that is an expression of their concern for the purity of their own language, though perhaps they do, in some quarters, conceive of that purity in rather narrow terms. Because it's well known that there are all sorts of words that the French Academy refused to recognize and held out for years and years, but in the end had to give in, admit officially into the French language and into the dictionary. But yes, in principle it shows a praiseworthy concern for the effectiveness of your language as an instrument of expression. I think if I was a Frenchman I wouldn't like really expressions like "le pop-star" or "le weekend" or ...

Aryadaka: Le camping.

S: Le camping...

Devamitra: Presumably that's happening throughout western European languages. The same thing's happening in Italian, and all the same words you'll find are actually in Italian dictionaries.

Aryadaka: But didn't the same thing happen to the English language when aliens came to England?

S: Oh yes indeed. This has happened with almost every language. Very few languages are pure. Even in modern times; there are so many of our words in English for different kinds of foods and drinks come from French. Our musical terms come from Italian. Just because those particular

countries have specialized more in those particular things. It isn't surprising that a lot of commercial, political, and diplomatic terms now should be English, should sort of enter into all languages. It seems that the English speaking countries are the centre, for good or for ill, of culture. So it's inevitable I suppose that words in English, expressions of that culture, penetrate into all languages practically, even pour into Chinese and Russian.

Baladitya: Do you think English will accommodate Pali and Sanskrit words into the language more easily ...

S: It's doing it already. Nirvana, karma...

Aryadaka: I read somewhere that the reason English is such a useful language is because it has adopted words from other languages all along.

S: I don't know whether that is the reason, because the form of English which is most widespread is a sort of basic English, with not a very big vocabulary. And in India you can hear lots of people speak simple, not very grammatical, English. One of the reasons for the widespreadness of English is the ease with which apparently one can learn to speak at least a form of English (not to say bad English, perhaps one shouldn't say that, but at least a form of English). A little English goes a long way in practice; you don't have to learn a lot of it to be able to speak at all, which is apparently the case with some [256] languages. Also it's not an inflected language, which helps.

A voice: What does that mean?

S: The terminations of words don't change in a systematic or semi-systematic sort of way. Anyway, we're dwelling rather a lot on the subject of language; let's have some actual questions. How much time have we got left?

Vessantara: Half an hour. Satyananda?

Satyananda: This is about Shabda. I believe Shabda operates...

S: Shabda means "word" of course, doesn't it? (laughter)

Satyananda: I believe it operates more or less on the principle that if someone wants to say something, we print it, with I believe a few exceptions - I've read of exceptional instances...

S: I'm not sure even that there are any exceptions. Have we actually laid down any exceptions? I've laid down one, which I'm afraid is sometimes broken, that I've asked Virananda to see to it that nothing that I am supposed to have said - nothing transcribed for instance - is published without my being able to check it and edit it. This is sometimes broken, so

if you do transcribe anything that I've said, please don't send it straight off to Shabda without my checking it first. That's the only sort of rule which I can think of at the moment. Are there any others? No, probably not.

Devamitra: Doesn't it depend on the amount of material that's been submitted for a particular issue? Certain items will be at least held over, if not published.

S: Well, that's rather different. That is not a matter of principle, it's just whether we've got the money to produce a Shabda of that size. Anyway, let's have the question.

Satyananda: There were three things. Firstly I was wondering whether ... well, from what I've heard it does seem that some of the material that's printed seems to very obviously break some of the speech precepts. And I was wondering whether we weren't actually making it ... the effects of the particular Order member having broken the precept, whether we weren't actually making it worse for him by actually printing it and spreading it further. And secondly whether we weren't making it harder for the Order, as a whole, in general, to practise the speech precepts...

S: Yes, yes. Mmm.

Satyananda: .. We seem to condone them by printing them seemingly out of a principle of free speech.

S: There is something in this certainly. On the other hand one expects Order members to be responsible and not to send to Shabda for publication any contribution which really contravenes any of the speech precepts. I think you're right in saying that that sometimes has happened, but the alternative would seem to be to institute almost a sort of censorship. And people generally [257] speaking feel very sensitive on this particular issue. There's also the question of who would exercise the censorship, who would carry it out. So so far we've tended to rely on the sense of responsibility, and the awareness, of Order members, even though we have sometimes been disappointed. That would seem - or at least so far has seemed to be - the lesser perhaps of two evils.

Satyananda: That was my question really - what was the lesser of the two evils.

S: The form of wrong speech which seems, at least in the past, to have been most prevalent, is simply harsh and cutting speech, which is really quite inappropriate in Shabda. One can speak plainly and bluntly without being harsh and without being cutting, or derogatory, or using quite unpleasant slang expressions, or expletives.

Satyananda: If that happens in an Order meeting, when they're doing their reporting-in, is it normal for people to talk to that Order member

about the possibility of not putting it in Shabda.

S: I don't know whether it has actually happened, but it might be an idea, because I sometimes have felt it to be quite unpleasant when the pages of Shabda were disfigured with expletives and all sorts of unpleasant expression which one really feels have no place there, or have no place in the conversation of Order members. And it might be a good idea in fact, on occasion, if someone is speaking in that way in an Order meeting, it might be a good idea if somebody says, well, "Look, don't mind my making the point but don't you think you ought to tone that down for Shabda, or even to tone it down a bit for this meeting". A few people, I know, within the Order have got quite strong views on these subjects, and they believe that freedom of speech includes the freedom to use expletives and four-letter words and so on and so forth. I think that's a bit of a delusion.

Padmavajra: That's a sort of tyranny for those who want the freedom to practise the speech precepts.

S: But I think, since I spoke about these matters in the course of this paper, I think people have been a bit more aware - people within the Order especially - of these sort of issues. Was that the question?

Abhaya: I was wondering, Bhante, about the boundaries of the ethical, and thinking that in a way it doesn't have any boundaries. Like everything you do or everything you say or think about comes within the boundaries of the ethical. And that the precepts are - well, you've called them guidelines - and some guidelines have been put forward, while other guidelines might have been put forward as well. In this connection I've been thinking about the ethical implications of the lack of clarity of thought, which you've spoken a lot about, and also what we've been speaking about this evening actually - clarity of thought. And whether this sort of thing doesn't actually come within the province of ethics, if you take it seriously. Otherwise you just think of - for example - improving one's clarity of thought as a sort of optional extra. You know, you can go to [258] evening classes and improve your thinking, and improve your speech through elocution, and that's something you can either choose to do or not to do, whereas sexual misconduct and taking the not-given is an actual precept which you must not break. But isn't this - this is what I'm getting at - isn't this a sort of false division, and we should think in terms of "clarify your thinking" as actually an ethical position?

S: Yes, because unless you clarify your thinking, how can you actually speak the truth? And also unless you clarify your thinking how can you really sort out what is skilful and what is not skilful in perhaps quite quite complex situations? There's also the whole aspect of the extra-effectiveness that clarity of thought will give to your communication, will enhance your communication. There's also the question of elegance of speech, so that your speech is more pleasing to other people, more

pleasing for them to listen to.

Abhaya: So in a way you could say that that sort of speech is more skilful, using the term kusala and akusala.

S: Well, clearly, as I've mentioned, the term kusala implies an element of intelligence, and that is what is needed I think in the cultivation of the speech precepts, or what is needed in relation to speech generally. One is not to think of it as something to which you don't apply your intelligence, you're not to think of it as something that just sort of automatically happens - that you open your mouth and out flies speech. I think to begin with people - when they're trying to improve their speech - will be a bit self-conscious, but I think that sort of thing happens in all sorts of situations in which you're trying to progress from an unconscious way of functioning to a more conscious way of functioning. So I think you have to accept that, for the time being, that you're going to be a bit self-conscious, or you'll have to correct yourself from time to time. You shouldn't hesitate to do that. If you don't find the right word first time, well try again. Don't hesitate to stop and think and just try to find the word you really want, that you really need, the right word to express your meaning, not do with some provisional equivalent, don't be satisfied with "nice" or "amazing" or whatever.

Aryadaka: What exactly do you mean by elegance?

S: That's quite a question. What does one mean by elegant? Elegant usually has reference to beauty - beauty of a special kind - it's beauty of form and movement. They even speak nowadays quite often of an elegant demonstration in mathematics, a demonstration that proceeds to its conclusion in the neatest sort of way in the mathematical sense is said to have a sort of beauty, a sort of elegance about it. I can't say whether it does happen because I don't know enough about mathematics, but one can apply it to other things - one speaks of someone moving elegantly or speaking elegantly. It's speaking in an economical and at the same time graceful kind of way. Speaking with art. Not in an artificial way, but in a way that shows that care and attention and sensitivity has been devoted to the process or the business of speaking. What's the literal meaning of the word elegance? It's a Latin word.

Abhaya: All I can think of is eligere means to choose. [259]

S: Well, it could be what is chosen, rather than just what happens. It could be something of that sort. Petronius Arbiter was called the arbiter-elegantiarum wasn't he? The arbiter of elegance, in the sense of the graces of life. He sort of laid down (I think this was in the time of Nero) what was elegant in life and art and literature, and what was not, what was graceful, what was pleasing. Isn't it what the French called "comme il faut", something of that sort? I won't go into that.

A voice: "Comme il faut"?

Abhaya: As it's necessary. Literally, as it is needed. As it is necessary.

S: Appropriate. As it should be, yes, in an aesthetic sort of sense, not in a logical sense.

Devamitra: Elegance and eloquence would seem to be quite closely associated in speech.

S: What is eloquence? one might say.

Abhaya: There again there's a suggestion of beauty, speaking clearly and beautifully.

S: I don't remember what the technical definition is, but I think first of all eloquence implies force of feeling. There's a definite, positive emotional content there. And then it implies a certain flow, and then a certain beauty of expression, a certain spontaneity, a certain element of conviction. In former times people studied the art of eloquence, I mean they studied rhetoric to help them to be eloquent. There was a very, very famous Latin work which was avidly studied all through the Renaissance period which was The Institutes of Quintilian. I think it was also called The Orator. It laid down precepts (it was a quite big work, I think in two thick volumes) for being a perfect orator, and Quintilian sort of summed up the essence of the Latin tradition of oratory in this particular work, which was much studied throughout Europe for two or three hundred years, ever since the revival of learning.

Abhaya: Have you read it?

S: I have read one volume of it. I have got one volume, I haven't got the other. One doesn't often come across it these days. It is a very minute and very detailed sort of work.

Vessantara: There aren't many situations in modern life - unless you are actually giving a talk - when you keep up a flow of speech in conversation.

S: Yes. Reading about the Renaissance period, as I've been doing recently, one becomes aware that there were all sorts of occasions on which orations were pronounced; set speeches beautifully written, beautifully delivered, appropriate to the occasion, expressing appropriate sentiments. For instance on the occasion of marriages, receptions of ambassadors, anniversaries of famous men, especial appointments, publication of a book. There were all sorts of opportunities of that sort. One still has them in connection with some of the older universities; there is still a Latin orator at Oxford who still, on the occasion of conferring honorary degrees I believe, and similar such occasions, pronounces Latin orations in Latin, still. It's the last remnant perhaps in Britain of the old Renaissance



tradition. Perhaps we should cultivate that more. It only persists I think in the form of short speeches at banquets, after dinner speeches, or of course the Prime Minister's speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet, which is devoted, unfortunately, entirely to politics and economics. So yes, it is a point that those occasions for oratory are no longer with us - well, perhaps one should even say that the occasions are there but we don't any longer (so to speak) adorn them with oratory. Perhaps we don't have time. This perhaps ties up with another thing that we've talked about many a time, the question of formality and informality. If someone comes to see you, even perhaps some important person, someone (you know) who've arrival you've looked forward to for some time, you don't think in terms of welcoming them formally usually, much less still with a welcome speech. In India they still do this, it's a survival from Victorian times. I've often been greeted with a long speech of welcome, sometimes read out and then handed to me afterwards, in some remote Indian village more often than not. But we don't do that now. If somebody turns up we say hello and slap them on the back - "Want some tea?" and that's the extent of our formality. So maybe one of the reasons for the decay of oratory is that we no longer have these formal occasions because we're rather off formality nowadays. So perhaps we should think about that at least; whether there is some room for improvement.

Indrabodhi: The level of conversation is often not very good. I think that's lack of education. They don't read much literature, and they don't know very much. Until we've done that we don't really have much depth to communicate to each other.

S: But one's got one's own ideas, one's own thoughts, one's own feelings.

Aryadaka: Do you think perhaps that one of the reasons we're not so formal is because we move around so much, and if you're in Norwich one day and London the next and Brighton the next people...

S: Yes, if we had a formal reception or (unclear).. it would take up rather a lot of time. But yes, supposing in the old days an ambassador had taken six months to reach his destination, of course there'd be a big procession on his arrival, and an official reception, and speeches by all sorts of orators in different languages, even poems of welcome, and so on and so forth. So perhaps it has got something to do with our whole way of life.

Baladitya: The television interview. The seems to have quite a bad effect on people's contact with speech.

S: I've got one coming up, it's probably coming up this week. In what sort of way do you mean?

Baladitya: Well, boxers, footballers, union spokespersons. [261]

S: Oh, I see. Oh, it is really painful to hear some people being (as it were)

interviewed on news programmes on the radio (I don't know about television), and to just hear their pitiful command of the English language. It really is pitiful. Those who have any sort of command of the English language seem to have it in one particular direction only, that of abuse. Abuse of the opposite party or whatever is rather fluent, graphic, vivid (laughter), but in other respects their capacity for speech is limited, even some very eminent people. I won't mention certain transatlantic friends of ours whose capacities for speech are rather limited, but there are such people. One can find them nearer at home too, especially among the trades unions. They're not all lacking in fluency, but a lot of them. So the situation isn't very encouraging.

Dharmamudra: .. (unclear)

S: No. Because in primitive tribes, even, you have oratory where people aren't even literate. Education gives you a certain amount of perspective perhaps in a certain amount of material. I don't think it depends entirely on education, in the formal sense.

Dharmamudra: It's not common in the working class is it? Though you get an exception.

S: I don't think that is because the working class is relatively less educated; it probably isn't really any longer, because quite a percentage of working class people go to university. It is more a question of having something to say and wanting to say it effectively.

Padmavajra: Isn't there a sort of cynicism about as well. You mentioned those occasions when you would actually eulogize or really make something of an occasion. Isn't it that nowadays this cynicism is continually undermining of anything like that?

S: In some circles yes. But I think one mustn't forget that in some other circles this doesn't happen, though maybe only too often in those circles what one gets is rather stuffy relics from the past, rather than anything with any (you know) feeling and fresh. But yes, I think what you say is correct. That there is this sort of cynical attitude, almost not wanting to make much of things, or showing your sophistication to your cynicism. So perhaps this is something we need to think about quite seriously. One doesn't want to be (sort of) antiquarian almost, or revive things for the sake of reviving them. But perhaps there is reason for trying to introduce a greater level of formality in certain proceedings. Not formality in the negative sense that that term has tended to acquire in modern times. It's to do things with a certain form, which suggests a certain beauty, a certain regularity, not so to speak in a haphazard or a chaotic sort of way.

Dharmamudra: It certainly helps people to be more relaxed if they had that sort of guideline.

S: It sort of lubricates the wheels of social intercourse, one might say. I'm sometimes a bit displeased - it doesn't often happen now, it hasn't happened for some time - but I used to be [262] rather displeased for instance if I was giving a lecture, and maybe it was a quite serious lecture, but then for some reason or other whoever was introducing me would do it in a very nonchalant, careless sort of fashion which was quite inappropriate to the occasion. This sometimes used to happen, you know the sort of thing I mean. For instance someone would sort of amble up to the platform and say, "Hello, good evening, nice to see you, Bhante's going to give a talk, what's it about? - oh, yes, such and such" and then a few sort of lame remarks and then sort of shuffle off and then... (voice drowned by laughter)... to give my lecture which would in all likelihood be on some quite serious aspect of the Dharma. I didn't say anything at the time but at least I can say it now. Perhaps we ought to give more thought to this. We have brought up this general topic of formality on more than one occasion in connection with things like welcoming people when they arrive at the Centre, and so on.

Aryadaka: Do you think we should get some guidelines written out on this?

S: It might be a good idea, since people seem to have lost touch with this particular way of doing things, or at least monitor our performance to some extent. But if we do, we need to do it in a serious way and in a meaningful way, and a pleasing way, and an inspiring way. Anyway, what is the time?

Vessantara: Five to nine.

S: Are there any more questions?

Vessantara: Kuladitya?

Kuladitya: Er, yes (laughter).

S: Oh dear.

Kuladitya: We were studying the chapter on covetousness...

S: Covetousness.

Kuladitya: Abstention from. And in our group we ended up talking about cannibalism.

S: Cannibalism.

Kuladitya: Yes. (laughter) And its relationship to the spiritual life. And we came up with a question which has implications that are rather hard to swallow. (laughter)

S: You are speaking of anthropophagy, not cannibalism with regard to cars and things like that? (laughter)

Kuladitya: Oh no. (laughter) Since you could say that in the case of cannibalism one would be killing someone out of greed or covetousness (laughter), do you think that cannibalism could be seen as a less serious breach of the precepts than other forms of killing? [263]

S: Well, perhaps not in case of necessity. Cannibalism does not strictly speaking mean killing human beings in order to eat them; it means simply eating human flesh. And I have said myself that I saw no ethical objection to eating human flesh (provided it was fit for consumption in the medical sense) if the deliberate taking of human life was not involved. There's even an instance of this in the Pali canon somewhere, I think in the Vinaya Pitaka. There was a certain bhikkhu who was very strict and was going from door to door for alms (laughter). I suppose it wasn't his lucky day - he didn't get any alms but he got a finger (laughter). There is a rule - or at least a custom - that you must not skip any houses; you must go from door to door in a regular manner, you know, being even minded towards the rich and the poor. So there was a house of a leper, and he didn't want to skip it so the leper was glad to give him some rice, but as he gave the rice his finger fell off (laughter). And according to the asceticism of the bhikkhu he calmly ate it. Though I believe there is also provision in the Vinaya for the non-consumption of human flesh (laughter) along with the flesh of tigers. But even a few years ago there was a very interesting case in the papers about - what was that?

Aryadaka: It was a football team. They were flying over the Andes and they crashed, and some of the people died and their bodies were frozen, and they just cut some pieces off and ate them.

S: Yes. Well, obviously it's very difficult to overcome one's natural human feelings in that sort of situation, but if it was a question of cannibalism or survival I think quite a few people would have recourse to cannibalism. So one might say that cannibalism under those circumstances was less reprehensible than actually killing somebody. Do you see what I mean? Cannibalism is obviously one of the taboos of our society. People feel a bit uncomfortable when you talk about cannibalism. I remember an occasion on which Vajrayogini and I had a very lively exchange on the topic of cannibalism and horrified the other people who were present. I'm just trying to think what exactly happened. I think we were talking about the same sort of situation: if you were on a desert island and there was nothing to eat, sort of thing. Yes, I think Vajrayogini was sort of teasing me to the effect - "What if I was on a desert island and there was nothing to eat in the way of vegetables, would I eat meat?" So I said, "Yes. If it was a question of survival I would eat meat. In fact", I said, "if it was a question of survival I'd eat you!" (laughter) So she rather appreciated the joke and she said, "Well, you'd have to catch me first" (laughter). I said

"Yes, and after catching you I'd have to boil you well because you'd be rather tough!" (laughter) So this sort of exchange was going on between myself and Vajrayogini, and we two were both enjoying it, but other people were rather horrified (laughter) as though we'd broken some taboo just by mentioning the subject at all. That was really quite interesting. But yes, cannibalism is one of these sort of taboo subjects or taboo practices that people don't like to talk about. And I think there's very very little of it probably ever goes on. But yes, under exceptional circumstances who knows what one might do? Anyway it's interesting that this little question came up in your group. It would be interesting to know whether the plumpest one would go first or the thinnest. [264] Anyway, any other question?

Kuladitya: That was it thank you.

S: If there's only one question left it seems a pity to leave it.

Vajranatha: It's about practising the mind precepts: In order to not be having states of craving, hatred, and ignorance, one would have to be spiritually advanced. This effectively means that we're breaking the mind precepts a great deal. Presumably breaking these precepts is of less importance for people at early stages of their development, as unskilful actions of body and speech have greater consequences, so they should be the prime areas of concern. So I was wondering do you think that a large part of the ethical life of most Order members should be directed towards keeping those precepts, or can they...

S: You mean the mind precepts?

Vajranatha: Yes, the mind precepts.

S: I'm not quite sure what you meant by important, or even what you mean by a large amount of the time. You can't really separate the mind precepts completely from the others inasmuch as some element of mental attitude is involved in the precepts covering body and speech too. It is of course right to say that those mental attitudes, whether imbued with wisdom or imbued with ignorance, which find expression in overt action are karmically more significant and therefore more weighty than those which do not. So therefore in that sense, yes, one needs to pay particular attention to actions of speech and body. But nonetheless "manopubbangama dhamma" - as the first verse of the Dhammapada says: Mind is the forerunner. And you can't really make very much progress ethically or in any other way, without giving quite a lot of attention to the mind. It does seem that one really needs to work on all the precepts. Whether one gives more attention to this or more attention to that will no doubt depend on one's personal situation and personal state. Obviously one is breaking the mind precepts all the time, but perhaps one should also reflect that one is keeping them all the time too, to some extent. One is breaking them all the time, practically, in some

sense, and also keeping them all the time. But it isn't that either you're keeping them or you're not; you're just trying to increase all the time the extent to which you do actually observe them. One might even go so far as to say it is doubtful whether even a Buddha observes them perfectly, if one is really very strict about it. (pause)

Kamalasila: Sorry? (laughter)

S: Well, in a way one can't observe the precepts properly so long as one has a physical body. You are taking life all the time, even by breathing, however reluctantly, however unwillingly, but there is some breach of this or that precept. I was meaning to be hyperbolic rather than .. (unclear).. But no doubt one needs to review one's practice of the precepts constantly. I have touched on this before; I'll touch on it again and then we'll conclude. It's very easy to settle down and be satisfied with a certain level of practice and think "Well, that's me, that's the way I do things, that's the way I behave, that's the way I am." [265]

We've seen this evening that this is especially the case with the speech precepts, or with our speech function in general. Just the way that we speak. We tend to be satisfied with the way that we speak and we don't think in terms of ever working on it or improving it, even in a secular sense what to speak of the spiritual sense. And if we're not careful the same sort of thing happens even with our observance of the precepts generally. We tend to accept a certain ethical level as sort of OK, and we don't make a serious effort to progress beyond that, with regard to whatever precept. I think this is something we need to be careful of, that we are making an effort to improve our practice all the time, and that means constantly checking up. Not in the sense that every ten minutes we pull ourselves up by the root to see whether we've taken root (as it were), not that sort of thing; that we're too over-scrupulous or neurotically anxious about our observance or non-observance of the precepts, but at least monitor our performance (as it were). Anyway, I think that really is enough. Time is up anyway, isn't it? All right. So there's more study still tomorrow isn't there? So there may well be a session tomorrow evening. OK.

Session 14. 5th November 1984, Tuscany

Vessantara: We've got quite a lot of questions; probably more than we can deal with this evening. We'll start with Kamalasila.

Kamalasila: On page 87 you speak of the Tathagata as possessing a critical awareness. Could you say something about why you chose this word critical.

S: 'Critical' comes within single inverted commas doesn't it? So that should alert you anyway. "He has a 'critical' awareness of the impossibility of giving full and final expression to his vision in fixed conceptual terms."

Well, the general sense is clear enough isn't it? But what does one mean by 'critical'? What I have in mind here is the distinction which Kant made between 'critical' and 'dogmatic', especially the dogmatic as distinguished from the critical use of reason itself. Kant held that all philosophy before him was dogmatic, that's philosophy up to him was dogmatic. And he even admitted (I think) that he himself, up to a certain point, had been a dogmatic philosopher; and he admitted it in terms which have become famous - he said that it was a reading of Hume's essay that woke him from his dogmatic slumbers. So what did he mean by that? What he meant really was quite simple: He meant that hitherto philosophers had employed the human reason, especially on such subjects as God, the soul, and immortality, without asking themselves, seriously, whether the human reason was fitted to deal with those topics. In other words they'd used the human reason to deal with those topics without any sense of its limitations. So according to Kant, a 'dogmatic' philosopher was one who used reason to inquire into certain subjects without first investigating whether reason was so constituted as to be able to inquire into those subjects at all. A 'critical' philosopher was one who, to begin with, examined his instruments - examined especially human reason - and tried to see whether it was really competent to deal with the subjects with which it was proposed to deal. So when I say that the Buddha had a critical awareness of the impossibility of giving full and final [266] expression in fixed conceptual terms, it was because he had (so to speak) looked at reason, looked at those conceptual terms, in that critical sort of way. This is simply what I was getting at.

Vessantara: Susiddhi.

Susiddhi: I thought he might ask me after that one. Given that man's existential experience is basically the same all over the world and that there are numerous references to impermanence and unsatisfactoriness in Western literature, why is it that none of the great thinkers of the West took the experience of impermanence or unsatisfactoriness as its starting point, and built up a 'Buddhistic', or at least 'Hinduistic' philosophy?

S: There are quite a few assumptions there. What about Heraclitus? Didn't Heraclitus say "Panta horei" - everything flows? But only a few fragments of his works survive, though Heidegger recently has studied him quite intensively. So perhaps it isn't quite correct to say that no thinker has taken impermanence as his starting point. Nonetheless it is true I think that generally in the West, while a lot of people, a lot of thinkers, a lot of poets, have been aware of the fact of impermanence, it has been (as it were) impermanence within limitations. For instance in classical times, as represented perhaps by Aristotle, people believed that everything below the sphere of the moon changed, but whatever was above the sphere of the moon didn't change - it was fixed, it was eternal. So there were limitations to their conception of impermanence; they defined the word impermanence in a narrow sort of way. It isn't enough to look at a word, and to see that that word exists in different traditions; one also has to ask

what is the actual concrete content given that word in the particular tradition or philosophical tradition concerned. For instance, a Christian, even, might say that everything is impermanent - you know, everything worldly is impermanent - but he would not include the soul. He would take it that the soul was something fixed, something unchanging, even something immortal; whereas a Buddhist would apply that concept of impermanence to soul. Why it is that some people, some great thinkers, or some great religious teachers go further than others, it's very difficult to say. That part of your question really would require an investigation of hundreds of different things. Just repeat that part of it. What did you actually say? What did you actually ask?

Susiddhi: Why is it that none of the great thinkers of the West took the experience of impermanence or unsatisfactoriness as his starting point?

S: Well, one or two perhaps did do that. I was thinking what you say later on.

Susiddhi: ...and built up a 'Buddhistic', or at least 'Hinduistic' philosophy.

S: And then?

Susiddhi: That's all.

S: Ah, it came at the beginning then.

Susiddhi: Well, I started by saying that "given that man's existential [267] experience is basically the same all over the world...

S: Yes. That no doubt is true.

Susiddhi: "...and that there are numerous references to impermanence and unsatisfactoriness in Western literature...

S: That's true, but subject to the qualification which I just made. That the content of the term may be somewhat different for different philosophers and different poets. Anyway...

Susiddhi: And then we come on to "why is it that none of the great thinkers..."

S: Ah, "Why is it". Well, there's a whole lot lurks behind that. Because one might consider psychological limitations, cultural limitations; one might consider the state of civilization at the time that those particular people lived. The state of scientific culture even. So how does one explain why one particular, or why one particular individual goes further than another? It's a very very general question. Why is it that the Buddha - let us say, for the sake of argument - went further than Plato? Why was it that the Buddha went further than Yajnavalkya? Why was it that Nagarjuna went



further than (well, let's say) Sariputra? What is it that makes one person go further than another, or deeper than another? This is a very very general question, isn't it? It's not just a question of those particular thinkers and poets. Why does anybody go further than somebody else in a certain respect? In other words what is the question that you are really asking? Because it's one specific instance of a much more general question. Why do some people go further than others? It's really that particular question. So everybody ought to be able to answer this, because it applies on so many different levels, in so many different contexts. Well, you've all got so many friends and acquaintances. You could say some of them go further than others, whether as human beings in a general way, or a particular respect. Why does one person go further than another?

Aryacitta: Because they're more intelligent?

S: But why is one person more intelligent than another? It throws the question one stage back.

Dharmabandhu: They work harder.

S: But why do they work harder? What makes one person work harder than another?

Devamitra: Isn't it a question of will?

S: But why should one person have more will (so to speak) than another? Or if they have the same will, why does one person use his will more than another.

Dharmamudra: Is there any answer to why?

S: Well, some "whys" can be answered.

Kamalasila: Is it a question of merit? [268]

S: Well, that is a more Buddhistic way of looking at it, but this would assume a belief in (say) karma and rebirth, which is obviously in order for a Buddhist. So if you ask, why did the Buddha go further, well, the traditional answer is, well, he had all those Bodhisattva lives behind him. Presumably those other people didn't. That wouldn't be a very satisfactory answer for a non-Buddhist, but then a non-Buddhist probably wouldn't be able to produce any answer that was satisfactory to a Buddhist. A non-Buddhist might say it was due to his genetic equipment, or it was simply a question of a particular combination of physical forces, but that wouldn't satisfy a Buddhist either. So what I'm saying is that this question is simply an instance of a much more general question, which involves all sorts of quite broad philosophical issues. A Buddhist might regard the whole business as being satisfactorily settled by an appeal to karma and rebirth

and merit and so on, but as I said that would not satisfy a non-Buddhist. A Christian might refer it all to the Will of God or to Divine providence, that wouldn't satisfy a Buddhist.

Devamitra: Presumably some questions you couldn't satisfactorily answer to a non-Buddhist, if you were a Buddhist.

S: Well, you can only satisfactorily answer anybody's questions if you share certain assumptions. Because you cannot always start de novo, absolutely from the beginning. If, for instance, a Christian asks you, "Why does God permit suffering?" you cannot answer that question, because you do not share the assumption of a God who permits, who perhaps does not permit, or should not permit, or could not have permitted, suffering. So you cannot answer questions like that, except on the basis of assumption shared between the questioner and the person who is being asked the question. That's why it's quite important in a discussion with somebody to find common ground, otherwise there cannot be any discussion; there can only be an assertion of mutually incompatible positions. That isn't a discussion. It might make an argument but not a discussion.

Vessantara: You've identified a number of figures in the Western literary tradition who go some way towards the Dharma. What figures in Western philosophical tradition would you say do come closest?

S: That's quite difficult to say. Because the Dharma really is a quite complex phenomenon, and the thought of various thinkers is quite complex, it's not to be easily summed up in a few words. So some thinkers come quite close to some aspects of the Dharma in certain respects, and in others not. I think it's really very difficult to strike a balance. Probably any thinker who is decidedly theistic could come close to Buddhism in a more general philosophical sense only in a very very limited manner. Just not so very long ago I was reading about Giordano Bruno. He seems to have come - I won't say very close to Buddhism - but he's certainly a lot closer to Buddhism, in a very broad sort of way, than orthodox Christian thinkers. It's not that he doesn't believe in God, but he has a very different conception of God. What is more important: he has a different conception of the universe. He seems to have realized that the new Copernican cosmography implied a completely different conception of existence, certainly a completely different conception of human existence. He seems to have explored the implications, from a broad philosophical [269] point of view, of the fact that man was not the centre of existence, and the planet Earth was not the centre of the universe. And he seems to have a very vivid sense of the incommensurability of the physical universe. He had a very vivid sense of space being infinite, and of stars being scattered in infinite numbers throughout that infinite space, and he believed that many of these stars were inhabited. So his overall (as it were) vision of existence on that sort of level was much closer to that of Buddhism than anybody's had been, perhaps, for well over a thousand years in the West,

or even longer than that.

So one can point to some such instances. Though it's not easy to strike a balance always. Schopenhauer comes close in some respects, but we know he was influenced by what was then known as Vedanta Buddhism - Schopenhauer's conception of the denial of the will, or we might say the cessation of craving, comes very close to Buddhism. Then again sometimes parallels have been drawn between Berkeley's subjective idealism (as it's usually called) and what is also called the 'subjective idealism' (though perhaps within inverted commas) of the Yogacarins, among the Buddhists. It would be quite interesting to try to institute some sort of comparison, and try to find out which thinkers and poets have been closest and in which respects. But it isn't something that can be done in summary fashion; you have to pay proper respects to the views of those philosophers and consider them as a whole, and try to strike a fair balance, not try to drag them into Buddhism willy-nilly. There are certain respects in which Plotinus comes to Buddhism. But then of course he was the disciple of Ammonius Saccas who some believe to have been a Buddhist, or at least influenced by Buddhism - a famous Alexandrian teacher in the third century AD.

Satyaloka: ... (unclear)...

S: Well, I mentioned his appreciation of Heraclitus. He in this century more than any other person perhaps has drawn attention not just to the historical importance of Heraclitus, but to the fact that his teaching - such of it as we know - is still relevant to Western philosophical thinking. He believes in fact (almost) that Western philosophy has been on the wrong track ever since, which is of course rather revolutionary. Perhaps one shouldn't take those few references as indicating that I necessarily regard him as being of proportionate importance, but simply that I've been reading him a bit over the last year, so that he is a little in my mind. It doesn't necessarily mean that the more often I mention someone, the more intrinsically important I consider him to be. It may be that he's just on mind at the moment. I did once have it in mind - this was years ago when I was in Kalimpong (I had more leisure than I have at present) - I had the idea of writing a history of Western philosophy from the Buddhist point of view. It's something I'd still like to do, but I don't think I'll ever have the time. It'll probably have to be left to other people to do.

Abhaya: Yes, we were talking about the mind precepts, and it came up in a discussion that quite a few people have had destructive impulses coming up, either in dreams or in waking reality. And we were discussing where these sort of come from, and one view put forward is that maybe we just inherit these from our primitive sort of ancestry, or it could be some sort of aggressive instinct [270] that's never come out properly. Someone else suggested...

S: Well, there is the view of Robert Ardrey that man is descended from a

killer ape; you're familiar with that no doubt.

Abhaya: I was just mentioning there that someone else had a strong impression that it came from a former life. So the question is: What do you feel about these sort of things, and what would you suggest people do about them when they irrupt into consciousness?

S: Hmm, destructive impulses. Perhaps we ought to be first of all clear what we're actually talking about. Is it an impulse actually to destroy something, and is it accompanied by (as it were) strong feelings of hatred and resentment, or is it simply an urge to destroy?

Abhaya: It just seemed to be, in most cases, an urge to destroy, without necessarily strong feelings and negative emotions coming up.

S: So what is that urge to destroy? Well, don't small children have this? Isn't there a sort of state that they reach when they want to destroy their toys? If you give them a toy, what they'll most delight in doing to it is just destroying it, just breaking it up. I must say I haven't given serious thought to this particular question before, so don't take what I'm saying now as very much more than thinking aloud. But it does seem to me - and I may have read this somewhere, in some writer on psychology - that in the case of the child breaking his toys (I think probably boys do it more than girls) is one aspect of sort of gaining control over your environment. Do you see what I mean? I mentioned the other day that creation involves destruction. If you want to create the statue, well you have to destroy the block of marble as a block of marble. So perhaps you can't have any creation which is not in some sense destruction. In another sense you don't have any destruction which is not creation. You can destroy the block of marble but you create a statue, or you just create (so to speak) a heap of chips.

Also something else that I remember reading was that (I'm still thinking aloud) in the case of very young children biting is very important, you know, biting of food. A time comes when you don't want just to suck, you want to bite - you've got teeth, you want to use them, you want to break your food down with your teeth, you get a certain satisfaction out of this. So it's as though (this is the kind of feeling that I begin to get) that in destructiveness you are imposing your will on your environment; you're showing that you're master of your environment. So perhaps (I'm speculating a bit here) when someone becomes particularly destructive, it's as though they feel that they haven't enough control over their environment. Do you see what I mean? And it suddenly breaks out in a markedly destructive form. I think it might be something to do with that. That is when it is dissociated from actual hatred, it may be quite a natural thing to feel like being destructive. Well, even boys (leaving aside small children) boys are sometimes destructive, they like to break things and knock things over, mark things. So perhaps this is all an aspect of (sort of) leaving one's imprint on one's environment, controlling one's

environment, showing that one is master of one's environment.

Abhaya: Perhaps I should add, this included murderous impulses, which weren't necessarily to do with hatred or... [271]

S: I don't see really how you can have a murderous impulse without hatred. That introduces a different factor, (pause) unless you just view a human being as an 'it', as an object to be removed from your path, which in a sense is almost worse, because it suggests incapacity for human feeling. But anyway I think something of the sort that I've said holds good for those sort of destructive impulses which are (what I might call) 'purely' destructive. I think in a sense they're not unhealthy. I think a lot of people, in talking about ... well, their work periods and working in FBS [Friends Building Services, a right livelihood business] and things like that, have mentioned that they sort of enjoyed breaking down walls, more than building them up. So why should one enjoy knocking down walls? Maybe it is to some extent your aggressiveness, but I think perhaps in a deeper sense it is this destructive element.

Dharmamudra: It is easier. (laughter)

S: Not necessarily. It depends how big and solid the thing is that you've got to break down. The farmer has to break the soil - that expression is used - has to break the soil, has to break the clods - before he can sow the seed. But it could be that in our modern life we don't get many natural opportunities of destructiveness. We don't break things - we don't pick up the sod, we don't chop down trees for firewood. So maybe there's a natural primitive element of destructiveness in us that doesn't get much outlet. And then of course this can quite easily be sort of amalgamated with emotionally negative feelings in the sense of hatred and anger, aversion, and the one can reinforce the other. But I think probably it is desirable or necessary to distinguish between what I've called the purely destructive impulse, which may not be unhealthy, and the desire to destroy out of hatred. By hatred I mean personal hatred towards some other person, some other individual or even perhaps an animal.

Manjunatha: Isn't this urge to destroy associated with the urge to know about something?

S: That is also true. You take things apart. Sometimes (this happens in the case of the child) he wants to see how something works. But I think that probably comes at a later stage. I think very young children, when they start breaking their toys, aren't just trying to see how they work. Boys will wrench the heads off teddy bears and so on.

Dharmamudra: I know it's quite common to find children about the age of two will actually bite through affection.

S: Well, that is not unknown even in later life. (laughter)

Dharmamudra: Could you say more, Bhante? (laughter)

S: I think I'd better refer you to the Kamashastra where there's a whole chapter on the subject. (laughter) Well, you know, this is interesting, because this goes back of course to Freud. It goes back to the oral stage, because to suck something and to bite something are very closely connected - or not so much closely connected, but the one is very near to the other - and sometimes it's not easy to see where sucking, which one might say is sort of greed based, passes over into biting, which is sort of aversion based, one might say. So one's capacity to give pleasure [272] and to give pain are very very closely connected. Sometimes they might get a bit confused.

Aryadaka: You said this urge seems to be stronger in men or boys? Do you think that's...

S: It seems to be. I'm not going to over-generalize here because some feminist will at once say it's just due to cultural conditioning. But actually, whether it is or not, little girls don't seem to bash their dolls about in the same way that little boys would if you happened to give them a doll. Which they don't usually want anyway. (laughter)

Dharmamudra: Has it got anything to do with liking something? When you get to really like something, maybe it gets too much or doesn't fulfil you any more.

S: Well, you see sometimes you hear people say things like, "Oh, I like you so much. You're so nice I could eat you" (laughter)

Dharmamudra: I've never heard anybody... (laughter)

S: You're rather a big morsel. (laughter) There is this sort of association between affection and eating or swallowing.

Dharmamudra: And breaking things up.

S: Yes, because if you bite something, or suck on it and you happen to have teeth, well, it becomes biting, and it gives pain to the person that you are biting, or whatever it is. But yes, I think that here again, in this whole area it becomes necessary to distinguish things which are really quite different. As I've said, I think one needs to distinguish between the destructive impulse and the impulse actually to cause pain and suffering and damage to a sentient being. One perhaps, if not actually emotionally positive, is at least not particularly negative, whereas the other definitely is. You may have a sort of natural destructive urge which is not being satisfied.

Dharmamudra: Could that be the opposite way round? Could it be a

creative urge that's not being satisfied, and therefore it becomes destructive?

S: Well, this is what is very often said. But I think if you've got a creative urge and this is not satisfied, I don't think it becomes destructive merely in the sense that I've been talking about. I think an element of frustration, and therefore of anger, enters into it, and I think that complicates the situation. But yes, broadly speaking if one feels like creating one may well develop a destructive tendency.

Abhaya: John Cowper Powys crossed my mind, because he used to have these strong destructive urges.

S: He was a very curious case. He was quite pathological, because he was a victim of very extreme sadistic fantasies wasn't he? He puts quite a lot of these into that book *Glastonbury Romance*. Anyway there was a sort of practical corollary to your question.

Abhaya: Yes. What does one do about this sort of thing? [273]

S: I think there are two answers, because really one is talking about two different things. If one is simply feeling an impulse to destroy something, it probably means you don't feel you have enough control over your environment and all that sort of thing. Maybe you should just do a bit of stone-breaking or tree-cutting or something of that sort. But if your destructive impulses spring from actual negative feelings of hatred and aversion, well then you have to tackle those feelings themselves, whether by the metta-bhavana or by rational reflections, change of environment or whatever. But I think it's important to make the initial distinction first. Sometimes of course the two things may be mixed up, and may not be easy to separate.

Vessantara: Ratnabodhi?

Ratnabodhi: You know the bottom of page 85 you say, in relation to meditation, the meditation on hatred, that "Once hatred has been eradicated one can then proceed to deal with the underlying state of covetousness that makes hatred possible". It seems logical that if one dealt with covetousness first, inasmuch as covetousness underlies hatred, one would be at the same time eradicating hatred. Therefore why do you put the eradication of hatred before that of....

S: Well, in this particular case, with this particular precept, one is concerned with hatred, yes? But there is also the point that when hatred is actually present in the mind, when it is actually manifested, if it is extreme it fills the mind to the exclusion of anything else, so you have to tackle the hatred first, and then get down to the craving which underlies it. But if one is in a relatively neutral situation - you aren't actually suffering from any upsurge of hatred, and perhaps even craving is not

manifesting itself strongly - well of course what you have to deal with is craving, because that is more fundamental. But while hatred is actually manifesting strongly that is what you have to deal with.

Vessantara: Padmavajra.

Padmavajra: This question concerns false views and becoming a mitra. I recently led a study group at Padmaloka where a male mitra expressed some of the popular miccha-ditthis of the day: feminism, pseudo-egalitarianism, et cetera, with some vehemence. I was wondering if there needs to be more scrutiny of people holding such views before we agree to them becoming mitras. How much does a false view prevent one from becoming a mitra?

S: So far, of course, our emphasis with regard to requirements for becoming a mitra has been positive rather than negative; that is the things which are expected of a mitra, not so much the things which are not expected. But nonetheless, miccha-ditthis are quite important and I think it is quite important that mitras shouldn't hold to any of these (as it were) fashionable miccha-ditthis very strongly. I think probably that's the sort of clue (as it were). One can't blame mitras, or blame really anybody else, for being infected with miccha-ditthis which are not only current, but which really pervade the cultural atmosphere, which pervade social life. You can't expect people not to be infected; well, practically everybody, including maybe even Order [274] members, are affected to some extent. It's very difficult to be entirely free from these miccha-ditthis. So I think one cannot insist, in the case of a mitra, that he's entirely free from these miccha-ditthis before he can become a mitra. But I think if a mitra is holding to these miccha-ditthis with some degree of vehemence, and seems really to believe them - not that he unthinkingly picks them up, he just hasn't thought about them, he's taken them for granted - but if he actually and consciously and deliberately seems to believe in them, then I think the matter will have to be gone into with him or with her. For instance, supposing a mitra believes in God - I mean seriously believes in God - well, it's very difficult for that person to become a mitra. Well supposing somebody says, "Well, what's the harm in using the word God? Maybe something of the meaning of the word God coincides with something of the meaning of the word Enlightenment", but they're not too sure about it, they're not dogmatically insisting upon it, well that is rather different. Or if they're not completely convinced about rebirth, they've got some doubts, that is different again. If they say dogmatically, "Well no, there definitely is no such thing as rebirth", then that is different. But I think it's more a question of the extent to which they hold these views, whether they hold them with apparent conviction or with real vigour, so to speak, instead of just being influenced in a vague, general sort of way. Miccha-ditthis are very pervasive. They were pervasive in the Buddha's day, they're pervasive in our own day. Some of them haven't changed. Well probably we've got all the miccha-ditthis that were around in the Buddha's time and quite a few more - or elaborations of the old ones. And



as long as there is no clear thinking - and we saw the other evening how difficult and rare clear thinking is - there will be miccha-ditthis, of more or less seriousness. You don't necessarily escape from miccha-ditthis by doing your best to adhere to the (as it were) orthodox doctrinal position; the miccha-ditthis are inherent in your vagueness of thinking.

Padmavajra: Do you think most of the miccha-ditthis of today are even - compared with the Buddha's day - more in social and political feelings?

S: Well, it is certainly those which we seem to encounter more. Perhaps it's because people attach more importance to those particular feelings. They don't usually have strong theological views. If you'd lived in the seventeenth century you would have found people having very strong theological views. So you would have come up against what from the Buddhist point of view would have been miccha-ditthis in that particular field. But nowadays people don't have such strong views on theological topics, but they do have strong views about the social and political topics. And therefore one tends to encounter the miccha-ditthis within that particular field.

Aryacitta: Do you think that we can't avoid clear thinking...

S: That you can't avoid clear thinking? (laughter) I wouldn't have put it quite like that, (laughter) but if one is seriously bent on Enlightenment, well you can't really avoid clear thinking, it's right in the way! (laughter) What I really meant was it's on the way, not... (voice drowned by laughter) ... [275]

Vessantara: Vajranatha?

Vajranatha: In the text you refer to the Brahmajala-sutta, which stated that these views between them comprehend all possible false views. And the Buddha classifies all false views in the Brahmajala-sutta as being either determinist or annihilationist. And I believe that all the views in the Brahmajala-sutta are properly- speaking philosophic views. However, in the movement, we use the term miccha-ditthi to include (?) meanings on all sorts of subjects, rather than just the nature of reality. So is it possible to extend this division into determinist and annihilationist to cover all miccha-ditthis in this broader sense? If so, can this help us to combat them?

S: I think it probably is possible to extend in this way. I can't say that I've tried it on any extended scale, but I think it probably is possible. It might be an interesting exercise to study the Brahmajala-sutta and then take certain well known miccha-ditthis modern miccha-ditthis, after establishing that they definitely are miccha-ditthis, understanding why, and then trying to relate them to the categories of the Brahmajala-sutta. It might be an interesting thing to do in a mitra study group! Because it would mean that one could take, say - or one would have to take, say - a

modern miccha-ditthi and examine its assumptions. In other words reduce it to its broadest possible terms, which is I think what we very often don't do. And then when one has reduced it in that way, to its broadest possible terms, exposed all the underlying assumptions, then try to relate it, in the light of all that, to what the Buddha says in the Brahmajala-sutta.

Abhaya: Are we to take it literally, in the Brahmajala-sutta, all possible false views are covered? That's what it claims. Is that...

S: I think one can take it literally, at least provisionally, until one has proved otherwise. It also perhaps depends on your own power of analysis because your analysis of a particular miccha-ditthi might not be sufficiently thorough, sufficiently rigorous; somebody else might come along and be able to achieve that more thorough or more rigorous analysis and in that way relate that particular miccha-ditthi to the categories of the Brahmajala-sutta. So I think one has to be very careful about claiming that particular miccha-ditthi was not covered by the Brahmajala-sutta.

Abhaya: So you have never come across a miccha-ditthi that was not covered by the Brahmajala-sutta?

S: I must say I've not ever attempted systematically to investigate whether all these miccha-ditthis are contained in the Brahmajala-sutta or not, but in the same way that truth coheres, surely in another way untruth coheres. Do you see what I mean? So if truths all sort of link up into a system, untruths all link up into a sort of system. So there must be some sort of interconnection between untruths, just as there is between truths. And surely one can't find any more general concepts than those of existence and non-existence. So it would seem likely that it would be possible to assign any specific modern miccha-ditthi to some place or other within that framework or that net outlined by the Buddha. But there's no need perhaps to take it on faith, one just has to take an individual miccha-ditthi and try to see for oneself. And [276] as I said, that would be quite a useful exercise.

Vajranatha: How would one apply that to, say, pseudo-egalitarianism, for example? Would you be able to work that out?

S: Well, probably one could. One would have to ask what were its assumptions - what did one mean by pseudo-egalitarianism, or what did one mean by egalitarianism, what did one mean by equal. I have gone into this to some extent, though without relating to the Brahmajala-sutta. If you say that two things are equal, well you're making use really of a quantitative term, and I would question whether you can apply a quantitative term in that sort of way to human beings - to individuals. You can say that, say, a pound of cheese is equal to a pound of chalk; they are in respect of weight, equivalent (you might say). But in what sense is one human being equal to another human being? Well, they could be equal in

respect of weight, but that isn't quite what is usually meant. So what does one mean? This is the first thing one has to investigate - what is meant by saying, for instance, that all human beings are equal. Well, it may be a true statement, but first of all one has got to understand what it actually means before one can decide even whether it is true or not. And I think a lot of people don't even pause to enquire what they mean by equality. Does equal mean the same? If it doesn't mean the same, well what does it mean? So very often things that we take for granted are far from clear, and the meaning of words which we use very frequently is far from being clear in our own minds. Another word that people use a lot is freedom, liberty. What do you mean by freedom? I think perhaps there's been more investigation of that than there has of the meaning of equality. I'm not going to give any answers now, but leave it to some of you at least to work out these things for yourselves.

Vajranatha: Do you think it would actually be useful for us to do that, it would actually help us to combat the views to actually go back to...

S: Well, whether egalitarianism is a miccha-ditthi or not - quite irrespective of that question - it would at least be desirable to know what you meant when you used the term. It's always good to know the meaning of the words that you use. 'Equality' and 'equal' are words which are quite often in people's mouths, so we might as well know what we and other people are talking about. It's not enough to make the right sort of noises.

Vessantara: Satyaraja?

Satyaraja: Could it be more appropriate in some instances to speak and think in terms of 'conversation' rather than 'communication'? Conversations, especially in the eighteenth-century sense of the term, suggests a stimulating discussion of ideas, art, and literature, which has a refining effect on the participants, and suggests a level below which speech is not allowed to fall, also a heightened awareness of, and hence continual cultivation of, the use of speech.

S: Yes. 'Communication' is perhaps a bit too ambitious. Perhaps we should aim at conversation to begin with. Though that doesn't always have a positive meaning: in law, for instance, criminal conversation means adultery. But anyway, just conversation by [277] itself - yes, it has a nice (sort of) gentle, relaxed (sort of) connotation. 'Communication' sounds a bit strenuous, a bit demanding. Yes, 'conversation' has a nice (sort of) civilized ring, especially as a verb: to converse. We don't usually use that expression, we usually say, well, "I was talking with him", we don't say, "I was conversing with him." So perhaps we should distinguish between talk, conversation, and communication - or even between idle chatter, talk, conversation, and communication.

Satyaraja: So you look at communication as something far beyond conversation?

S: As we use the term, yes. Though obviously terms acquire meaning in accordance with the way in which you use them. What is the literal meaning of 'conversation'?

Abhaya: 'Vers' literally means 'to turn', 'con' means 'together'.

S: To turn together. To put your heads together almost. Hmm. To turn over together?

Abhaya: Well, literally it's 'vertere' is turn, and 'con' is together. It's made up of those two parts.

A voice: I thought 'ver' was 'towards'.

Abhaya: The root is definitely 'vertere', to turn.

S: As in 'convert'.

Abhaya: Yes.

S: Yes, perhaps we should make more use of the word 'conversation'. You could more naturally say "I had a conversation" rather than "I had a communication with..."

Satyaraja: What would you define as 'communication' then, if you say it's something much higher than conversation?

S: Well, communication, as we use the word in the FWBO - and we use it in a rather specialized way - suggests a certain degree of intensity. It means the actual (as it were) conveyance to the other person of what you really and truly and quite deeply and (as it were) existentially (sort of) think and believe and feel. 'Conversation' doesn't usually imply, or connote, anything of that sort; it's much more relaxed, more casual, even more formal.

Manjunatha: Communication tends to take place on a deeper level; conversation can be just...

S: Conversation seems to have a more social connotation, whereas communication has (so to speak) a more existential connotation. There used to be social events called 'conversaciones'. Do you remember? I think at the end of the last century. Well, you won't remember literally (laughter). I don't remember them. But do you know the sort of tea-party-like assembly just for the sake of conversation - to meet together and to talk, perhaps about some particular subject; a sort of organized conversation, if you like. Has anyone come across that term? It's the Italian form of conversation. Conversaciones were quite popular about the turn of the [278] century. They were featured in Victorian society towards

the end of the century, usually for sort of cultural purposes. You didn't want anything as formal as a lecture, but perhaps you invited some prominent person - some expert on some particular topic - just to be present and just to talk to people in an informal way, or semi-informal way, over a cup of tea.

Satyaraja: Do you think there's any place for that in the Friends? I know we have study groups and things, but do you think there's a place for a conversaciones-type...? Or tea? (laughter)

S: Perhaps. Or perhaps we should start right at the bottom with a little grammar group, (laughter) or spelling group. Something that did occur to me the other evening I could have mentioned, was handwriting. I mention this as a sufferer to some extent from other peoples' handwriting. Not to mention their typing sometimes. Sometimes I get letters which are a pain to read, they're so badly written, the handwriting is so bad, a real (sort of) scribble. And sometimes people's typing isn't much better. For instance, I've got a letter upstairs in my file now - I really don't want to try and read it again, because the person typing the letter has used such a very very old ribbon on her typewriter that I find it very difficult to decipher the words. And there are three closely typed pages, and I just don't feel like spending a couple of hours deciphering what this person has written. So I mean, what on earth could they have been thinking when they sent a letter like that? So in the same way if you send someone a badly written letter, in handwriting that is barely legible, well you're not really thinking of the feelings or the convenience of the person to whom you are writing. So if you open a letter and you see a grubby piece of paper, scribbled with a few barely legible lines, you don't get a very favourable impression.

So I think people need to take much care of their communication in this sort of way too: take more trouble - this is what we were talking about, we were talking about sort of excellence in this sort of area - take more trouble not only about expressing your thoughts to others and being clear, whether you're speaking or writing, but also when you do write, write clearly, so that the letter is easy to read - or even a pleasure to read. Some years ago there was - and I believe there still is - a script writing movement, and script is quite pleasant and easy to read. Or otherwise it does sometimes make life quite difficult if you've got letters to read which are barely legible. I had an example only a couple of weeks ago, just after I'd come here. Someone wrote to me about some quite important matter - certainly important to him - quite crucial - but the crucial word was illegible, I couldn't read it, though I was quite familiar with his handwriting, but at that point his handwriting was so bad that I just couldn't read it. And therefore I missed that crucial word. I didn't know what actually he was wanting to... I had to write and ask him to explain again. Do you see what I mean? But this is lack of awareness, lack of care, lack of consideration. I know sometimes it's due to lack of time, but once you've learned to write clearly and legibly, well, even if you write quickly your handwriting is still quite readable. And also when you write a letter,

arrange it nicely. Some people don't leave a margin, or the lines are very close together, or they use a tatty old piece of paper, or it's a page torn out of an exercise book. This is not the way to write to people if you really have any sort of care for them, or you wish to communicate positively. [279] Anyway, it occurred to me afterwards I should have mentioned this too. It's all an aspect of what we were talking about. Anyway, enough about that. How is the time going?

Vessantara: It's twenty-five to nine. In the FWBO we recommend the metta-bhavana practice for just about everyone. Buddhaghosa seems to recommend the metta-bhavana only for hate types. Would you like to comment on that?

S: Yes. Interesting as Buddhaghosa's discussion of the character types is, it shouldn't lead us to suppose that you can divide people up into this type and that type as though they are exclusively and entirely either the one or the other. That is not the case. In fact most people are sort of intermediate types or mixed types. And therefore I think you can say that there are very few people that are so (as it were) unmixed and so completely devoid of hatred that they would not need to do the metta-bhavana. Even though we may not be pure and simple hate types, we have a very strong component of hatred in our mental and emotional attitudes, so we need the metta-bhavana. Buddhaghosa's analysis can suggest that you are definitely and identifiably this character type or that. That's far from being the case. A lot of people who've even thought to what character type they themselves belong are not at all clear, even after years of self-examination. It's very difficult for them to tell which type they belong to. And so therefore they might ask whether they should practise the metta-bhavana or not. I'd say practise it and be on the safe side, there's sure to be some hatred lurking somewhere, however meek, pleasant, positive, agreeable, friendly you may appear to be - or even be.

Dharmamudra: Would you say there's a time when people can stop doing the metta-bhavana?

S: Well, if you're naturally and normally radiating metta all the time, you've no need to do the practice. (laughter) .. easier to develop what you already have. Some people do seem by nature more friendly and more emotionally positive and more warm than others. But they're not really very common. Some people are manifestly more full of good will than others. But there's no reason why they shouldn't do the practice too, they'll just enjoy it, because it'll be so much more easy for them to do than it is for some others.

Vajranatha: In our study group we discussed the three unwholesome roots in relation to the ten precepts, and the point was raised that in tradition, fear was sometimes included as a fourth unwholesome root. This made me wonder that as abstention from greed, hatred, and ignorance can be taken as precepts, would there not also be a value to undertaking to

abstain from fear as an additional rule of training?

S: Perhaps one has first of all to try to understand what fear is. Perhaps one shouldn't assume that fear is necessarily always negative. To the best of my recollection, the Pali canon never speaks of greed or hatred or ignorance in positive terms, but it does sometimes speak of fear in positive terms. It says for instance there are things which you should fear, and things which you should not fear. It speaks of fearing conditioned existence, and it uses that expression in a quite positive sort of way.

There is I believe a wisdom, a jnana, which consists in an understanding of those things which are truly fearful, for instance conditioned existence. So Buddhism doesn't actually say that fear, per se, is an unskilful mental state. So it is perhaps for this reason that abstention from fear is not included in the precepts. There are some kinds of fear from which you should abstain, but there are other kinds of fear which you should in fact cultivate. As I mentioned, Buddhism, in the case of the Pali canon, does maintain that conditioned existence is fearful and should in fact be regarded as such. You should be afraid of conditioned existence, you should be afraid of rebirth, unless of course you're a Bodhisattva - that's another matter. Do you see what I'm getting at? So perhaps the question assumes that fear is necessarily an unskilful mental state. But that is not in fact the case as far as the Pali canon is concerned. So then the question arises, well what are those instances of fear which are unskilful? Well, for instance, the Buddha says in one passage, which I remember, talking about sila, talking about dana. He says, "Monks, do not be afraid of good works." Some people are afraid of doing good works, of doing good, maybe afraid of practising too much meditation. When I came back from India in 1964 lots of Buddhists around the Buddhist Society were afraid of doing too much meditation, they were afraid that if you did too much meditation you might go mad - if you did more than, say, five minutes (this is what I was told), that a certain well known authority had warned people not to meditate for more than five minutes at a time, meditation was dangerous. So they were afraid of meditation. So yes, don't be afraid of meditation, don't be afraid of good works. So what should you be afraid of? When is fear justified? When is it not justified? One needs to go into those sorts of things. So when, would you say, is fear not justified? And when is fear an unskilful mental state? Or what makes fear an unskilful mental state?

Manjunatha: Is fear very much related with craving, as say hatred is? In other words fear of losing that which you...

S: Yes, it's fear of losing something that you are attached to. Or fear of not losing something that you are not attached to, something that you would like to get rid of. The opposite of fear is hope, isn't it, in a way? I mean you're afraid that you might not attain what you desire, or that it might be taken away from you, and you hope similarly that you will gain, you will attain, what you desire. Dr Johnson associates them doesn't he, in well

known lines: "Where then shall hope and fear their object find? Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?" he asks. In other words he's saying what are the true objects of hope, what are the true objects of fear? And there must be true objects of both, otherwise you're in a state of suspense between the two, and your mind becomes stagnant and corrupt. So Buddhism would perhaps say likewise - that there are things you should fear and things you shouldn't, things you should hope for and things you shouldn't. It is not that hope and fear are necessarily unskilful in themselves, but only as they are directed, or only as regards their objects, or depending on their objects. So it would almost seem that if you look after greed and hatred, you look after fear too, to the extent that fear is unskilful. So fear, as an unskilful mental state, isn't given the same prominence in the Pali canon as are these three others, though it is sometimes mentioned. [281]

Aryacitta: In the Heart Sutra it's mentioned. I can't remember the exact passage. Once you've got rid of the five skandhas then you overcome fear.

S: Yes, because the five skandhas are the panca upadana skandhas as they're called. That is, skandhas related to grasping. So as soon as the grasping goes there is no fear on account of the skandhas. You're not afraid to lose them any more. So in a sense, to put it in a general way, one can say the basic fear is the fear of death. That's the real fear that you have to overcome.

Vessantara: Whilst fear can be skilful, as in the case of fear of the conditioned, when you're working on the (?)path can you say that it's skilful in the way the metta is skilful? For instance, an arhant would feel metta. Presumably he would no longer feel fear of the conditioned because that would disturb his mind. So from the highest point of view can't you say that all states of fear are unskilful? Or in some sense negative?

S: So the question is, would an Arahant feel fear? Presumably on his own account, he wouldn't feel fear of conditioned existence because he has no desire. He would have nothing to be afraid of, no cause for fear. But in what sense can you say that an Arahant feels metta? Is there any statement to the effect that an Arahant actually does feel metta? Because the Theravadins did believe, or some of them believed, that a Buddha didn't feel karuna. So does an Arahant feel metta in the sense that those who are not Arahants feel metta? I mean for instance in the case of karuna there is the Mahayana's well known distinction between karuna directed towards beings, towards dharmas, and towards Sunyata. So one might make the same distinction with regard to metta. So if one looks at the Arahant in (as it were) Mahayanistic terms, he wouldn't have metta as we perhaps experience metta; as directed towards beings, or as directed towards dharmas even. So from our point of view he wouldn't be experiencing metta, not the metta that we experience, not in a highly



developed form even. He would be experiencing something to which perhaps there's no analogy in our experience, and which perhaps we could extend the word metta to, but wouldn't be metta in any recognizable sense so far as we were concerned.

Aryadaka: Is that upeksha then?

S: Well, no doubt upeksha comes nearer than does karuna or metta, but again one could make the same distinction with regard to upeksha as one does with regard to metta and to karuna. In fact there is a different term for the (as it were) more transcendental upekkha; that is called tatra-majjhata in Pali, which means more like 'balance'.

Vessantara: Well of course you've only got your experience on any level of existence. Considering that you may only have the same word for it, it's going to be different. Arguing another point you give, we do take the precept abstain from craving. You could say that it would be positive to crave Enlightenment...

S: Though actually that expression is never used - I'm referring to the Pali terms - it is never said that you should experience [282] tanha or nirvana. That is never said. Though as I have pointed out, sometimes the word karma is used in that sort of literal way. But the word tanha is only used in a negative - that is to say unskillful - sense, not in any other. But anyway, what was the question? The question was about fear, and why is not usually regarded as one of the akusala-mulas. I think it is because, as I said, that fear is not (as it were) unambiguously unskillful. There are many situations in which fear is skillful from the spiritual point of view. So I assume it must be for that reason - that fear as such is not classed as an unskillful root, whereas ignorance is always unskillful, craving is always unskillful, and aversion is always unskillful. But this is what it occurs to be to say at the moment, but I'd probably have to look through the Pali canon and look at all those passages in which the Buddha has spoken of fear, before coming to a very definite conclusion. But perhaps - and this is mainly the point I am making - that we shouldn't assume that fear is always, necessarily, an unskillful mental state. We usually tend to assume that, especially if we've read books about psychology and psychotherapy and that sort of thing. "You've got to be free from fear" - they never suggest that there are some things you ought to be afraid of, and run away from.

Dharmabandhu: Milarepa often exhorted people to fear samsara.

S: Well, that is very much in the Buddhist tradition

Manjunatha: What's the situation that arises when at your highest moments you do fear to fall back, because you can fall back. But if you have in a way transcended that, then you won't fear any more, because you...

S: Well, a Stream Entrant won't fear to fall back, because he will know that there is no possibility of his falling back. So you don't fear something which cannot possibly happen.

Satyaloka: Do you think fear is a good motivating force then, that we could draw on more than we do?

S: I think it probably is, though bear in mind fear is not the same thing as timidity. One should be afraid of unskilful actions; I think one could quite positively talk in those terms. The Buddha certainly does in the Pali canon.

Dharmabandhu: Don't we also have like a fear of blame?

S: That is not necessarily skilful, because if you're simply afraid of the blame of the group, that can simply indicate that you haven't perhaps even begun to be an individual. It would be different if you were afraid of the blame of the wise, but simply to be afraid of blame is not necessarily skilful. But even if you are afraid of the blame of the wise, it must be your fear as an individual of their blame as individuals. You shouldn't be afraid of losing the approval (so to speak) of the wise.

Aryacitta: I remember you said once - I forget where - that fear has no place in the spiritual life... [283]

S: I might well have said that, but I think the context probably will have been rather different. Or perhaps I was emphasizing the importance of courage. Fear in the sense of the antithesis of courage is certainly an enemy of the spiritual life and has no place in the spiritual life. Perhaps I was using fear more in the sense of timidity.

Manjunatha: I think it might have been in The Religion of Art. You placed quite a lot of stress on fearlessness.

S: Yes. That's more an instance of courage, boldness, initiative. I must have been surrounded by a lot of timid bhikkhus at that time! Actually people on the whole tend to be rather lacking in courage, don't they? Enterprise, initiative, boldness - those are not very prominent qualities nowadays. It's as though modern life doesn't offer much scope to their exercise.

Dharmamudra: Are you saying that's generally all declined?

S: Yes.

Dharmamudra: Have you any idea why that is?

S: Well, I did suggest it might be because modern life doesn't offer very much scope, but it isn't just that. Very often people don't seem very sure

of themselves.

Dharmamudra: Is that because there is too much to choose from?

S: It's not so much too much to choose from, but too much by which perhaps you feel overwhelmed, or unable to cope with. But I'm even thinking within the context of the FWBO, even within the Order - I really think that Order members could show much more courage than they actually do. Very often Order members generally seem really quite timid, lacking in boldness, I mean spiritual boldness almost. Do you see what I mean?

Devamitra: Can you give an example of the sort of thing you think is lacking?

S: Well, taking initiative, especially with regard (say) to the spread of the Dharma, just doing things that need to be done. There seems to be quite a lack of initiative. There are certain people, yes, who are quite good in this respect, but I think the Order as a whole - that is, the majority of Order members - are not particularly good in this way.

Aryadaka: Do you think that one should test their courage in different ways?

S: Well, what does one mean by test? And who is to do the testing?

Aryadaka: I suppose traditionally there were rites of manhood that people had been through, that tested their courage, and we don't have those now.

S: Yes, that's true.

Aryadaka: I don't know what takes their place now - climbing mountains or that sort of thing. But just putting yourself out on [284] a limb, or facing a position you haven't been in before.

Padmavajra: Starting a centre.

S: Yes, starting a centre. You see, very few people think in those terms. I mean obviously starting a centre is not something that you should think of doing lightly, but I'm quite sure more people could think in those terms - not of going off individually but of getting together with two, three, four other people and starting a centre in some other part of the country, some other part of the world even. There doesn't seem to very much of that kind of thinking. It isn't as though everybody is fully occupied, some are fully occupied but not all by any means... (end of recording)

Session 15, 6th November 1984, Tuscany

Vessantara: We've got about half-a-dozen leftover questions, none of which seem to be about Glasgow. (laughter) We'll start with Kamalasila.

Kamalashila: This one, again, arose out of our study group's discussion of fear the other day. I've read that Shelley - in a biography of his - and other romantics were fascinated by horror and the supernatural, and his wife wrote Frankenstein. (laughter) It seems that the exercise of the imagination can bring one into contact with a certain kind of fear, like fear of ghosts. Would you say that there is any parallel between this and the similar sort of fear that can arise on solitary retreats?

S: Hmm. (pause)

Kamalasila: I'm not really referring to the sort of fear that arises in meditation, but a sort of propensity for the imagination to dwell on that sort of thing.

S: It has been observed that children like to scare themselves. So it might be helpful to take that as a starting point. Why do children like to scare themselves? Sometimes they like to scare themselves with scary stories and imagining weird things around the corner. But why should they want to do that?

Dharmamudra: Test themselves out.

Aryadaka: Excitement.

S: Excitement, I think it's more excitement than anything else. But when does one want to excite oneself?

Voice: When one's bored.

S: When one's bored, when there's a certain incapacity for feeling, a certain dullness of feeling. It's as though one whips oneself up into a sort of state in which feels something at least. Do you see what I mean? Someone quoted the other day Doctor Johnson's remark. Padmavajra mentioned it, he'd been reading Rasselas. What was it that Johnson said about...?

Padmavajra: Oh, that his ... one of Johnson's characters observes [285] young ladies have a lot of time on their hands. And she said, "They think they've fallen in love, but they're just idle".

S: So there may be something of that sort in what we're talking about. It's almost as though people play upon their own feelings not exactly because they're idle, but in a sense because they've nothing better to do. They want to sort of stimulate themselves, they want to feel something. It may well be that that also happens on solitary retreat - here I'm just speculating a bit, or hypothesizing - that there you are all on your own,

there's nothing to distract you, nothing to amuse you, you've nothing (in a sense) to occupy yourself with, there's no external demand, it's as though there's a sort of void, a sort of empty space, so you fill it with something or other. And one of the things that you can fill it with is all sorts of horrible things, scary things, which will at least perhaps distract you from that feeling of loneliness that possibly you experience.

In the case of the Romantic poets, to go back to them, perhaps they needed almost to titillate themselves. It is interesting that - well, you've mentioned Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (laughter). Yes, she wrote that didn't she, when they were on their way to Italy. I think she wrote it in Switzerland. But there were at that time a whole lot of sort of Gothic horror stories in circulation. Mrs. what's-her-name, author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Mrs. Radcliffe she was a well known author, another lady you notice, and there was the famous Monk Lewis. They called him Monk Lewis because he'd written a horror story called *The Monk*. A Shelley himself when he was sixteen wrote a sort of horror story didn't he? Called *Zastrozzi*, I think it was *Zastrozzi*, something dreadful like that. But it's interesting that you get this sort of crop of horror stories in English literature - these Gothic horror stories - at the end of the period of reason. It's when the Romantic movement was beginning to start up. It's as though, perhaps - generalizing a little wildly - people had got rather tired of reason, they'd got rather tired of being very very rational and very cool and controlled, and maybe they were getting a bit bored with reason, so not only did one have - in more strictly literary terms - the Romantic movement, and also the Gothic revival in architecture, but one also had the sort of Gothic horror stories, though one must say Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* wasn't so much a Gothic horror story; it had certain features of proto-science-fiction about it one might say - remember it resembles a little bit perhaps H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. But I think when one does try to rouse oneself in this way, or when one uses one's imagination in this way, to frighten oneself, it may well be, on certain occasions, that you are doing that in order to - not exactly fight off feelings of boredom but - give yourself something to feel. Perhaps you feel there is an absence of feeling. So when one feels that there is an absence of feeling or what Keats calls (I think) the feel of not to feel, then you're not going to be stimulated with a mild or delicate feeling - you want something crude, even something coarse, something rather blatant, and fear perhaps: the sort of half serious fear that you experience when you imagine, and know that you're imagining, ghosts and things. But at the same time you think, well, there might be ghosts, there could be. So there's a touch of reality, and therefore perhaps at least a touch of real fear, associated [286] with it. You can in that way, to some extent, put yourself in touch with your feelings again. That's all I can suggest at the moment.

Aryacitta: Is it possible that you get so frightened when you stimulate yourself so much, that you get so frightened, you get so possessed almost by the emotions so much, that you can actually start having an effect on

the environment, and start creating these things?

S: Well, this sort of thing happens with children. They frighten themselves to such an extent they may go into hysterics. I think people perhaps with strong imaginations can do much the same sort of thing, and can end up really frightening themselves. So perhaps one should embark on these experiments with caution.

Padmavajra: Do you think that somebody with imagination, in the sense that you just used it, is closer to the imagination as a faculty to perceive images, in the sort of Coleridge sense, than somebody who doesn't have that? Do you think there's any link up?

S: I'm really not sure about that. I was thinking about that I think after our recent discussion. I came to the conclusion one could speak, using familiar terms, of a horizontal imagination and a vertical imagination. You can see perhaps what I mean by those terms. The horizontal imagination is what Doctor Johnson is thinking of when he speaks of "the dangerous prevalence of imagination". It's what carries you backwards and forwards in time, on the same level of experience, which is the cause of hope and fear in the ordinary sense. But imagination in the vertical sense is ... I was going to say a completely different faculty, but perhaps it isn't completely different, but it's a faculty by means of which you come into contact with images which symbolize a higher world. So these two kinds of imagination, horizontal and vertical, are similar inasmuch as they are both dissociated from the point instant of present experience, but one (as it were) diverges from it on the horizontal, and the other diverges from it on the vertical, but they both diverge. So they have that in common. Or they diverge in different directions so to speak, and therefore there are features that they don't share with one another.

Padmavajra: Do you think that somebody who had a dangerous prevalence in imagination, if they were in the right conditions they could (as it were) channel that capacity into the other sort of imagination? I'm thinking here of something that John Middleton Murry once said about Christopher Smart. He said that if Smart had lived in the Romantic era he would have been another William Blake, but because the atmosphere was so hostile he became a lunatic.

S: Well, was the atmosphere hostile? In what sense was it hostile? Why does one person (as it were) go mad and not another? Or what is it to be mad? Doctor Johnson himself remarked that people thought Christopher Smart mad because he insisted on falling on his knees in the street in public and praying. But he commented, he said, "I would at least pray with [287] Kit Smart as anybody else!" And also I think he made a complaint against him in that he didn't love clean linen; Johnson said, "I love not clean linen myself". So by what criteria was he in fact mad? I mean, there's that also.

But this question of conditions for the rechannelling (so to speak) of imagination, redirecting it from the horizontal to the vertical; I wouldn't like to generalize about that too much, but there's no human faculty which can't (as it were) be redirected. In the case of this (what I've called) horizontal imagination, one has to ask oneself, well, what is behind it. Whether what is behind it is the same as what is behind (so to speak) the vertical imagination. So it's not perhaps a question simply of redirecting something that merely needs to be redirected, but perhaps it's also a matter of discovering what is behind the horizontal imagination, and perhaps sorting that out, or reorganizing that, before one thinks in terms of developing the vertical imagination. Because what could be behind your horizontal imagination is a neurotic tendency, and you would have to resolve that before you could develop the imagination in the vertical sense. So I don't think it's a matter of simply redirecting, there's also some sorting out and organization to be done.

Vessantara: Indrabodhi?

Indrabodhi: Another question on the topic of fear: I was thinking about superstition, and wondering if you had any ideas how they come about, and what gives them their power?

S: Superstition is a term that people use rather loosely, so perhaps you could give some examples so that everybody's quite clear what exactly we are talking about. Because some people believe that religion itself is a form of superstition - that if you have any religion you are superstitious.

Indrabodhi: I was thinking of things like Friday the thirteenth being unlucky, and broken mirrors bringing ten years bad luck, that sort of thing.

S: Or is it seven years bad luck? Why do people believe this? Well, in the case of Friday the thirteenth, I think Friday was regarded as in a sense inauspicious because Christ was crucified on a Friday. And I think in the case of thirteen, including Christ there were thirteen at the Last Supper, the thirteenth being Judas Iscariot, so I think it's on account of those associations that Friday the thirteenth is considered inauspicious. But that's quite different from it (as it were) bringing bad luck. Where the superstition about the broken mirror comes from, I'm not sure. It could be (this just occurs to me) that you see your face reflected in it, and if the mirror breaks it's as though your face is broken, and you are broken, and I believe there are some forms of magic in which they break a mirror in which the reflection of someone's image has been made to fall, and so on and so forth. It could be connected with that sort of thing. But these are irrational things. Why do people believe in them? Well, I think it's probably because people have in them a quantum of fear, which projects itself onto some thing or other, or whatever lies to hand. Some people are afraid of [288] walking under ladders, not for practical reasons, not because a pot of paint might fall on them or something of that sort, but because it's

unlucky. Or they become worried if a black cat crosses their path in the wrong direction, and all that sort of thing. I think it is because there is this quantum of fear as I've called it, which projects itself onto this or that. You can't account for it rationally, it isn't itself rational, so it tends to project itself in this apparently quite arbitrary sort of way. And sometimes of course, a real fear will absorb an unreal one, because then you'll really have something to worry about. This is why, in time of war (for instance) there is a marked diminution in mental disturbance. This is the case at present in Northern Ireland, at least it was until a few months ago - things could have changed while we're here. But the incidence of mental illness - this is what I've read in more than one place - is lower in Northern Ireland than anywhere else, it has fallen markedly since the disturbances began. Because in a sense people have got a concrete, real, focus for this quantum of fear. So it's as though if you've got fear in you, you will imagine - or you'll see - something to be afraid of. If you've got anger within you, or hatred within you, you'll see, you'll find, something to be angry with, something to hate. And if you just want to love something or someone, you will find your desire to love will latch itself on to someone or something, even perhaps to a picture of somebody, a statue of somebody. Even the mere name that you hear - you know, people have been known to fall in love with somebody just after hearing their name, without even seeing them. I'm sure it can happen.

Abhaya: Sorry, what did you say they had in them?

S: A quantum of fear.

Abhaya: No, the person who falls in love with someone.

S: ... Of love. The prime example of the sort of thing that comes to my mind is Don Quixote, who sees things as he needs to see them; who sees windmills as giants, and he sees - who is it?

Kuladitya: He sees the inn as a castle.

S: The inn as a castle, yes. And the basin as a helmet - barber's basin as a helmet, and a very ordinary sort of serving wench as Dulcinea del Toboso. Actually Don Quixote is a very profound study in that sort of delusion (if you like), or the mechanism of projection, especially part two, when Cervantes really gets into his stride. And it's very interesting to see how Don Quixote's delusions start affecting his squire, who to begin with is a very down to earth character indeed. And then the squire's delusions seem to affect Don Quixote! It's a quite extraordinary book, considered philosophically. I think this is why it is one of the great classics of Western literature. It is really a study in delusion, and man's capacity to deceive himself, and in a sense his need to deceive himself, his self-deception as a survival mechanism almost, or technique of survival. [289] I did once think (this is one of my famous unwritten papers) I did once think of writing a paper on Don Quixote and the four viparyayas! (laughter) But anyway I



shall have to leave it to somebody else (laughter), I've given the idea. Unfortunately (I mean, in a sense unfortunately) it's rather a big thick book. There are some quite dull parts to it - the little pastoral idylls and things of that sort. They do rather drag, you can actually skip those, they're sort of interpolated. But especially when he gets into part two - when Cervantes gets into part two - he's quite gripping.

Satyaloka: Isn't superstition concerned with what we were talking about yesterday: control of your environment, or lack of. I was thinking of the other side of the coin, you know, good luck charms and things of that sort.

S: But is that superstition in the strict sense? That again is a question of definition. That would seem to be a form of popular magic (as it were), and magic definitely is a means of controlling the environment. Early man did feel himself very powerless, and he didn't like to feel himself powerless, he liked to believe that he could control things sometimes, even believed that he did control them. I've seen myself some very remarkable instances of this sort of thing. I've seen it in a sort of religious context. I knew somebody in Bombay years ago who had a religious group of his own, and he believed he'd received a sort of (you know) revelation from God. And he seriously believed that he could alter situations and circumstances by concentrating his mind on them, and he was someone who, as far as I could see, was in fact very very ambitious but was unable to acknowledge it to himself. And he had quite conscious ideas about trying to influence the government of India and so on, even world affairs, but he was quite unsuccessful. But I watched him - I saw him over the years - developing sort of fantasies about being able to control things by just putting his mind on them. And he ended up believing that he actually influenced the decisions of the government of India, and he even influenced quite seriously and quite effectively relationships between India and Pakistan, and was even, on certain occasions, preserving world peace. He believed that. But there are many parallels to that sort of delusion among (as it were) religious people. But in the case of this particular person I was able to observe even the growth of this delusion at quite close quarters. And it seems to me that it was the product of a frustrated will to power, almost. You so desperately want to be powerful that you fantasize, you have fantasies of exercising power.

Aryacitta: So that's "a dangerous prevalence of the imagination".

S: I think one could describe it in those terms. I think it does fall within what Johnson meant by that phrase, yes. Yes, in fact Johnson gives an example of that sort - of the mad astronomer who thought that he was controlling the universe, oh you haven't got to that yet? Yes, he gives an example of that sort of thing. You can get, on a smaller scale, in the case of those people who think, well, they're keeping everything going; if it wasn't for them everything would fall to the ground, everything would collapse, nothing would run successfully without them. They're [290] convinced of that, but it's a delusion in the same sort of way, even though

perhaps not so serious, in that they estimate their own importance. They like to think that they're more powerful than they actually are.

Indrabodhi: Would you say that reading books on war heroes, and going to see films of sort of super-heroes, falls into the same category?

S: Not necessarily. Because we are rather starved of the heroic, aren't we? It may be quite a healthy need which people try to satisfy in that particular way. On the other hand they may be just indulging in Walter Mitty-like fantasies as a substitute for practising real heroism in their actual lives.

Dharmamudra: Isn't that a sort of safe stimulus that people get when they go to the cinema? Where they don't actually have to risk anything.

S: That no doubt enters into it quite often. This is an indulgence. It's not even a catharsis, it's an indulgence, one might say.

Aryadaka: In reading about Wellington recently, I noticed he had this idea that if he hadn't been at Waterloo they wouldn't have warned him about it, it was absolutely essential that he was there...

S: I think he was probably correct (laughter), because there are a lot of people who are necessary. Because some people imagine that they are necessary when they are not it doesn't mean that nobody is necessary. I think if Wellington had not been there Napoleon would not have been defeated. As it is, strange to say, I did read somewhere that the French still insist that Napoleon was not in fact defeated.

Aryacitta: Just that his soldiers ran away. (laughter)

S: But anyway, somehow, whether he was defeated or not, he ended up on Saint Helena and Wellington didn't. Anyway, let's carry on. We have some questions left?

Vessantara: Aryadaka.

Aryadaka: Yes, Bhante. This is about the six element practice. I had some difficulty with this, and discussing it with other people on the retreat they also have difficulties. My difficulty was after we get rid of the earth element the other elements are no longer contained, and so conceptually it's difficult. Other people have similar difficulties and also other difficulties - they just came up against something and they didn't want to continue the practice.

S: Perhaps one shouldn't think about it too much, or in a way try to understand it in a sort of definitely rational sort of way. One first of all relinquishes the earth element, and then the water element, and then the fire element, and the air element, but most people have a bit of difficulty

when it comes to space. Because the first four elements are gross elements; it's relatively easy to imagine oneself giving up those, divesting oneself of [291] those. But when you come to space it isn't quite so easy. But the point is that the four gross elements, they do occupy space. So that when those four gross elements are no longer there, there is no longer any space which they occupy. When they occupy space, of course, they don't just occupy space in a general sort of way, they occupy space in a very specific way. They occupy a certain area of space, they demarcate a certain area of space. That area of space is you-shaped, that is, y-o-u shaped, 'you' meaning your physical body, it has the shape of your physical body. It's like (as it were) making a mould. Supposing the mould is in two pieces. Well, the moulding encloses a certain area of space which corresponds to the configuration of the face of the person whose face it is a mould of, if you see what I mean. But when you open the two, what's left? Do you see what I mean? It's as though the space which formerly was demarcated by those four gross elements is no longer demarcated. There is no longer (as it were) a line of demarcation between that part of space which is occupied by the four elements in that particular way, i.e. that particular form, and that part of space which is not so occupied. Like the taking apart of the two halves of the mould. So you could say, in a manner of speaking, the smaller space is merged in the larger space; the enclosed space is merged in the unenclosed space.

In Indian philosophy there is a simile for this; it's the simile of the pot. If you have a pot (it's a bit like the mould) that pot encloses a certain area of space; this they call the pot space. Then outside the pot there is an area of space which is not enclosed. If you break the pot, the space which formerly was enclosed by the pot is no longer enclosed; it so to speak merges back into the space which is not enclosed. So in this way the space element enclosed by the pot is given back to space at large. So in the same way, when after you've given back the four elements within you to the four elements without, the space which those four elements had demarcated is also given back. Then of course again, to take it just a step further, your consciousness was associated with your physical body made up of four elements. So what happens to that consciousness when those four elements are given back, and when even the space which they occupied is given back? The consciousness has nothing to hold onto. It has got no more reason to associate itself with that particular part of space than with any other part. So one can speak here in terms of the limited consciousness merging with the greater consciousness, though it probably is better not to do so, for (as it were) philosophical reasons. But simply as it were to think in terms of a letting go; that when even the space formerly occupied by the physical body has been given back into the larger space, there's nothing for the... (break in recording) ... this point one imagines oneself (as it were) just letting go. No longer attaching (so to speak) the consciousness to that particular physical body, which is no longer there, even the space it formerly occupied is no longer there. It is a very very effective practice as you might have already felt or experienced to some extent. This is why obviously there will very often be a certain

amount of resistance to it. If you experience resistance it means you're probably doing it properly. If you're not experiencing any resistance, well, probably you're just going through the stages mentally, but without really experiencing them or realizing them, or even imagining them very deeply. [292]

Aryadaka: How much time should we spend on this practice? How much importance do you attach to it?

S: Well, it depends how much time you've got. I think it's not a practice that probably you should do outside the retreat situation, because it can shake you up quite a bit. But if you're away on retreat, especially on solitary retreat, it's quite good to include a session of that in your daily meditation programme. If, say, you do, say, a session of mindfulness, a session of metta bhavana, and say two sessions of your visualization practice, well, as a fifth session you can have a session of this practice.

Manjunatha: Is there any reason... well, it seems very obvious that you start with the earth element and then water, and then fire...

S: Well, you're going from the more gross to the more refined. And that means that concentration gradually becomes more intense. And also if you start off with a gross object it is more easy to do the practice than if you start off with a quite subtle object, because concentration gathers momentum as you go along.

Manjunatha: Because I was thinking, maybe if you start with air, which is the air you breathe, that is what in a way keeps the whole system together. So if you give that up, that means you don't breathe any more. That means everything breaks up and it's almost like giving up everything gross in a way. It's almost as though it seems more logical to start with that because that seems to be the thread that holds you together.

S: Yes. That's more logical, but then one might say well, it's more psychological, and psychologically it's probably better to start with something which is grosser, which you experience more tangibly.

Vessantara: Some people I've spoken to seem to get into difficulties taking it sort of logically and literally. For instance, they thought of if you give away the earth element, you really give that away, and when you get to the air element you can't breathe because you haven't got any lungs to breathe with.

S: That is a bit literal minded. Yes.

Vessantara: Or if you give away the earth element, well you're just a pool on the floor ... (laughter)

S: Well, you shouldn't be even thinking about the earth element once

you've given it away. I was about to say, well, some people are a pool on the floor anyway. (laughter) Outside the FWBO of course. (laughter) Anyway, perhaps we'd better carry on.

Vessantara: Vajranatha.

Vajranatha: It's about the ethical versus the psychological approaches to the spiritual life. Psychological analysis of oneself - by which I'm not thinking of formal analysis but an examination of one's motives - seems to have positive and negative implications for the spiritual life. On the one hand, it can help [293] one to understand why one is unskilful, and so help one to become more skilful; on the other hand it can be used to justify unskilfulness. This second use of psychological analysis seems to be quite common in modern Western society, so I was wondering if there was a case for rejecting it completely and simply trying to act ethically, in other words trying to get back to a pre-psychological 'naivety'. If so could this only take place at a certain point in the spiritual life, after one had been sort of weaned off psychology, and when one had taken the precepts after Going for Refuge for example, or would this rejection be an extreme position, as there is a great deal of analysis of mental states in traditional Buddhism? And lastly, if balance is needed between these two approaches, how would you choose between them in a specific situation?

S: This sort of pre-psychological naivety is a bit of a myth in some ways. You almost conceded as much when you referred to psychological analysis in Buddhism. But it's a bit of a myth in a way even in the West, because for instance Freud himself remarked that most, if not all, of his basic insights had been anticipated by the poets, and apart from the poets there were the moralists and the theologians. I mentioned the other day Samuel Johnson and his psychological insights. But it would seem as though with Freud, or starting from Freud, analysis got a bit out of hand. And as you say, the fact that you could analyse yourself and (in a way) understand why you'd acted in a certain way, in a sense excused you from acting in that way. I think that is the nub of the matter. And this attitude is very widespread in the West. When I say the West I mean the non-Communist West, this side of the Iron Curtain. It doesn't obtain that side of the Iron Curtain, their miccha-ditthis are a bit different. It even influences the judicial process doesn't it? Because if you can convince the court that you weren't in your right mind or something of that sort, you can escape punishment sometimes. If you can plead that you weren't really responsible for what you did for such and such reasons. So there is this sort of tendency, not only on the part of society but on the part of the individual, to (sort of) regard themselves as not responsible for what they do - not accountable - and therefore really not ethical beings, if they can analyse sufficiently the reasons why they behaved in that particular way.

For instance supposing you go and smash a shop window. Well, if can prove that you did it because you were socially deprived in some way, or your father wasn't always at home, or you didn't have enough pocket

money, well you can be let off punishment. And one can think of much more extreme instances than that. So society seems to have accepted this to some extent, or even to a considerable extent, and the individual is obviously affected by this sort of attitude. So that if one carries it to extremes one is absolved, it would seem, from all ethical responsibility. Really one ceases to be a responsible agent. And it seems really dreadful that society should tend to take the view in so many cases that people can be treated as though they are not responsible agents. Sometimes it may happen that someone is not a responsible agent, when he cannot be regarded as a citizen, and should not really be permitted to exercise the rights of a citizen, and should be kept either under restraint or under care, like a child. But if you're not to be kept under restraint or under care it can only be only the basis, only on the assumption, that you are a responsible agent and are capable of behaving as such, and will [294] behave as such. And will be accountable as such to other members of the community. So where does that leave us in terms of the question? So let's just go through the question bit by bit, after that preamble.

Vajranatha: I was wondering if there was a case for rejecting it completely, and simply trying to act ethically.

S: Ah. "A case for rejecting it completely." I don't think you can reject it completely, because in Buddhist ethics the question of motivation is also very important. The question of what mental state you perform an action with - whether skilful or unskilful. So you can't really escape a certain amount of self-examination to say the least. It may not be analysis, it may not be psychoanalysis in the technical modern sense, but certainly it will be a measure of self-examination and it will represent an attempt to understand the motives of one's actions so that one can determine the nature of those actions from an ethical point of view, and either avoid them or not avoid them, where their ethical quality is significantly dependent on the mental state with which they were performed. So I think the short answer to the first part of the question is that analysis cannot be altogether avoided, within the context of the ethical life. The ethical life itself involves a certain amount of self-understanding of motives. You could get along without that, but only by conforming yourself completely to the ethical standards of the group, assuming that those standards were in fact ethical, which is of course very often what people do, without perhaps scrutinizing the nature of the standards demanded by society. So let's go on.

Vajranatha: ... in other words trying to get back to pre-psychological naivety.

S: Yes, there wasn't any such pre-psychological naivety really. But certainly there was a state of affairs in which analysis was not carried to the extreme that it sometimes is today, and perhaps we need to get away from that. Maybe it's not so much a question of going back - perhaps you can never really go back - but going forward to a new understanding of

the new synthesis. Then?

Vajranatha: If so could this only take place at a certain point in the spiritual life, after one had been weaned off psychology and one had taken the precepts after Going for Refuge for example.

S: And when one Goes for Refuge and starts observing the precepts as a consequence of one's Going for Refuge, then one has begun to go forward and achieve that new understanding and that new synthesis which I mentioned. But there will still be required, I think, an element of analysis - of self-examination and self-understanding; understanding (that is to say) of one's own motives.

Vajranatha: ...or would this rejection be an extreme position, as there is a great deal of analysis of mental states in tradition.

S: Well, it would be an extreme position, and partly for that [295] reason, yes. I don't think one can escape from the necessity, in the ethical life, for a certain amount of what I've called self-examination, which might well include a certain amount of analysis in the non-technical sense.

Dharmamudra: Could that be contemplation, instead of analysis?

S: Well, it is analysis in the sense of trying to sort out the different strands in one's general overall motivations - analysis in that sense. It's not just contemplation. Contemplation is a different sort of activity, taking the word literally. It's just an observing, not a trying to go deeper.

Kuladitya: Can you trace the rise of this tendency to excuse people's behaviour?

S: It seems quite definitely to go back to popularized Freudianism, but what exactly the successive steps were, whether they were represented by different authors and so on I wouldn't like to say. But it quite clearly it does stem not so much from the writings of Freud himself directly, but from what I call popularized Freudianism, popularized psychoanalysis. Freud himself, if one reads him, he's a very clear, a very exact, a very precise thinker and writer indeed. He's very very meticulous. One may disagree with him, but it is usually crystal clear what he is getting at, what he is saying, what he is believing. He's quite a delight to read in fact, from a purely literary point of view, even in translation. But there's a lot of very loose, very ambiguous, very woolly, popularized psychoanalysis and popularized pseudo-Freudianism that he probably would not have approved of at all. He had his limitations but he was certainly quite a rigorous thinker.

Prasannasiddhi: Would this be in some way connected with desire not to inflict punishment on someone who had committed an unskilful action?

S: But why should one not desire to inflict punishment? I mean there are all sorts of things that people are very willing to inflict punishment for. There are some very unfortunate and I think very irrational tendencies in Britain anyway, in our judicial system, springing from pseudo-liberalism in one form or another. For instance when you're so concerned with the rights of the criminal that you forget completely - we've seen in practice - the rights of his victims or potential victims. The pendulum - in the case of some people - seems to have swung completely the other way, gone to the other extreme.

Satyaloka: You're not talking about an instance of diminished responsibility through insanity or something like that - the state of your mind being unbalanced?

S: No I'm not referring to that, because it has always been recognized that if you are (so to speak) technically insane, there is diminished responsibility. That is recognized actually even in the Vinaya. A monk who is able to plead that he was mentally disturbed at the time of breaking a particular precept is held not to have broken them, due to what we would call diminished responsibility. I think that there is such a thing as [296] diminished responsibility, as when someone is (so to speak) actually insane (to use that term). One cannot really be held responsible for their actions. Or when someone is under very great emotional stress, they cannot always be held responsible for their actions, especially when the emotional stress has been caused by factors which are really beyond their control. What I'm referring to is the sort of situation where a clever lawyer puts up that sort of defence of diminished responsibility simply as a means of getting his client off the hook. And this seems to be happening more and more frequently. Also perhaps it goes back not only to Freudianism - perhaps Freudianism supplies the instrument - but to Rousseauism: that man is fundamentally good, that if this (for instance) young man had been brought up properly in an ideal society he would never have thrown stones through windows, he would never have stabbed anybody or mugged anybody, it's all the fault of society, it not his fault, why should you punish him. Do you see what I mean? This is in many cases the sort of attitude that one comes across. Maybe society has some responsibility, but you cannot place the whole responsibility on society without removing ethical responsibility from the individual, or treating the individual as a non-individual.

Padmavajra: Do you think that there's an inference that the idea of economics is the prime conditioning factor of somebody's consciousness, as also something which is...

S: Yes, I think it's interwoven with what I call Rousseauism. I mean, as I said, Freudianism provides the means, it provides the analysis which makes the whole thing perhaps a bit more convincing. But I think Rousseauism, in conversation with perhaps Marxism, both popularized, provide the sort of underlying philosophy: Man is fundamentally good,



he's conditioned - perhaps totally conditioned - by economic circumstances, so if he does anything bad it can't be his fault because, well, he's completely good, and his behaviour is totally conditioned by economic circumstances. You can analyse his mind with the help of psychoanalysis to show that in detail. So the individual is no longer responsible for his own actions. This is - though this is a bit of a caricature - but this is roughly the sort of situation that I'm concerned about.

Manjunatha: That definition - that you're not responsible for your actions - seems to be a direct application of that fixed view of self. It's almost like you are like that and you can't do anything about it.

S: Yes. Yes, yes indeed. Yes, you can't do anything about it.

Padmavajra: I once had this very same argument with someone - the mitra I mentioned yesterday in fact, in a study group - and he came up with the idea: well what about the case of somebody definitely in deprived conditions, in what sense - he cited the example of people in Brixton [a reference to the 1981 Brixton riot, tr.] in what sense are they really responsible for their actions? This is the argument that people put forward: that people are so poor, they're not given any means of education, and so on, so they ...

S: Well, first of all I think one has to go a little bit, in [297] this particular case, into the idea of deprivation. Because one can find people in India who are infinitely more deprived but who don't exhibit that kind of antisocial behaviour. And also you might find - well you say no educational opportunities but yes, there is a system of free compulsory education. There's a lot of absenteeism, a lot of truancy, but that is not the fault of society. You might say it's the fault of the parents, et cetera, et cetera. You could say that some responsibility rests on society inasmuch that it's a consumer society, and through TV, which of course deprived people always have, colour TV, they get a picture of the good life which they just want to live. Perhaps society is at fault there to some extent. But if you regard people as not morally responsible, well you're regarding them as non-individuals. And if you regard people as non-individuals well any sort of real social life, any sort of human community, is really impossible.

Baladitya: How much do you think the involvement of the emotion of guilt is involved? In that the people who run the court come from a different class from those people who are usually up before it.

S: I think in some cases where the people who are on the bench, for instance, are what are called the pseudo-liberal type, they may well feel guilt and be trying to (as it were) expiate that by letting people off rather lightly.

Aryacitta: Did you say if you can't regard people as being morally responsible there's no chance of...

S: No. I said if you regard people as morally not responsible that is tantamount to regarding them as non-individuals.

Aryacitta: Does that mean there can't be any communal life?

S: Well, yes. You can only have a community in the ordinary social sense, if people are willing to take responsibility for their own actions.

Padmavajra: Would it be more true to say that one regards people in society as potential individuals, rather than...

S: I'm not using the word 'individual' here with a capital 'I' so to speak. But at least people within society, in the ordinary sense, must be sufficiently individuals to be accountable for their actions, otherwise they are non compos mentis one might say, and can be consigned to mental hospitals or other such institutions, or put under restraint. So if people are constantly told "You are not responsible" they will not be responsible. If you want people to be responsible you must treat them as though they are responsible. If you treat them as though they're not responsible they will not be responsible, they will be irresponsible. One can see this with children very clearly, you can either treat them as responsible individuals, and you can do this at quite an early age, and get them to realize that they're responsible for their actions, and the consequences of their actions; or you can just be very indulgent and they will grow up without any realization, really, that actions have consequences, and they will expect the world [298] to be indulgent just like mummy and daddy, and when they find the world isn't indulgent like mummy and daddy they'll develop a sort of grievance, they'll develop resentment, a chip on their shoulder.

Prasannasiddhi: Would you say that there is actually a place for some degree of leniency, in the circumstances in which somebody is perhaps quite poor?

S: Well, I'd examine what was meant by 'poor', because sometimes people are quite arbitrarily drawing a line and calling it the poverty line, and if you are under that line well, you're automatically poor and deprived and regarded and treated in a certain way. I think this is quite wrong. What does one mean by poverty anyway?

Satyaloka: You'd be poor if you didn't have the basics for survival - food, shelter...

S: But in modern societies in the West the line is drawn very very much higher than that.

Satyaloka: Are you saying it's not a line that can be drawn? What are the criteria you're pointing to?

S: Well, for instance there are emotional factors to be taken into consideration. What sort of home life do you have? What sort of relationship with your parents? Even perhaps your physical health, things like that. The sort of area you live in. I don't think you can say that because someone's parents earn less than a certain amount, that family is to be labelled as a poor family and regarded as being automatically deprived, and therefore someone coming from that family and performing a certain antisocial action therefore automatically cannot be held responsible. I don't think one can take that view. Nonetheless I have said that there is such a thing as diminished responsibility, and I indicated the factors that could be regarded as being responsible for that. I remember for instance reading about the riots in Brixton. There was a lot of looting of shops, but which shops were looted? Does anybody remember? Were food shops looted? No, it was mainly TV shops.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps that represents cultural impoverishment.  
(laughter)

S: Well, there isn't really any need - certainly in Britain - for anyone to be culturally impoverished, because there are things like free libraries. You are able to read and write. There are not many people who cannot read and write, and if you haven't learned to read and write it isn't because facilities are not provided. If you can read and write you've got access to culture. Your free public libraries; you can borrow records from public libraries of all sorts. Very very few people have so little money that they can't afford to watch TV or go to films and things of that sort. People have got cultural facilities on a scale that they've never had before in history. Even the poorest and most deprived people, say living in a place like Brixton, have got more access to cultural facilities than anybody ever had in [299] the past, except kings and princes. So can we really talk about cultural impoverishment or deprivation? In the Middle Ages only rich people could own books, very rich people, but anybody can build up a small library. So I think we have to recognize that much more relies on the individual; the individual is responsible for much more than a certain school of thought nowadays would like to think he is. It's as though people want to make the individual helpless and not responsible for himself or herself. It's almost as though one is encouraged to think of oneself as not responsible.

Aryadaka: That's where the reward lies.

S: Mmm?

Aryadaka: You're rewarded if you're not responsible, whereas if you accept responsibility then you have to serve your time. You won't have to do a prison sentence, for example, if you...

S: Well, what has brought you to that stage? Why could you not accept

self-responsibility at an earlier stage and act positively and ethically, and not end up in front of a court?

Dharmabandhu: Perhaps a century or so ago wasn't the general atmosphere of responsibility? Individual responsibility.

S: Well, you had to be, just as you have to be in India today, because the state didn't look after you. You had to be. If you didn't you starved, and very often you did through no fault of your own, not through lack of effort, because of lack of opportunity.

Dharmabandhu: So it's not as if it's an on-going process that man's become more irresponsible. It's like perhaps a reaction. You know, certain people are encouraged to be responsible, then they're encouraged to be not responsible.

S: Well, it is known that there are sort of epochs in history of that sort. Whether it's as simple as that - whether we've seen many swings of the pendulum in that sort of way - I wouldn't like to say. But certainly it would seem that at present, at least in Britain, there is what I call a school of thought (I don't put it more strongly than that) which would seem, in effect, to encourage people not to accept responsibility for their own actions, and to excuse them on grounds of moral responsibility whenever they do anything antisocial or unethical. I don't think that way of thinking is completely widespread by any means, I don't think everybody will look at things in that kind of way, but there is a school of thought, and one might even say an influential school of thought, of that kind.

Manjunatha: Wouldn't that arise from the approach to studying the behaviour of the individual *en mass*? In sociology they study the population and they derive trends. So the individual is not an individual but a part of the mass.

S: That's true. Yes.

Manjunatha: So in way he's not responsible, he's just...

S: Yes, because you can predict statistically that you are going to have a certain number of burglaries and a certain number of stones through windows in the course of a year, so that in a way suggests, because it's predictable that therefore it can't be helped, it's automatic, it's not dependent on the decision of any free individual, it's a part of your social forces. But there is a sort of fallacy involved here. I don't quite know how to express it. But what it amounts to is this: That you can predict that out of (for the sake of argument) 100,000 people, one person in the course of the year is going to commit a murder, but that does not mean that any particular individual within that group is obliged, or necessitated, to commit a murder. But the fact that something is statistically predictable does not necessarily mean that any particular person within the statistical

count is obligated to perform that particular predicted action. Do you see the distinction? But if you don't understand that, then it means that you will tend to regard people as merely statistical material, and tend to assume that since a certain percentage of actions of that type are predictable, therefore people are predictable, and therefore that each individual is predictable, and therefore that he does not have freedom, therefore that he is not responsible for his actions. But what also occurs to me - we heard of people pleading in court that someone couldn't help himself because he was deprived *et cetera, et cetera* - well, that reminded me of a story where years ago, in the days when some people believed in fate or predestination, someone pleaded that he'd been predestined to commit a certain action, and therefore he couldn't be punished. So the magistrate or judge said, well I accept that if you were predestined to commit the action it would not be right to punish you, but nonetheless I'm sorry to say I'm predestined to sentence you (laughter). So society could argue, well if the individual isn't responsible for performing the action, all right, society being composed of similar individuals isn't responsible for its actions either in punishing him.

Vessantara: I'm sure quite a lot of it comes down to Marx's thought - that if you want to paint a picture of capitalist society as being really bad, well then you tend to paint a picture of it where it's so bad that individuals are driven...

S: Yes, they've no alternative.

Vessantara: ...through inequality to perform them. Or even they're justified to...

S: Even they are to be praised, because they're helping to break up a rotten and unhealthy system.

Dharmabandhu: Would that be pseudo-Marxism? Not Marxism itself.

S: Well, one would have to examine the original texts to find that out. Not many people have managed to work their way through *Das Kapital*. I'm sure some people here did it at school, [301] but not everybody. Anyway, any more questions? How is the time going?

Vessantara: It's just gone ten to nine. Devamitra?

Devamitra: I have a question about babies.

S: Babies. (laughter) Well, you are responsible. Righto.

Devamitra: My question arises out of comments made by Aloka in the October Shabda. He comments in his letter from Street Farm that he'd noticed that after his girlfriend had given birth to their child, that his sex drive seemed diminished. And he wonders whether this is to do with the

fact that, unconsciously perhaps, that sex drive had been connected with the desire for children. I wonder if his thoughts are in fact correct...

S: Well, it could have been inhibition due to fear of further similar consequences. (laughter)

Devamitra: Well...

S: Carry on.

Devamitra: Well, that's one possibility. What I was going to ask was do you think that... let's assume that Aloka's reflections are correct, of his own experience, do you think he might be exceptional in this respect, or do you think that in actual fact there is quite a strong drive, in a man even, to reproduce and to have children?

S: I suppose we could ask the married men. But I think one has to ask what one means in the first place by this strong urge to have children. Because even assuming that there is such an urge in a man, it's surely a quite different thing from the corresponding urge in a woman. Because in the case of a woman the urge to have a child is the urge to have the experience of the child growing inside her, and actually giving birth to it, and suckling it *et cetera, et cetera*. That is what having a child means, or being a mother means, among other things, to a woman. But there's nothing analogous to that in the case of a man surely. So what does it mean in the case of a man to say that he has an urge to be a father? There is I think quite a bit of material on this subject in the field of anthropology, as a result of the study of early societies, or even contemporary more traditional societies. It does seem that man, that is to say the father, very often regarded the son as an extension of himself. You mustn't forget that formerly nothing was known of the part actually played by the female in the process of reproduction. It was universally held until very recently that the process of insemination by the male was literally like the planting of a seed. Just as a seed is planted in the soil, the soil only provides the nutriment; in the same way the male plants his seed in the female, the female nourishes that, but it is his seed, it is his child, in the sense that it is not the mother's child. Do you see? So therefore there was a definite decided tendency for the father to regard the child, especially the son, as an extension [302] of his own personality, his own being. And therefore it was through the son, in a sense, that the father achieved immortality. This sort of way of thinking comes up quite clearly and quite strongly in Hinduism, where it is explicitly stated that you achieve immortality through a son. This latter seems to have developed more into the idea that the son, through performing post-mortem rites on your behalf, ensured your immortality, ensured your going to heaven. But this belief in one form or another is very very common in early societies. So very often a man would want a son not for the (as it were) organic reason that a woman would want a child, but as a means of ensuring, or achieving, immortality for himself. Sometimes it's even said that the son is

almost literally the father reborn, and their lack of knowledge about the actual biological process of reproduction reinforced that. But it would seem that the desire of the father for a child in that sort of way was not organic, as is the desire of the woman; it wasn't a demand of his organism. It was more the result of one might say cultural conditioning, or actual beliefs of a certain kind. If they had any sort of root it was in psychology rather than biology. Man's urge to transcend death, to overcome death, through offspring. There's much more of that in it.

Devamitra: So it would seem that in the absence of that kind of cultural conditioning, that Aloka's experience is strange?

S: It depends on the strength of the experience. I believe that some traditional societies like those of India and those of China, a man's desire for a son is very very strong indeed, and would no doubt reinforce the sexual urge. But even in modern times, on a quite different level, many men feel that by producing a child, especially producing a son, they've sort of proved themselves in some way as men; they've demonstrated that they are men; they've sort of demonstrated their potency almost. So once you've demonstrated it, well, unless you're neurotic you don't need to demonstrate it again, or at least the urge or the need to demonstrate it is not great. But I think broadly speaking a man, even when he does have a very strong feeling to have children, doesn't experience that urge in the same way as a woman does. The urge is much more on the psychological level. Of course in very very early societies men were not even aware, apparently, of the part that they played in the reproductive process; they didn't connect copulation and the giving of birth to a child by a woman; some spirit was credited with the paternity. You get many relics of that, say, in Greek mythology where maidens were always being visited by gods and giving birth to children as a consequence. What was the actual question about Aloka then?

Devamitra: Well, the connection between the apparent reduction of the sex drive with the birth of a child.

S: I don't think one can say anything about that with regard to Aloka without in a way knowing more about Aloka, I mean at the same time I don't think one can generalize very much apart from the extent to which I have already done.

Satyaloka: You said the locus of that is psychological. Would it be biological in the sense of genetics? I heard this idea [303] by some well known geneticist that there's an urge for a gene to reproduce itself, to replace itself...

S: Well, this is very likely. First of all one has to ask what does one mean by an urge on the part of a gene? I mean this is perhaps a bit anthropomorphic. (laughter)

Satyaloka: There's a book called *The Selfish Gene*.

S: Ah, yes, well, that's a bit suspicious isn't it? (laughter) But even if a gene does have an urge (let's say) to reproduce itself, even if we grant that, can one speak of that as being of the same order as a human being's desire for offspring? These are really two very very different things. After all a human being is a much more complicated thing than a gene, even though a gene is sufficiently complicated.

Padmavajra: Speaking about desire for a son, in Hindu cultures, like a desire for immortality, could you say that that sort of desire for immortality, in somebody in the spiritual life, is replaced by another kind of aspiration for immortality? In a way one should replace that.

S: Well, in the case of spiritual life, spiritual communities, spiritual traditions, even in the context of ordinary culture, one is concerned with what one might describe as the conservation of values, not just the conservation of genes. And values can be conserved only through human beings. So if there is a sort of cultural and spiritual equivalent to paternity, it is in a sort of spiritual paternity, whereby values are handed down from one person to another, without there being any biological connection at all. Very often in the past the two went together, because you handed on to your son your own values, even your own spiritual values, especially say if you were a priest and your son was a priest. But certainly there will be, on the cultural and spiritual level, that analogous tendency to conserve values, to ensure that values are handed down from one generation to another, not just genes. So in a way, in the case of those leading the spiritual life, the handing on of values to a fresh generation of people, who live in accordance with those values, is (one might say) a substitute (using that term in a quite neutral way) for the having of actual physical offspring. You're not transmitting your genes, you're transmitting your values. Not that you can't do both, but, well, if you're too busy transmitting your genes you won't have much time to acquire any values! (laughter) So please transmit your values rather than your genes.

And, yes, this brings me to a point... Have we got any more questions? Well, we'll wind up with this one. This is a sort of point, rather than a question. Talking of the transmission of values and not of genes, it's quite easy to transmit your genes, it doesn't require much thought, probably the less thought the better (laughter). But it's not so easy to transmit your values. And we notice this inasmuch as we don't see many Order members giving birth to other Order members. So what does that mean? It means they haven't succeeded in transmitting their values. And I'm really surprised that the Order is not doubling every year. Because that would mean that in order for the Order to double every year, it really only needs one Order member to produce one other Order member. (I think I've got my arithmetic [304] right, yes, one other Order member.) That doesn't seem very much to ask. Or let's be very very reasonable - one every two years. That in the course of two years you (as it were) produce



one other Order member. What does that really mean in the terms that we've been..? You're succeeding in transmitting your values to one other human being with whom you are in contact. If you can do that, just transmit to one other human being every two years, well, it would mean that every two years the Order would double. But it's not increasing at anything like that. It would suggest that most Order members are spiritually sterile. Not to say spiritually emasculated, not to say something else of the same kind. Do you see what I mean? Every Order member ought to think very very seriously of transmitting the values which they try to embody. Just as some men seem to be more fertile than others, so some Order members seem able to produce more mitras and Order members than do others. But every Order member should really be able to transmit his values to one other person every two years? It doesn't seem very much to ask. But here we've got, well, say coming on this Tuscany, only fifteen people from the whole Movement in Great Britain, plus one from North America and one from South America, one from New Zealand, one from Canada one might say. So, you know, that's not really very many for Order members in Britain to produce. It's as though it takes the united efforts of ten Order members over a period of two years to produce one offspring in the form of a new Order member. So it does seem that something is lacking somewhere. So I'd like people to give serious thought to this. If your sort of way of life, whatever it may be - whether it's in a co-op, community, or connected with a centre, doesn't sort of permit you to have that sort of contact with some Friend or mitra or anybody, even someone not connected with Buddhism at present at all - doesn't permit you to have that sort of contact with them whereby in the course of two years you can transmit your values to them, well, your way of life needs examining.

Vajranatha: I'll just change the tape over.

S: Well, perhaps I've already said everything I wanted to say.

Dharmamudra: Are people restricted, Bhante, to unmarried people really... (unclear) ... dealing with families at all.

S: Sometimes people in families have been in contact with more people than those who are not in families. No, one mustn't think that one is restricted, one allows oneself to be restricted. Some people are just more outward going than others, they have a keener sense of the importance of transmitting the values in which they believe. They make a point of communicating with people.

Manjunatha: Just thinking about this I read in a book about ... (unclear) ... he says that the desire for immortality is one of the characteristics of a genius, that is a very good urge to have. And it seems in the West people are not particularly concerned with immortality; it seems we're really a lot more prone to nihilism.

S: That's true. [305]

Manjunatha: ... so would it be a good thing to cultivate that.

S: I think the desire for immortality is a form of eternalism, but nonetheless it would seem that it would provide, in a moderate form, a more positive basis for further spiritual development than does any form of nihilism. So yes, probably it would be preferable to think, provisionally, in terms of immortality. And then transcend even that desire, or sublimate that or refine it, so that it's not (as it were) horizontal immortality, but a vertical immortality. Anyway, maybe we should leave it there.

Vessantara: Thanks very much for leading these sessions.

S: Thank you for the flowers, oh, he's taken them away! (laughter)

Padmavajra: All that talk about genes...

—End of Seminar—