

THE VENERABLE SANGHARAKSHITA

GUHYALOKA ORDINATION COURSE, 1988

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I am not quite sure what everybody is expecting, or not expecting, but at least this isn't going to be a lecture. It isn't even going to be a talk. Originally, I had entitled these notes: Concluding Remarks - concluding, that is to say, the whole Ordination Retreat. But, at one stage in the proceedings - I am not quite sure how, or even when - the Concluding Remarks became Concluding Exhortation; or even Exhortation. I am not sure whether Exhortation, even, is quite the right term. Perhaps it should be more of the nature of a reminder, or even, I should say, reminders, because its very much in the plural and not in the singular. So let me put forward(?) reminders.

There are some fifteen reminders, and I can assure you they are not exhaustive, by any means; they are just points that have occurred to me from time to time as I have had contact with the people on retreat, and also as I have called up memories of past retreats, especially the conclusions of retreats and perhaps also the ... people who have gone back, so to speak, into the world.

So these concluding remarks, or exhortations, or reminders, are made mainly for the people who have recently been ordained; but that is not to say that they are not of value for others, whether they have been ordained for a comparatively long or a comparatively short time. But they primarily refer, or are primarily addressed, to the nine relatively new Order Members; so the others can just consider themselves as listening to them. Even though the remarks may not be addressed directly to them, they may possibly find them of some personal value too. They are not necessarily arranged in order of importance. I don't want you to think that No. 1 is the most important, No. 2 the next in order of importance, and No. 15 the least important of all. Perhaps you should think of them, rather, as arranged in a circle, like a sort of round robin, so that you can't say that one is any more important than the others; in fact they all really sort of hang together, they are all of virtually equal importance, they all more or less reinforce one another, one might say.

The first point I want to make, the first remark, the first exhortation or the first reminder, is that I hope that those who have been newly ordained will, in the days to come, in the months to come and in the years to come, even, keep up contact with me. This might seem very straightforward and very simple and very obvious, but I can assure you it doesn't really always happen like that. Sometimes I have had the experience of being on an ordination retreat of three months with somebody, and he is ordained, and we have all had a very good time together, studied together and meditated together, maybe he asks if he can go for a walk with me, so we have walked together; yes, and he is ordained, and he goes back to his Centre - and I don't see [2] him again! - maybe not for a whole year; maybe he doesn't even write. Maybe, before the three-month retreat, before he was invited on that retreat, he had been writing to me every month, even every week; but, after he has been ordained, I don't even get a birthday card from him or a Wesak greetings card.

So this is something that I would like to emphasize: that people should do their best to keep up their personal contact with me. I know, of course, that when they go back to their own

Centre, their own Chapter, everybody is going to be very busy; there are going to be lots of things to do. But please remember that Bhante hasn't forgotten you, and hopes that you haven't forgotten him; or hopes rather that you will show that you haven't forgotten him by occasionally appearing - perhaps even wanting to go for a walk with him! - and occasionally writing a letter. If you can't write a letter, at least send a picture postcard from the nearest museum or art gallery, just to show that you haven't completely forgotten him! So please keep up personal contact with me to the extent that you can. Sometimes people quite genuinely think that Bhante is busy, and of course he is busy ..., and sometimes they therefore think that Bhante hasn't got time to ... answer, hasn't got time even to read a letter written by me, but that isn't really the case. I can always make time for Order Members, and especially for those who have been only recently ordained. Sometimes people think: I've nothing very interesting or very important to tell, but that seems to be more of the nature of not really valuing oneself sufficiently, having perhaps even a poor self-image, as the psychologists say.

So, whatever people have been doing, even if they haven't been doing very much, I would certainly like to know; because, if you haven't been doing very much and should have been doing more, I would have an opportunity to write and tell you so, exhort you to do a bit more. So, yes, please do keep up the personal contact in one way or another, in whatever way you can.

Then, secondly, please do be regular in your attendance at Chapter meetings. I am sure you have heard about this before. You have heard about this, I am sure, from Vessantara and perhaps others, that, yes, there are these Chapter meetings, there are these weekly gatherings of Order Members living and working in the same area, and they are extremely important. We all know what the Buddha said about his disciples needing to meet together regularly and in large numbers in order that the unity of the whole Sangha, the whole spiritual ..., should be preserved. You may ... that those same Order Members meet together on other occasions, for other purposes, but when you meet on Sunday evenings as a Chapter you meet just because you are Order Members and because as Order Members you just appreciate being together. Not just being together in a social sort of way. I have spoken of Chapter meetings as spiritual workshops. I know they are not always that, but that is definitely what they should aspire to be. Your being together on the occasion of a Chapter meeting should mean that you have a quite vivid, a quite lively, a quite spiritual exchange on the basis of your common commitment to the spiritual life and to the Three Jewels.

I do know that it sometimes happens in some Chapters that Chapter meetings become a bit dull. I know cases where Order Members have even wondered why on earth they [3] were meeting together. Well, that should really have been obvious. But, yes, fortunately, especially fortunately for those of you who are going back as new Order Members, in the last couple of years things have improved considerably. I do know that many Chapters are real spiritual workshops in which things happen, in which people get to grips with one another, so to speak, get to grips with the Dharma, get to grips with their mutual communication, and get to grips with any problems that may be arising in their midst. So, yes, at least ... be regular in your attendance at Chapter meetings and really do try to contribute to them as real spiritual workshops, which would perhaps ... why we are there.

Then, of course, closely connected with the topic of Chapter meetings, there is the question of Order weekends, which occur much less frequently and which should be a real event for every Order Member. I am not quite sure what the present arrangements are: I think we are

now having three national Order weekends every year, each one for three days; that is, I think, a relative innovation. But, howsoever it may be, make sure that you inform yourself properly when the next national Order weekend is - or the next regional Order weekend, for that matter - and plan accordingly. Sometimes one asks somebody: Why weren't you at the national Order weekend? and he says, Oh, I had forgotten about it - which seems really quite extraordinary. Or he says: Oh, I had arranged to go away that weekend, or I had arranged to do something else - I had arranged to go sailing, or I had arranged to go away with my girl friend, or I had arranged to go and visit my parents. So that, in a way, is carelessness, a lack of organization. As soon as it is known when the national Order weekends are going to be held, you should just make a note of that in your diary and organize the rest of your programme around that; go to see your parents some other weekend. Sometimes I have felt a bit suspicious in the case of a few Order Members, because every time a national Order weekend came up they seemed to have arranged to do something else; and when that happens very frequently one can't help wondering whether there is a sort of unconscious wish to avoid the national Order weekends, though why that should be one can't possibly imagine. So plan your year, even, well ahead, so that you are able to attend Order weekends.

While we are on that topic, there is another point quite closely connected [with it]: try to make sure that you arrive fresh; not absolutely whacked, as it were. Try to arrange your work during the days leading up to the Order weekend so that you don't arrive so tired that you can't join in things, and try not to arrive late; try to arrive in good time so that you can join in the opening Puja or the opening meditation, and so on. And don't hurry away, unless it is really absolutely objectively necessary, before the weekend is over. It is very disheartening, sometimes, to find people arriving not the evening before but just in time for lunch, and going away the next day, perhaps straight after lunch, having a very, very short national Order weekend. Occasionally, of course, it really does ..., but don't make a habit of this. Try your utmost to be present for the whole of that weekend or three days, as the case may be.

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Then, again, a very similar point, and that is with regard to reporting-in to Shabda. You have all heard about Shabda, or I think you have even read an issue of it by this time, and you will know that there are reports from Order Members. Sometimes these reports are writings-up of [oral] reportings-in on the occasion of the national Order weekend, but sometimes they are what we call letter reports: that is, someone, whether or not he attended the National Order weekend, sits down and writes an account of what he or she has been doing the previous month - anything of general interest, anything positive that that person has to contribute to the Movement as a whole. But, when you have read that last Shabda - I don't know whether you have actually experienced this - you may have been a bit disappointed to find that there was no report from your own particular favourite Order Member back home in your own setting. You may wonder: Where are they? What have they been doing? Are they all asleep? Are they all away on solitary retreat? There is no reporting-in from Dharmachari So-and-so or Dharmacharini So-and-so. What has happened?

So, yes, it can be a great disappointment, sometimes, and I myself have often felt disappointed in that way, to open your Shabda, wanting perhaps to know what somebody is doing, maybe in some distant part of the globe: not a word. Occasionally one finds a whole Chapter, even, not reporting in. It is as though they had sort of dropped out of the Movement for a while. So, in your case, please don't do that, if you possibly can, and you should ... every month, or very nearly every month, report in to Shabda, let other Members of the Order know

where you are and what you are doing, what you are thinking, what you are feeling, how your meditation has been going, what you have been reading, whether you have been travelling, whether you have had any interesting experiences, whether any Insight has come to you which may be of use, of value, to the Movement as a whole, whether you have read a book that you would like to draw to the attention of other Order Members and would like them to read too, whether you have discovered a new technique in connection with your meditation that you would like other Order Members to try out. All these sort of things can be reported in to Shabda, and to contribute to Shabda is a means of communication within the whole Order. Sometimes you may like to contribute an essay on some topic, or occasionally, subject to great self-criticism, you might like even to contribute a poem! But, even if you are a very good poet, not too often. If you are as good as all that, you should be collecting your poems together and publishing them in booklet form at your own expense! So please do report in to Shabda. When someone doesn't report in to Shabda, as I have said, it can be very disappointing. It is rather like phoning up somebody and you can hear the phone ringing but nobody answers; or, worse still, you hear a voice saying: This - is - an - answering - machine; in other words, there is no communication. So please do communicate through Shabda as much as you possibly can.

Again, a closely related topic: that one should try, as much as one can, to realize the unity of the Order. You all know, I think, that the Order, and especially the unity of the Order, is symbolized by the figure of the Eleven-Headed and Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara. One could say that each of those eleven heads symbolizes a Chapter. Of course, I know we've got more than eleven Chapters, but leaving that [5] aside, maybe we've got eleven regions throughout the world. But, yes, the heads represent a degree of unity, as it were. And then there are the thousand arms, the thousand hands. Each Order Member represents one of those arms, or one of those hands; one of those arms joined on to the body of Avalokitesvara. And, of course, as I think we have all been told, each hand holds a single implement, a flower, wheel, vase, bow and arrow, and so on, and those particular instruments, those symbols, represent the particular activity of each individual Order Member, the particular talent, one might say, the particular gift, that each individual Order Member makes to the Order, to the Movement, to the world, as a whole. But they are all integrated, all those symbols, all those implements, all those hands, all those arms, all those heads, they are all integrated into this one figure, the body of Avalokitesvara, which is the Order, or even, in the widest possible sense, the Movement. So it is very important that, as an Order Member, one feels oneself to be one of these arms, one of these hands, of Avalokitesvara, a Member, so to speak, of the Order.

And, in this connection, another point which I would like to make is that ones identification with the Order as a whole - ones feeling that one is an arm or a hand of Avalokitesvara - should be very strong indeed. It should be sufficiently strong, at least, to enable one not to over-identify with ones own particular Chapter or ones own particular Centre. When you are spending your whole time, almost your whole life, within a particular Chapter, working around a particular Centre, just meeting other Order Members connected with that Centre, thinking about that Centre, working for that Centre, perhaps very efficiently, very loyally, it is very easy to lose sight as it were of the Movement as a whole. It is very easy just to lose sight of the whole figure of Avalokitesvara and focus, as it were, on one particular head, or even just on two or three particular arms, two or three particular hands. So one must try not to do that. One must, yes, be loyal to ones own Centre, ones own Chapter, work for that wholeheartedly, but see that ones own Centre, ones own Chapter, is only part of something

which is very much bigger, very much greater, very much more important than any particular Centre, any particular Chapter, however big and however good. And this, as I have suggested, should be a real feeling; one should feel this very strongly.

And then a similar point. Avalokitesvara, as we know, is the embodiment in particular of Compassion, just as Manjughosa is the embodiment of Wisdom and Vajrapani is the embodiment of Energy or Strength. So if Avalokitesvara is the embodiment of Compassion, and if one is oneself a limb, an arm, a hand of Avalokitesvara, what does that mean? It means that one should be operating in accordance with Compassion. One should be operating in accordance with the [6] love mode, as we say - or metta mode, as we sometimes say - and not with the power mode. And this should especially be the case when one operates with, relates to, communicates with, fellow Order Members. Unfortunately, when one operates in relation to the world and people outside in the world, organizations and institutions outside in the world, it may not always be possible to operate purely in accordance with the love mode, but certainly, when it comes to relating to or communicating with fellow members of the Order, one should be very careful that one is operating, in their case, purely in accordance with the love mode, which is a very difficult thing actually to do. Usually, as I think everybody realizes, our tendency is to act in accordance with the power mode, to try to coerce other people, however subtly; to try to give them a nudge, even a push, in the particular direction in which we want them to go or think they should go. But, in the case of fellow Order Members especially, we should simply not do this. We should act entirely and exclusively in accordance with the love mode. If we are not doing this, we are not really relating to other Order Members as Order Members - as individuals.

Speaking of operating in accordance with the love mode, I would like to draw special attention to one particular expression of this that I have somewhat concerned with in recent months, if not for the last year or so: and that is one of the Speech Precepts. We have to practise kindly speech. I have been struck from time to time by the amount of rough speech or harsh speech that goes on within the Movement and within the Order, and even, perhaps, as between Order Members and Mitras - I mean, on the part of the Order Members. So it is very important that we should make a special effort to practise kindly speech, or even, one might say, affectionate speech. Be very careful not to speak in a rough, harsh or abrupt way, or simply in a way which is devoid of affection, which is not an expression of affection. It is very easy to do this, especially if you do spend part of your time in, say, a masculine world outside the FWBO for any reason - usually, of course, this is when we are working in it. It is very easy to forget, when one comes back into the Movement, into the Order, that the type of relating that may be appropriate, the sort of speech that may be appropriate in the outside world, is certainly not appropriate within the Movement and within the Order in particular. So make a point of practising kindly and affectionate speech. You probably have been doing it here, more or less, I imagine; but, when you get back into the world, there may be temptations to speak in another way even within the context of the Movement and in the context of the Order.

I mentioned the way sometimes, unfortunately, Order Members speak to Mitras; they don't always, I am afraid, speak to them in a gentle and kindly and encouraging way. Sometimes, of course, this is the result of a misunderstanding of fierce friendship, but fierce friendship, as I think I mentioned the other day, doesn't really involve bullying or anything of that sort, or using any sort of harsh or aggressive speech. So please be kind to your Mitras. Don't forget that you were a Mitra once. People do forget, believe it or not, very quickly. I remember,

when I was in the army - yes, sometimes even my experiences in the army are relevant to my life in the FWBO! - I remember one of my friends who was called up at the same time as I was, a very little man; he couldn't have been more than about so high, and he was very meek, very non-aggressive. He was also always talking, he was always nattering, as we called it in the army. His name was Harry; we called him Harry the Ticker, because he was always going tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, just like a watch or a clock - always talking, always nattering, always going on about something. Anyway, one day, this very nice, quiet, inoffensive little chap was given a stripe. Yes! He became a lance-corporal, and overnight changed - believe it or not, he became bossy, cocky, aggressive, authoritative, always ordering people around; well on his way, obviously, [7] to becoming a sergeant! This one little stripe put on his arm made this tremendous difference. I hope this sort of thing doesn't happen when Order Members get their kesas round their neck. But something like it, something just a little bit like it, does seem to happen with some Order Members, at least in relation to their unfortunate Mitras. If you are not careful, you will feel that, by becoming an Order Member, you have not made a spiritual commitment; you have attained a higher grade. You have been, as it were, promoted. You are a sort of spiritual corporal, even a spiritual sergeant - not to speak of a spiritual regimental sergeant-major! (That might be the Chairman, of course!)

But be very careful, when you get back to your Centre, that you are behaving towards the Mitras - and you were a Mitra just a few months before - as though you had some sort of promotion and were in a position therefore to order them around or to give them advice. Sometimes I have come across really quite shocking cases of Order Members handing out advice to Mitras - advice that was really quite unsuitable and quite unfortunate, and didn't do the Mitra concerned any good at all - just out of that sort of over-confidence that you as an Order Member knew all about it, you knew what was good for Mitras and the Mitras just had to listen and follow your instructions. Sometimes one does find a touch of that creeping in. I don't want to exaggerate, because the Order, even at its worst, is not quite like the army; I know that very well. But human nature is human nature, and sometimes that sort of tendency does unfortunately creep in: that you have been elevated to a somewhat higher position and have been invested with a sort of authority. So don't let that happen; remember that you were a Mitra once, and try to relate being a Mitra to that kindly and gentle and encouraging fashion; don't be too anxious to give them fierce friendship. That may be needed one day, but make sure you give them lots of gentle friendship and kindly friendship and affectionate friendship and sympathetic friendship, before you start thinking in terms of giving them fierce friendship. Don't start off with fierce friendship; that can be very discouraging for the poor Mitra, who feels perhaps as though he has been hit over the head with your friendship and your metta. It really does sometimes feel like that. So be kind to your Mitras, don't bully them, and remember you too were a Mitra once. Yes, you may think it quite humorous, but believe me it is very easy to forget what you were like before. It is not just failure of memory, but perhaps failure of empathy as well.

Then we come to something that you might have been expecting me to mention before, but, as I also said, I am not dealing with this points in order of their importance. That is: keep up [break in recording] ... [your] sadhana. I am sure you are well aware of this. You have been reminded about this, I'm sure, quite a few times already, and I am quite sure that everybody who has been newly ordained has decided - is quite sure, in fact - that he is going to keep up his sadhana, that nothing is going to deflect him from it. I don't want to discourage you or undermine anybody, but it is not really as easy as you might think. Once you get back, there will be all sorts of things to do, all sorts of things to think about; there will be all sorts of

distractions, perhaps; and, if you really do want to keep up your sadhana on a daily basis, you will have to be very determined indeed. For instance, if you do [8] your sadhana in the morning, especially in the early morning, you will have to be very careful you don't stay up half the night, whether watching TV or doing anything else; because if you stay up half the night and don't go to bed until very late, you just won't be able to get up in the morning, and if you don't get up in the morning you probably won't do your sadhana for the day. So make a very, very determined effort to do this, and watch very carefully for anything that might get in the way of your doing it.

All right; on from the sadhana to keeping up Dharma study. Here, of course, you have done a lot of Dharma study, comparatively speaking - much more than you probably ever did before, certainly within a three-month period. And perhaps you will require quite a period for digestion. Don't forget to think about what you have been studying, perhaps revise what you have been studying, go through the texts that you have studied yet again; go through the notes that you might have made on them, and in this way gradually make the material that you have studied a part of your overall experience, a part of your being, as it were. And keep up study in the sense of studying new things, new texts, new suttas, new works on the Dharma. But be selective in your general reading. Some people, of course, are greater readers than others, but always ask yourself what is going to be the effect of what you read on your mind. There are so many good things to read - leaving aside, even, the sutras and Buddhist texts; there are all sorts of classics of world literature. So if you do read, be careful to be rather selective.

I remember that, some years ago at Padmaloka, we used to keep a portion of the Order Library, or just the Library, as it was then, in what is now the lounge; and some seven or eight years ago I made a little study to find out which books were taken down from those shelves most frequently, and there were two real winners. One of those was on Hitler and the Third Reich; the other was on black magic. These were far and away the two most popular volumes; they were taken down again and again by sundry people in the course of one or another retreat. It could be that they were floating up into spiritual realms and just wanted to take on board a little ballast to keep them nearer to home. But be that as it may, the two topics of Hitler and the Third Reich and black magic seemed to exercise a great fascination, as though people's hands would automatically stretch out to take down these volumes. Even a copy of the Kama Sutra that we had there didn't achieve anything like the same popularity; it was rather neglected! So be selective, be conscious in your reading, and try to get through, little by little, not just the Buddhist sutras and standard works on Buddhism, but the great classics of world literature. Try to read some Shakespeare or Milton, Keats and Shelley, and try to read your Homer and the Greek myths and legends. Try to read, perhaps, some of the Chinese and Japanese poets, perhaps some of the Zen poets: ...So be selective in your reading, don't just read anything. It can be a form of distraction, even.

All right, were coming on; we come now to point No. 12, and that is that one should try to have an annual solitary retreat. I don't know how many of you have been on solitary retreat (I am speaking now of those recently ordained). I hope you have all [9] been on solitary retreat at some time or other, even if it is only for one week, but even in the very early days of the Movement I suggested that everybody should try to have a solitary retreat at least for a week - preferably for two or three weeks or even longer - every year. It does give one a chance to reassess, it does give one a chance to, in a way, be oneself more; because when we are living in a community, working in a Centre, working in a co-op, or even just living and working and functioning in the world, we are being impinged on by other people all the time. It is

sometimes very difficult to tell where other people end and we begin, because very often we are thinking their thoughts, we are being influenced by their emotions, we are being influenced by their feelings, we are tuning into their wavelength, as it were, all the time, just as perhaps they are tuning into ours. It is very difficult to separate and sort out what really belongs to us, what thoughts are ours, what feelings are ours. So that, very often, when people go on a solitary retreat, their first experience is an experience of relief. They are just on their own, they are not being impinged on by other people, not even as it were psychically. They are breathing their own air, they are moving about in their own space. They are just experiencing themselves, and perhaps nature; and that can be a very great relief indeed, a real holiday. So one should try to have at least a short solitary retreat, at least a week, every year.

And then - here I come to a rather special point, in a way. My note reads: Take part in post-ordination process: Subhuti's memo. So perhaps I had better read Subhuti's memo, which is a memo that Subhuti addressed to me on 18 April 1988, headed Post-Ordination Process; and that is not a mistake, not preordination but post-ordination process. This is something of an innovation, something of a new development. We now have, or we are going to have, a post-ordination process. I will say a few words about that in a minute, but Subhuti's memo, in his own words, reads:

Can you please stress to those ordained at Guhyaloka this year that they still need to keep working on themselves when they are ordained? In the first year or so, they may find that they come up against many difficulties, and they will need to recontact the inspiration that they will have experienced at Guhyaloka. The ordination process team at Padmaloka are arranging a retreat for them in February at Padmaloka. It is quite important that as many as possible of them come.

So they still need to keep working on themselves when they are ordained. These wise words from Subhuti are really based on our experience, not only on Subhuti's experience but my experience, Vessantara's experience and the experience of many others who have had to do with preordination retreats and the preordination process as a whole. They still need to keep working on themselves when they are ordained.

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Yes; the fact that one has been ordained means that one has already done quite a lot of work on oneself. One may have changed quite remarkably over the years, in the course of one's association with the Movement, and, yes, one has therefore been ordained. One has Gone for Refuge. But sometimes it happens that people have made such an effort over the previous few years, the few years immediately prior to the ordination, made especially such an effort in the course of the ordination retreat, and have been also so pleased and so happy to be ordained, that they have had a sort of feeling that Now we've arrived - were there; almost, We've reached the goal. But, of course, you have reached the goal only very relatively speaking indeed, but there is the danger that that feeling of having reached the goal, achieved your immediate objective, is so strong that it is quite difficult, when ..., to think in terms of any further effort. It is quite difficult for you to think of ordination as the beginning of a process rather than as the culmination of a process. Yes, it is the culmination of a process, but it is also the beginning of an infinitely greater process, too; so you mustn't forget that. You mustn't, so to speak, rest on your Guhyaloka laurels. You mustn't think that the investment, so to speak, of energy that you have made in the course of the last few months is going to constitute a sort of capital on which you can go on drawing indefinitely without putting

anything further into that capital - if you see what I mean. So, yes, one really needs to remember that, when one gets back wherever one is going back to, one needs to keep working on oneself, even though one has been ordained - or rather, should keep working on oneself all the more because one has been ordained.

Subhuti goes on to say: In the first year or two, they may find that they come up against many difficulties, and they will need to recontact the inspiration they will have experienced at Guhyaloka. This is certainly something that we have found in the past; or recently, I have begun to think that the post-ordination process is no less important - perhaps, in some cases, even more important - than the preordination process. Because very often, at the end of an ordination retreat, people find themselves in a very positive frame of mind, naturally; they are full of energy, full of enthusiasm, full of devotion, full of determination, everything seems so easy. They have lived under these ideal conditions for so many weeks, so they go back to their original situation, perhaps to a new situation; go back to their old friends [or] to new friends; and they feel they can just take on anything, they feel they can conquer the world. So at a council meeting, perhaps, or a Chapter meeting, the question arises: Who is ready to do this? Oh, I will, the new Order Member pipes up, I will! And every time a volunteer is asked for, he volunteers; he feels he can do it all. But, after a few weeks, he finds that he can't do it all; he has taken on too much, in his over-confidence and over-enthusiasm. He hasn't understood his own resources. He hasn't realized the extent to which his own positive mental state was due to the very positive conditions in which he had been living for all those weeks. Or he may come up against some unexpected difficulties. He may find that other Order Members, instead of appreciating his wonderful qualities and all that sort of thing, seem to be very obstructive; seem to be getting in his way, not letting him do what he wants, not appreciating his insights, not taking his advice, ignoring his suggestions. It may seem like that; and he may start feeling either very [11] downhearted, or - something else that may happen - he may meet up with an old girl friend, or he may go home when his parents are in the middle of a row, or something like that, and that will bring him down emotionally very much indeed. And, in this way, he begins to have a not very easy time. When that happens, of course, the real recourse, the real practical refuge, is just fellow members of the Sangha; and here, as well, keeping up contact not only with me but with fellow Order Members, especially those whom you regard as kalyana mitras, really takes on an extra importance.

So, to cut a long and sometimes rather unfortunate story short, the new Order Member, after a few months, may start losing at least something of his initial inspiration. This is why Subhuti has thought up this very good idea of the post-ordination process: at least this short retreat at Padmaloka - I think it is going to be for two weeks - where people will be able to recontact the inspiration that they will have experienced at Guhyaloka. Even if you haven't lost contact with that inspiration, come along anyway; because living and working in the world, as most of you will still be doing, any inspiration that you can get, from whatever source, will be very useful indeed. This retreat is being held in February at Padmaloka, and as Subhuti says, it is quite important that as many as possible will come - that is, as many as possible of you. It may be that, in the future, ordination doesn't represent the end of a process but represents the middle of a process, and that there will be, as it were, a real, quite lengthy, post-ordination process for all new Order Members. What we are going to do about the old Order Members, I am not quite sure; but perhaps we will find some means of rehabilitating even them! But, yes, it is very easy to lose contact with one's original inspiration, as experienced especially at Guhyaloka.

Then, the penultimate point: avoid distractions. Here you are free from distractions. The only ... distractions you get - what are they? You get, yes, the occasional aeroplane going overhead, or maybe a change in the weather that distracts you; or your own thoughts - very real distractions, I think, on a retreat like this come from within, from ones own thoughts. But when you get back into the world, as I am sure you know - maybe as soon as you get down to S..., the distractions will begin, and they will go on increasing and increasing, thickening and thickening, becoming more and more obvious, crowding in on you more and more, until you get back to your Centre or your community. You may even find some distractions there; you may even find that in your absence a great big TV set has been installed and is glaring at you, the monster in the middle of the sitting room; and you may even find your spiritual friends sitting round with their eyes glued to this ...And perhaps they are so entranced, so fascinated, by the programme that they are watching that when you enter they don't take any notice! That is the nature of TV, as I have observed: it is very, very, very distracting.

There are other distracting things. There are, for instance, films. I know that, for Order Members living in big cities, especially those who read Time Out and City Limits, there are all sorts of distractions. You just flip through the pages of one [12] of these publications - there's this film and that film, and this programme and that programme, and this event and that event, this celebration and that celebration; you just want to go and see so many things. And even though some of the things might be quite interesting, quite useful, taken all together they really do constitute a terrible distraction. Trashy literature is also a distraction; cheap magazines, colour supplements and cheap fiction, newspapers, Boys Own magazine, Superman - yes, I've seen all these being read in men's communities! - these are also distractions. If you want to be a Superman, be a spiritual Superman, or something like that. So avoid distractions. And I hardly need add - in fact, I don't even really like to mention the subject in a place like Guhyaloka, but I am afraid and I'm sorry to say that members of the opposite sex can also at times be distractions ...

Side 2

- and they are to be, one might even say, avoided as much as possible; as much as is humanly possible. They are very big distractions indeed.

Last point: I wont say it is the most important, for reasons I have mentioned, but in a way it runs through all the points that I have already made. That is: make sure that you keep what has been called the beginners mind. Beginners mind is, I believe, a Ch'an or Zen expression, and I think there is a book called simply Beginners Mind - a little book on Ch'an or Zen itself. What is meant by beginners mind? Beginners mind is a mind which just approaches even apparently familiar things in a fresh way; which sees them as it were for the first time. If you think back, you can probably - some of you, at least - remember your first experience of meditation; the first time, perhaps, you came along to an FWBO Centre; the first meditation class you attended; the first time you did the Mindfulness of Breathing or the metta bhavana. You may remember your first experience of spiritual friendship, even at your first contact with a Centre. And that first experience, in many cases, I know, is very strong, very fresh, just because it is the first. It makes a tremendous impact, a tremendous impression, a very deep impression on one; perhaps so deep that you never forget it. But after a while, what happens? You have done the Mindfulness of Breathing - yes, the first experience was very good indeed, very positive. I have known people, even within the Movement, who have told me that, though they have been doing the metta bhavana or the Mindfulness of Breathing for, say, the

last three years, their best experience of it was the first, because, presumably, they approached it with a beginners mind. Because, perhaps, when you do it for the second time, the third time, the fourth time, it is not quite so fresh. You don't appreciate it quite so much. And, if you are not careful, it becomes that old metta bhavana practice, that old Mindfulness of Breathing practice, or even that old meditation class - it all becomes rather dull and a bit uninteresting and even unstimulating; you've done it all before, you've done it so many times before.

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But you should try to think each time that you haven't done it before; of course you haven't done it before. You never do anything twice. You don't step into the same river twice, as Zeno said - the ancient Greek who lived hundreds of years ago. You don't do anything twice. Everything you do is done for the first time. Because you are different; the situation is different; the time is different; perhaps the place is different. So you should keep alive that experience of freshness and newness, and what one might call first timeness; especially, say, with regard to ones meditation practice. Because, if you don't, in the end you might start thinking in terms of that old Order or that old Movement or that old FWBO. You have done so many things, as you think, so many times before, it all becomes a bit dull and a bit stale, and then you start becoming a bit dissatisfied. You start looking out for something else, some distraction, usually; something that will give you a bit of a zip, something to give you a bit of stimulation, something that will make life seem interesting and exciting and make something happen. You might even start looking around for another spiritual practice; you might think: The Mindfulness of Breathing doesn't seem to be giving me very much; the metta bhavana doesn't seem to be giving me very much; my visualization practice doesn't seem to be giving me very much; maybe I made a mistake. Maybe it wasn't Manjughosa after all, maybe it was Tara; maybe it would be good if I changed my practice. You start thinking in those terms. You start thinking: It might be good if I had a complete change. Maybe I'm being too spiritual. Maybe I ought to go back and have an experience of the world again. You just give way to distractions or even start indulging in rather carping criticism of the Movement itself, and carping criticism of your own Centre or your own Chapter, or other Centres and other Chapters, just as an expression of your own personal dissatisfaction, disgruntlement as we say. It is very important that you maintain that beginners mind, that fresh approach, as though everything was happening for the first time; because, yes, in truth it is happening for the first time. You are doing it for the first time.

I remember when I was a child I used to sing a hymn, in church of course, beginning New every morning is the love. Do you remember that? - anyone sung that? No? Oh, you have.

New every morning is the love Our wakening and uprising prove.

The love, of course, is Gods love, but ignore that! The morning is new, the day is new. It is not the same old day; it is not the same old sun. It is new every time. It is not the same old meditation. It is not the same old Chapter meeting. It is not the same old Movement. It is not the same old Bhante making his rather tiresome points again and again! It is all new; you have never heard it before. You approach it with a fresh mind, and therefore you appreciate it, and you enjoy it, and you rejoice in your own practice; you rejoice in the fact that you have the opportunity to practise the metta bhavana and the Mindfulness of Breathing, the opportunity to enjoy spiritual friendship. Because, if you get into this state of losing your beginners mind, you start not appreciating what you have got. You even [14] start not

appreciating the Three Jewels. Even the Three Jewels can start becoming dull and ordinary and uninteresting and uninspiring, unstimulating, just because you have lost that beginners mind. So try, perhaps above all things, to keep your beginners mind with regard to everything that you do in the context of the Movement and the Order and spiritual life generally.

So these are my points; these are my reminders, if you like; these are my exhortations; these are my concluding remarks.

I don't know everybody will remember all of them, but you will remember at least some of them, and of course they are on tape. I expect Vessantara remembers them all, and I won't be surprised if he writes them all out from memory anyway. But be that as it may; if you bear these points in mind, if you bear even some of them in mind - because they are all, so to speak, interconnected - you should continue to make good progress. In fact, if you bear some of them in mind, much [more] still if you bear all of them in mind, one might even go so far as to say Stream Entry will be within your reach, and your having been ordained will be what the Buddha in the Pali scriptures called a rich and fruitful, a growing thing.

[Spellchecked and put into house style, Shantavira November 1989]