

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON "SPREADING THE DHARMA"

[Women's Order Convention 1987]

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Sanghadevi, Ratnamegha, Padmasuri, Ashokashri, Mallika, Vajragita, Srimala, Sarvabhadri, Ratnadakini, Padmavati, Vidyavati (*Transcriber's Note: The voice prints were too minimal to be able to identify the speakers by name in their subsequent contributions*)

Sangharakshita: All right, let's see what we can do with these questions. Spreading the Dharma.

What would be your view as a means of spreading the Dharma more widely, of establishing a team which would tour around the world holding retreats and from there refer people to existing FWBO Centres. Beforehand the team would make contact with other Buddhist organisations in the area and perhaps hold some local public talks as a preparation. Do you feel the Movement is ready for this and is it a good use of our present resources?

I'm wondering, to begin with, what function this team would fulfil that wasn't fulfilled by the existing FWBO Centres to which the team would be referring people?

_____ : It's going to continents where there are no centres. Making contact with people who may not otherwise hear about the movement at all for many years in terms of actual centres.

S: That raises the question of the best use of our present resources, because presumably it would be a better use of our existing resources if we couldn't do everything, to have such a team, if it did exist at all, going around in areas where there was at least some hope of people being able to establish contact with an existing Centre. Otherwise you'd go along, you'd give people a glimpse of something and then they're not able to do anything about it. They can't follow it up. But then of course the question arises, as I mentioned, if there is already a centre in that area, what would that team be doing that that centre wouldn't be doing? Presumably it would be having public lectures, presumably it would be holding retreats, presumably it would have its own connections with other Buddhist groups in the area and so on. Would it not be a duplication of effort?

_____ : We thought more of countries where there aren't any and it takes a lot of resources to establish a centre but if you had a team like this and you managed to interest people who started meditating and then going on retreats, then maybe getting ordained and then starting a centre in their country.

S: So you envisage the team going regularly?

_____ : Possibly, yes.

S: Because a one off visit wouldn't really be so helpful, because not many people would be in a position, even if they wanted to do so, just to up sticks and off to a nearby country that had FWBO Centres.

_____ : But sometimes if people come to retreats in England, then go back and continue meditating that's very effective. It could have that effect.

S: I'm just wondering whether all the organising and all the expense would really make it worthwhile. Whether it would be the best use of our existing resources, bearing in mind that those resources are limited in every way. If we had lots of unoccupied Order members and lots of spare cash, I'd say well fine, if some people feel like doing that. I don't see it as practicable at the moment, and certainly not as regards the women Order members because there are so few of you. There are so many Centres, as you know only too well, where there are no regular women Order members, so we presumably need to fulfil that requirement first.

I think perhaps the only way in which there could be a team would be where you had a team of people going where there might even be established FWBO Centres, but a team of people who specialise, as it were, like the team that's been going around from Vajraloka. Perhaps a team of people with a specialist knowledge or a greater experience than is usual in the Order, either of meditation or of Dharma study or something of that sort. But no, I think at present we're not ready for this, unless perhaps of a specialist nature, and then that specialist team would tend to go round more where there were Centres already, helping them to raise their level in certain respects.

_____ : Resources aside, would you not think it would be skilful thing to do, to actually stimulate people's interest, because presumably we already send out publications to countries where there's no direct way of it being followed up other than that person travelling many thousands of miles.

S: Yes, that's true. But then that requires just a postage stamp. Whereas, if supposing you're thinking of people making say a round the world tour, it's going to cost tens upon tens of thousands of pounds. So, quite apart from the question of people, it's not easy to get Order members to India, we don't have the funds for it. Most of those who have gone have paid their own expenses. We've not been able to finance them. In some cases they passed the hat round among their friends, or their friends have passed the hat around for them, which in a way is quite a shame that the FWBO as such has not been able to finance them, even for such an important thing as going and conferring ordinations.

_____ : Maybe this team ought to have some sort of livelihood like Buddhist theatre show or.....

S: But think of all the organisation that requires. You'd need a roadie going on ahead and.....

_____ : Or the retreat would actually have to bring in money.

S: That's a chancy sort of business, isn't it. It seems a good idea but I don't think we're ready for it yet.

_____ : Do you think we have to be more adventurous at the home base?

S: Perhaps we have to consolidate the home base more. There are lots of things that we just don't have funds for. Think of publications. I'm a bit disappointed that this year we can't bring out certain things we hoped that we would bring out and the new *Mitrata Omnibus* it seems we may not be able to bring out as a proper publication, which is an absolute shame if we can't, just due to lack of funds. Which means that all that material

is just confined to the Movement. And if we did have a few thousand pounds to spare I think it would be a much better investment if we put it towards bringing out the *Mitrata Omnibus* in a form that could be distributed outside the FWBO. But we don't apparently at the moment have funds for that purpose. We can't even support people who are working full time for the Centres - some are still signing-on. Here and there there's even a chairman who has to sign on. This is really quite a shame. It reflects on us in a way quite badly. So I think we have to attend to those sort of basic things first. Otherwise we're trying to spread out from a comparatively weak base. So yes, in a way it's a good idea, this, but I think we can't do it just yet.

We've heard from Jayapushpa that on leaving England for Malaysia, she asked you for advice about setting up the FWBO in Malaysia. You apparently said you could write a book on the subject. What at the moment do you feel are the most important factors you would like to put across to the Movement in general about spreading the Dharma?

I'm not sure what that last bit means. 'The most important factors you would like to put across to the movement in general about spreading the Dharma'- spreading Dharma in Britain or spreading it say in Malaysia or some other country where we go newly, or a Buddhist country or a non-Buddhist country?

_____ : I think was quite a general question, worldwide. It certainly wasn't specifically Malaysia.

S: Well there the situation is rather different. You have to bear in mind first of all that Malaysia is officially an Islamic state. There are certain things you can't do, certain things you can't say. I don't think you can even give a public lecture without sponsorship by a recognised Buddhist group. I think, if I'm not mistaken that, as a foreigner you even need, strictly speaking, official permission to give a public lecture. But they sort of turn a blind eye provided you behave yourself, but that law is there if they want to invoke it, so that one has that to bear in mind, which one doesn't have to think about in Britain. For instance I doubt very much if you could publicly denounce belief in a personal god in Malaysia. I do notice that all the Malaysian Buddhist publications soft pedal religious differences. They definitely soft pedal them. To an extent, sometimes, that compromises the integrity of Buddhism. So that's something that one needs to be aware of.

And then in Malaysia there are a number of Buddhist groups, mainly Chinese, and in the case of Jayapushpa she's a solitary Order member. I think there the danger is that the FWBO's distinctive emphasis or distinctive message, may get lost. Because it's one thing just to be personally popular and give talks on the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths and perhaps aspects of the Dharma that the other Buddhist groups accept and acknowledge and give talks on, but it's quite another matter to put forward the FWBO's distinctive approach, especially the emphasis that we place on Going for Refuge and the centrality that we see that as possessing. If we're not doing that, even though we're there as an Order member, and running retreats and teaching meditation, we're not really representing the FWBO. Do you see what I mean?

So I think in a country like Malaysia, where there are other Buddhist groups, it's necessary for us not only to make sure that we are teaching the Dharma, teaching Buddhism, without any dilution, but also make sure that we're putting across our own distinctive approach at the same time.

_____ : In our discussion we talked quite a lot about teams of people going to new

areas. That does seem much more preferable than just....

S: Yes, if it is possible I think that's very much better. It's better for the sake of the people going. It's not easy to function on one's own, and also one can just function more effectively.

_____ : And it does give more of an FWBO flavour because you've got a variety of people with different personalities....

S: Well not that you've just got a variety of people of different personalities but you have a Sangha and people can see how a Sangha operates. Quite a few people have made the comment to me after coming in contact with the FWBO for the first time, especially going on retreat, having known little or nothing about the FWBO, they've made the comment that they've been very impressed by the way in which Order members work together. This has impressed them as much as anything. But you can't show how Order members work together unless you have a number of them actually working together. One solitary Order member, or even two, however good, however spiritually advanced, is not able to give that sort of impression, not able to demonstrate the actual functioning of the Sangha. That is a very important thing.

But with regard to what generally speaking we should spread, what we should put across initially, it depends very much on local conditions. Whether you speak more in terms of psychology, meditation, doctrine, Buddhist art, you just have to look at your audience. But sooner or later, yes, one must get across the distinctive message of Buddhism, and within that the distinctive emphasis of the FWBO.

Any supplementaries on that? I would have thought all that was quite obvious.

_____ : Do you think you can get across this centrality of Going for Refuge without having a Sangha?

S: I think you can get it across in theory but it's much better, it becomes much more vivid if you have a Sangha at the same time. You could perhaps put it across just as an individual with the help, to some extent, of slide shows and so on, video tapes, but there is a limit. The best way of putting it across is just showing the Sangha or a chapter of the Sangha in action. Whether it is a team of men or a team of women or a mixed team. People have commented that Order members relate to one another in a quite different way. Not just a question of co-operating on a certain project or in the course of a retreat but actually relating to one another as individuals in a quite different way. a way that's different from the way in which people usually relate. [Pause]

The emphasis will vary from country to country. For instance in India when we are putting across the Dharma in general and within that the FWBO, we can't avoid social questions, we can't avoid the question of the caste system. In Britain when we talk about Buddhism we don't have to mention the caste system at all, unless we're specifically referring to India, but in India you have to mention this. This is one of the first things that people want to know, or very often want to know, especially in the case of the ex-Untouchables, 'well what does Buddhism have to say about the caste system?' So you may not personally be interested in the caste system at all but you have to speak about it quite extensively!

Mallika: There has to be time to study the social conditions.

S: Indeed, yes. In the West if you start talking about Buddhism, whether to an individual or in the course of a lecture, the question which you will get inevitably, sooner or later, is what does Buddhism have to say about God. You won't get that question in a Buddhist country. No one will ask you that in Sri Lanka, unless they happen to be a non-Buddhist.

I don't know whether there are any questions specifically that arise in teaching the Dharma in any of the countries, other than England represented here at this moment? Are there burning questions that arise say in New Zealand or Holland or anywhere else that you've experience of? Finland? [Pause]

_____ : There generally seems to be more commonalities than differences in some ways in spreading the Dharma amongst people and encouraging people to come along and study and.....

_____ : It does seem important to actually relate to their principles rather than FWBO in England. I think that happened in Finland a bit, that the Finns felt that it was English culture that was being brought along.

S: I heard a lot about that in those days. I thought they made a big mistake. I felt that they imagined it was English just because it happens to come from England. For instance the question of single sex communities. I think in the 'States some people tried to say, well this is just an English approach but it's nothing to do with a specifically English approach. It's something that follows from the principles of the Dharma itself.

_____ : But I think it's important to clarify that. I think it wasn't this clear.

S: Because well there is no English Buddhist culture. If ever there is going to be an English Buddhist culture, well it's going to take hundreds of years to develop. If there is any sort of cultural admixture in Buddhism as taught by the FWBO well it's still an Indian admixture. I also feel in the case of people in some countries that they use this - oh such and such practice or whatever comes from England and we don't want it because this is not England - as a defence against that thing. For instance especially the single sex situation. If they can say well that's just English and that is just suited to the English temperament, well then they can evade an important application of the Dharma. I think that has happened and I know this sort of point used to arise in the early days with people in Holland. Yes.

Vajragita: It's changing.

S: Oh yes. Of course on the other hand when we go to India some people like to think that this form of Buddhism is made in England! [Laughter] But then it isn't. It was made in India first!

Vajragita: People like doing their own sort of thing their own way.

S: As you've said it may be necessary to make the distinction clear, so that people don't think that just because you come from England, Buddhism is mixed up with English culture, or just because you come from, well Holland, supposing you go from Holland to say America, people don't think that the Buddhism you are teaching is mixed up with Dutch culture. I think one needs to make that point, but sometimes people can be a bit defensive when you are suggesting to them to take a step that they are perhaps reluctant to take and which is against their conditioning. They put up all sorts of defences, and this

is one of them. That, well in this country we don't need to do that.

Padmasuri: That does happen in India I've noticed. Certain aspects, perhaps particularly in the family, when it's all right for the husband to treat the wife really badly because that's Indian conditioning. Well it's different for you because you're English and then say, well actually I'm Buddhist.

Vajragita: It's easier because I'm Dutch as well so I won't let them get away with that.

S: Yes, right.

_____ : It was puzzling to hear Bodhisattva say that she's noticed Finns relate to wrathful deities much more than peaceful. I was wondering should one then really use more....

S: But then one has to look at what is meant by 'relating to wrathful deities'. How do they see them? Or does it represent a sort of rationalisation of their own tendencies towards anger?

_____ : Yes.

S: This might be the case not just with Finns but with anybody attracted by wrathful deities. They might think that because there's such a thing as wrathful deities, it's OK for them to get angry sometimes. Well what does one mean by a wrathful deity? A wrathful deity is a bodhisattva. Does a bodhisattva get angry. What is meant by the wrath of the wrathful deity in this sort of context? One needs to understand that.

_____ : It certainly seems to appeal to that nationality. Maybe it's useful to use it but make sure.

S: Then there's also this whole business of national characteristics. It could be that two or three of the Finns with whom we're in contact are drawn to wrathful deities, but is that a sufficient base from which to conclude that well, that's the thing for the Finns! [Laughter] Give them plenty of wrathful deities! [Laughter] One needs to have a fairly broad experience of a people before one can even begin to generalise. I think if one comes from a different country or a different culture or even a different age group, I think one has to at least be careful not to tread on people's toes without knowing it. If you do it deliberately as a skilful means well that might be another matter. I think at least when you go to work in another country you should inform yourself about local conditions and cultures, beliefs, customs, at least to an extent sufficient to ensure that you don't commit any blunders or offend people without intending to do so. For instance you wouldn't go and work among the ex-Untouchables without knowing something about Doctor Ambedkar, and you certainly wouldn't make uncomplimentary remarks about him. That would just put an end immediately to your mission.

You wouldn't even say something like, well I think Doctor Ambedkar didn't have a very good understanding of Buddhism, well that would put a finish to your mission. Or if you expressed sympathy for Brahmins. [Laughter] That would put an end to your mission among those people. But supposing, let's reverse it, supposing a Buddhist came, let's say from Burma and we went to a lecture on Buddhism by him, and supposing in the course of his lecture he praised Mrs. Thatcher to the skies and said that she was a Dharmaraja, well some of our friends just wouldn't be at all receptive to anything that that particular preacher happened to say! He would have trodden right on some of their pet corns!

[Laughter]

So at least I think you need to know enough about the local culture to avoid putting your foot in it, rubbing people up the wrong way. You don't necessarily have to have a profound knowledge of that culture or be able to talk about it, or present Buddhism in those particular terms. That I think isn't absolutely necessary, but at least you must know enough to be able to avoid faux pas's.

Anyway let's pass on.

In some parts of the Movement at present, there seems to be tendency on placing a very high value on indirect methods of personal development, e.g. Alexander Technique, Psychosynthesis, Counselling etc. Should Order members perhaps put more emphasis on direct methods and encourage that in others? Should we put more value on, and be more imaginative with, the existing direct methods? A good example being the way in which the Order members at Vajraloka have enlivened the teaching and practice of meditation.

I must admit I have wondered a bit about the prevalence of these indirect methods in some areas of the Movement, notably in London. I'm not against people having recourse to these indirect methods if they really do help, but I've been wondering whether a certain imbalance hasn't been created. I'm not suggesting that perhaps people place less value on the indirect methods, but perhaps place more value than some of them seem to place on the more direct traditional methods. I suspect that here and there things have got a little out of balance. I won't be too sure about this because I haven't carried out any systematic survey but perhaps it is something that needs to be watched. Supposing someone is doing a bit of yoga, bit of counselling, bit of psychosynthesis, but doesn't have much time for meditation, doesn't have much time for Dharma study, that wouldn't be desirable, especially in the case of an Order member.

So I think it's a question of emphasis and proportion. And, as for presenting even the existing direct methods themselves, more imaginatively, well of course I'm all in favour of that, provided it is a genuinely more imaginative presentation of those more direct methods, and not something else entirely.

_____ : Say a mitra was thinking of going off and doing a course in say psychosynthesis, obviously it would depend on the individual but sometimes you might not be quite sure well is it actually a good thing for her to do that or is it better that she just carries on going on more retreats and maybe she feels a bit stuck and she feels she needs that for own development as well as perhaps being able to use it later in the Movement.

S: Well as regards one's own development sometimes people are looking for short cuts. If a short cut really is a short cut why not take it? But one must make sure it is a short cut to the place that you actually want to go to, and not a short cut to an entirely different place! [Laughter] So if people do take up things like psychosynthesis they should be very clear as to why they're taking them up. I know the question of livelihood is also involved in some cases and that is quite legitimate because the question of livelihood is a quite pressing one for many people, and they often think in terms of a means of livelihood which would leave them a certain amount of free time and which would not be inconsistent with the practice of the Dharma. It seems to me that in a way this is not unprecedented. I've been having quite a few thoughts about this recently, well recent months or the last year or two. For instance in the Buddhist East, how is a full timer

supported?

_____ : By the laity.

S: Yes, and how do they support him? By what means, by what method?

_____ : They give him food and robes.

S: But do they always just give them?

_____ : The monk has to perform certain ceremonies and keep in contact....

S: So what sort of ceremonies?

_____ : Births and deaths and marriages.

S: Yes, what else?

_____ : Blessings and good luck blessings.

S: Yes, crops, agriculture, success in business.

_____ : Blind faith.

S: No, maybe, but that's not what I'm getting at at the moment.

Mallika: Well they perform services to people.

S: They perform services which the community, rightly or wrongly, recognises as of value. So the community in effect, the laypeople where you get that monk/lay dichotomy, very rarely I think support them for purely spiritual reasons. So far as the lay people are concerned, the monks fulfil a sort of secular function. They function in a way that the lay people see as beneficial to them in a quite mundane sort of way.

So in the case of members of the Western Buddhist Order, they don't think in terms of blessing births, deaths and marriages, or usually they do so with reluctance if they have to do so at all, it doesn't amount to a livelihood, and they don't think in terms of performing ceremonies of blessing for the crops or people don't come to them for a charm to succeed at work or pass an examination or get a new lover. They don't fulfil that sort of function. So what can they do which will meet a need of the laity, so to speak, the need of people say outside the FWBO which is not against the Dharma but which will bring them in some money? Well various indirect methods, therapies and.... Do you see what I mean? There's a sort of continuity. They're grappling with the same problem in a way.

_____ : Though isn't it slightly different in that an Order member or mitra who's teaching those things may actually be thinking that those things, well usually they think those things will definitely help people grow towards the Dharma. It can get a bit blurred because....

S: But do they really think that. Do they really think that by teaching say yoga or psychosynthesis those people will necessarily grow towards the Dharma in a specific sense?

_____ : Well we did discuss this quite a bit and we did think that some Order members certainly who were using those indirect methods were very much aware that, yes it was all right to just teach yoga for people just to get physically healthy from that but also that there was the idea that maybe would move on through that to meditation.

S: Well monks in the East I think have similar ideas because they think, well these worldly people, they aren't meditating or studying the Dharma but at least they're developing their faith and they're supporting us, they're giving dana and that will help them in following the spiritual path in the long run. Do you see what I mean? They see whatever they do, which we might regard as just superstitious, as having had some sort of connection with, or relevance to, the Dharma. You could even argue from another point of view in the case of our own people that they sometimes have a blind faith in certain therapies, no less blind than the monks in the East sometimes having in their particular lines. For instance in Tibet lamas hand out charms and amulets to protect against this, that and the other. They believe in those things but we might say they were completely mistaken. For instance a lama friend of mine came to see me and he said he'd been ill and I'd asked what medicine he was taking and he'd swallowed a hair of his guru, which he'd kept all those years and he was convinced that that would cure him.

Voices: Did it?!

S: I don't remember. [Laughter] Because I'm afraid I rather upset him because he showed me this hair, and quite spontaneously I said, 'oh it looks like a dog's hair!' [Laughter] because it was rather thick and black and curly, so it didn't look like a human hair, and he was a little bit upset. [Laughter] But anyway the main point I'm making is that the full timers in the FWBO are in a way faced by the same problem as the full timers in the East, their counterparts in the East, and seem to be having recourse to much the same solution.

_____ : Do you think it's a good thing that that's happened? Do you feel it's necessary in our modern Western society to have these particular sorts of indirect methods?

S: I think a lot depends on the nature and validity of the indirect methods. Whether they really are indirect methods of following the path, at least in the long run, at least heading in that general direction, and I suppose the extent to which the persons teaching them realise that. I think you can see a connection between say yoga and meditation. When I say yoga I mean *Hatha* Yoga and meditation. Sometimes people who teach Hatha Yoga also teach Raja Yoga which involves meditation, and one can see a clear connection between meditation and Buddhism. But supposing an Order member set himself or herself up as a palmist or an astrologer, it might be a livelihood, it might constitute a livelihood, might constitute a very good one, but would it really be an indirect method? One or two people might even think it was, but personally I'd be rather doubtful. Some people might even argue, well there is something in astrology, you can help people in living their lives by that means. As I say I'm personally rather doubtful. So there are some borderline cases. Though I say teaching yoga, especially teaching it as an indirect method of personal development - by indirect meaning of course a method that didn't necessarily work directly on the mind - well it was right livelihood, you would be helping people get a little closer to the Dharma perhaps and you would have the satisfaction of being able to support yourself. Similarly I think from what I've heard of it, with the Alexander Technique.

_____ : What about the more sort of psychological orientated therapies, such as psychosynthesis and counselling?

S: I must say I don't know much about psychosynthesis. I've read a book that Vajrayogini gave me some years ago. I think in some ways the important thing about psychosynthesis is that it is open, as far as I understand, or as far as I've read, to a transcendental dimension in human experience, which is not necessarily the case with all psychologically oriented therapies. So I don't think they actually give any teaching of a transcendental order. I don't think they have any methods or practices of that type, but at least they are open to that particular dimension. They recognise it, it would seem, at least in principle. But I'm not personally acquainted with the details of their practices so I can't say very much.

_____ : Do you think that people do need to be clearer though at Centres, why there are these various indirect methods, so that.....

S: Yes, especially when the direct methods are available, and when they are Buddhist, one perhaps thinks well even in the case of Buddhists it might sometimes be necessary to have recourse to some form of therapy to clear up a particular difficulty, but not in a sort of general way as a substitute for the traditional Buddhist practices. And of course in the case of non-Buddhists or people who weren't interested in Buddhism, well in their case if they want to learn yoga or if they want to learn perhaps even psychosynthesis, certainly if they want to practise Alexander Technique, well you could teach them as a means of livelihood, with the conviction that you were helping them to grow to some extent.

Mallika: Perhaps it might be necessary to discourage these alternative methods as being fashionable.

S: Yes one does see things going in waves. One does see changing fashions in this respect. [Pause]

There is of course the more general point that meditation is quite difficult and even Dharma study isn't always easy, and people may think sometimes that they'd like a method or an approach to Enlightenment that was easier, or they just feel like a change, so their eyes start wandering and they look at one or another of these, well not exactly indirect methods, well just therapies or whatever.

_____ : Do you think that's a wrong view?

S: Which?

_____ : Well surely there isn't an easy path.

S: Oh yes, yes. [Laughter] If there is an easier path why not follow it?! [Laughter]

[End of side one side two]

_____ : Step by step. They might not be ready for.....

S: But I'm thinking more of people who have definitely committed themselves to the Dharma, especially Order members, even mitras. They should not stray away so easily.

_____ : Don't you think we have an actual vision to offer that there is a difference between spiritual and psychological. So many people I think suffer from psychological problems but then don't see that there is something more after you've cleared up those

problems.

S: Assuming of course that you can clear them up by having recourse to purely psychological methods.

_____ : That's why I think it would be good to have Order members practising psychotherapy. That they would have this clear vision and guide people further if they could. Or even some people I think go to psychotherapy when they are looking for spiritual guidance.

S: Well people may not always know what they're looking for. They may not always know what it is they're taking up and practising or what they're going to. They're not necessarily very well informed. Usually or very often it's a matter almost of luck it seems, whether they end up practising Buddhist meditation or something else. They just happened to see a particular poster. This is one of the reasons I think we just need to make ourselves known better, have more publicity.

_____ : I think some people maybe just need somebody who can really listen and who's got mettā, and that will help them.

S: True, Yes. [Pause]

_____ : Do you think we should be more careful about people we don't know at all who turn up at retreats and maybe are quite disturbed. Do you think we should turn them away?

S: Well it isn't always evident that they're disturbed. It very often comes out, in certain cases it has come out, only after they've been admitted to the retreat. But certainly Order members on retreat need to keep their eye open, as it were, and be able to spot the signs, as it were, as early as possible.

_____ : What should we do then if realise somebody's mentally disturbed?

S: It depends to what extent they're disturbed and whether say trying to meditate will make them worse or not. It depends also what effect they're having on the rest of the retreat. I should take all those factors into consideration. I think Dharmadhara and others are trying to work out some guidance for people what to look for, what one should do, what one should not do. I think Advayacitta has some experience in this field. But I think we are reasonably lucky in the FWBO. We don't seem to attract many cranks or disturbed people. Just a few. What we really need to do is just to emphasise the Dharma all the time and, even if we do develop an interest in some other method, technique, therapy or whatnot, be very clear why we are doing that and give prominence to the Dharma all the time.

_____ : I was going to say if you are teaching indirect methods would it still be desirable to try to make very overt links between what you are doing and the Dharma. If you are working with a group of people quite regularly and for a period of ten weeks?

S: It's very difficult to generalise. One might be asked questions which oblige one to make some sort of link, or one might not.

_____ : But whether perhaps it's worth making more overt connections, or whether you'll simply lose your clients and lose your money and then....

S: I think you can only play it, as it were, by ear. In the case of some people, one thing may happen. In the case of others the other thing will happen. You will only learn from experience. I'm quite sure that if you advertise say a meditation class people go along just wanting to learn meditation, and if you start talking about Buddhism after a while, some people will be put off and some people will be pleased and attracted, and some people might come along wanting to learn about meditation but with firm Christian convictions, and not wanting at all to know about Buddhism. Others might not have any religious beliefs and might be only too happy to learn that, well, behind this type of meditation there is Buddhism. So it's difficult to generalise.

Also I think we have to be careful about using this expression 'indirect method', because when I introduced it I meant by that an indirect method of working on the mind. Yes. I spoke of meditation as the direct method and say Hatha Yoga as a means of working on the mind indirectly. It could be that not all the therapies and so on are indirect methods in that sense. Everything that one does has some effect on the mind, no doubt, but an indirect method of working on the mind is very much an indirect method of working on the mind. That is its primary purpose - to work on the mind, but indirectly via the body especially.

_____ : It's to clear the mind from wrong views.

S: No, not exactly, it's more to do with, one might say, negative emotions. You don't really clear the mind of wrong views properly until you come to discuss actual Buddhist teachings and doctrines. No amount of Hatha Yoga is going to get rid of the idea of a personal god! [Laughter] So if one is speaking of something, a particular practice or method, as an indirect method, you must be very clear that it is in fact having an effect upon the mind, a positive effect, and you must have a pretty clear idea as to how that is coming about. How it is having that particular effect. Otherwise you're working in a very haphazard, slapdash, sort of fashion.

In the case of, let's say, counselling, it may not even be an indirect method. If you are discussing with that person their mental state with a view to making that mental state more positive, well in a way it's directly attacking the mind. Or, if it is indirect it's indirect inasmuch as you're going via words and via discussion, but the aim that you're seeking is a more positive mental state for that person. So we have to be careful that 'indirect method' doesn't become a sort of catchphrase that we use without fully understanding what we mean by it. And ask, if one is having recourse to, or teaching, an allegedly indirect method, one must always ask oneself well is it having an effect on the mind, even though it does go by a roundabout way and take a long time, well is it having an effect on the mind. Does Hatha Yoga for instance have an effect on the mind? Do people become calmer? Do they become more collected, do they become more concentrated, mentally, as a result of doing Hatha Yoga. If they don't, if it's just a sort of limbering up exercise that leaves them mentally where they were before, well it's not an indirect method. It's just an exercise.

So this is what we have to ask ourselves, or one of the things that we have to ask ourselves. Is this particular method functioning as an indirect method of working on the mind? Of course there can be some techniques that affect only the body and are worth having recourse to, or worth even teaching, simply because they relieve pain and discomfort and so on. But they are not therefore necessarily to be labelled 'indirect methods', because you may restore someone to a better physical condition, they may go out and rob a bank or commit an act of rape or something of that sort. You've not touched their mind at all.

Anyway let's pass on.

When you gave your paper on Ten Pillars of Buddhism in 1984....

Good heavens, all that time ago!

..... the sixteenth birthday of the FWBO, you said about the Order coming of age.

Sixteen in Indian terms but perhaps twenty one in Western terms perhaps. [Laughter]

We were wondering if you were intimating that by the time the Order was twenty one, you hoped that there would be a very definite manifestation of the Bodhicitta.

No, I don't think [Laughter] I was thinking any such thing, no.

Since there seems to be a relationship between spreading the Dharma and the Bodhisattva Spirit, do you think the rate of expansion of the Movement since giving that paper does indicate that more Order members really are beginning to function more from genuine interest in others, and therefore through compassion, or do you think we generally underestimate both the personal and collective effort we have to make before the Bodhicitta can arise?

It's very difficult to say. I don't think there's been any dramatic increase in the rate of expansion of the Movement since I gave that paper. The movement of expansion has continued, but it hasn't been dramatic. *Taraloka* has been established during that three year period hasn't it. What else has been established?

_____ : *Guhyaloka*.

S: *Guhyaloka*. The Newsletter has turned into *Golden Drum*. Several publications have been brought out. These are all good things but nothing very dramatic.

_____ : Edinburgh, Oxford.

S: Yes possibly Cambridge, Birmingham. So whether the rate of expansion of the movement has increased is rather doubtful. It's a very difficult sort of thing to estimate or assess, isn't it. But then the question goes on to ask:

Are there any aspects of personal practice that you think the Order could make use of to help develop the Bodhicitta?

Of course one mustn't think of the Bodhicitta as too separate a thing from the Going for Refuge. That needs to be remembered. I've said that the arising of the Bodhicitta is the sort of altruistic aspect or dimension of the Going for Refuge itself. You don't Go for Refuge just for your own sake. So if you deepen your Going for Refuge at the same time you do expand your Bodhicitta as it were. So I think one shouldn't discuss or ask about the Bodhicitta without bearing in mind the Going for Refuge. It's not as though well I've Gone for Refuge, now what do I do about the Bodhicitta? I know that that's how it's sometimes presented in certain traditional texts, especially Tibetan ones, but that's because they've undervalued, they've devalued, the Going for Refuge so that it needs, or it appears to need, some sort of supplementing. If you see the Going for Refuge as the fundamental act of the Buddhist life or what constitutes the Buddhist life, well you've nothing to do except deepen that. From provisional to effective, effective to real, real to

absolute.

_____ : You talked in the questions and answers from the White Lotus Sutra series about the movement. You talk about spiritual strength and that you didn't think the FWBO had accumulated so much spiritual strength that we manifested outwardgoingness on the basis of our spiritual strength to a marked degree more than other major Buddhist traditions in the West. I wondered what you'd meant by spiritual strength, and whether you mean Going for Refuge as well.

S: Well clearly the FWBO doesn't exist apart from its members. The Order doesn't exist apart from its members, so that if there's any lack of strength on the part of the Order or the movement in general, it means that there isn't a sufficiently intense Going for Refuge. That the Going for Refuge hasn't really shifted from the provisional to the effective and the effective to the real, on the part of a sufficient number of people. At the same time there's something else that one has to bear in mind. One often finds that people are acting and going out, as it were, propagandising, in the case of Buddhist groups, not necessarily because they've got a very deep Going for Refuge of very active Bodhicitta but for quite different reasons. I've talked about this quite a lot in the past. That people can be very active and apparently dynamic for quite neurotic reasons, and no doubt we have to beware of that ourselves, and make sure that our outwardgoingness is not the result of some inner frustration, some dissatisfaction with ourselves, but represents a genuine overflow of the Bodhicitta, so to speak. Yes.

So when I said that we aren't so outward going as some other groups, I wasn't meaning to suggest that those other groups had necessarily a stronger experience of the Bodhicitta.

_____ : No I didn't think you meant that but I just wondered what you had meant by this 'spiritual strength'.

S: Well strength in the purely spiritual sense can only come from our practise of the Dharma, especially the ever deepening of the Going for Refuge. Perhaps that's a bit too general or a bit too abstract, but it means a more solid practice of meditation, a better understanding of the Dharma, more effective Right Livelihood, more positive relations with other people, more effective communication, a clearer understanding of the goal and so on.

_____ : So can one have Bodhisattva spirit before Bodhicitta has arisen?

S: Well it depends in what sense one understands Bodhisattva spirit. If one understands it as a straight translation of Bodhicitta, then obviously not, but if by Bodhisattva spirit one just means altruism in a general sense, well obviously one can have a measure of altruism before one has really gone for refuge or before the Bodhicitta has really arisen.

_____ : You seem to have been encouraging us to be more outward going even if it hasn't arisen, so would that be a good method?

S: Well one is very much aware of the needs, not to say the plight, of other people who haven't heard about the Dharma and who might be able to benefit from it, and even if people haven't really Gone for Refuge or even very effectively Gone for Refuge, well they can still draw the attention of other people to the existence of something like the Dharma or to the existence of something like the FWBO. Even an unenlightened person can put up posters! [Laughter]

_____ : And through doing that you probably do deepen your altruism.

S: You can deepen it, you may deepen it in the true sense, but even if you don't, well at least objectively speaking you've done something useful that may result in bringing some other person into contact with the Dharma, and thereby changing their whole life, for the better.

_____ : Do you think we need to balance that? Some people who are intensifying their meditation. More people are doing that.

S: Well we need more of everything, but not everybody can do everything. It's difficult enough to do a little of everything, what to speak of a lot of everything. So, no doubt, certain people could intensify their meditation, certain people could study the Dharma more deeply, certain people could give more lectures, certain people could involve themselves more thoroughly in team based right livelihood situations and so on, but no one's able to intensify all those things at the same time.

_____ : So do we need more specialisation?

S: Well yes and no. We need to improve, and improvement often involves specialisation, but at the same time we need to keep a certain balance. I wouldn't be happy about someone concentrating exclusively on meditation and never studying the Dharma, and vice versa. Also the emphasis may change from time to time. You might spend several years with an emphasis on meditation rather than study, and then a few more years with an emphasis on study rather than meditation.

Anyway, last question. It's a sub-divided one.

In a recent 'Shabda', Vessantara remarked that as the result of listening to a talk given by a Nichiren teacher of not a very high standard but which nevertheless was appreciated, that perhaps in the WBO we have set too high a standard of public speaking which has discouraged some people from going out and giving talks. Is it better to have more talks of a lesser standard or few talks of very high standard? Do you agree that people have been put off giving talks for this reason? If one is giving one-off talks to different groups, which do you feel are the basic Buddhist principles one should try to expound?

I think there's a certain amount of ambiguity here. What does one mean by a high standard of talk? [Pause] Well what did you imagine Vessantara meant? Vessantara is alleged to have said or remarked that a talk given by a Nichiren teacher 'of not a very high standard', so what did he mean by that initially? You have to understand that before you can go onto the next part. What did you understand him to mean when he said that that teacher's talk was not of a very high standard.

_____ : It wasn't very clear in the way that it was delivered I think.

Mallika: Not particularly Dharmic.

S: Yes.

_____ : Not affecting emotion (?)

S: So would there be any use in giving that sort of talk? Did you understand Vessantara

to be suggesting that maybe it was better to give that sort of talk rather than no talk at all. For that sort of talk some people might be more open to that sort of talk than to a really good talk. Did you understand him to be saying that?

_____ : No.

_____ : He was suggesting that there was validity in that. It attracted a lot of people.

S: Yes, but it attracted them but they didn't know what they were going to get, did they?

Mallika: I think he was making a comparison that we could offer a better talk than the one he heard and that could be given by people who considered themselves not of a very high standard.

S: Ah, but when they considered themselves not of a very high standard, what did they mean by that? Did they mean the same thing by that as Vessantara meant in connection with the Nichiren teacher? Did they mean that they could give a good talk even though they were mentally confused and didn't know much about the Dharma [Laughter] or did they mean that they hesitated to give a talk because their delivery wasn't very good or something of that sort?

_____ : Maybe they were comparing themselves to somebody like Vessantara himself who is a very good speaker.

S: Yes, so what the point I'm trying to make is that there are really two kinds of good talk or two kinds of bad talk you could say. Let's concentrate on the second. One kind of bad talk consists of a talk on Buddhism which is basically quite confused or confused to some extent, that doesn't convey the Dharma adequately and is really quite misleading. Well there's no point in anyone giving that sort of talk really I think. But then there's a bad talk in the sense of the person knows the subject and they're quite clear about certain things but they're not able to put it across very well. They're not a very polished speaker. They haven't got all that much confidence. I think there is an argument for encouraging such people to give talks, sticking to things that they know quite well, even though their delivery isn't very good. They may hesitate or they may pause from time to time or might even lose their way in their notes, but what they say is adequate. It really is the Dharma, however simply it is put. So I think people can quite competently spread the Dharma without being a good speaker in the technical sense, and I think very often people aren't looking for that. They're not looking for brilliant speakers. They're just looking for some truth that they can get hold of, and even if it is put across in a very unsophisticated form, if they feel that you're genuine, if they feel you're sincere, and if you basically do know what you're talking about, even though you are not a particularly good speaker, it can be very effective.

_____ : I think perhaps that is the area where people haven't stepped forward because of those sorts of difficulties.

S: Yes, because I'm quite sure that in the case of the majority of mitras they're sufficiently clear about the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, sufficiently clear about the life of the Buddha, sufficiently clear about theism and non-theism, to be able to give a talk. What to speak of Order members. But being a fine speaker, an impressive speaker, with emphasis on the speaker, that's another matter. Not everybody is able to be a good speaker in that sense, nor does everybody need to be.

So I don't think one needs to leave the preaching of the Dharma, via public talks, too much to the best speakers in the Movement. Again depending on audience. If you get an invitation say from a university or from a philosophy department, well send your best people because such places won't be able to appreciate an unsophisticated talk and if someone went and gave an unsophisticated talk, however genuine and valid, well they might even laugh at it. That would be their weakness. But if you get an invitation from the local Rotary Club or Women's Institute or a school, well almost I think any Order member could go and give a suitable talk.

_____ : I think Vessantara was implying that we do actually have the resources if we had the courage, to go out uninvited, go round the country giving public talks, if we had the confidence. Every Order member should be able to do that.

S: That's true. Invited or uninvited, it doesn't really make any difference in principle and perhaps we should go and give more uninvited talks. That is to say talks which we organise ourselves and to which we invite people.

_____ : And also then you can choose your topic a bit more rather than being asked to speak on something.

S: Yes indeed. Well you can choose all sorts of things. The type of hall you speak in and whether you have a chairman or not, literature on sale. But perhaps people should be more enterprising in that sort of way, and we shouldn't expect just the very best speakers to do this sort of thing, unless there's a particular reason why only a very good speaker should go along.

I am asked 'do you agree that people have been put off giving talks for this reason?' - I don't know, I don't have any evidence. I don't know whether any of you have got any ideas on this.

_____ : I think it's an unsaid reason for being put off. I don't know how much actually people have stepped forward and someone says no don't give a talk I don't think you're a good enough speaker, I think it's more people just measure themselves against the Subhuti and the others and think, oh I can't speak like that so therefore I can't give a public talk.

S: Well it depends on the nature of the situation. If it's say Wesak day at the Centre and you need a really good talk, well everybody may not be able to give that, but if it's just a one off occasion, as I said for a Women's Institute or a Rotary Club or a school, well I'm pretty certain that any Order member could put across enough for that particular occasion. Just two or three ideas are probably all that's needed, and a pleasant friendly manner, and a readiness to answer questions afterwards. People don't usually ask, I think, trick questions in those sort of situations, they just want to know.

_____ : When you go to places like that you are there on their terms. We discussed how maybe we could use our resources better, like the Nichirens seem to be doing, just organising talks.

S: Well the one doesn't exclude the other.

Mallika: People don't think of themselves as speakers.

S: They don't even have to. Just speak! [Laughter] You're doing it all the time! After all

how many people are there on this convention? Thirty seven. I've heard every one of them talking away sixteen to the dozen! [Laughter] Almost hours on end. Who isn't a speaker?!! [Laughter] It's just a question of losing your self consciousness and lack of confidence.

_____ : Just! [Laughter]

S: There could be more confidence within the Movement in a general way, and that shows itself in all sorts of ways, including this. People are a bit reluctant to give talks.

_____ : We did talk about maybe the speakers' classes had gone a bit out of fashion and maybe we could do a bit more.

S: If people feel that they're needed revive them by all means. Give one another feedback. They still feature on the men's pre-ordination courses. Don't they feature on the women's too?

_____ : They do.

S: And there's critical feedback.

_____ : We also talked more perhaps in terms of just not one person going to give a talk but going as a team, maybe four people or something.

S: (*laughs*) Ha Ha.

_____ : But one person would give a talk....

S: A bit like a steamroller to crack a nut! [Laughter] It's not a bad idea to take along one other person. I know there's safety in numbers but... [Laughter] they're not likely to try and mob you or lynch you or.... It's a good idea to take along one other person who can sit right at the back, so if you're not audible just make a signal, (*whispering*) 'speak up', and can give you feedback afterwards, and also help in selling the literature or whatever.

_____ : But it's also not only just for the speaker at the time of speaking but afterwards if you have a general communication with the group you're talking to.....

S: Again it depends on the occasion, the size of the group, the number of people present. Otherwise if there's four of you and just three of them turn up it looks ridiculous! [Laughter] You just never know.

_____ : Maybe it would be helpful to have a team teaching speaking, like Vajraloka team can provide meditation, if there was a team going round the centres teaching and giving some training.

S: I don't think it really requires it. I think you can all do it yourselves. Give feedback. It's pretty clear what people are doing wrong. Someone doesn't project his voice properly or somebody else keeps looking down at his notes and somebody else keeps picking their nose or something like that. You see all these things happening. [Laughter] Or someone else has got too many notes and maybe someone else has got too few.

_____ : It seems more than confidence but enthusiasm that is lacking. I think it would regenerate that if somebody took it on.

S: I think they've just got to develop an urge to communicate the Dharma, seeing that there are so many people who need it. I think it's as simple as that. I'm not pointing them out as an example but look at some Christian preachers. They don't speak at all well. They just repeat the same thing over and over again but they go round doing that. They've got that sort of enthusiasm. Probably it is a false self confidence but they do it and they attract some people. If they can't speak they go round with a placard 'Jesus died for you' sort of thing [Laughter]. At least they do that! If you feel you can't speak well just go round with a placard! 'You too can gain Enlightenment. Meditation is the Way. FWBO Centre such and such'. Well some people will see it and some people may come along. [Laughter]

It seems to me that lack of self confidence is the real problem, not inability to speak. And you develop self confidence by doing something and getting feedback afterwards. I think after giving four or five talks almost anybody would be reasonably competent, if they receive proper feedback afterwards. And if you go to say a Rotary Club meeting or Women's Institute or school, you don't have to give a very long lecture. It doesn't have to be very learned. Maybe twenty, twenty five minutes is quite enough. Just making a few points very clearly and strongly and inviting questions afterwards, and you'll get usually I think simple questions like 'How do you live?', how do you make a living? Where does your support come from? What do you think about the family? Do you believe in God? What is meditation? Is Buddhism the same thing as yoga?' You just get questions of this sort usually.

_____ : Maybe there's a bit of reluctance there if you don't want to say you are on the dole. You feel a bit uncomfortable.

S: Well why should you be uncomfortable? If you think you're doing something wrong well stop doing it! If you think it's all right well say so. [Pause]

Ah.

If one is giving one off talks to different groups which do you feel are the basic Buddhist principles one should try to expound?

Well, that'll depend to some extent on the nature of the group. If it's a youth club, you won't speak about quite the same things as you would if it was an old folks' gathering or something of that sort, but I think a very big basic thing to emphasise is that people can change, that you can change, you can develop, you can transform your present self, and that Buddhism or what is called Buddhism, is just a practical way of doing that. Everything else is really secondary. I think this is the main thing to be inculcated in people who don't know anything about Buddhism. Everything else is secondary. That you can change, you can lead a better, more fulfilling, more happy, life. And in Buddhism that isn't just an empty ideal or a theory - there are actual practical methods coming under various headings. There's meditation, there's ethics, there's communication, there's the arts. According to Buddhism the arts are a means of personal development and so on. Living in a community.

And you can always question people's assumptions. Somebody might say well I'd like to come to meditate but my husband always comes home at that time of the evening, I have to stay and get his dinner. You can say well why do you assume that you have to do that? Why do you assume that you can't just leave it for him and let him get it himself? This might be a completely new idea to some women. I'm sure it would be! To some women it's unthinkable that their husband should get his own dinner. Or even make himself a cup of tea. Do you see what I mean?

_____ : You can't say that in India.

S: Well no, there you'd obviously urge a woman to be a dutiful wife and wait on her husband! [Laughter]

_____ : Well something in between I expect!

_____ : I was just thinking of the first time I did that. Told him to get his own dinner! [Laughter]

S: There's away of doing it. [Laughter] Sometimes it applies to children. Teenagers who are accustomed to having always mum around doing everything for them. Well a time has to come when mum rises in revolt and says well you're quite old enough to get your own tea or wash your own shirt or whatever it may be.

Anyway any further point?

_____ : We talked quite a bit about not missing opportunities when you're maybe just travelling on a train or something and you meet somebody. Perhaps we don't stand out enough, the fact that we are Buddhists, and I was wondering if - I don't how much you travel on public transport....

S: Very little I'm afraid.

_____ : I wondered if you actually went out and well how much you said you were a Buddhist to somebody you just happened to be meeting in passing.

S: I do wear this little buttonhole badge which can sometimes be a talking point, yes.

_____ : The Three Jewels.

S: Yes. I think one can do something of that sort. The difficulty of course English people don't usually take kindly to getting into conversation with strangers. You have to be a bit careful how you go about it, but sometimes people do want to talk on a journey and they tell you what they're doing and are quite happy that you should tell them what they're doing. Several people have told me, especially Devamitra, that they often have very good discussions with people from whom they hitch lifts. Very often, I think Devamitra and others, I think it is mostly men, have said that long distance lorry drivers who are very good for hitches are often bored and are only too happy to have a heart to heart talk with whoever it is they give a lift to, and Devamitra's often ended up talking about Buddhism, leaving a leaflet with them or a pamphlet and the address of the nearest Centre.

I remember on an early journey of mine on the railway, I got talking with a young woman sitting opposite me and it turned out - because I wasn't wearing my robes - it turned out that she was a Catholic nun (laughs) Yes, so we had an interesting talk about robes and I said, well I'm a Buddhist monk but I'm not actually wearing my robes in public, and she said well, I'm in exactly the same position [Laughter] We recently changed all that. So we had a bit of a laugh over it about the sort of headgear they used to wear and she was saying how pleased she was to be freed from all that and she thought it much more sensible to be going around dressed like everybody else. So that was quite a talking point and we had quite a good discussion.

But it's not always easy in Britain to get into conversation with people. I think when

someone gives you a lift it's much easier because there you are right beside them and very often they pick up a hitch hiker just because they want a bit of company and maybe a chat. But someone sitting opposite you in the train maybe immersed in his paper, may not welcome any interruption, so you have to be aware of that. You also have to be aware and a bit careful if it's someone of the opposite sex. They may misunderstand your approach, especially if it's a man talking to a woman. Unless she's very old and you're very old and all that. [Laughter]

I notice several

[End of tape - no other tape found - the last question had been asked so I assume no other tape was made!! - Silabhadra, transcriber]