

The Venerable Sangharakshita
Questions and Answers on "The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path"
Held on the Tuscany Ordination Course 1983

Those Present: Sangharakshita, Vessantara, Devamitra, Anandajyoti, Punya, Devamitra, Padmaraja, Ajita, Sagaramati, Ratnapani, Prasannasiddhi, Martin Redman (Vidyaratna) Duncan Skinner (Dayaratna), Ian Wray (Advayacitta), Keith Mitchell (Vidyaraja), Chris Pegrum (Bodhiraja), Ian Polke (Sanghaloka), Mike Howes (Satyapala), Steve Murray (Sanghapala), Paul Lynch (Tejaratna), Agracitta, Satyadeva, Satyapriya, Viracitta, Sanghadeva, Punyaraja.

S: So who's going to start off?

Vessantara: I'll start. I'd like to start by welcoming you on your first public appearance on this course. (S: Thank you). So this morning we're going to have general questions arising out of earlier, the first half of the path. I'll start with one from our group.

Talking about Perfect Vision and studying the first of the Perfect Vision Mitratas and in the first year of Tuscany a number of people commented on the fact that sometimes Perfect Vision seems relatively close, sometimes it seems a long way away. And it occurred to us that there are almost two different criteria for establishing Perfect Vision. One seems to be seeing Perfect Vision as a point from which you cannot fall back. For instance, you've talked in terms of if you see somebody progressing steadily for 15 years, the pull of the unconditioned becomes increasingly stronger than the pull of the conditioned, you can infer they're a Stream Entrant. That seems to be rather closer to your model of...

S: You may be able to infer.

Vessantara: Yes, you may be able to infer (laughter). So there's a, as it were, gradual approach which is more your grains of dust analogy. The second criteria is in terms of gaining Insight, in overcoming subject/object duality. This seems to be a more, as it were, definite "experience", inverted commas. If you - for instance in the last Padmaloka Men's Event you were talking about things which were frightening. You were saying, "Well, what's really frightening is contact with the Transcendental. My God this is it!" So it seems as if you have a model of gaining Insight which is this gradual grains of dust. You don't even notice until afterwards, you realize I must have become a Stream Entrant about then.

The second model which is an overcoming of subject/object duality, which you'd think would be the sort of experience which you'd be aware of, it would be an experience of a different order and you'd sort of know that you'd reached that point. So there seems to be a conflict between one view of Stream Entry where it seems you can go past the point of Stream Entry and you only realize later, and another one where it would seem you definitely know if you had a certain kind of experience which would make you a Stream Entrant. Could you resolve that for us?

[2]

S: I think... I don't think there are two models. I think there's still only one model. It is this old difficulty, if you like, which is raised in the Sutra of Hui Neng - among other places - of the apparent conflict between the gradual path and the abrupt path. I don't see any real conflict

and therefore I don't see any two models because, even when there is a question of this gradual accumulation of grains of dust on the right side of the scale, well what is it that one is accumulating, even though gradually? One is accumulating, even though gradually, a transcendence, an increasing transcendence of the subject/object duality. I mean, this is what one is basically concerned with in either of these two "models", inverted commas. In the one case the subject/object duality seems to be resolved gradually, in the other it seems to be resolved suddenly and abruptly. So I certainly didn't intend to convey that in the case of what you've called the first model, there was no resolution of the subject/object duality. (blank in tape). So what you've called the second model I didn't mean to suggest that there was no resolution, say, so to speak, of unskilful mental states but barely the seeing through the subject/object duality. I don't think one can really set up two models in that way.

Vessantara: So would the difficulty arise in, because one distinguishes so strongly between the mundane and Transcendental, there's a tendency to think that attaining the Transcendental is, is a leap, it's a jump and in a sense it is ...

S: Yes.

Vessantara: But it seems as if you, you're saying that you can, the subject and object can sort of gradually merge, almost, to the point where you're not quite sure what point they finally merged into one another.

S: Yes, but this is especially the case, perhaps, if Insight occurs as it, I think, usually does, within the context of meditation where the meditation has become very refined. One is perhaps having higher Dhyana experiences and where, therefore, the difference, the distinction between subject and object becomes progressively attenuated to a degree where one isn't, so to speak, sure whether there is an object as distinct from a subject, you know, there or not. Whereas, if Insight occurs within a less refined context, let us say a non-dhyanic context, well there is perhaps, you know, more likely to be a greater experience of abruptness and discontinuity. (pause).

Vessantara: Sagaramati's group have a number of questions.

[3]

Sagaramati: There are actually two questions Bhante. I think they can be answered in one go. I'll just ask the first one. It concerns the four levels of Sunyata. Do these four levels of Sunyata each correspond to a transcendental experience, i.e. are they all deeper levels of Perfect Vision? Do any of them correspond to insight with a small 'i', i.e. are any of them a mundane insight or experience?

S: No, the intention was, in making that distinction which does follow tradition, is, was that they are deepening, they do represent deepening degrees of Insight with a capital 'I'.

Sagaramati: With a capital 'I'?

S: Quite definitely.

Sagaramati: Because in our group we found the use of the word 'Sunyata' in that context as very literalistic and didn't really correspond to the way we're trying to get a feel of what

Sunyata really means. We found it rather conceptual and very literalistic and didn't convey a feeling of what Sunyata was trying to convey. I don't know if (?)

S: Well, assuming that one knew to begin with what it was trying to convey! (laughter).

Sagaramati: You have used the word like the "open dimension" and a ...

S: Well yes, I borrowed the expression "open dimension of being" from Guenther. I've used it occasionally. But I have said that I have found, I do find, the whole tradition a very conceptual Indian approach to the communication of the experience of Sunyata - I won't say misleading, but, perhaps you know, not always very helpful and I think I have said on several occasions, well recently, that I think it's helpful to think of Sunyata, rather the concept of Sunyata, as trying to communicate, as trying to establish the fact that experience, I won't even say Reality, but experience is essentially incommunicable. That there is something that escapes communication, that escapes verbal communication, that escapes, you know, conceptual construction and so on. That things in general, experience is empty, in the sense that it's empty of any definitive concept which successfully communicates what it really is.

Sagaramati: How are we, we thought (I don't know whether it was we or me (laughter), I mean, like the first one, you see that the conditioned is empty of any of the characteristics of the unconditioned. Well, as the Insight is meant to be a transcending of the subject/object dichotomy, that seemed a rather dualistic way at looking at what is really Insight.

[4]

S: Well if one is to speak at all one cannot but speak dualistically. For instance, I said a few moments ago that one realizes that (well I mean, there is, strictly speaking, no one there to realize, I mean that anything is anything. So if one is going to have recourse to words at all or to concepts at all, one cannot but express oneself dualistically, that must be understood. So I think it's the same here.

I think that that is a very useful way of approaching things, that the conditioned is empty of the characteristics of the unconditioned. I think we're in fact on quite firm ground here. We're really dealing with the viparyasas because, I mean, one of the main sources of human confusion and suffering, if not the main source, is that they look, for what they, you know, want to find, where in fact it cannot be found. And this is all that this first degree of Sunyata is really saying. But it's saying a very great deal, it's saying a lot. That you cannot in fact find unconditioned happiness in anything which is conditioned. That that kind of happiness, unchanging happiness, is not a feature, not a characteristic, not a quality of anything that is conditioned, but this is of course what we're doing all the time. We're expecting to derive that unconditioned happiness which we seek from something which is conditioned, whatever that may be. So this is really quite practical and, as I've said, down to earth, so it is very useful to think in that sort of way.

Sagaramati: There again I mean, going on what you've said in the 'Nature of Existence' seminar. I mean you seem to indicate that, well, I mean the unconditioned and the conditioned are, in a sense, well the basis of them is in your attitude to life or what is objective. You know the conditioned can't satisfy you but, I mean, what is required is a change in your attitude, and the things themselves, whether they're conditioned or unconditioned you will see them if you change your attitude in an unconditioned way.

S: I think you have to be able to see, you know, that there is a distinction between what one calls the conditioned and what one calls an unconditioned in order to be able to change one's attitude, because, as the Buddha says somewhere in the Pali Canon, if there was not this unconditioned, there would have been no escape from this conditioned. So if one doesn't at least have a, you know, a vestige of a glimmering of some awareness, you know, not even Insight, of an Unconditioned Reality, one can't think really in terms seriously of escape, so to speak, from what is conditioned. One can't even think in terms of the conditioned not possessing the attributes of the unconditioned if one doesn't have, at least, the notion of an unconditioned.

[5]

Sagaramati: I was trying to say that, well, the conditioned is your own attitude. I mean that is the source of the conditioned, is in your mental, well, your pervertedness, mental pervertedness.

S: But that is in a way to reduce the object to the subject, but one can't really, you know, reduce the object to the subject any more than one can reduce the subject to the object. If there is any reducing to be done you have to reduce both subject and object to that which is neither subject nor object. So you can't really say that it's only a question of 'my attitude' because the question arises, "Well, my attitude towards what?" You can't just have an attitude, you have an attitude towards something. (laughter)

Sagaramati: The thing is, Bhante, I can't do anything about that something, I can only do something about my attitude. I think that's the problem.

S: That's true, but the whole notion of doing something about your attitude assumes a certain view, even a right or a wrong view, about, you know, something that is there towards which one has, or can have, an attitude. Say life, existence, another person, and can you have an unconditioned attitude towards another person? I think you'd find it rather difficult simply to have an unconditioned attitude.

Sagaramati: Yes, but by that I meant compassionate etc.

S: At least to begin with, I mean we have discussed this in connection with the metta-bhavana, that first of all you do start off with an object, you know, that you develop metta or karuna towards a person or persons. But once you've done that and once that has got, say, strongly under way, one can, it would seem, experience the metta or the karuna by itself. One could then, perhaps, speak in terms of an attitude without an object. But the potential of there being an object remains, still exists, because if other beings came within your purview, came within the purview of your attitude, your metta or karuna, then it would be an attitude of metta or karuna towards them. So the possibility, you know, of objective reference is not excluded in that case. Unless, of course, the metta and the karuna have become Transcendental in which case, of course, they would have no object because they would not be subjective states, you could not even speak of them as attitudes because whose attitudes? They'd be just sort of floating as it were, you know free from subject and, you know, even free from object. Which is something that we find very difficult to imagine because, if you imagine them even as floating, you imagine them as occupying space, as floating through space, therefore you imagine them as objects. (pause)

[6]

Sagaramati: I think, I mean going back to my point, well the fact is that even that, taking the object as the given conditioned object, even although that object is conditioned, if you try to cling on to it, the fact is that object, being impermanent, which is its nature, will actually go against your attitude.

S: Yes

Sagaramati: There is something like an objective...

S: Well you could say that were it not for the object, you would not be able to see the inadequacy of your attitude so to that extent an objective reference is, even, necessary, one might say.

Sagaramati: I think, what I was trying to sort of get at is that object that is impermanent, is that object that is impermanent, is that the conditioned? You were saying you see the conditioned as empty of the unconditioned, so if you see the object as impermanent, are you seeing that object as a conditioned phenomena empty of...

S: Well one can say that within one's experience there is what is sometimes called a subjective pole. It is not that here are you and there is an object. There is a sort of continuity which we refer to as our experience, and within that you can distinguish the subjective pole and the objective pole and you, as it were, think about that objective pole within your experience which you identify as an object and invest it with certain qualities and attributes and you may wrongly invest it, you might start investing it, to use this language that we have been using, being impermanent, with the attributes of permanence, or being conditioned, with the attributes of the unconditioned. But in as much as you've wrongly so invested it, that is sooner or later brought home to you by some painful experience and then you have to search around for the cause of that and you realize it's your wrong identification of that so-called object as, in effect, permanent and unconditioned rather than impermanent and conditioned. One could look at it like that. (long pause)

But within our present experience we never escape from that subject/object duality so we have to think in terms not just of a subjective attitude, so to speak, divorced from an objective reference, but of an attitude towards an objective reference, which may be mistaken or which may not be mistaken. Which is usually mistaken of course.

Were those the only questions that came up from this morning or were there some others?

[7]

Sagaramati: This is regarding Perfect Emotion. You say in the lecture on Perfect Emotion - rather you say the Buddha says, that developing compassion is enough; there's no need to study, say Pratitya Samutpada. Some people didn't feel they felt that that needed a bit of explaining.

S: This is a quotation from a Mahayana text which is cited in the Siksasamuccaya and it is said that a Bodhisattva does not need to be taught many things. The Buddha is represented as saying that the, in the case of a Bodhisattva, he needs to be taught, you know, only one thing, that is compassion. There is a standard figure of speech in Indian literature. This is discussed

very much by Hindu writers, Hindu commentators, in connection with Vedic texts, which is called eulogy, or prasamsa - I think it's prasamsa, but anyway the meaning is eulogy. A certain topic, or certain quality, or certain action is eulogized in order to draw attention to its extreme importance, but the eulogy is not to be, you know, not intended to be taken perfectly literally. Do you see what I mean? So here I think it is a question of eulogy, the Buddha is not to be, to be taken as literally saying that you need only think in terms of doing Metta Bhavana and can neglect all other practices and all other approaches. He is not saying that, he is drawing attention to the supreme importance of compassion, of Karuna, in the life of the Bodhisattva. This is not to say that if someone were to take up the practice only of Karuna, then he would not eventually arrive at all other aspects of the Teaching because, for instance, if you are determined to practise, you know, Karuna, well clearly you would have to be non-violent because you couldn't compassionately, you know, take people's lives, not to begin with anyway. (laughter) You have to practise, you know, non-stealing, not taking what is not given, because that's not a very compassionate activity and you'd have to speak the truth out of compassion, you'd have to preach the Dharma out of compassion, so you'd have to know the Dharma, so therefore you'd have to study the Dharma so you could perhaps get around to everything else, via simply compassion.

So it might not even, you know, be wrong to take that statement quite literally, at least it would not lead you astray if you were to take it even quite literally, but, I think, nonetheless it is intended to be a eulogistic statement. you know, drawing attention to the overriding importance of compassion in the life of the Bodhisattva especially.

But this does draw attention to a very important point which is that - I've spoken sometimes in the past of our being concerned, in the FWBO as distinguished from some other movement, some other Buddhist movements - concerned more and more with less and less. I've been thinking about this a little bit even in the last day or two in consequence of [8] having read the newly published translation of the biography of Marpa which is indeed very inspiring reading, but all the characters in it seem almost obsessed with the idea of obtaining very advanced Tantric teachings and I'm sure this is not the intention of the biography, but the impression almost is produced that one can neglect things like precepts and ordinary meditation and so on and so forth. All that one has to do is go straight for these most advanced and most esoteric Tantric teachings which some of our friends in America seem to do. And I mean sometimes one can't help feeling a bit doubtful, even in the case of some of the characters appearing in this biography, because, on the one hand they are said to be advanced siddhas and so on and so forth, on the other they appear to exhibit ordinary human failings. Now I know that, yes, in some cases, all right, those failings may be only apparent, may be designed to test their disciples and so on and so forth, but it would not seem to be the case in all cases. So one is left feeling a little uncertain about it all and also left perhaps reflecting that it is much safer and even much more desirable that one should not think in terms of trying to practise what appear to be highly advanced teachings, or which may be highly advanced teachings, but that one should think more in terms of practising just a few very basic, apparently elementary teachings which are in fact of great depth.

If you take even the ten precepts - I think I dwelt a little bit on this topic last year - if you think only in terms of that first precept - to refrain from injuring living beings - you could in fact base your whole spiritual life, your whole approach just on that one precept and you could get very, very far indeed. And it would seem that, very often, people in their haste to get on with more advanced teachings, don't properly practise what seems to be, I won't say more

or less advanced, but the more basic teachings and, therefore, do not succeed in laying a proper foundation for their possible practice of the more advanced teachings later on. Do you see what I'm getting at?

So it would seem that we do need more and more of less and less. That's why in the FWBO generally we've gone right back to basics, to neglected things like the Going for Refuge and, well, the Metta Bhavana, which in some parts of the Buddhist world isn't thought very highly of at all.

Sagaramati: How does that work out in say the daily practice of an Order member? Someone working in the co-op etc. maybe has one hour per day for meditation. Well the basic practices, say the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana, but he's also got a visualization practice. So would that apply there? Should he make sure he does the Mindfulness and Metta as a priority and above his visualization practice?

[9]

S: One is assuming that one practice is more advanced than another. I don't know whether one can say, absolutely, that one practice is more advanced than another. What does one mean by advanced? One could say, well, more difficult. Well, more difficult for whom? So I think one has to be a little careful even in speaking about more advanced practices. I mean, surely, the advanced practice is the practice which, for you at least, works. Well one knows that there are people, you know, practising - allegedly - advanced Tantric teachings but they don't seem to make any difference to their actual behaviour, so in what sense are those practices more advanced than something like Metta Bhavana or Mindfulness of Breathing? And so I would say, well first of all I'm not querying that the hypothetical Order Member has only an hour in the day which he can devote to meditation, I won't question that! (laughter) But, I think, if he is confronted by a choice between, let's say, Mindfulness of Breathing, Metta Bhavana, his visualization practice or even, let's throw it in for good measure, the six element practice. He should ask himself, well, which practice actually is the one which benefits him most at present, and devote his hour to that. And when he goes away on retreat, solitary retreat, or when he goes, say, to Vajraloka, let him then devote time to those other practices for which he doesn't have time in the course of the daily round.

Anandajyoti: Could you say, Bhante, that the visualization practice would be more advanced than say the Metta or the Mindfulness to the extent that it presupposes a certain level of commitment?

S: Yes.

Anandajyoti: And as a result would be, it would be inappropriate to practise the visualization practice without that degree of commitment?

S: Yes, one can say that one could if one wanted to, speak in terms of an advanced, or a more advanced practice, say, that a more advanced practice was that which included a greater number of elements. So that it wasn't, for instance, a question of the visualization practice being an entirely different practice, having nothing in common with Mindfulness or Metta. Your Mindfulness and your Metta would be taken up, into and incorporated with your visualization practice. So that, therefore, visualization practice is not an alternative to weak Mindfulness and weak Metta but when your Mindfulness is strong and your Metta is strong,

you take them with you, into your visualization practice and you can't really do the visualization practice without them. So the more advanced practice is, in a way, the more complex one which includes as [10] elements within its greater complexity, practices which you've already done, as it were, separately. You could, of course, even say that in the case, say, of the Metta Bhavana, that when your Metta Bhavana is really highly developed, well, you start, spontaneously seeing, you know, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and daksas and dakinis, and so on and so forth.

Well, anything more about Perfect Emotion?

Sagaramati: Anybody else got any?

Punya: We were discussing the relationship between the four Dhyanas and the Brahma Viharas and the question came up, of how similar Upeksa was in the Dhyanas and Upeksa in the Brahma Viharas. And generally we were wondering if you'd had any more thoughts on the relationship between the Dhyanas and the four Brahma Viharas?

S: I can't say that I've had any more thoughts; in fact I'm not quite sure that I can recollect what my previous thoughts were, last year and the year before.

Punya: It seems as though, that you did have an idea that they were similar, I mean, you could look at them in some sort of way together but it didn't seem all that clear.

S: Yes, what I meant was that one has in the Pali Canon these different accounts of, well, let us say, rupa-loka experiences and arupa-loka experiences, but it does not seem that one can arrange them in a proper sequence, that is that one cannot arrange them in a linear sort of fashion, so that one follows upon another, all the way through, as a further and higher experience. It would seem that the Brahma Vihara states represent different dimensions, let us say, of the four Dhyanas, well the four Dhyanas of the four Brahma Viharas, rather, than that the Brahma Viharas carry on where the Dhyanas leave off or vice versa. As far as I know, in nowhere in the Pali Canon are these two sets sort of coordinated within a common framework. Perhaps that's not a bad thing because, otherwise, we perhaps tend to think in terms of higher meditative experience in a too cut and dried fashion. And too linear a fashion, progressing from this state to that state. Sometimes it's very difficult to keep track of one's progress, one doesn't know whether one is going up or down or round and round, because often one explores different dimensions, different facets.

So, perhaps, one should think in that sort of way too, that it isn't, one isn't just sort of going up and up, as it were, along a path, up, say, the side of a mountain, but that also, [11] the different petals, say, of a lotus are expanding from a common centre. It's not just a question of going forward, as it were, but also of rounding out one's experience. (pause)

I think I have suggested before, with regard to the Four Dhyanas, that perhaps one should pay more attention to the similes that the Buddha gives for these, than to the, as it were, psychological analysis of them as consisting of a diminishing number of, you know, mental factors. Five and then four and then three and then two and two again.

Vessantara: Would it be possible to relate those similes to the Brahma Viharas?

S: One could try. (laughter)

Vessantara: But you haven't.

S: I must say I haven't given it serious thought. But there's no reason why one shouldn't. There must be some relation, however indirect or obscure. (pause)

Sagaramati: Is there a hierarchy in the Brahma Viharas?

S: Yes, usually it is said that the Upeksa Vihara is on a different level.

Devamitra: But the other three are on the same level? (repeated)

S: That would seem to be the suggestion, yes. I did come across the other day an interesting tradition from Tibetan sources to the effect that the Brahmaloikas were so called when the states in question pertained to, what would amount to Samata. Though that word was not used. And that the expression, the illimitables, was used when they are, as it were, aspects of the sunyata experience, which is quite interesting, that is not actually said in the Pali, Theravada tradition, based on the Pali Scriptures, but, that would seem to me to make sense. The Tibetans might have derived it via the Sarvastivadins or just from their own experience.

Sagaramati: That would even fit in, presumably, with seeing the Arupa Dhyanas as Transcendental.

S: Yes, yes.

Anyway, any further points? How have people been faring generally going through this material? Do people feel they've got a pretty thorough knowledge of it so far? Or are they discovering big gaps in their basic knowledge? (long pause)

[12]

So how far have you actually come as of today?

Sagaramati: Well today we started Perfect Mindfulness.

Vessantara: There was one more question which comes from the earlier part of (Perfect Emotion?).

Martin Redman: This arose out of the discussion on the pleasure and reality principle which is discussed in Perfect Emotion. We'd heard a rumour that you speculated that it may be desirable for all Order members to completely abstain from imbibing alcohol. Firstly, we wondered whether it was actually true and, if it was, whether you could elaborate on your thinking why you suggest that.

S: Yes, it, the rumour, was correct. In fact it's amazingly correct. (laughter) In fact it's the most correct rumour I've encountered for a long time (laughter) because actually I did just wonder - it was no more than that, though it was quite serious wondering, partly prompted, by comments from one or two Order members who did feel, one Order member in particular, that alcohol should be abolished within the FWBO. I wondered about it for various reasons.

Let me try to recollect my thoughts. First of all there is the cost, which is not small (laughter). That also obviously applies to things like tobacco, if one is thinking in terms of simplification of life well clearly there's no place for things like tobacco and possibly not alcohol either. Especially when one thinks of say the situation in India where we do need all the money we can get for very important and very vital work which at present is held up, at least partly, by lack of funds. So within the Movement possibly a fair amount of money is spent on things like tobacco and alcohol which could well be transferred to the India account. Maybe it isn't quite as simple as that, but you can see this is one possible line of thought. Another of course is the fact that alcohol is something that does quite easily get out of control. I think within the FWBO, within the Order as a whole, there's no actual alcoholism I would say (laughter). I think people are quite reasonable in this respect. I mean, occasionally, yes the odd Order member, or two or three Order members, do go a bit over the top which is not desirable. I did hear about a rather unfortunate, I suppose it can be described as a Christmas party in a community last Christmas and I wasn't very pleased about that. But I mean, such happenings are exceptional. And, I also must say, I have found in the past in dealing with people, especially when I was living down in London, a little alcohol sometimes overcame people's inhibitions and helped them to communicate. But, then again, this is all sort of still wondering. One sees that in the [13] world outside the FWBO a vast amount of money is spent on alcohol, as on, of course, other unnecessary things like tobacco, and on cosmetics, an extraordinary amount of money, billions of pounds in Britain alone are spent on things like that. So does one really want to encourage that by one's example? It may be that in the course of one's own life the odd glass of wine does no harm at all - it might even do you good - but it is, at the same time, one might say, well, an example which you are setting to people outside the Movement. So should you not consider, as it were, setting an example of abstinence in view of the fact that people outside the Movement might take the fact that you're indulging in the odd glass of wine on special occasions, as a justification for their continuing to drink, if they feel, of course, the need of any such justification. Also one sees, not only is a lot of money spent on alcohol, but, people do all sorts of dreadful things under the influence of alcohol, even, you know, commit murder. So does one really want to contribute, even to a very small extent to that?

So these were the sort of thoughts that were passing through my mind. At the very beginning of the FWBO, at the beginning of the founding of the Order, one of the reasons why we took up the Ten Precepts was that the Ten Precepts, while being a comprehensive set, did not include the requirement of abstaining from alcohol because it was felt, or rather, I felt at the time, that that would probably be asking too much of people, you know, within the social setting of England particularly. And also the fact is in Buddhist tradition itself, the taking of alcohol is not put on a level with the other precepts because it is possible to take a little alcohol without doing any harm to oneself or others, where it isn't possible to indulge in a little murder, or a little theft or a little adultery without doing any harm, you know, to anybody else. So alcohol is on a rather different level as regards one's personal life as a Buddhist. But, more recently, now that the Movement is stronger, the Order is stronger and grades are being raised and all that sort of thing, and more and more is being demanded of people, I have certainly started wondering, and to that extent the rumour was correct, whether it would not be a skilful thing if we, you know, we gave up alcohol.

There is another consideration, also, that one does not want to start, as it were, laying down rules, or saying, that people mustn't do this and they mustn't do that. People have a way, surprisingly, of reacting (laughter) to such things, even though, sometimes, the rule may be

highly beneficial, but they don't seem to like it. But, nonetheless, I have wondered about this. I don't know whether anybody else has given any thought to the matter, or has, similarly, wondered?

[14]

Devamitra: There's just one point I'd like to make, as a result of the discussion that took place around this in my group. One point which emerged was that you could apply the same argument that you apply, I think in the Right Livelihood lecture with regards to people working in slaughtering houses. Well, as you know, the idea of patronizing public houses and so on you are actually keeping those people in unskilful employment.

S: Yes.

Devamitra: So that was just one extra point (?) for us. Also we were discussing the relative merits and de-merits of, or the desirability of taking people to a pub after a class and using that, as it were, as a skilful means of gaining, getting into communication and so on with them.

S: Well we know that in the Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra that Vimalakirti himself frequents, I forget the Sanskrit term, but wine bars, let us say, (laughter) for the sake of contacting people who could be benefited by the Dharma. But we're also told he was a great Bodhisattva, in fact, equivalent to a Buddha. Whether Order Members can aspire to function in that sort of way is therefore another matter. But, I mean, this is an argument that I have heard, but, I'm not altogether convinced by it, that you need to, sort of, march somebody off to the pub. I mean, some people have been shocked by this. I know the case of at least one Mitra, attending a class at the LBC, he'd come straight from some other country to study the Dharma further in Britain and possibly be ordained, and he said, after his first class he was marched off by two Order Members to the nearest pub, and he was quite shocked. Far from being a skilful means in his case, it would seem, it was a highly unskilful means. It gave him serious doubts and reservations about those two particular Order Members which may not be dispelled even now. (laughter) So they clearly didn't know what they were doing, because, for a skilful means to be a skilful means, it must be skilful in relation to the persons concerned, and clearly, they did not know how he would take it and what his reaction would be. So it was not a skilful means. So you have to be very sure of your ground for a skilful means to be a skilful means. (pause)

Supposing you march somebody off to a coffee bar, well, they're not going to take that in an unfavourable way, whereas they might if you take them off to, to a pub. They might be shocked. I mean, even if they go to a pub normally, they might not be expecting an Order Member to march them off to a pub for a discussion about the Dharma. It doesn't seem to be the most suitable environment.

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Again, I don't want to be, I always, in fact, try not to be too, well, to over generalize. I don't say that never, under any circumstances would it happen that, it was a skilful means to take someone to, to a pub and have a drink and discuss the Dharma over a drink, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. But I think the occasion on which that would be a skilful thing to do would be very, very rare indeed. (long pause)

Well, what are people's general feelings about this question of alcohol within the Movement? I believe we've banned it from all official functions, so to speak, which is a good thing.

Ajita: I must confess, I never take any people from classes to pubs, I usually take them to a coffee bar, but, I do enjoy a glass of beer. On occasions I find, actually, it does help, for something not the beer itself actually, but just to go to a pub and have a talk with a, maybe a Member of the Order or something. Myself and Uttara, we quite regularly go to one at the end of a week, we sometimes go to a pub, have a glass of beer, and it doesn't seem to be - I personally don't notice any sort of regressive effect. It isn't the only (?) I have contact with, I don't notice any regressive effect, as such. But, I mean, I can still see the point of right livelihood for the people who work at the pub, that is. That is worth considering, I think.

S: Well, not only the question of right livelihood, but that so vast a proportion of national resources is being spent in that way. I was coming by train through Italy just recently and practically all the way, I think from Venice down to Pavenna, from Ravenna to Bologna, Bologna to Florence, Florence to Pisa, Pisa most of the way to Grosseto - vineyards, vineyards, all the way. Uninterruptedly, vineyards.

Ajita: I know this might sound like a justification for the habit of drinking, but personally I don't think it is, I mean, through that you can get yourself known. For instance, the Glasgow Buddhist Centre's situated in amongst hundreds of pubs etc. There's a lot of pubs around that area and actually, whether it's good or bad, I don't know, but (I do ?) actually, I have made a lot of contacts and drew people out of these situations in to the aura, at least, of the Western Buddhist Order. Although I don't go there with that in mind, it just spontaneously seems to happen. That I do meet, some people in the place, get to know them, then you tell them what you are doing. And from that I've quite often drew people out of a heavy habit - some people have a heavy habit of drinking - into the framework of the Movement. So I often wonder can we exclude that as a field of operation completely.

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Duncan Skinner: I have found on occasions that it has been useful to take somebody who's relatively new to the Friends into a pub; the alcohol helps them to relax and sometimes so does the ambience of a pub. I'm thinking of people who can only cope with a very low level of communication. It's enough for them to feel comfortable with you. It might be, it might be a good idea, to be sure of your motives, just to drink something like coca cola, then you know you're not going in for alcohol. In that case I don't drink alcohol, I go and drink coca cola. I do find it occasionally (?).

S: What about, so to speak, the larger argument. I don't feel disposed to question that there are, you know, some people at least, maybe quite a lot of people who can, you know, drink a moderate amount of alcohol without it doing them any really noticeable harm. But what about, you know, the broader perspective, not only right livelihood, but the diversion of national, even human resources, and so on'? And the sort of things that are often done under the influence of drink. Because, if you consider, I mean, alcohol does not actually have a positive, alcohol as such, does not have a positive effect on the system. It is a poison and a lot of people drink regularly which means that there is always this poison, alcohol, you know, in their bloodstream and it isn't good for them physically, and it does have a slightly blurring effect, let us say, on their overall awareness. Often people drive under the influence of alcohol and even a very little can make a difference. So what about this broader perspective, even

granting that, well, in the case of most Order Members, you know, the odd drink or the odd visit to the pub wouldn't, you know, do any great harm. But what about, you know, this whole broader question'?

Devamitra: I mean, in effect that comes back to, I suppose, setting a sort of example.

S: Well, not just setting an example because that's an expression which some people find unfortunate, but then, if we do profess to be the nucleus of a new society, well surely that nucleus should be a real nucleus and not infected with the vices, let us say, to use a strong term, of the old society. Surely the nucleus should be as pure and as strong as possible. I mean, do you envisage people depending, in the ideal society, on alcohol? (laughter)

Duncan Skinner: So it seems then that you're suggesting, in this area, we insist that people meet us on our ground, on our terms, and that we don't meet them on their ground because their ground is negatively based?

[17]

S: No, I don't think you cannot meet people on their ground, it's impossible. You can't meet people just at the Centre. You have to go out and you may find yourself in relatively less positive situations, but you still have to be discriminating because you do have to meet people on their own ground. Well, even when you meet them on their own ground, it must be ground which is relatively favourable to some communication of the Dharma. I mean for instance you may have to meet people in their own homes. But supposing they've got four or five undisciplined children who constantly interrupt conversation. You cannot then meet them on that particular ground, you've got to take them for a walk away from their children, or, take them away for a weekend because the children render conversation impossible. (pause)

So even when you do meet people on their own ground, you still have to choose your ground.

Sagaramati: Isn't it a matter of being clear as regards one's ideals and seeing the relationship between what is an accepted pattern of behaviour in normal society, and seeing the relationship that has with the ideal society? You know, even though you go into a pub, you know, as it were your purpose that this is not something that would belong ...

S: (interrupting) Well for instance, Salvation Army people go into pubs, I mean, freely, I mean, they're well-known for it, but, they don't drink, and they're tolerated. They may not be listened to all that seriously but, the odd person may listen to them.

But anyway this discussion's all exploratory. I can't say that I've come to a definite decision personally, because, it is a complex matter, but, certainly, at the very least one does expect that if people do have recourse to alcohol, do that in, well, I was going to say, a mindful fashion - I'm assuming that one can do it in a mindful fashion - and must keep it very strictly under control. And the less of it, obviously, the better. But perhaps we do have to pursue the matter further and ask ourselves honestly, whether we ought not at least for the benefit of others and the benefit of the Movement, if not for our own benefit, encourage the giving up of alcohol.

I've even wondered about other things. I think it is, of course, taken for granted more or less within the Movement - has been from the beginning - that one who goes for refuge and one

who tries to observe the first precept is a vegetarian and I think this is very important. And this is something which many other Buddhist groups in the West, and even Buddhist countries in the East neglect and overlook. I was therefore very pleased to see Philip Kapleau's book on "The Buddhist [18] Case for Vegetarianism" and I hope everybody will read that. I don't know if anybody has, some of you might have seen it. It's a very well argued case indeed, both on scientific and on Buddhist, spiritual grounds. But arising out of that I was even wondering - and there is something about this in the current Shabda - whether we ought not very seriously to consider our whole attitude, not only to meat, but even to dairy products because one does hear some very dreadful stories, even about eggs and battery hens and things of that sort.

So perhaps we ought not complacently to rest on our laurels and to say, "Oh well, we're vegetarians" and that's that. "It doesn't matter about milk or butter or cheese or eggs and, of course we don't go to the pub every night but a bit of wine every now and then is O.K." But you ought to examine all these sort of attitudes from time to time, with a view to a possible up-grading of our standards. I don't think we ought to be too concerned what people outside the Movement will think of us because it isn't so many years ago that to be a Buddhist at all was something quite unthinkable and eccentric so far as the ordinary person was concerned. That is no longer the case. And I think in the long run, if you do stick to your principles, well, people respect you for that. Well, what were the initial reactions to this rumour when first reported? (laughter)

Martin Redman: It caused a fair amount of controversy. (laughter) It was debated at length, more than once (?). We didn't really come to any real conclusion either, we sort of, hotly debated it.

S: I think one has to be very careful about carrying on with old habits and just thinking they're of no account. I'm thinking especially, more especially of smoking. I think some of you had a bit of difficulty about that at the beginning of the course. So if you have been able to give it up, please stay that way when you go back. It would be very good that no one who has given up that habit reverts to it. Otherwise you've got the misery of giving up, sooner or later, all over again. (laughter) So why trouble yourself in this way? I know some people do say, I heard this argument, that if you're doing a certain kind of work you need to smoke, it helps you to concentrate, etc. etc. Well, I also heard it said that if you write, for instance, you need to smoke, to concentrate your mind and calm you down, but personally I've never found this. (laughter) So, I really don't think it is so. So I can speak from my own experience of writing, I can't speak from my own experience of brick-laying or anything of that sort but I suspect that, just as in the case of writing, you can concentrate and write without the help of tobacco, similarly with brick-laying or anything else of that sort. So I think [19] you've got to be very careful not just to carry, almost automatically, what are really bad habits over from our former lives.

Ratnapani: I think this, this, how can I put this? There seems to be - in some people's minds anyway - a sort of, an attitude of, that all this sort of ethical stuff, the old habits and so on, are all a bit, sort of, old fashioned That you don't really need to worry about that sort of thing too much, That as long as you're doing your meditation practice, you're in touch with the Dharma, you read the Vimalakirti and so on, go to the occasional Order meeting, then, all this other stuff, it's a bit, sort of, Victorian and not really quite necessary.

S: Well I gather that the term 'old fashioned' has come into currency lately To some extent, with reference to myself, I'm said to be a bit old fashioned But I think it isn't a question of being old fashioned, or, in the fashion, or, up-to-date, it's a question of what is really skilful and unskilful. So I think, to introduce concepts like old fashioned are very, are just very misleading, well perhaps they're intended to mislead. They're really, they're red herrings dragged across the path. I mean, what does it matter if a particular quality that you admired was admired in the Victorian period. Even by the Victorians, even by Queen Victoria herself. (laughter) What does it matter? If it's a skilful quality, it's a skilful quality. Queen Victoria, I believe, believed in speaking the truth. She spoke it very bluntly, in some of her letters, indeed. Many of her ministers winced when they read her letters because she was so blunt and straight forward Does that mean that we abandon that virtue just because it was favoured by Queen Victoria and other people in her time? It really is so ridiculous. But the argument is really worth no more than that. (pause)

Vessantara: If it means anything at all, it means when you say somebody's old fashioned, it means they're left out of the current group (?).

S: Yes. It, I mean, this whole, this notion of old fashioned also assumes a rather curious theory of progress as though people have automatically been getting better and better ethically and spiritually over the centuries so that the way people behave now in the Twentieth Century, because it's the Twentieth Century, must be better than they way people behaved in the Nineteenth Century because it was the Nineteenth Century. So if you are still behaving in the way that people were behaving in the Nineteenth Century, you must be, not just behind the times, but even perhaps, ethically at fault, Well it is so absurd. (laughter) One does get these sort of [20] absurdities unfortunately, even within the Order.

Duncan Skinner: Is it possible that, rather than morality is becoming old fashioned, the pursuit of pleasure is becoming more fashionable, and morality is the reality principle impinging on the pleasure principle, which is assuming more and more momentum.

S: I think one has to pursue a middle way here. I mean, one of the things that I have been saying, that from a Buddhist point of view, a pleasurable experience as such is neither skilful or unskilful. And I certainly don't want to move in the direction of puritanism - I mean, using that term rather loosely perhaps - but there is certainly a place for skilful pleasure in the spiritual life, in fact there must be. I mean, the spiritual life without skilful pleasure has very little zest to it and people will not, therefore, make very much progress. But it must be skilful and that is very important. Well one of the most skilful pleasures is that which one experiences in the course, of meditation. Well, some puritanical people, even puritanical Buddhists in the West, aren't happy with pleasurable meditative experiences. They think it should be hard and difficult and painful all the way, apparently. I have met such people, even, but that is not the traditional Buddhist approach. So pleasure does have it's place within the spiritual life. It has an essential place, but, it must be skilful pleasure.

Ratnapani: This is perhaps an opportune moment that we end our discussion today on the whole question of subhabhavana and asubhabhavana ways of growing. And maybe that's, this is quite, this is considered not entirely new, but, reasonably, to be put so strongly that you can't grow without an attitude of, sort of, the subhabhavana, the ever increasing appreciation of the lovely and experiencing the lovely and, sort of, taking pleasure in higher and higher things, that, concentrating on the unlovely just won't lead to growth and development.

S: (interrupting) Yes, sometimes you may have to concentrate on the unlovely for certain specific purposes, on certain specific occasions, but that by itself I think is, psychologically speaking, is just not enough. You need a positive inspiration.

Ratnapani: It's an interesting point that you have to see the unlovely as unlovely, but, having done that, the rest is, sort of, more an emphasis on loveliness.

S: Yes. Well this is one of the great weaknesses of, at least, the modern Theravada, that they do point out the, the [21] unloveliness of the unlovely, but they don't point out with sufficient zest and enthusiasm the loveliness of the lovely. That is what gives much of Theravada teaching, current Theravada teaching at least, it's very sort of one-sided flavour.

Oh well then, let's leave it there for this morning. Pursue some of these subjects and perhaps other subjects also tomorrow.

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Vessantara: So including this one, we've got five more Question and Answer sessions, so what we thought we'd do is devote this one to Perfect Livelihood, next one to Perfect Effort, the next one to Perfect Mindfulness, the next one to Perfect Meditation and then have a general one at the end.

S: All right.

Vessantara: So this morning it's Perfect Livelihood questions and Anandajoyti's group are going to start.

Ian Wray: Bhante. This question arose out of discussion of the possible political dimensions to Right Livelihood. How fruitful do you think it would be for us to try and spread the Dharma behind the iron curtain, and if fruitful, which way would be the better to spread it - through official channels or subversive means?

S: I think it would certainly be fruitful to spread the Dharma behind the iron curtain, just as it would be fruitful to spread it on this side of the Iron curtain. I don't think there is any doubt about that. I do not think one would be allowed to spread it behind the iron curtain through official channels. I do not think there are any such channels except to a very, very minor extent indeed and those channels would probably not be accessible to us - I am thinking of the diplomatic channels. For instance, one of my friends, a prominent Ceylonese Buddhist did become Ceylonese Ambassador to the USSR, he did what he could and he did manage to get 40,000 copies of the Dhammapada published in Russian through the official publications agency. By the way, you cannot publish anything privately in Russia. Publications are entirely in the hands of the State. So he was able to do so much, it wasn't very much, but it was something. He told me, by the way, that that edition of the Dhammapada sold out very, very quickly indeed but, though he pressed for further editions, the Soviet government was not cooperative. He did that in virtue of his diplomatic position, the Soviet government being willing to oblige him up to a point.

So obviously we do not enjoy those sort of facilities nor are we likely to perhaps. So that really rules out official channels. It leaves only the clandestine ones - other religious bodies do try to spread their beliefs in that way. Many Christian bodies are engaged in smuggling

Bibles into Russia. We would have, if we functioned at all, to function in that sort of way unless there were some people who were able to go on short visits to Russia and make personal contacts. I think probably the best place from which to do that would be India, because Indians can go to Russia quite easily. India is on quite good terms with Russia politically, [23] so I think maybe some of our Indian Order Member friends could do something eventually. I do not think we are going to be able to do very much from the West.

Vimalamitra: Not even Finland?

S: Something might be done from Finland, I had not forgotten Finland but I think probably we can do much more from India. Finns can get to Soviet Russia and even stay there for short periods but how much they would be able to do when there, is difficult to say.

Some of our other Order Member friends have visited Russia. Vajradaka has paid at least one visit and he did contact people on the underground railway in Moscow who turned out to be interested in meditation and took a few classes at their flat, but that is something we do not publicise for obvious reasons because people at the Soviet Embassy in London, they go through the press, they read everything that is published and they might seize on any scrap of information like that and perhaps block any possibility of Order Members going from Finland to Russia.

One of the things I did come to know, mainly through my Finnish friends, is that the Soviet government definitely dislikes Buddhism. But it dislikes it for rather curious reasons. It dislikes it because it regards it as a pacifist organization and the Soviet government does not permit pacifist propaganda in the Soviet Union. So Buddhism is, so to speak, banned not because of its Anata teaching or anything of that sort but because it is regarded as promoting pacifism.

But certainly we should get into whatever country we possibly can. It is surprising how some countries are opening up. Some Order Members have spent fairly lengthy periods in Yugoslavia, in Poland. It might be possible to do something in those countries. (pause)

Catholic countries have opened up within my life time. Formerly, when I was in Kalimpong, it was not possible for to send the magazine "Stepping Stones" into Spain or Portugal I discovered. The copies were stopped at the frontier by the customs people; such literature was not allowed into those countries then. Now there is no problem whatever.

I remember a French scholar who came to see me in Kalimpong told me that she had gone to Spain on holiday. In as much as she was a serious student of Buddhism at the Sorbonne she had taken Buddhist texts with her to study on holiday and she was not permitted to take them into Spain. The customs examined her luggage and found these books on Buddhism and she was not allowed to take them into the country. But the situation, as [24] I said, has completely altered now so we need not despair.

At present the two groups of countries which are very difficult for us to get into are the communist countries and the Muslim countries. We can get, I think, I believe, into almost every other kind of country. So things have opened up quite a bit even during the last 20 years. So we do not have cause for pessimism. Let's get in wherever we can.

But in the case of a Movement like the FWBO, sooner or later we would have to start functioning openly because we do aim at the transformation of society, not merely at the transformation of the individual within the existing society, whatever that may be. In fact we consider that there is a limit to the transformation of the individual, a limit to the extent to which at least the average individual is able to transform himself under certain conditions, and conditions therefore, for the benefit of the majority of people need to be changed very radically in many different ways.

Anyway, so much for that question. I'm not sure how it connects with Right Livelihood, or does it just vaguely arise out of it?

Vessantara: Well in that lecture you talk not only about the economic but also about the social and political aspects of life.

Keith: That in fact relates to the next question.

You commented in the text that the Buddha gave little emphasis to the political aspect of society because the ordinary person had little influence politically in the Buddha's day, but nowadays we can have much more influence on political life...

S: That was perhaps a trifle optimistic.

Keith: ... do you think we should take this factor more into account as a Movement than perhaps we have done so far?

S: I think to some extent it is a question of the strength of the Movement and where we can best deploy whatever energies we have. Clearly we have to have a list of priorities. I do not rule out in principle our trying to influence the political aspect of things, whether as a Movement or individually, but I think that probably at present we are still (1) much too weak and insignificant as a Movement and, (2) we do not even have sufficient energies in the form of qualified people to carry on our Dharma work in the way that we could if we did have more people. I certainly do not rule out the possibility, for want of a better term, of political action. Though obviously one would have to tread very carefully because it is very [25] easy, with best of intentions, to go astray - to get swept off one's feet - and I think it would not be possible for us to have anything to do, say in Britain, with the existing party political system. I do not see how we could wholeheartedly sympathize with any existing party. Not sufficiently to be able to join them as party members and work through them, even assuming that one was able to achieve some influence within them, which would perhaps be extremely doubtful.

I tend to think that perhaps one should concentrate, if one does take an interest in politics, on specific issues which transcend party differences, where one can perhaps rally people's support irrespective of their party affiliations. For instance - this is something as it were mildly political - you might for instance campaign against abattoirs and battery hens and all that sort of industrialized farming and you might rally support from right across the political spectrum. (pause;) You might take up various environmental issues which were not party political issues and which, I think, should not be made such. You might take up the question of blasphemy laws.

Anandajyoti: In your lecture, Bhante, you talk about Right Livelihood in terms of the transformation of the collective aspect of life, and you suggest that perhaps the Buddha did not include, he did not mention the social and political aspects because at that time the individual had less possibility of influence in those spheres. I was wondering whether an alternative might be that the Buddha did not talk about those areas more perhaps because his teaching was more, came across as a teaching of the transformation of the individual than the transformation of society. That the emphasis was primarily, in his teaching, on the transformation of the individual.

S: One could also take the view that in the Buddha's day, society was not so greatly in need of transformation perhaps as it is now. It had a much simpler structure. It was, for instance, easier to get away from it, You had only to withdraw into the forest. You can't do that any more. You cannot get away from organized society. You cannot get away from government. There is no spot on the Earth probably where, if you went, you could be free from governmental control or interference. So in self-defence almost, we have to turn round and try to transform the society in which we live. We might even live on the fringes of it, but we are still living in it. We are still a part of it. We've no choice but to transform society.

In the Buddha's day perhaps there was a choice - whether to work on your self outside society, or to remain within society [26] whether or not you worked on your self - we do not have that choice. (pause) In the Buddha's day, the political system was a net with very wide meshes. The little fish could slip through, But nowadays the meshes are very fine indeed, even the littlest fish cannot slip through.

Anandajyoti: Yes, at one point in your lecture you suggested perhaps the Buddha might have included something like Right Citizenship if the situation had perhaps been a little different ...

S: In a way he does very marginally, when he speaks to the Vajjians and reminds them that he had taught them that their future prosperity depended on their meeting together regularly, and then of course he applies that to the Sangha, it is well known. Thereby establishing a definite parallel between ordinary social life and the organized life of the Spiritual Community itself. (pause) There is no doubt that the Buddha legislated for the Sangha which could be regarded as the nucleus of a new society, in as much as the Sangha constituted the norm of ethical behaviour even for the laity. In the appropriate degree that is to say.

Vessantara: A couple more general questions, then about four or five specifically relating to Right Livelihood and Co-ops. Chris had a more general one.

Chris: Would you say that having a vision of the new society is one of the qualities of the true individual?

S: I think the true individual cannot ignore others. And he cannot ignore others in their collective aspect as well as in their individual aspect. So to that extent I would say yes, it is one of the characteristics of the true individual, that he thinks in those sort of terms because he is concerned, not only with his own development but with the development of other people - concerned with himself and his development in conjunction with that of other people. So he cannot, sooner or later, avoid coming along to the question of the new society - I would say. (pause)

In other words the true individual cannot cut himself off from other people. The fact that you are genuinely an individual does not mean that you live - or can live in glorious isolation from other people. I think that, especially under modern conditions, is really quite impossible. You might go away to a solitary caravan for a few weeks but that is as far away as you can get, and even then you carry with you a supply of food which of course has been produced by other people. You stay in a caravan which you probably have not built with [27] your own hands. So you are not really completely away from other people even so.

If there was a place where you could go to - where you could live under a tree and live off fruits and nuts - well, yes, you could then be said to be completely away from people - are completely independent of people for a few weeks - as people were in ancient India in the Buddha's day, but not otherwise. Even on your solitary retreat you remain dependant on other people, at least indirectly. To say nothing of your maybe taking a train in order to reach your place of solitary retreat. You're dependant on the cooperation of other people even in order to enjoy a solitary retreat at all, even for a week or two. You could walk there I suppose - you walk along a road; you walk wearing shoes which other people have made. So other people's cooperation seems to be absolutely essential to the leading of the spiritual life, even going on solitary retreat.

So the true individual cannot but be aware of all those factors. The only question is, what attitude do you have towards other people. There is no question of your either being in contact with other people or not being in contact with other people. You do not really have that choice, not for more than a few minutes at a time. (pause) Whether you like it or not, you are landed with other people and they're landed with you, so you just have to make the best of it. (laughter) (pause)

Vessantara: Devamitra's group had a question on political system from Martin.

Martin Redman: This arose out of our discussion of the Dharma Raja and your comments on it. We wondered what sort of political system would you think would be most sympathetic or conducive to the new or Ideal Society?

S: I wonder whether this can be determined in the abstract. I wonder whether one does not have to take into account the national character, so to speak, of the people for whom you are legislating or for whom you are constructing your political system. For instance, I've recently been reading - or I've looked at - a book which Devaraja had read and recommended, on national character, especially on the characters, the national characters, of the English, the French and the Spanish. If one takes - it's written by a Spaniard who was equally fluent in those three languages - English, French and Spanish - and he had lived in all three countries for extensive periods - and reading that book, he seems to suggest that different political systems suit the different national characters. There may well be something in that. In that case it would perhaps be difficult to devise a [28] political system which fitted every country equally well. (pause) Parliamentary democracy for instance does not seem to function very well, at least not brilliantly, outside the western democracies. Does not seem to function, on the whole, very well in Africa. It's not doing too badly in India perhaps, is not doing particularly well in Pakistan, does not seem to be doing at all well in South America. Perhaps that is not the pattern for them; that may be a possibility we don't really like to contemplate. Perhaps dictatorship is the best political system for some peoples, some states. I'm not saying it is, so please don't quote me to that effect. (laughter) But we perhaps have to consider the

possibility that it may be, repugnant as we find personally, the idea of political dictatorship. (pause) Or one party system of government.

People born and brought up in England at least regard that as quite abhorrent, but perhaps it is the kind of political structure that suits some countries at least at a certain stage in their development. Not all countries do have a thousand year history of parliamentary institutions. (pause)

So I doubt very much whether you could devise an ideal political system which would fit equally well all conceivable countries. I'm assuming of course - this could also be discussed - that those countries remain sovereign nation states though I personally doubt whether that particular kind of set up is a very desirable one, or has shown itself to be a very desirable one. The major wars of history have all been between sovereign nation states. (pause)

So I do not think one can say, from a Buddhist point of view, that any one system of government is necessarily abstractly the best and therefore to be applied to or followed by all. (pause). There would be of course certain common principles, one of which would be that particular political structure may be possible for the individual to follow, both in his individual and in his collective life, the teachings of the Dharma.

Vessantara: One request for information (unclear) come on to (unclear) co-ops and such like ().

Ian Polke: In the text, Asoka is referred to. The only known reference we could find to Asoka was in H.G. Wells' "Outline of World History". Can you tell us where else there might be any history of Asoka?

S: There are a number of works mainly by Indian scholars. There is "Asoka and His Edicts" which I think is by Doctor [29] Barua. But there are a number of different translations of his edicts, editions and translations, one of which we have in the Order library at Padmaloka. There are various legendary sources but they're not of much use really, the main one being the Asoka Vedana. I'm not sure where one can find a translation of that, I'm not sure there is a translation of it, but certainly there are works by Indian scholars dealing with Asoka and editions and translations of his edicts. His edicts are, of course, the main source of our information about him. They are contemporary with Asoka himself, they were set up by Asoka himself. New ones come to light from time to time. Not so very many years ago, I think somewhere, in I think it must be what is now Western Pakistan, a bilingual inscription was discovered, one of the languages being Greek. But there is this work, I think by (Chatabagya?) in the Order library - Asoka's Edicts with an introduction, the edicts themselves, an English translation. That is what one should to go. (pause)

H.G. Wells gives a quite favourable general impression but does not really tell one very much about Asoka or his times. There is something of interest in a general way in S. Dutt's "The Buddha and Five After Centuries" which is also in the Order library. (pause)

Vessantara: Moving on to work, Ian has another question I think.

Ian Polke: In the group we tried to formulate a list of points which should be present in a Right Livelihood situation. I'll give you the list of points in a minute. The question about it is,

have you any comments which you would add to these points and, are there actually any further points in addition to this list that you would add? And the points are as follows, there are six of them:- The first one is - there is no particular order of merit to these six points - the first one is that it should provide personal support for the people working in the situation in terms of food, shelter, sufficient money for creative interests and the ability to give gifts to others. The second point; that the situation should be able to supply financial support for Dharma work of various sorts such as Centres. The third point; that the work should be creative, either personally or even if your job is not terribly personally creative because you can see it is part of the greater mandala, in the sense that it is supporting Dharma work etc. etc. Fourthly, that there should be an element of Kalyana Mitrata between those who are working together. Fifthly, that it should be an ethical trade or profession and, sixthly, that it should be efficient, there should be an element of planning - you could say an element of Sampajanna - in those who are running it and planning it.

[30]

S: I can think of one or two modifications. Firstly this question that work should be creative. That seems to me rather vague especially in view of the qualification which was introduced. Because one could say that if the work that you were doing was helping to produce money for Dharma activities, well it was intrinsically, or at least automatically, creative. But did one actually mean that?

Vessantara: I think we were talking in terms of things being creative per se rather than the end products that you actually ...

S: A lot also depends on one's attitude. For instance, one can work, say, in an FWBO restaurant and one would have thought that washing up was not a very creative activity, but some people are able to do that in a highly positive spirit and really enjoy it. So I'm a bit doubtful about this question of creativity or that the work should be creative. I'm not even quite clear what is meant by creative in this context. I think the word 'creative' is used rather loosely anyway. Can one have creative washing up in the same way that one has, say, creative writing for instance? Can one really compare in that sort of way? So I think there is probably something to be cleared up there.

Is it among these points definitely stated that one's involvement in that particular Right Livelihood situation is on the whole genuinely assisting you in your overall spiritual development? Is that actually stated as a separate item or is it sort of assumed to underlie the whole?

Vessantara: It would be by implication I think. If you have Kalyana Mitrata, what you are doing is creative.

S: Also perhaps it needs to be spelt out, though this is on the negative rather than on the positive side, that the work should not involve the production of some luxury product that human beings can very well do without because you might be making money, you might be working quite creatively, you might enjoy Kalyana Mitrata etc. etc. but the end product might be something - well it's just really not needed, it is a luxury item. So perhaps one should bear that in mind too - that ones Right Livelihood project should be geared as far as possible to basic or relatively basic human needs. That's one of the reasons I'm quite happy about vegetarian restaurants. First of all they do provide food which is an actual human requirement

- you cannot do without food, it's not a luxury item. Though perhaps it can be made a luxury item. (laughter) And also the fact that you run a vegetarian restaurant means that an ethical principle is being directly propagated amongst people who might otherwise never have heard of the Dharma or cared to come into contact with it in other ways.

[31]

So this is really quite important. I think sometimes people who work in our vegetarian restaurants - unfortunately two of them have been closed which I think is really sad - should realize this much more. You're not just providing cheap, or relatively cheap food, you are actually spreading the message of non-violence indirectly through your vegetarian restaurant. So it is very important Dharma activity in itself. I think that needs to be much more generally realized. (pause)

I did have my doubts about candles because they seemed to be a bit of a luxury item but I was assured that most of them are bought by people who burn them for devotional purposes. All right, fair enough, they're devotional requisites let us say but I must admit I did have my doubts. I imagined them being used largely for lavish dinner parties and so on but I believe that is not really actually the case'. (laughter) Current sales I believe are directed mainly within the Movement itself. Yes, the candles are used mainly for devotional purposes. But I think we have to watch that, that we do not just devote valuable human and other resources just to the production of luxury items. I think that is an essential element of Right or Perfect Livelihood.

Housing? Well, people do need houses so that is a quite basic human requirement. I'm quite happy with any Right Livelihood project which is connected with the provision of housing. I'm going by the traditional Buddhist list of the four requisites of the monk. The four things that a monk can expect to be supplied with by the society to which he belongs. That is to say, food, clothing, accommodation and medicine. We have not done much about clothing so far. That would seem to be a more complex matter. I hope perhaps we can in due course.

We have not actually grown any food. I'm rather hoping we can do that also sooner or later although that may raise its own problems. I do believe that attached to the Bhaja retreat centre near Poona there is some land on which we are in fact growing our own paddy which I think will be utilized on retreats. There will be a few (morns?) of it each year anyway. (pause)

Vessantara: Sagaramati's group had a number of questions. (pause)

Sagaramati: We have one that fits in from the last one. It is not about creativity but it is about job satisfaction. We think that job satisfaction is not possible while packing peanuts etc., or serving at tables. Is job satisfaction necessary?

[32]

S: Well I think one must question that assumption. I referred to the possibility of people enjoying washing up. I've actually seen people packing peas and they have been at it day after day really happily and gaily if one may say so. So I think you can do probably almost anything in a happy way and derive job satisfaction from it, especially if you bear very much in mind the ultimate aim for the sake of which you are engaged in that particular activity. It is well known you can be in a luxuriously appointed office and be highly paid and be doing work which is in a sense quite important and prestigious but not have job satisfaction at all.

Some of our Friends have left such jobs and prefer to be packing beans. (laughter)

Sagaramati: We were trying to give a balance between, well, there is the objective needs we talk about - I mean money for the Dharma etc. - but there is also the person to be considered. "Satisfaction" is the use of a person's faculties and packing peanuts some people certainly could not use their faculties, therefore they would not be satisfied, that is the argument.

S: But does one want to be using one's faculties all the time? Sometimes one likes to give one's faculties a rest. (laughter)

Sagaramati: The thing is, in a co-op situation it is eight hours a day, may be six days a week. It is a long period of time. It is not as if it is four hours a day.

S: I rather question this rather sort of hard and fast division between the subjective and objective as though, well in addition to the objective needs of the situation, well there is your own personal job satisfaction. I really question this because I think you can get personal satisfaction from fulfilling the needs of the objective situation. Not that you must gain your personal satisfaction independently and separately from that, as it were. That is one point. And also I think one has to take a broad view of one's overall deployment of all one's skills and capacities and so on. If someone for instance was very good at teaching the Dharma, I'd consider it rather a shame if they had to spend all their time packing beans. They might be thoroughly enjoying it and be very willing and happy to do it, but it would nonetheless be a shame because they could make a better contribution and benefit more people, so far as one can see, by being engaged in the teaching of the Dharma.

So it is a question of seeing the total objective situation; seeing yourself as a total person with various skills and capacities and just throw yourself into the situation in which you can be most useful. If you don't get satisfaction out of that, well I think there must be something wrong with you, (if [33] you have got a separate job satisfaction?) I think this whole idea of job satisfaction has arisen partly because most livelihood situations in the outside world are quite unsatisfactory for many people, and also because of a rather subjective individualistic sort of emphasis these days.

Sagaramati: Do you think it is possible, say when someone comes into a Centre and he wants to get more involved in the Centre, and say there is a vacancy in Friends' Foods or the restaurant, that person should be capable of just ...

S: Oh yes, I think so. Doing anything that comes to hand. Certainly someone newly coming along and needing really to prove himself, to show that he is willing. The powers that be, to use that favoured expression, would not be well advised to keep him there for ever if he has got various other skills and talents. But yes, someone who is newly arrived on the scene could very well be directed to the nearest thing that needs to be done and should be very willing and happy to do it. I think it would be surprising if he or she was not. It would be foolish to keep them there indefinitely if they had important talents which could be of use to the Movement in some other way. But I would be rather surprised if someone came along and expressed a desire to throw in his lot with the FWBO and you said, "Well, there is this job of washing up in the restaurant or packing beans down in the basement to be done" and he says, "Well, I did not come along to do that sort of thing. I've got a Ph.D." It would be very surprising if he adopted that attitude and it would I think really test his genuineness.

Sagaramati: One does come across that quite often.

S: One's Ph.D will keep. (pause). My overall impression is, on the whole throughout the Movement, that people are a bit too precious about what they would like to do and what would be interesting to them. I think this is probably the effect of the surrounding society. I think there should be a much greater willingness and readiness to do just whatever needs to be done and what you're capable of doing. One should genuinely throw oneself into that and enjoy doing it without any reservations. You notice very often people can do things, which otherwise they would not have liked to do, for the sake of someone who is dear to them in a quite subjective sort of way, if they ask you to do it. Oh it's quite a different matter. If they are going to be pleased and approve of you at the end, that's a quite different matter. So it shows that you are able to do almost anything quite happily. (long pause).

Sagaramati: This one is between power mode and love mode. Is it possible to run a business without recourse to using the power mode, both with dealings within the co-op and with [34] dealings with the outside world?

S: Well it depends, I think, who is in the co-operative. If the co-operative consists of Order Members so that it becomes an Order situation, it should be possible to run that business internally without any recourse to the power mode. If it consists of a mixture of Order Members, Mitras and Friends, it may not be possible to run it in that way just because not everybody is really able to function as an individual. And I think in relation to the outside world it would just not be possible on the whole to function without recourse to the power mode.

This question arose in a concrete form at Padmaloka once in connection with Padmaloka candles because certain people - customers outside the Movement - were defaulting on payments for candles with which they had been supplied. So Kovida had the bright idea of taking them to the Small Claims Court - I believe it has been disbanded by the present government, or at least it was going to be. If it has been I think that is rather unfortunate. It is a very inexpensive way of recovering small sums from defaulting debtors; it is very simple and you do actually get the money, so ...

END OF SIDE ONE

[35]
SIDE TWO)

... so Kovida consulted me. There was somebody who owed Padmaloka Candles, I think it was something like \$500, but Padmaloka Candles could not afford to lose that. As far as we could tell, the man who was running the business was just indulging in a bit of cussedness and seeing if he could get away with it. He was not very scrupulous. So it was not a question of if he was compelled to pay he would be bankrupt or anything like that. So I advised Kovida that I thought in the circumstances it was quite right for him to have recourse to that Small Claims Court.

So you go along and you file your case and then they send some kind of notification to that

person calling upon him to pay. If he does not, he's called before that Court and I think property can be (attached?) or something of that sort. Anyway, Padmaloka Candles got its money back at very, very small cost indeed.

I think we may have sometimes to have recourse to the power mode in that way but even in this case I was concerned that we should be sure that we were not ruining anybody. For instance someone might have defaulted but he just didn't have the money. His business had gone wrong or something of that sort; he might have been ill. But this was definitely not a case of that sort, the man was just trying to see what he could get away with and we did get our money. So in that sort of case, recourse to the power mode is justified and you can not do without it, probably, in running a business in connection with the world.

I did say, some years ago - the necessity has not arisen for me to say it since - I said many years ago that an Order Member should never take another Order Member to Court, because clearly one is having recourse to the power mode against another Order Member. So whatever an Order Member may do to you, if that does so happen, well, just by misunderstanding or may be in a moment of cussedness even, you should not have recourse to the power mode ever, in dealing with him - certainly not in that extreme sort of way. (pause)

Within the Order, the power mode should simply just not be operative at all. To the extent that order is the Order and to the extent that Order Members are Order Members, the power mode will not be in operation at all. To the extent that you invoke the power mode in your dealings with another Order Member, you are not treating him as an Order Member and you are, yourself, not behaving as an Order Member. When you call in the Police, you are having recourse to the [36] power mode but sometimes you may have to do it for the sake of security of the Centre and so on; or your personal safety even. (pause)

Anyway, is that clear?

Vessantara: Devamitra's have got one or two points.

Martin: Some Order Members seem reluctant to work within their local Centre's co-op structure and therefore set up separate businesses, presumably as they are afraid of losing their personal initiative to a larger co-op structure. Would you care to comment on this approach?

S: One of the most important things - if not the most important thing within a co-op - and this was not actually listed but perhaps it could be - is a spirit of cooperativeness! (laughter) If you do not have that, the co-op does not really function as a co-op and I have in fact mentioned fairly recently, that I thought cooperativeness, the quality of cooperativeness, should be added to our list of qualities of the True Individual.

Now, you may get a number of people working together within a co-op but it may happen, unfortunately, that there is not much of a cooperative spirit. So someone who does really and genuinely want to throw himself into the co-op and give it everything he's got, may feel discouraged. He might feel ... well, if I cannot function in this sort of way within the co-op structure, maybe I'd better set up separately. But I personally think this is a mistake in as much as it's a sort of council of despair almost.

I think despite one's personal frustrations, if that is in fact the case, one should remain within the co-op function and try to induce by persuasion and discussion, other people within the co-op to actually be co-operative. I think that would be better because I think the cooperative structure is much more in accordance with Buddhist Ideals, the Buddhist Ideal of Right Livelihood, than any other where a number of people are working together.

If it is a one man business, well that is another matter; if you are just self-employed, there's nothing inconsistent with Right Livelihood there, but if it is a situation where you are employing others, you are the boss and they are definitely working for you, well that can only be a Right Livelihood situation only to a very limited extent.

For instance, supposing you are employing other Order Members. It really means, in a sense, that at least [37] formally, if not actually, in effect you are not treating them as Order Members because you have got power which they do not possess, or even power over them as their employer. Do you see what I mean? You may be a perfectly good employer, they may be perfectly good employees, but the actual formal structure is one in which you are vested with power and they perhaps are not, or at least they are perhaps vested with power too. Perhaps they belong to a union. But then it is a balance of power, not a genuine cooperation, at least formally, at least regards the structure, that is concerned and I think that is not desirable.

So does that really answer your question? (pause) I can understand only too well, capable and intelligent people feeling frustrated having to work with other people in a co-op who perhaps are not so intelligent, are not so quick on the up-take, are not so energetic. I can understand them feeling very frustrated though I think we have to resist the temptation to try to go it alone, as it were. (long pause)

There is also another aspect of Right Livelihood which has not been mentioned. It is not quite so central perhaps, it is a bit peripheral that is to say. If we are supplying a service we should not provide that service in such a way as to result in something which is inconsistent with our ideals as Buddhists being supported ... is that too abstract? (Laughter) All right, supposing you have some kind of, say, printing press or advertising agency. You depend on your work from outside. Now supposing somebody was to ask you to print for them, say, a party political pamphlet advocating, on a certain occasion or in a certain connection, violence? Would it be in accordance with your principles of Right Livelihood to print that for them? Supposing they asked you to print, say, an anti-semitic pamphlet. Would that be in accordance with your principles? Should you help them to spread that particular ideology.

So I think that also needs to be taken into consideration. You might have a catering service and that catering service might be asked to do the catering on some particular occasion that you would regard perhaps as unethical. So there is that aspect also to be considered.

Vessantara: Presumably you have to decide where to draw the line.

S: Yes. Sometimes it may be in practice very difficult. Supposing you are asked to print 10,000 labels for beer bottles. Well, is that ethical or unethical, or are you actually encouraging beer drinking? Some people might take one view and others might take another view. There are sure [38] to be marginal cases where opinions will quite genuinely differ.

Vessantara: Society seems so complex - you may be supplying somebody who in their turn is

supplying somebody, who is doing something unskilful and to some degree ...

S: You cannot avoid that all together. It is impossible. For instance people who come to your vegetarian restaurant, you do not know what they are going to go off and do afterwards. (laughter) You cannot possibly keep a check on it, but there you are, keeping them fit and healthy with your vegetarian food, regardless of what they are going to go and do. You cannot possibly ask each one for a personal biography (laughter) - an account of what they are going to do for the remainder of the day after eating your food. (laughter) Do you see what I mean?

Duncan: In such marginal cases, should we allow ourselves to be influenced by the money, perhaps our need for money, or perhaps ...

S: Well perhaps it depends how much one needs the money. (laughter) If a million pounds is involved (laughter), it is a bit different from if ten pounds is involved.

Duncan: I've got the idea! (laughter)

S: A Co-op, like so many other situations, is a very complex one, where very often one factor has to be weighed against another almost from moment to moment, certainly from day to day and week to week. (pause)

Mike: Can I just go back a step? You seem to be saying about the formal structure of a Co-op is quite important, there is also the informal structure, I was wondering ...

S: No, what I said was the Co-op structure as such, that is to say, it is a structure where everybody has a voice, where no one person has sort of responsibility or directive power more than any other. If anyone has power, it is power that has been delegated by the Co-op collectively. I think that structure bears a certain similarity to the structure of the spiritual community itself and therefore I consider the Co-op structure as the most appropriate form which our Right Livelihood activities can take. It is not a structure in the sense (as of something though?)(it's?) relatively arbitrary which is merely imposed on a group of people. This is the way that they would like to work together co-operatively because they are individuals, they all want to be responsible, they all want to know what is happening, they all want to have a share in the running of the [39] enterprise. Nobody wants to just sit back and let somebody else tell him what to do, so that he does not have to think.

Mike: I believe that with Co-ops as well as with companies, you can actually have limited liability, which suggests limited responsibility. Do co-ops have limited liability?

Vessantara: Yes.

Mike: You have got individuals co-operating within, when in fact within the terms of responsibility, they're not fully responsible. If they make vast losses they are limited in their liability. Do you think that is ...

S: I must say, I have not considered the ethical bearings of limited liability. Perhaps - this is just speaking off the cuff - perhaps in the context of business, one should not have an unlimited liability and surely it must be reasonable that you should not have an unlimited liability, otherwise the law would not allow such a thing. What in practice does limited

liability mean? What are you not liable for which you might otherwise have been liable for?

Mike: Well, if you operate a business, you are responsible - which normally consists of the ethical problem - then you actually ... you are only limited to a certain extent, so may be there is an encouragement not to be responsible.

S: Yes. I would say that if a Buddhist Right Livelihood enterprise does happen to be run irresponsibly, then I think the people running it in that way should recognize that that is what they have done, and even if the law does not oblige them to do so, they must make good any loss or damage they might have caused to other people.

I think they would be ethically obliged to do that even if they were not legally obliged. For instance, supposing - we can take a parallel sort of case, I'm not sure of the law here - supposing you were driving a car; supposing you actually did drive recklessly and you injured someone, and supposing your insurance company managed to get you off so that - I do not know whether it would happen, but let us suppose it could happen - the injured party did not get any sort of compensation. So even though legally you were not liable, I think you would be morally obliged to pay some kind of compensation. (pause)

I think one has to recognize one's moral obligations are not limited by law. May be it is useful to have those sort of [40] limitations for certain reasons but that should not be used as an excuse for not fulfilling what are in fact one's moral obligations. (pause)

In other words, you should not confine yourself to fulfilling those moral obligations which a law obliges you to fulfil. (pause)

We know that there are people who deliberately engineer bankruptcies so as to avoid meeting their responsibilities. That, of course, is absolutely unethical. We should do the opposite - pay up, even if we are not under any legal responsibility to do so, if we feel that we have moral responsibility. (pause)

Any other points, or have we exhausted Right Livelihood? No more about packaging beans? (laughter)

Padmaraja: Just one point Bhante. Do you see the Co-operatives as providing the economic base for the future development of the Movement? Do you see that as the main source of income, our co-operatives? (pause)

S: I think it is a good thing that to the extent that the Movement has to depend upon sources of income other than those deriving from the Dharmic activities themselves, I think it is a good thing that that money comes from our own efforts via business enterprises, and as I've already indicated, I think that the best structure for those business enterprises is the co-operative one. So in that sense your question is to be answered in the affirmative. But I don't exclude various other possibilities. For instance that there are Friends, Mitras, even Order Members with full time jobs in the outside world who, out of their enormous salaries, are making lavish donations. I do not exclude that possibility and I don't exclude the possibility of our getting grants for appropriate purposes from Government. And, of course, there is the income from classes, courses, retreats and so on. What proportion any given Centre will derive from these different sources is rather difficult to say, but it does seem at

present that for some Centres at least, the Co-ops are an important source of income. Though I was rather shocked to find, in the case of one Centre, that - in fact more than one Centre - the Co-ops seemed to be financially rather a drag on the Centre. Far from the Co-op financing the Centre, the Centre seems to be financing the Co-op.

I did work out in the case of one particular Co-op that every member of that Co-op owed the parent Centre \$1000. Yes. I'm sure that the members of the Co-op were not aware of that but that, in fact, was the position.

[41]

S: ... So theoretically, co-ops are started up to assist - amongst other things - Centres financially, but if one is not very careful they end up by being a burden and draining the Centre rather than contributing to it financially. (pause)

I am glad to say that is not the case with all Co-ops but it is the case with some and that is really quite unfortunate. I have been emphasizing that something needs to be done about that. (pause)

Duncan: One thing we discussed very briefly in our study group is the relationship between business efficiency and one's involvement with the Movement or even spiritual growth. Some Co-ops do not seem to fare very well.

S: I think it is a bit of a "micchaditthi", to use that expression, that efficiency is somehow unspiritual and inefficiency is somehow a mark of spirituality. I think that particular micchaditthi must be combated.

Sagaramati. It was not really that the idea was to be really efficient and to have a really good business making money it did involve a lot of energy and activity and may be that you could not get off for weekends at Padmaloka etc. It's that tension between a really fully energetic, efficient business and, at the same time, giving people opportunity for retreats.

S: Well there is a proverb: If you don't like the heat, stay out of the kitchen. And may be a business is a situation of heat, though I think it does differ from business to business - it will depend upon the type of work. I remember I often used to just look into Padmaloka Candles' workshop - apart from the liquid wax that was boiling, there did not seem to be much heat around. (laughter) It seemed to be going on in a pretty easy-going, leisurely sort of way. Except once in a while, there was a big order - not very often, about once a year, something like that. Then they would rally round and they would be working fairly frantically for two or three days, (laughter) then take may be a week off, but not much more than that.

I have not actually worked in a business - well, yes, I have in my very young days. I was going to say I have not worked in a business commercially, but, yes I did for seven months when I was sixteen. I worked in a commercial firm. I did work quite hard during the day but, I remember, my evenings and weekends (and I only had Saturday afternoons off in those days - not Saturday mornings) I plunged into my reading and writing and the rest of it. I do not remember any difficulty or even thought of any difficulty in switching from the one to the other. That's a long time ago so I may be mistaken, but I [42] certainly don't remember anything of that sort. I can vividly remember the way I spent my evenings and my weekends. So I really rather wonder.

I think people have to train themselves to turn their energies from this to that and I think one has to be very careful not to speak in terms of different kinds of energy ... When I'm functioning in business, I've got my business energies going and I can't use those business energies for study - I've got to get study energies going. I'm inclined to think that is really a load of rot. (laughter) I do not find it at all convincing.

Sagaramati: The question is not one of switching from one type of energy to another. It's like, well if you are opening up a restaurant and a shop and you said you're going to open so many days a week and in the evenings, you've got a liability and a responsibility to do that.

S: Well you should go into things with your eyes wide open, not think innocently that, well, if you open up a restaurant, well you can do it when you feel like it, and if you want a week off for a bit of study or a quiet wander in the country, well you'll be free to do it, but you won't. So you have to go into these things with your eyes wide open and having taken them on, recognize that that is what you have taken on and you've got to fulfil these particular needs.

Sagaramati: Then you get messages from Padmaloka asking why aren't people on retreat.

S: Well, tell them! Tell them you're working. (laughter) Maybe they do not know, maybe they think you've got loads of free time so they are just telling you about their retreats. If you are working, then say so. But it is up to you to know what you are doing and what the needs of a particular situation are. It could be that you've made a wrong choice, it could be that you have to re-organize the use of your time, it could be you are doing too much of one thing for your own good. All right, you have to balance that against what seem to be the needs of the objective situation, and the shortage of people and so on. But I think you have to accept that some situations of whatever nature are going to be very demanding and that while you are involved in those things, you are not going to be able to do other things.

This is a choice that every Order member is going to be faced with and the more experienced you get, the more things you're able to do, the more you're going to be faced with. You're not going to ever get beyond this sort of situation. You are always going to have to make choices and to do what you think [43] is the best for you to do at any given time. There are always going to be demands. Please come to Poona ... no, please come to Bristol ... or please come to Boston .. please join me in South America.

They are all urgent needs. Yes, you are needed in all those places and you could do good work maybe in all those places. You could do good work taking classes, you could do good work helping to run a Co-op - but it's up to you to choose and then not be distracted by all these other calls but just put yourself wholeheartedly into what you have decided, for the time being at least, you are going to do.

Duncan: To continue on a similar theme, I was wondering, do you think it would be useful for people to make longer term commitments to particular businesses, perhaps a five year commitment?

S: One of the lessons that seems to have emerged, not to say one of the messages from the events of the last few years, is that people do need to commit themselves to situations for longer and longer. But that also assumes a degree of self knowledge.

I certainly do not encourage Mitras to commit themselves to situations for a long time. Well, they are not yet committed to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. They don't perhaps know themselves, they're still sorting out problems of various kinds. I don't think Mitras can be expected to commit themselves any where for longer than, say, a year.

And maybe a new Order Member who is sort of finding his feet as an Order Member - you should not expect him to commit himself here or there for five years. He may need to look around a bit, see different Centres, different communities. But I think within a couple of years the new Order Member should have decided what he is going to do predominantly for the next three to four years. But he must be given the chance to look around a bit, to discover not only what needs doing but what he is good at, because one doesn't want to withdraw prematurely from a situation.

But I think Centres, Co-ops, Communities, in the long run they all need, on the part of most of the people belonging to them or helping to run them, a relatively long term commitment, and the more important the job you are doing, probably the longer term commitment is needed. In the case of a big Centre it's ridiculous to think of being Chairman or Treasurer or Secretary just for say six months or a year, it's ridiculous. You should think in terms, in the case of a big Centre, of four or five years. It will take you a year, not to say two [44] years, to learn the job. And in the case of people leading classes and courses, the people coming along need a certain amount of continuity of contact.

If, say, for two or three months it's you, then for a week it's somebody else, and for three months it's another person, and for another couple of weeks it's yet another, they don't have the chance of building up a relationship with a particular Order Member. (pause)

So I think newly ordained Order Members should regard the future as reasonably open. In some cases the newly ordained Order Member may well feel that he or she needs to return to the parent Centre or community or co-op for a while, knowing that there is a certain need there and not wanting to leave abruptly. But they should feel free to, say, look around at the whole Movement and see where they are most needed or where they could be most useful, and spend a year or two in doing that perhaps. But having looked around and made a choice, well, then commit yourself to a situation for, well, at least two years, ideally perhaps three or four years.

I think you can do most good in that sort of way, but not just a few months here and there. You may be able to broaden your experience but you cannot make much of a contribution in that way unless you are a very specialized Dharma teacher - you are able to go round a number of different Centres leading Dharma study - that is another sort of thing, or giving lectures. Anyway that would be your job, that will be what you have committed yourself to. (pause)

So I think, once ordained, you shouldn't be in a hurry to get away from your parent Centre but on the other hand, you don't have necessarily to think in terms of being there for ever and ever. (pause) Probably that was pretty obvious already. (pause)

Sagaramati: It was not at the LBC. We had quite a discussion at the LBC in a council meeting. Some people thought it was really bad that people who had been sent to Tuscany and financed by the Co-ops etc. should even have the choice at Tuscany of perhaps not

returning to that Centre or Co-operative. They felt it was an act of, well almost like a bit of a, being a bit of a traitor. You had a duty ... and that ... and go back to your Centre, who provided you and brought you up to that level, to go back and give to that Centre as a definite duty. They did not like the idea of having a choice after Tuscany of maybe doing something that evolved while you were at Tuscany.

[45]

S: I think one must have a choice because if one does not have a choice, well one is not an individual. You may exercise that choice by recognizing that you have got, in a way, a certain obligation to your parent Centre, therefore you should go back there at least for a while, but on the other hand if you have any obligation in the broader sense, it's to the Movement as a whole, to the Dharma as such rather than to a particular Centre or particular community or particular co-op.

But obviously, if you are a reasonably responsible person and you do see, having been ordained, that the situation from which you have come which has helped to bring you where you are, really needs you, at least for some months, and it's going to suffer because you don't go back, well obviously you will feel like going back there for a while, whatever your other plans may be.

But I don't think it can be laid down as an absolute requirement that a particular person, having been, as it were, 'produced' as an Order Member by a particular Centre, is under some kind of absolute obligation to go back just there. I don't think one can say that; I don't agree with that. (pause)

One can bring, perhaps, the need to his notice but one has to leave it to him to decide whether he is going back there or not. It must be the result of his free choice, not because he feels bound in a compulsive sort of way. He might see a greater need in some other Centre. He might be taking a broader view and looking at the needs of the Movement as a whole.

But this does bring up - perhaps I could just say a word or two about this, though we may continue it later - this does bring up the question of what one does after ordination.

I think it is quite important that one so arranges things that one is in a situation where one can consolidate the commitment that one has made and probably it's not a bad thing, (I'm not going to generalize too much or too strongly) probably it is not a bad idea in many cases to go back to the parent Centre or Community where you are already familiar with things and the way things are and establish your commitment there, under relatively familiar conditions. But in some cases someone may feel that they've sort of become such a new person they want to make such a new start. They may feel that the people in their Community or at their Centre see them in a particular way which they don't want them to see them in any longer. They may feel, under those circumstances, that they would prefer to consolidate their commitment under fresh auspices so to speak. Well, that is understandable too. But I think that [46] will be relatively the exception and I think probably on the whole it's, so to speak, safer to go back to your old Centre, your old Community, your old Co-op, and consolidate your commitment under those more familiar conditions before venturing forth into some new situation as an Order Member and committing yourself there for a substantial period.

But in any case, consider very carefully the sort of situation to which you are going back -

whether it is in fact the situation which will best enable you to consolidate the commitment that you have made on the occasion of your Ordination.

Anyway, it's lunch time. In fact it is past lunch time.

[47]

Sagaramati: There are about three questions. The first one is on the third method of getting rid of unskilful mental states which refers to watching the mental states pass like clouds.

We thought that - isn't it, or couldn't it be a bit alienating to do this practice if you aren't already in a quite concentrated state of mind, which most people usually, say, coming along to a Centre, aren't?

S: Well, I suppose in a sense it's the purpose of this method to alienate you (laughter) from those particular mental states. We shouldn't be afraid of the word 'alienation'. I mean there are some words which in the course of the history of the FWBO have become sort of 'bogey' words. Words like 'negative' - "we mustn't be negative", etc. etc. So sometimes we use them rather unthinkingly so that if those words are used, we just sort of shy away from them automatically without even stopping to think.

So, in this particular case, one might say, well what's wrong with being alienated from unskilful thoughts, or unskilful mental states? What does one mean by speaking of some danger of alienation, etc. etc? I mean maybe there is something in this point, but let's understand it properly. So, perhaps we can go into this.

What actually happens when you dissociate yourself from unskilful thoughts? You try just to watch them, to distance yourself from them, to take up towards them the attitude of an observer, as though they are not, in fact, your thoughts, so that you cease to feel them, cease to experience them. This is not repressing them or even suppressing them, because you keep them there in view. And it's probably not just the unskilful mental state itself but the whole situation in which it arose. I mean, in as much as you can see that, and you can see how that unskilful mental state developed, to that extent you already begin to dissociate yourself from it.

But anyway, what was that original question?

Sagaramati: Well, isn't it really ... is it a practice that a person who isn't already deeply in touch with themselves and integrated ... wouldn't that person tend to become alienated?

S: Well, 'deeply in touch with himself'. What does one mean by 'deeply'? How does one measure it? (laughter) I mean, is [48] anybody who comes along to a Centre, or even been around a Centre for several years, likely to be 'deeply in touch with himself', if one takes that very literally?

Sagaramati: Just in terms of his feelings.

S: Well I mean if you are experiencing those unskilful mental thoughts and you are actually observing them presumably you are in touch with them? (Laughter) I wonder what the fuss was about. I mean it seems people are so afraid of being alienated that as I said they shy away

at the least hint of alienation.

Sagaramati: But isn't the thing, well it's connected with another question, the question of energy; that is your energy, therefore you're cutting yourself off from a part of your own energy.

S: But are you? If you take up an objective attitude towards it, if you see it as something 'out there', surely you are, as it were, withdrawing energy from it. So in fact the opposite might be happening, one could say. I mean, does it happen that you lose energy by watching unskilful thoughts in this particular way? Does it actually happen? (pause) It seems as though we are in danger sometimes of being misled by cliches, and I think this whole thing of alienation is, well perhaps we ought to start using the word 'alienation' in a positive sense. (Laughter)

Sagaramati: I think it also ties in with the idea of people being brought up as Christians, therefore being out of contact with certain emotions, which basically, maybe are not very skilful, but they have to experience them to become pagan.

S: But as I said, if the situation assumes that you have been feeling the unskilful emotion, you're not suggesting that you're not feeling it, you're not trying to suppress it or repress it, you're just trying to distance yourself from it, and withdraw your energy from it. And you can do that, according to Buddhism by just observing it, by just letting it float past you, like a cloud in the sky. Has anybody ever tried this method? Does it work? This is the real point, does it work? And as I mentioned already, it's not just a question of contemplating the unskilful emotion in isolation, but also, surely contemplating the circumstances under which it arises. And if you can see those more objectively, then, yes, surely the force of the unskilful emotion will be diminished. If you can see, 'Well the situation arose and there was I just reacting in the old mechanical fashion and it's simply that which has produced this emotion' - well that is surely not alienating yourself from that emotion?

Sagaramati: Like you're seeing it after the event; that's ...

[49]

S: Well even in the course of the event itself, while the emotion is still persisting, you can see the sort of conditions in dependence upon which it arose. (pause). I mean what is alienation? Perhaps people need to look a little bit into that. Alienation in respect of mental states generally. Perhaps that isn't clear. What does one mean by alienation? What does alienation mean as a clinical concept?

Sagaramati: Doesn't it mean that there's something in you that, if you were a normal, healthy person, you'd experience, but, at present, you don't actually experience it.

S: What does one mean by 'in you'? Well, what is the difference between being alienated from something which you should not feel alienated from and being unconscious of something of which you should be conscious? Is there a difference between the two types. Is there a difference between being unconscious of something and being alienated from it?

Devamitra: Don't you make some sort of distinction in your lecture on 'Alienated awareness and integrated awareness'? What I understand is that alienated awareness as you define it there, is one's non-experience of oneself. But there seems to be - you seem to imply that

there's an awareness of that thing which is not actually experienced (Sagaramati: (inaudible))
- Yes, but isn't that what we're trying to get at?

S: Yes, one could say, looking at it in that way, that in alienation, you are aware of the denotation of something but not aware of the connotation.

Devamitra: Ah!

S: Which is putting it in another way. You're aware of it just as sort of impersonal fact, but not really aware of its emotional implications. So when it is said that one should just watch one's unskilful mental states and just let them pass by, it is not suggested that you should merely have an abstract idea of that unskilful mental state, whatever it may be, and, continuing to experience it, you just watch it. You don't make any attempt to cut yourself off from it emotionally. Therefore the question of alienation can't really arise. So, in having recourse to this method, you are not in fact in any danger of falling victim to the dreaded alienation.

Sagaramati: I think part of it might be the actual image used. A cloud is a rather flimsy, floating, disembodied thing.

[50]

S: Well, this is the traditional Buddhist image, but one must ask what is the point of the image, what is actually being compared? You could in fact compare it to a mist which is enveloping you. You should not allow yourself to be confused by that. Just keep your eyes open, just continue to watch. The mist will clear, it will pass on, and you will then, perhaps, see it as a cloud. One perhaps could extend the image in that sort of way. Don't lose your head even though you are immersed in the mist. Sooner or later the mist will clear and you'll see the mist as a distant cloud, floating on its way. (pause)

Anyway, what other questions did your group have?

Sagaramati: They're all a bit similar. They'll all get the same hammer, I feel! ... Isn't suppression the thin edge of the wedge, leading to repression for people whose psyches are used to the unconscious habit of repression?

S: Well how can a conscious process lead to an unconscious one?

Sagaramati: Because people become unmindful.

S: Well that could apply to any conscious process. Therefore one would not have recourse to any conscious process, because you could start doing that conscious process unconsciously. You shouldn't even try to meditate because you might start trying to meditate unconsciously! (laughter) You shouldn't read or study because the whole thing might start becoming unconscious. This is quite true! (laughter) But that is no reason not to engage in any conscious activity! There seems to be quite a lot of woolly thinking here this morning!

Sagaramati: They're not my thoughts, Bhante!

S: Oh, I'm sure! (jeers and laughter) We have to remember that self-consciousness is

something painfully achieved and maintained in clarity with some difficulty, so all the while there's going to be a sort of gravitational pull, pulling us, or attempting to pull us, down from our state of consciousness to unconsciousness, from self-consciousness to simple consciousness. So that applies to anything that we may happen to be engaged in, especially when it's of a skilful nature. So it is quite likely that we may pass from suppression, which is a conscious process, to repression, which is an unconscious process, but that need no more frighten us in this case than in any other case. We must just be on our guard against it - here as everywhere else. What about that - people of weak .. what was that?

[51]

Sagaramati: People whose psyches are, they're used to this sort of habit.

S: Of?

Sagaramati: Repression. They've learnt how to repress things, and it's become like an unconscious habit.

S: Well, this is, this is, well, a universal human process. This is part of your socialization. Everybody is repressed to some extent. Otherwise you couldn't survive in society. So I don't think one should think in terms of there being some people who are repressed and others who are not. Broadly speaking, everybody is repressed. This is a part of socialization. One is probably thinking of repression in particular areas, where perhaps it isn't necessary, even in the interests of socialization, that one should be repressed. Some people perhaps are repressed in that particular way. But, nevertheless, what I said still holds good, that repression is a general process; the unconscious is always pulling at us, and it's a question of maintaining a constant effort to be mindful and to maintain self consciousness.

Devamitra: Isn't the objection to suppression as one of the methods for dealing with unskilful mental states which some people come up with, that suppression, it is felt or thought, rightly or wrongly, is more likely to lead to repression, and therefore you're more likely to lapse from consciousness to a state of unconsciousness?

S: But sometimes a situation may require you to suppress. In the interests of the objective situation you may have to suppress. But then, at the time that you suppress, you should know that you are suppressing. And, tell yourself that you are just suppressing for the time being. But that, you have to go back, as it were, to that emotion which you are putting aside, and deal with it when you have time. I mean, for instance, I was reading a biography recently. In the course of that biography - the subject of that biography is involved in a battle - he's the general in command, and his whole attention is on the battle, but in the course of the battle, someone near and dear to him, one of his aides, is killed. Well, he feels that, but he's got no time to allow himself to experience his emotion of grief. Because he has to give his whole attention to the conduct of the battle. So, he as it were, suppresses that, maybe with more or less degree of consciousness, but after the battle is over, he can obviously allow himself to go back to that, the emotion does not remain indefinitely suppressed. (pause) [52] There's no need to make a 'bogey' of suppression either. Sometimes we have to suppress certain feelings. (pause) Also, we have to be careful how we think even of the suppressed feeling. Sometimes a feeling will just go, if you suppress it, if you put it aside; sometimes you can suppress an unskilful feeling, and it isn't that it's there, sort of lurking in the depths of the unconscious, it just sort of dissolves, it dissipates. I mean, for instance, you can wake up in the morning and

just not feel particularly good, not in a very good mood. Well that mood should be suppressed, that not very good mood, and you can do it in a quite positive and healthy way by just refusing to succumb to it - opening the windows, looking at the sunshine, maybe doing a few exercises, going for a run, reading, meditating, and then that particular mental state will just dissolve. It is not that it is something to which you have to return later on and give attention, it's not even that. So we should be much more ready, I think, to put aside some of these not-very-skilful and not-very-positive states, not sort of be misled by the idea that you've got to experience everything and mustn't suppress because there might be a danger of repression, etc. etc. We should be a bit more robust than that.

Sagaramati: Another one - it's in the same area. Just the difference between suppression and repression. Does suppression entail the suppression of the actual emotion or just the suppression of its externalization, and do you ...

S: (interrupting) Well, it may be either, it may be either. I mean, as in the instance I gave, the man in charge of the battle hasn't time even to experience the emotion in that sort of situation. It isn't that he simply controls the outward manifestation of the emotion. He ceases, almost, for the time being, to experience the emotion, but he's able to return to it afterwards.

Sagaramati: That suppression doesn't entail any, well what we'd call loss of energy, you're not cutting off from ...

S: Well, sometimes it does. If the emotion is a very powerful one, well you need energy to suppress it, so sometimes the holding of an emotion down does take up quite a lot of your energy. This may happen. You have to see the overall situation and what is the most desirable course of action, but suppression cannot be altogether ruled out, as in some cases it's a quite positive and healthy alternative, especially in the case of negative emotions, unskilful mental states generally. They don't have to be indulged, they don't even have to be experienced. I think we have to be very careful that we don't think of, say, negative emotions as something that we've got to experience, that if we don't [53] experience they're there and we're alienated from them. That is not necessarily the case. They can be of a lighter sort, that if you don't pay them too much attention they do actually dissolve. If it's something more deeply rooted and persistent, well that is different, that sort of emotion, say built up over many years, may be going back into childhood, you may well have to experience or re-experience. You may to some extent be alienated from that and have to recapture the experience. It's interesting, perhaps, at least psychologically, that people should seem to be so afraid of alienation. It doesn't seem to be the case that the ancient Greeks, for instance, were afraid of alienation. Anyway, let's pass on.

Sagaramati: That's it.

S: That's your stint.

Vessantara: Anandajyoti, you had a question about evolution.

Anandajyoti: You leave open in your talk, Bhante, the possibility of the Higher Evolution being, to an extent, collective. So is there a link here with your idea of the Cosmic Going for Refuge, and if so, to what extent is there a conflict between the cosmic Going for Refuge as a movement of the cosmos, and Going for Refuge as a conscious act of the individual?

S: Well, in what sense do I 'leave open'?

Anandajyoti: Well you leave it open to the extent that you leave open the possibility of humanity evolving to a higher level of awareness as a whole.

S: Ah, when I say 'as a whole' I don't mean as a sort of collective entity, but as a Spiritual Community, that is to say as a result of more intensive co-operation, let us say, between individuals. You do see the difference?

Anandajyoti: Yes.

S: Yes. What was the rest of the question?

Anandajyoti: Well the rest of the question was: Is there a link here with your idea of the Cosmic Going for Refuge. In a way the misunderstanding of the first part ...

S: (interrupting) Yes, if one uses that expression. I did use it very tentatively, and sort of poetically. The Cosmic Going for Refuge would be the Going for Refuge ... First of all, yes, maybe I could distinguish two senses. First of all [54] the Going for Refuge of a number of individuals on a cosmic scale. That's one sense, but in the other sense - I think this is the sense that I was getting at here - the sort of tendency in the cosmos as a whole to evolve, which ultimately culminates in what we call the following of the Path and the Going for Refuge. This ties up in a way with some points made in a book that I read recently and which Sagaramati is now reading on the - what's the title?

Sagaramati: 'Origins of Life'.

S: 'Origins of Life'. Where it's made clear that evolution is not just a category which applies to the biological field, but which applies to the cosmos as a whole. That evolution takes place even on the most elementary physical level. So if you conceive of the Going for Refuge as an extension, as an intensification of the evolutionary process, and a lifting of it to a higher level, then one can say not only is the whole cosmos evolving, but that the whole cosmos is Going for Refuge. Not that it is actually Going for Refuge or that everything in the Universe, in the cosmos, at this instant is going for refuge, but that that is the overall tendency of the whole Universe. (pause)

Vessantara: Could you give an example of the sort of evolutionary process this book's talking about?

S: I think you'll have to read the book itself because the examples are quite, as it were, technical. In fact, I'd encourage everybody to read the book who has any sort of interest in that kind of subject matter.

Sagaramati: But basically on the level of the subatomic, there is evolution happening, and it's something you find anywhere, whether you look at, on the cosmic scale, you look at galaxies, even galaxies, which shape everything, it's still actually a process of evolution. You can find even in the cosmos different forms of star clusters that are, as it were, from, they're like fossils from further back in the sort of evolution of the whole galactic set up.

Vessantara: Can you talk in terms of development of that? How do you distinguish development from, how in modern human society you distinguish between development and progress, progress being just sort of change? How do you distinguish development at that level, how do you know it's an evolution?

S: Well it's, I suppose one uses the criterion that Herbert Spencer developed, that evolution is from the more simple to the more complex.

[55]

Sagaramati: But that would mean that a computerized society was more evolved than, say, the Hellenic society, which wouldn't be the case in terms of how we see the evolution of consciousness.

S: But a computer is not more complex than the human brain; it's much much less complex, and the Greeks had human brains. (laughter) All right, so we've just got our little gadget which is much less complex than we ourselves. (pause)

Anandajyoti: So does that mean, Bhante, you discount the possibility of an evolution on a general level without the element of conscious effort; so do you discount the possibility of, say, humanity as a whole, through this continuance of the process of evolution, possibly evolving to a higher level, where maybe even the form that the consciousness manifests in is a different form?

S: Well the other day in one of the study groups we were talking about people's life stories - this is not so tangential as it might seem - and mentioned that on the previous two Tuscanies I had listened to all the life stories, and I'd got one overall impression from all of them, which was that the person concerned, as the person relating his life story approached, or began to approach, the point at which he made contact with the FWBO, there seemed to be sort of inevitability about it, it was really as though his whole life has really been directed to that end - or heading in that direction, even heading in the direction of ordination and Going for Refuge. So one can understand that retrospectively, but he could not have understood that at the very beginning; he would have a vague sense of, well, dissatisfaction, a movement in a particular direction, or trying to find a direction. He'd be moving but he wasn't sure where, or how, or towards what. So it's the same with the evolutionary process. You can't look back and see that, yes there has been an evolutionary process. You can look back from man, say, to the higher apes, and you can see that evolution has taken place, from the higher apes to man, but if you were an ape, it wouldn't be very easy to envisage the emergence of man. So it is rather like that in the case of the evolutionary process as a whole. Do you see what I'm getting at? It's not a straightforward linear process. It's a process that gradually sort of clarifies itself, gradually defines itself as time goes by. It's sort of, in the early stages, apparently sort of groping, and uncertain, but it achieves certainty and clarity as time goes on, until in the spiritual life itself, in the case of the spiritual path itself, it attains, so to speak, complete self-consciousness and clarity, thereby speeding up the whole overall process. (pause)

[56]

Vimalamitra: Would you say, then, Bhante, that, say, well, now, if you're into the kind of spiritual life now, you're a member of the Western Buddhist Order, if you had a strong intuition that you should go in a certain direction, and you couldn't reason it out, you couldn't be quite clear, that maybe you ought to go in that direction, because that might be, kind of,

leading you in the right direction to develop further?

S: It could be, it could be, or of course it could be the opposite; you don't know, because evolution is like that, evolution does go up blind alleys. Some branches of the evolutionary process, so to speak, do go up blind alleys. There've been lots of blind alleys, and that can happen on higher and ever higher levels. You may have the intuition to follow in a particular direction, but you may be going up a spiritual blind alley. You have to take that risk - that's why you'd be well advised to consult your spiritual friends. I mean, if they also had that sort of intuition, or if they did feel also that you ought to follow that particular line, well, you may be on safer ground. But you can't be sure. You may all be following a blind alley, going up a blind alley. (pause)

Also I suspect a little the use of the word "intuition". I mean intuition can cover so many things. It can cover your higher spiritual consciousness, your unconscious unskilful tendencies, etc. etc. Also it would depend on what it was your intuition was telling you to do - whether it was something relatively short-term or long-term, something that was reversible or irreversible, and so on. (pause)

Sagaramati: So in a sense, Kalyana Mitrata comes in in the evolutionary process as a way of the individual trying to clarify what is a bit subjective.

S: Well, I believe someone gave a talk about 'Mutual Aid', Prince Kropotkin's 'Mutual Aid'. Well, you could say that Kalyana Mitrata was mutual aid at the highest level, and had, as it were, spiritual evolutionary value. (pause)

Anandajyoti: Do you think, Bhante, that the traditional Indian cosmology, where you have a spiritual involution going along with material evolution, is adequate in the light of more recent evolutionary studies?

S: It is much more adequate than the Semitic cosmologies, so it provides at least a good starting point, let us say. Perhaps we shouldn't say more than that, because there isn't even an agreed cosmological pattern according to modern science - even the 'Big Bang' theory is not without its [57] opponents, it's by no means unanimously accepted, though it's accepted by a lot of scientists. (pause).

I think in its general outlines, traditional Indian cosmology is not out of step with modern scientific discoveries, whatever that may mean.

Anandajyoti: I was thinking more particularly of material evolution going hand-in-hand with spiritual involution rather than the wider perspective.

S: Well, science in any case does not profess to deal with the spiritual, so far as I know. So one couldn't really expect any verdict from that - on that, rather, from science. One would have to study the conclusions arrived at by modern science, if one can in fact speak in that sort of unitary way, and compare them with corresponding Buddhist findings, and also compare the whole scientific approach and its significance with the spiritual approach as such. I mean, this is quite a vast undertaking - I mean, what is the relation between scientific knowledge and what one might call spiritual knowledge? Has the one any bearing on the other or do they occupy two quite separate, as it were, watertight compartments? I mean, does

it make any difference to our spiritual life, to put it crudely, whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun goes round the earth? If it does make a difference, well how, and in what way? I mean, does it make a difference to our spiritual lives, that there isn't a Mount Meru and four continents and so on? Assuming that one takes those as physical realities.

Anandajyoti: I think what I was getting at, Bhante, was that there seems to be a correlation between material evolution and development of levels of consciousness, whereas in the - is it - as far as I understand it, in the traditional Indian picture, that the process goes in opposite ways, as you have a more - as evolution progresses materially, becomes more complex, you have a spiritual involution, which is a sort of - levels of awareness get lower as material evolution .

S: (interrupting) I don't think that there's really a substantial difference here. Though of course in both cases there is an implied differentiation between the material and, so to speak, the spiritual. If one finds that in association, say, with a more complex organism, material organism, a more refined consciousness arises, well one can look at that in various ways, one can speak of that more refined consciousness as an epiphenomenon of the material organism, that is to say the direct, almost chemical product of it - that's materialism - or you can speak of it as something entirely different, a [58] different principle which is enabled, so to speak, to manifest on account of the higher organization, more complex organization of that more developed organism. That's a sort of dualism. And one can go further than that, and can envisage that consciousness, which is now manifesting through the material form, as the last and lowest link of a whole chain of consciousnesses which stretches up and up.

This is the traditional Indian view, one might say. In some ways, philosophically speaking, the Samkhya comes very close to Buddhism. This was pointed out by many early scholars, but was rather discounted since, and maybe it ought to be looked at again, because the Samkhya - which is one of the six schools of Indian, allegedly Vedic, philosophy (I say allegedly Vedic because the Samkhya isn't really based on the Vedas at all) - according to the Samkhya there are two primordial principles: one is purusha and the other is prakriti. Purusha is spirit, consciousness; prakriti is nature. Prakriti consists of three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas. In the beginning, as it were, in prakriti, the sattva, rajas and tamas are in equilibrium, but owing to the sheer proximity of purusha, spirit, who doesn't actually do anything, but owing to his sheer proximity the Prakriti starts to evolve, and it, so to speak, divides into two poles, what we would call a pole of consciousness, which is able to reflect the spirit, and what we would call a pole of matter, and the pole of matter, as it were, evolves upwards, and the pole of spirit, as it were, involves downwards, and they eventually meet, and we can say that, in our sort of modern terms that is where, say, human evolution takes place.

So this is, say, the traditional Indian view which seems, more or less, with modifications, to have been - I won't say taken over by - but seen by Buddhism, as though the pre-Buddhist Indian seers had some kind of intuition of the truth of these matters, and the Buddhists also had. They saw things in much the same way, but in as much as they had perhaps an even higher or deeper vision, they did modify that outlook of the Samkhya to some extent. I think all this needs quite a bit of investigation. (pause)

Sagaramati: You wouldn't - the idea that the biological produces the conscious, or the consciousness - that would go against Buddhism, in a way, because there's meant to be three factors for the birth of a being, there's the biological but there's a consciousness, as it were,

ready to be reborn.

S: Yes ... one needs to look very much at this whole question of the distinction between the material and the so-called spiritual. If one approaches it in a naive sort of way one [59] lands oneself in all sorts of philosophical difficulties. (pause) But I think one can quite reasonably think in terms of a material evolution into which there is, as it were, progressively infused the results of a spiritual involution. Perhaps one can't say very much more than that.

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One must avoid thinking literalistically - "Where does the consciousness come from?" Questions like that are based on literalistic assumptions which, if unquestioned or unexamined, will only result in confusion.

Sagaramati: It's very very difficult to think ()...

S: (interrupting) It seems to me, perhaps one could go so far as to say that there is no such thing as metaphysics in the scientific sense. There can only be a pseudo-scientific metaphysics - all metaphysics is essentially metaphorical, and therefore poetic. If you try to state the facts of the case, so to speak, in non-metaphysical terms, then you are left pretty much with what seems to have been the Buddha's own position, simply speaking in terms of, well, 'In dependence upon this, that arises', without committing yourself to any metaphysical position whatever. If you do try to elaborate a metaphysical position, I think its truth is of, so to speak, the poetic rather than the scientific order, even though the language in which the formulation may be couched is scientific in the sense of being conceptual. I think that needs to be borne in mind. But, nonetheless, poetic truth, one might say, is still truth, though not of the scientific order.

Anyway, let's go on from there - any further questions?

Anandajyoti: Not from our group.

Vessantara: There are some ... The 'Perfect Effort' lecture talks about developing, talks about bhavana, meditation; there are some questions about (?)

Ian Polke: Is there any textual evidence for the arupa dhyanas being transcendental, any traditional Buddhist texts?

S: Well there are texts which make one think. For instance, there is a well-known episode in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta describing the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment. It has been noticed that the Buddha attains - attains parinibbana - [60] rather, not Enlightenment - attains Parinibbana - directly, not after going through the arupa-dhyanas but after going through the rupa-dhyanas. I don't know if you remember this, at the time of the Parinibbana, the Buddha is represented as going through the rupa-dhyanas, then through the arupa-dhyanas, then coming down to ordinary consciousness and then going through the rupa-dhyanas and from the fourth rupa-dhyana attaining Parinibbana. Scholars have already used this particular passage as evidence of the fact that originally in the Buddha's teaching, or in the Buddha's experience, if you like, there were only four dhyanas, four mundane dhyanas, and that the four arupa-dhyanas were, so to speak, later added on to that series. So in that case you have

rupa-dhyanas followed immediately by Nibbana itself, by the Transcendental. If you bring in, therefore, the arupa-dhyanas at all, then they would be perhaps aspects of the Transcendental rather than further stages of the mundane. Again perhaps one should beware of literalistic thinking. I mentioned the other day that there is a Tibetan tradition that the Brahmaviharas when united, so to speak, with Sunyata become the aparamanus, that is to say the infinitudes as they are also called. In which case it would seem that the Brahmaviharas become Transcendental, in as much as they become unlimited. So in as much as the arupa states are also, at least the first of them, unlimited, because there's the sphere of infinite space, there's the sphere of infinite consciousness, well that would also seem to suggest something that transcended the reach of the mundane.

Ian Polke: So it's suggested rather than stated anywhere directly?

S: I think - one would need to go through all the Pali literature and extract all the material on this particular topic, which is in fact quite extensive, but certainly the traditional view as handed down by the Theravadins, and Sarvastivadins too, on the whole, is that the arupa-dhyanas are mundane and that beyond them is the Transcendental. One is looking at all these things critically and trying to establish perhaps the form of the Buddha's personal teaching.

Ian Polke: Other things on a similar note ... What is the relation between the initial concentration object in ... sorry, what's the relation between the concentration object in the higher dhyanas and the arupa-dhyanas and the initial concentration object? For instance, I presume that one could ascend to the arupa-dhyanas, assuming them to be mundane for the moment, you would start off, say, with the breath; what sort of concentration object remains in the arupa-dhyanas?

[061]

S: Well, it's quite simple - in the case of the arupa-dhyanas, the concentration object is the preceding arupa-dhyana. For instance, there is the experience of the infinitude of space, so one contemplates the infinitude of space and one realizes that in as much as space is infinite, and in as much as one is contemplating the infinitude of space, your consciousness must, like space itself, be infinite. In that way, you pass from the experience of infinite space to the experience of infinite consciousness. This is the traditional explanation. You're not concerned obviously with a concentration object in the ordinary sense, because you've passed far beyond the need, even, to concentrate in that sort of way.

Ian Polke: A similar point regarding concentration object: To transfer from the rupa to the arupa-dhyanas, is it a spontaneous process or is a specific technique required such as you just described from the transference from ...

S: (interrupting) Well an effort will certainly be needed. If you've kept up and if you're sustaining an effort, if you are fully experiencing a particular state, in this case a particular dhyana, and you are putting energy into continuing to experience that state, when you have, as it were, fully experienced that state but you are continuing to put energy into the experience of that state, well then spontaneously you will begin to experience a higher state, in a sense even without exactly being aware of what is happening in a technical sense. But you will need to continue to make the effort. You won't sort of automatically be carried over into that higher state without making an effort. So one doesn't really need any technique. If you persist in your

efforts to experience the lower degree, assuming that the experience is a mundane one, well, sooner or later then, that experience will overflow, so to speak, into the next highest stage.

Ian Polke: So if you persisted in the deepening of the fourth rupa-dhyana, the arupa dhyanas being assumed to be mundane for the moment, then you would, as that deepened, you would eventually reach a point at which it would overflow into the arupa dhyanas.

[61a]

S: Yes assuming that you sustain your effort to experience that particular state.

Ian Polke: This next thing takes the opposite point of view almost. If the arupa dhyanas are now unconditioned, one speaks normally of setting up the process of discursive thought almost, to enter the samadhis. Would...

S: (Interrupting) No. I didn't speak in terms of a process of discursive thought to enter into the samadhis. I mean discursive thought is present in the first and second dhyanas. One speaks in terms of a return to the experience of discursive thought assuming one has experienced dhyanas which transcend discursive thought in order to set up the development of Insight.

Ian Polke: Yes. I was using samadhi in the sense of a transcendental dhyana. (Pause)

Vessantara: It seems in a way when you go to the first arupa dhyana to the second one you are performing that process in a way. When you say that you go from the consciousness of space to infinite consciousness reflecting on your experience of space is that equivalent.

S: Well one says reflecting that isn't necessarily to imply a discursive process. One sees. One can perhaps put it no more definitely than that. You just see. That - your consciousness, in as much as you are conscious of the infinitude of space - is itself infinite. One could of course speak of a very subtle discursive process but again one mustn't be misled by taking things too literally.

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Sagaramati: But isn't it, in the tradition, you have dhyanic experience but you come down to neighbourhood concentration and develop insight from there ...

S: Yes.

Sagaramati: ... whereas this way you seem to be going from the fourth dhyana, as a continuation of your efforts in the fourth dhyana you go on to the transcendental level. Is that conceivable?

S: I think one also has to beware of expressions like 'come down' . These are also quite metaphorical expressions, though, yes, as you say, things are expressed in, so to speak, a contrary manner.

Sagaramati: But could you say that, say the fourth dhyana represents a refining of the subject-object dichotomy, that just working on that, without thinking about impermanence or anything, you could transcend the subject-object dichotomy?

S: Yes, I think I have spoken in these sort of terms, that you 'refine it away', so to speak. You can either directly attack it, you can sort of 'refine it away'. I think, if I'm not mistaken, that the traditional conception of cetovimutti corresponds to that, whereas pannavimutti corresponds to the direct tackling of things with Insight - corresponds to the Sarvastivadin pratisankyaniroda and apratisankyaniroda.

Sagaramati: Is that the two Unconditioned elements?

S: No; you look it up, it's something different. (laughter) (pause) Well, it's cessation consequent upon, let's say, investigation, and cessation which is consequent upon non-investigation, broadly speaking. (pause) It's as though in one case the conditioned is allowed to die out, in the other it's just killed.

Sagaramati: Maybe one is associated with the greed type, and one with the hate type.

S: Yes, yes it could be, yes.

Anandajyoti: I was wondering, with the, where it just dies out and you refine the subject-object dichotomy, does that imply that the distinctive feature of the Buddha's teaching was that he was able to convey, well, in conceptual terms, or pass down in conceptual terms, a basis for the development of Insight, that in a sense you could, you needn't, let's say you don't need those, that you could just work away on your meditation, and work away on refining the subject-object [63] distinction, until it just faded away.

S: If there was, as it were, sufficient momentum behind your spiritual life, if you had a real dissatisfaction with mundane existence, that would carry you forward, even in the absence of any anticipatory sort of philosophical knowledge about further states of the Unconditioned and so on. A great, in a way, disadvantage in modern times is that we know all about these things theoretically, but there isn't a sufficient motivation, a sufficiently strong motivation actually to transcend the conditioned.

Sagaramati: So it is possible to be without micchaditthis, without having really studied - is that true?

S: I think that would be unlikely. But I think that if there was no outside interference, and if you did have that strong motivation, that strong dissatisfaction with the conditioned, it would carry you through the micchaditthis; you would yourself see through them as a result of your own experience, unless of course they were strongly reinforced from without. You can sometimes see this happening in the case of Christian mystics who do attain to a certain understanding, a certain insight, a certain vision, but it's contradicted by the teaching authority of the Church, and the mystic is puzzled and does not always know what to do. Even, perhaps, lapses or relapses into what we would describe as micchaditthi. (pause)

Vimalamitra: So it does seem quite important to have this feeling of keeping on going whether you're getting to the first or second dhyana or not.

S: Yes.

Vimalamitra: ... whereas in a way there seems to be quite a great temptation, if you were to

get into that experience, to kind of just rest there.

S: Yes. One finds this as a sort of constant refrain in some suttas, that having attained so far you should not rest there, but push on.

Vimalamitra: But, why in a way, I mean, presumably, well, there seem to be quite a few Hindus who get quite into the dhyanas, but they don't seem to, obviously they haven't kind of gone on.

S: Well there is always this tendency to settle down in something, to settle down in these sort of higher mental and even spiritual states, especially when they're very enjoyable, and even to exploit them, or to allow others to exploit them, [64] or allow others to exploit you, because it may become, well you yourself may feel in a very sort of highly positive, exuberant state for instance, and that may be evident to other people, other people may be attracted to you, and in India it's very easy for people to start thinking that you must be some kind of divine incarnation, you may even start thinking that yourself, and in that way you become the centre of a cult, and you're handing out teachings and people are flocking round you, and under those conditions you don't think any more of making any further effort yourself. You come to a dead stop, and perhaps you even start regressing. (pause) One might say that India is full of mystics and semi-mystics who have come to a stop in this sort of way. And think mainly in terms of founding their own ashram and setting up some sort of cult almost of themselves. But there are others, more sincere, of whom one perhaps doesn't hear, who don't fall for that temptation and remain in isolation, just continue meditating, relatively unknown.

Vimalamitra: So, presumably these kind of people who attain a certain state must think that they're Enlightened.

S: Sometimes they do - sometimes they even say so. I mean, for instance, people like Rajneesh, to take a prominent example, does say that he is Enlightened, and there are people in America who say that they are Enlightened. I've met, myself, people who said that they were Enlightened in the full sense, but I was not able to accept that statement of theirs. And sometimes other people say it on your behalf.

Vimalamitra: What is it, say, that would kind of keep you going on, I mean, what is that?

S: Well in the absence of your own genuine desire for further progress, well it can only be either your own teacher or your spiritual friends. Your own spiritual friends, whether more developed than yourself or equally developed. Sometimes even someone who is less developed may be able to see that you are not yet perfect! (laughter)

Vimalamitra: So it is actually just a knowledge inside yourself, a feeling that, well, there is more to be done.

S: Yes, because you remain dissatisfied with the state that you've attained. It isn't giving you everything that you want, everything for the sake of which you originally set out on your quest - there's still something missing. So therefore you think you must press on - as the Buddha did; he wasn't satisfied with what he'd attained under his early teachers, even though they were very satisfied indeed, very pleased with him apparently, but he was not pleased with himself. (pause)

[65]

Sagaramati: Could that, maybe, be where the Unconditioned comes in? You're not satisfied with anything conditioned.

S: Oh yes, because if your original motivation is sufficiently radical, it's a motivation to experience the Unconditioned, and nothing conditioned is therefore going to satisfy you for very long.

Sagaramati: Though maybe you wouldn't have any idea of an Unconditioned.

S: No, you might have no idea of it in the conceptual sense at all, you would merely know that you were still not satisfied, and that would be enough to keep you going, to keep you on the move. On a much lower level, it's rather like the experience of people who go shopping around different spiritual groups. And eventually they come into contact with the FWBO. Then they feel, 'Now we've arrived, now we're satisfied. This is the sort of group that we want to be involved with', but when they were sort of moving from one group to another earlier on, it was not that they had a clear conception of the sort of group that they wanted, or even that they wanted a group at all, and then found that perfectly fulfilled by the FWBO. It's something much blinder than that, so to speak. But nonetheless, still in a way quite sure.

Sagaramati: Could that be in any way connected with sraddha? Or is that something different?

S: Yes, you could regard sraddha as the more emotional aspect of that. You have a faith in something which you've not as yet experienced, not yet seen, have no idea of, but you've got a feeling for it.

Ajita: Can you say that the more an Order Member became devoted and had faith, the more he'd be, in a sense, more ambitious in the spiritual life? - that would come out in his practice or his work etc.?

S: One could say that, if one chose to use an ambiguous word like ambitious. There might be a danger in using that word, but perhaps we shouldn't be frightened of it. One certainly shouldn't say, or couldn't say that an Order Member should be unambitious in his spiritual life. (pause)

So, any further questions, or are all those all the questions of all the groups?

Vessantara: () (long pause) ... one very minor matter - in the meeting this morning there was a difference of opinion about offerings. People making [66] offerings to the shrine, say during a puja. Some people were offering things which were maybe valuable to them, say like malas or something like that, and then, after the puja they'd take them back again. One school of thought felt that if you were going to offer something then it should be offered and after the puja you should have no claim on it - others felt that you could make in a way more beautiful offerings, offerings which were meaningful to you, but still take back the thing afterwards. Would you care to comment?

S: Well, the Buddhist tradition is quite ambiguously that you don't take back an offering.

Vessantara: Quite unambiguously?

S: Unambiguously, that you don't take back an offering. Otherwise it's like giving someone a box of chocolates and taking it back afterwards, and eating it yourself! So an offering as an offering, yes is definitely made once and for all. But on the other hand you might say, well, there is the question of the beautification of the shrine, and you can certainly lend things which belong to you for the sake of beautifying the shrine - but that is rather different from actually offering them. So perhaps there needs to be a clear distinction between these two things.

Ratnapani: Could one suggest, Bhante, that, say someone offering a mala that means something to that person, so that what they're actually offering was not a string of beads, but some sort of gratitude, or some higher feeling or aspiration, or some aspect of going for refuge, that that is what was embodied in these things that they were putting on the shrine, so in a way the object was merely the box containing the chocolates, so what you took away was merely the empty chocolate-box, as it were, leaving the ... (laughter)

S: Well! It would be rather odd if you gave someone a box of chocolates and just took out all the chocolates and said, 'Well, I'm giving you the chocolates but I'm taking away the box.'

Ratnapani: You'd presumably eaten them in the (concluding) puja ...

S: If you were to say, 'Well, the box is of more value to me than the chocolates', but if the box is of more value to you than the chocolates, well surely you should have given the other person the box, as the more valuable thing, and kept the chocolates!

[67]

Ratnapani: Yes, but you're not necessarily saying that, you're giving the most valuable thing and keeping the least.

S: Well, if you can even give the most valuable thing, how come that you should not give the least valuable thing? It seems to be a question of the cow go through the door but the tail gets struck! (laughter) Do you see what I mean?

Ratnapani: Well, maybe it's because you want to give a lot of chocolates but merely have one box and have to take it back to refill it.

S: It might be! No, I think I'm a bit unhappy about this sort of watering down the idea of offerings - offerings being a form of dana, as distinct from actual decorations. People in the Buddhist East, they often lend things, yes, to decorate a shrine or a hall for a particular occasion - that's quite understood. Tibetans often lend their thangkas and their lamps and so on and they are just definitely taken back afterwards. So I think there should be a clear-cut distinction between what one offers and what one does not. One shouldn't even appear to sort of offer something and then take it back. I think that's the real criterion here. An offering should be an offering and a non-offering should be a non-offering.

Vimalamitra: What about if someone offers - you often see little rolls of things they've written, maybe a text or something, and they - afterwards they take it back.

S: Well, what does one mean by 'offer'? If you offer something to a living individual, well that's clear, you make it over to him for his use. That in future belongs to him, it does not any longer belong to you. But when you offer to the Buddha, you give to the Buddha, well in what sense do you give? Usually, of course, in the Buddhist East, once you've given something, by way of offering it, it's on the shrine, it's the perks of whoever is caring for the shrine, that is it's the perks of the bhikkhus or lamas or whatever. Do you see what I mean? And they'd be very annoyed if you tried to take it back! (laughter) For instance, if you offer coins, as some people do in the Buddhist East, or if you offer scarves - for instance, the question of scarves is quite important. In Tibetan temples you offer a scarf, and on festival occasions the shrine will be inundated with perhaps hundreds of scarves - those scarves are the property of the monastery. Now, for instance, if you may turn up at the monastery and find you've forgotten to bring a scarf, you'll just have a word with a monk and he'll sell you one of those scarves that have been offered and you'll then offer it again. And this is quite accepted, because having been offered, the scarf is the property of the monastery to be used for the monastery's benefit. [68] So I think one should give some thought to these matters along these lines, and be quite clear about what is given, or offered in the sense of being given, and lent for decorative purposes. In the case of, say, scrolls that people have placed on the shrine, I think if they are sort of confessional scrolls, they should be burned afterwards. I think that is the best thing to do with them, either as part of the puja itself, or people just individually burn them, or someone burns them; but I don't want to sort of water down the idea of actual giving, this is what I'm more concerned with. Sometimes, of course, people do ask for things to be placed on the shrine and blessed. That is, they may give a guru or a lama something to keep with him for a while so as to bless it - especially, say, a mala - so that's clearly understood. That object is deposited with him for a short while - it may be a matter of minutes, it may be a matter of weeks - for purposes of blessing, and that is given back. It is not a gift to that particular person. Traditional Buddhists are quite clear about all these things, so perhaps we just need to be clear what we're actually doing. So if you, for instance, as one says now, 'offers one's mala', well one is not offering one's mala in the sense of giving it to the Buddha and then taking it back, you are placing it on the shrine, so to speak, for a blessing, or in the sense of symbolizing your consecration of that particular spiritual activity, represented by the mala, to the goal of the spiritual life.

Devamitra: But presumably it wouldn't be appropriate to do that when other people are making offerings, if you see what I mean, in a general sort of offering procedure.

S: If they were making offerings in the sense of actually giving? For instance, supposing - this does sometimes happen, say in a Tibetan temple - there were offerings of money, there was a big bowl, and everyone was putting in money: If you threw in your rosary, it would be taken that was actually given, and the monastery would sell that and get the money, if it was an offering, a gift, in kind. It would not be taken that you were just asking for it to be blessed.

Sagaramati: In the offerings section of the puja it should be offerings, not decoration or a combination?

S: Of course offerings have become sort of decorative, but I think we have to, as it were, watch that and to ask ourselves, well what do we mean by making offerings - maybe it comes down to the fact that we have to ask ourselves 'what do we mean by making offerings?'

Steve Murray: I was thinking, perhaps, you could bring up both, so that would clarify the

situation, say with the offering part of the puja, you could bring up an offering, and also, with the other hand, as it were, a sort of decorative item for the shrine.

S: Well, the fact that something that is given is decorative, doesn't mean that it is any the less given. A bundle of old bank-notes can be very undecorative, but they also are given. So you could have decorative gifts and undecorative gifts. I personally think bundles of bank-notes scattered across the shrine look quite beautiful! (laughter) I'm sure some treasurers of Centres will agree with me. (laughter)

Anandajyoti: Do you think, then, Bhante, that if people do want to put their malas on their shrine for them to be blessed, as it were, they should not do that during the section where other people are making offerings, during the recitation, say, of the Avalokitesvara Mantra?

S: I wouldn't, without further thought, like to lay down a hard and fast rule, but I'm just concerned that the two things should be quite clear in people's minds. I think that is the main point - whether you are actually giving something or not. And if you're actually giving it, in the sense of offering it on the shrine, well obviously if it's given there must be some arrangement for someone to take charge of that, and make use of it. Perhaps the question doesn't really arise on a retreat like this. It may arise at a Centre; it may be doubtful whether someone has placed something on the shrine as a gift to be utilized by the Centre, or for a blessing and that he will take it back later on. Perhaps it's in the Centre context that these things need to be clear. I mean, if someone was to scatter bundles of bank-notes over the shrine just for decorative effect, it would be rather disappointing. (laughter)

Mike Howes: Bhante, what about, I'm always happy to go to the shrine and give an offering of a bit of incense that's been put there for me but in a way it's not really an offering is it?

S: No, it isn't. This point has been discussed many and many a time in the past, years and years ago, and people were asked to bring their own offerings. It seems very difficult to get people to do this, though some Centres are more successful than others. I think in some of the more peripheral Centres it's much more common. When I say peripheral I mean smaller Centres away from London, or even away from England. It seems more successful there, people do actually bring things and offer them; but it isn't really an offering in the strict [70] sense if it's provided for you. Buddhists in the East are very much better in this way - they wouldn't dream of just offering something that's provided for them to offer, it's not a real gift at all - I mean as in the case I mentioned, of the scarves, well if they find themselves without an offering, they buy an offering from the monks, and then offer it, because it's theirs and they have given it - they buy a scarf, in this case.

Anandajyoti: We could do the same at Centres. We could have the incense that's usually placed for offerings in front of the shrine just in the reception room.

S: Yes, people have tried this; it has sometimes worked, but, again it hasn't always worked. I don't know what the current practice is in, say, the LBC, and in other Centres, Glasgow, I just don't know.

Martin Redman: LBC the incense is provided () sometimes on festival days there are flowers and sometimes incense for sale.

S: Yes, people do bring flowers quite often on special occasions - I noticed recently when I was down there, quite a lot of people brought flowers, which they actually did bring to the Centre, which they bought or picked in their own gardens.

Ajita: I think we became influenced by the Chinese Buddhists (who've got their own place?) - they always buy incense, so we find that () weekend classes, at the weekend classes people just buy a pack of incense and stick the whole lot on sometimes - we might have about a hundred sticks of incense on at one time.

S: Well, some people might say, well, they are already giving quite a lot to the Centre, well someone might be giving, say, a monthly donation by way of standing order - then it seems a bit ridiculous to ask him to buy a small stick of incense when he comes along. Though, actually, a traditional Buddhist would not think that strange - they'd say, 'Well, a gift is a gift' and even when you offer a stick of incense it must also be a gift, but we need not, perhaps, take such a strict view. The main thing is that people should have a feeling of giving, and it should be clear if someone is giving something or not giving something, otherwise confusion may arise. If you sort of pocket something - on behalf of the Centre of course - something that someone intends taking back after it's been duly blessed. (pause) What was decided in this particular instance - or was anything decided?

[71]

Vessantara: That we'd ask you.

S: So what did you gather from what I've said?

Vessantara: That there isn't a hard and fast rule, but that people should be clear what they are doing, and, especially, they should have a feeling of giving.

Sagaramati: Yes, the argument was that people giving rosaries felt that that was definitely an offering. I brought the point up because I didn't think it was an offering.

S: Because if it is to be considered as definitely given, well then, obviously, it's to be taken by whoever is responsible for organizing the whole proceedings, and they either sell these things and raise cash from them, or they give them away to certain people for certain purposes - they become their property. This is the sort of practical result of it, just as when you give a cash donation.

Sagaramati: I think it is - has been a tendency on retreats - I noticed in the Scottish retreat, last retreat, I put, during the puja I ...

Tape comes to an end

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PERFECT AWARENESS

Anandajyoti: Was there any reason, Bhante, why you discussed this limb of the Eightfold Path in terms of 'The Four Levels of Awareness', rather than say in terms of 'The Four Foundations of Mindfulness'?

S: The Four Levels, the Four Dimensions of Mindfulness include the Four Foundations, so one was discussing it in more comprehensive terms. Simply that.

Anandajyoti: Oh! I see. I wondered whether you thought that it might be more approachable, the way you approached it, in terms of the Four Dimensions of Awareness, rather than in terms of The Four Foundations of Mindfulness? Whether you had thought that it might be a more approachable method?

S: In as much as it is more comprehensive, I think to that extent it is more approachable.

Sagaramati: The Four Levels - is that traditional?

S: No, that isn't traditional. As a formulation it isn't traditional, but obviously the material is to be found in tradition.

Anandajyoti: Would you find the level of Awareness of Reality within the Four Foundations of Mindfulness?

S: Yes, that you would find in the sense that there is awareness of Dhammas. This can be understood in a twofold manner, or in two senses, which are related, that is to say, as awareness or mindfulness of the various traditional formulas of the teaching, or of course for the realities which those formulas represent, for instance the Five Skandhas. Though sometimes that is understood simply as the calling to mind of these various conceptual formulations as the Five Skandhas. But I think that that isn't really enough. That's only a sort of starting point. The aim is really to penetrate through to the reality, so to speak, which that particular teaching represents, or which it tries to convey, or tries to communicate. The two new elements, so to speak, as compared with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are of course awareness of other people, awareness of one's environment and awareness of nature. There are many passages in the Pali Canon which go to show that those forms of mindfulness, though not actually enumerated in any formula, were certainly not to be neglected. I mean for instance the monks were not allowed to travel from place to place in the rainy season because they might walk upon, might tread upon, growing crops. This certainly suggests some kind of environmental awareness one might say. Similarly, you can hardly behave properly, hardly behave skilfully or ethically towards other people, unless to begin with you are aware of other people, you are aware of them as sentient beings. So in that particular [73] treatment of Perfect Mindfulness, it's not that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are excluded, it's more that they are incorporated into a more comprehensive, albeit not as a formulation, traditional, formulation. (Pause)

Anandajyoti: Yes, we've got another question. We were wondering, Bhante, how would the practice of mindfulness be affected by the transition from the mundane eightfold path, to the transcendental eightfold path?

S: Well in one way in which it would be affected would be that it would tend to be uninterrupted. (Pause)

Sagaramati: So it would be present and just would never disappear?

S: Well, I did advisedly use the term 'tend'. Because I didn't want to suggest that it would be

absolutely uninterrupted, in the full sense, because if one is thinking in terms of stream entry, well stream entry is, so to speak, only stream entry. There are further stages beyond that. So if Perfect Mindfulness does become absolutely perfect with stream entry, it suggests there is no further room for improvement. So the improvement can only consist in terms of greater continuity. So therefore with stream entry at least, mindfulness although greatly stabilized and much more continuous than before, is no longer perhaps absolutely continuous in all respects. But certainly if one did enter the stream there would be a noticeable improvement in one's mindfulness, and it would start, no doubt, to percolate through even into, say, the dream state. I don't know if anybody is in the position to say that since they, say, became involved with the Friends, or since they took up meditation, their mindfulness has improved. Maybe one hasn't been involved a sufficient number of years but I wonder whether anybody has noticed anything like that. That they have, broadly speaking, become more mindful over the years. Because one [74] should have done, but if it's only a matter of two, three, or four years the change might not have been remarkable enough for one to notice. (Pause)

Sagaramati: It's hard to say, isn't it. It's hard to remember what you were like ten years ago. Probably weren't very mindful ten years ago!

S: Well if you can't remember what you were like ten years ago, perhaps that means that you are very different now. And therefore have improved. It could of course mean simply that you don't have a very good memory.

Sagaramati: I think I'm more aware of things, definitely. In terms of just ... well, when you look at them. Well ... that's a sort of obvious ...

S: And aware no doubt of your own reactions to things. So that the reactions aren't quite so ... reactive as they were before. (Pause)

Padmaraja: What do you mean by being more mindful in the sleep state? What do you mean by that?

S: Well, everybody knows that in the sleep state there is not consciousness as in the ordinary waking state. So therefore you are not aware of yourself as dreaming. And therefore not aware of what is happening to you in the dream state. In the same way that you would be aware of what was happening to you in the waking state. But as one does become aware more generally, more mindful generally, you'll find that you start having the experience of actually being in the dream state experiencing dreams, but knowing that you are dreaming. In other words it's as though the self consciousness of the waking state continues into the dream. So you can be aware of what is happening in the dream, even control what is happening in the dream, or at least control your thoughts, which in the dream state comes to the same thing. In much the same way as in the waking state you can control your reactions or your responses to the things that happen to you. Has anyone any experience of this? I know some people in the Movement do have. In other words there isn't that complete discontinuity between the waking state and the dream state that there usually is.

Mike Howes: What about awareness during a state which is perhaps deep sleep, non-dream, is there a sort of awareness being carried through there?

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S: This again raises the question of the nature of awareness itself, it raises the question of different levels of, so to speak, consciousness. For instance, sometimes we dream, and when we wake up we know that we've dreamed. But we can't remember the content of the dream at all. We feel in a rather strange state, especially as we slip back into the waking state, we sort of make a last minute, a last second attempt to grasp the content of the dream, but it eludes us. We've no recollection of it. But at the same time we are left with a sense that a very great deal has happened during the dream state. So we are not conscious of the dream, we are not conscious of the dream state, but nonetheless, within the dream state, so to speak, there is consciousness. It's as though one level of consciousness is sealed off from another so that from the level of the waking state, the dream state is unconscious. You could apply that by analogy to the so called state of deep sleep too. An analogy I used to give is that of the underground chamber. There may be an underground chamber, and it may be brilliantly lit within, and it may contain all sorts of things, even all sorts of treasures. But if it's sealed up, if there is no opening, if there is no window, no door, then you are unable to see into it. So far as you are concerned it's just dark, it's just black, there is nothing there. But if you can just make a little opening, well then you can peep into it, you just get a glimpse of it. So it's as though in the dream state you are inside that underground chamber. But when you are in the waking state you are looking at that underground chamber from the outside, and there is no door or window through which you can see inside it. So as I said, it's as though one level of consciousness is sealed off from another. And the extension of consciousness to those levels doesn't so much consist in making those levels conscious, but in opening a sort of door, or window, or channel of communication between the different levels. So this I think could apply as much to the state of deep sleep as to the dream state itself.

Mike Howes: Is there anyway one can go about trying to achieve this, or is it just a matter of awareness, practice?

S: The general practice of awareness will, eventually, have some such result. But nonetheless, there are more specific practices. For instance one of them is that immediately before you go to sleep you make an effort to be very mindful, and you make a strong resolution that the mindfulness [76] is going to continue into sleep, or emerge within the sleep state. One can do that. One can also repeat a mantra as one falls asleep. That will help in the same way.

Sagaramati: There are actually some books on techniques used in tribal societies; Suvajra's tried them and he says it works. Lucid dreaming I think they call it - where you are aware in the dream. Do you think these techniques are worthwhile?

S: Well - in as much as they do, so to speak, extend consciousness, extend awareness to these other levels, or at least dissolve the layers of unconsciousness, so to speak, between the different levels of consciousness - yes they are worthwhile I would say. I haven't come across those particular books, In some ways it's surprising, in some ways it isn't surprising that such techniques are known to so called primitive peoples. (Pause). Were those the only questions about mindfulness?

Sagaramati: We said that that the far enemy of mindfulness is distraction. Is there a near enemy to mindfulness?

S: One could say, and here I'm improvising, that the near enemy of mindfulness was alienated awareness, or even self-consciousness in the ordinary colloquial sense. I don't know if there

are any other suggestions.

Sagaramati: Could you say more about self consciousness in the colloquial sense?

S: We did touch upon it in our discussion group last night I think, that when you are so conscious of yourself as doing something, or saying something, that that consciousness inhibits or interferes with what you are actually doing or saying. I'm sure everybody's familiar with that sort of state. You often experience it when you get up to give a talk. You're so conscious of yourself as giving a talk, so conscious of yourself in relation to the audience, and the audience in relation to you, you're not just conscious of the audience, that you sort of trip over yourself. You find it difficult to be spontaneous, difficult to be direct. But ideally, when you stand up to address an audience you should address them as simply and easily as when you ask someone to pass the sugar. Actually with practice it does happen, I can say this quite [77] confidently from my own experience that yes, it does happen, after you've given many many talks, giving talks becomes such an ordinary thing, such a usual thing, you do it completely without self-consciousness. Especially when you get into the habit of doing it when you are giving one talk after another.

Sagaramati: Doesn't it lose a certain edge? I find that doing a class, the first time you're doing a class, you're a bit on edge, but it somehow gives you a certain (verve). But when you get into a sort of routine of doing a class, you don't feel nervous when you do it, but it's almost like something is actually lost. Its become too matter-of-fact.

S: Well there's the fact that an experience or a situation is a new one, is somewhat stimulating, and it tends to concentrate the mind. So what you have to be careful of is when you are say taking a class for the tenth, or the twentieth or the hundredth time, the fact that it isn't a novel situation doesn't mean that you cease to give it your full attention, your full concentration, and cease perhaps to find it stimulating. You have to try to see it as a new situation each time, as it is in fact, a new situation. Because there are new people there, there are different people there. Even if there are the same people, they're not quite the same as they were last week. You're not the same as you were last week. You don't have to say exactly the same things in exactly the same way. So you should try to see the situation as a new situation every time. Because it is in fact a new situation. But obviously there are degrees of newness, and an entirely new group of people, perhaps an entirely different country would perhaps stimulate you and concentrate you to an even greater extent. So I think you have to watch and see whether you are not becoming stale, and whether you are ceasing to respond to the situation in the way that you should. It is perhaps, time you had a rest, or time you had a change. I think it is very important that you are not preoccupied with the idea of the class, that you don't build up an idea in your mind of, "oh this is the beginners class, this is what the beginners class is like," and respond to that. It's important that you actually try to see, to be aware of the people that you actually have got before you on that particular occasion, and respond accordingly. Not the old, "here we go again, it's [78] the same old eight-fold path, it's the same old Mindfulness of Breathing, and they've heard it all before, and I've heard it all before, but we've got to explain it yet again in the same old words!" That is not the recipe for a successful lively class. I personally think that one should be able to go on for years taking beginners classes without becoming stale. And of course it is important that you should arrive at the class not feeling tired, and properly prepared. It's difficult for you to be mindful, to be aware, and see the people who are there as they are, and respond accordingly, if you yourself are tired. Or if they are tired even. Because they can't give you the feed-back that they should

be giving. The classes are not something to be squeezed in after work, but something to be prepared for, and given very serious attention.

Ratnapani: There was one thing I wondered about, Bhante, about this business of being nervous of giving a talk. It does seem to help to be a bit nervous. There's more energy and concentration.

S: Well, you see, there is a saying of Dr. Johnson, which I recollect. He says "The anticipation of Death recollects a man's mind wonderfully." (Laughter)... So, any sort of critical situation concentrates your mind. Just because it is a critical situation. So it's not surprising that if you feel nervous, which means the anticipation of a critical situation, you should also have all your energies keyed up. Just as in the case of an animal that senses danger, he's all sort of keyed up for instant flight or fight.

Ratnapani: Would it be that as one becomes more integrated, these energies can be more summoned at will and put into the talk?

S: Yes, in a sense, that they are there, just ready. Just because they are integrated. You can turn them in any direction.

Ratnapani: It's as if the fear is a temporary integrating factor.

S: Yes. I won't say that the fear itself is integrating, but the fact that the situation arouses fear means that it is a situation that also mobilizes your energies. Of course one can experience fear for all sorts of reasons. The fear of failure. The fear that you're going to make a fool of yourself. That your talk is not going to go down well, [79] that you're not going to succeed. I think this is probably the main reason for people feeling nervous about giving talks, They want to succeed. I think it's a manifestation of the competitive instinct. And this is why people are sometimes reluctant to give talks. Because they would like to impress people and give a really good talk, but they are not confident of their ability to do that. So this creates nervousness and in extreme cases, unwillingness to speak at all. Even though the knowledge might be there, the necessary self confidence is not there. Maybe it's also like when you know a little of a foreign language, but you hesitate to speak it. You don't want to make a fool of yourself. Sometimes that happens. You know that the native speaker is going to laugh at your curious accent, or your bad idioms, or is not going to understand you at all which is most embarrassing of all.

Sagaramati: Is there a relationship between ones competitiveness and self-confidence? The more competitive you are, maybe the more you'll feel not self-confident?

S: I think there are two kinds of self-confidence. One is based on the knowledge of past successes and can be quite egoistic. The other kind of self-confidence because you do not think in terms of competitiveness or being successful at all. One can see this quite clearly in certain people, I've certainly noticed it in the course of the last two Tuscanies, that certain people, standing up to give their talks, they clearly had never given a talk before and they are not particularly good perhaps but they have got self-confidence. They're not bothered, they're not thinking in terms of, "Will my talk be successful or not successful?" So because they do not think in that way, they have what comes across at least, what one might call self-confidence. But it's not the self-confidence which is based upon, or is the outcome of,

previous, numerous previous egoistic successes. That's rather a different thing. But it may be difficult to tell the two things apart. But do you see the point of the distinction?

Sagaramati: This self-confidence which comes about through past successes, is that the self-confidence which should be, in a sense, undermined? We talk about ... like in the Diamond Sutra ...

S: Yes, that sort of confidence should be undermined. It's useful from a mundane point of view, even necessary, but it has no significance [80] at all spiritually speaking. But sometimes what one would call a good speaker is someone who has self-confidence born of experience. But you can also have a good speaker who doesn't have that sort of self-confidence at all, and who isn't perhaps, even a good speaker in the technical sense. But, none the less, if he is speaking about the Dharma, he is able to put the Dharma across in a very effective manner - even an impressive manner, even though he hasn't got any of that self-confidence based on previous egoistic successes, and doesn't know any of the 'tricks-of-the-trade' so to speak. Sometimes one does encounter such speakers. You need to be for public purposes either the one or the other. The genuine article, or a reasonably good imitation'. (chuckle) But what you mustn't be is a bad imitation. A shoddy imitation.

Devamitra: If you're just a good imitation of how Bhante does the Dharma, presumably you'll go on giving talks. What's to check it? What's to bring about ...

S: I don't think it could be broken down in that particular situation itself. But in other situations, especially situations with your spiritual friends. Sometimes of course, by the sheer momentum of your own spiritual development you start seeing through your own success, and realizing it isn't a genuine success, and then becoming disillusioned with it yourself.(pause)

Question (unclear): What is a genuine success then? How do you distinguish between them?

S: Well briefly a genuine success is a success which is not achieved for any egoistic ends.

Devamitra: What would be the obvious characteristics, would you say, of the imitation?

S: Self satisfaction would be one of them. I remember there is a story in this connection. I forget when it takes place - in the last century, maybe the century before. There was a quite well known preacher. He was well known for his very inspiring, very moving sermons. And someone happened to be present at one of these sermons and was very impressed by the sermon. So much so that he wanted to shake the preacher by the hand afterwards. So he followed him into the vestry. In the vestry there was a mirror, and he saw that the preacher was so satisfied with his performance that he was repeating his last oratorical strokes in the mirror (laughter)... [81] to himself in sheer self-satisfaction. He didn't shake him by the hand after all. Clearly it was a performance, on which, in the vestry, he proceeded to congratulate himself.

Devamitra: If you do have that tendency, to perform, the answer to your problem does not necessarily lie in abstaining from giving talks, taking classes, whatever it might be.

S: You might have to for a while, you might have got into such a habit you just can't stop it.

You find yourself in front of a bunch of people, you can't help performing. So you may have to actually stop for a while. In a way, in order to undermine your own false self-confidence.

Prasannasiddhi: What is genuine self-confidence?

S: Well, genuine self-confidence is based on actual spiritual experience. You're speaking out of experience. It's not confidence in any trick, or even knowledge in a superficial sense, but a confidence in your own being.

Sagaramati: Even in a beginners meditation class, some people are going to argue about the benefits of meditation. Even though they can beat you in an argument, they're not going to experience the meditation ...

S: You just laugh at them! Just as if someone tries to convince you... if you've got a nice ripe peach, it isn't sweet. All the peaches they've ever tasted were quite sour. You just laugh. "As far as I'm concerned, peaches are sweet. That's my experience." You wouldn't feel undermined by what they were saying. You know they are completely wrong, and they are talking about something completely different, and you didn't mean the same thing when you used the word 'peach'. Perhaps he was talking about gooseberries! Because you have your own experience to fall back upon.

Sagaramati: Does that mean that real self-confidence cannot be undermined?

S: Well, how real is 'real'? Because there is real self-confidence which is still mundane, and there is real self-confidence, real [82] experience which is beyond the mundane. So any mundane experience in fact should be undermined. Therefore any mundane self-confidence, or self-confidence based on any mundane experience, should from a spiritual point of view, should ultimately be undermined if you are to proceed any further.

Devamitra: You wouldn't apply those levels, as for instance would apply to 'going for refuge' or confession ...?

S: You could do. You could have the purely formal self-confidence which comes from experience in certain situations. For instance social situations. Then you could have the 'effective' self-confidence, which is based on some experience, admittedly, but mundane, And then real self-confidence which is based on some higher spiritual experience. Even a Transcendental experience. And then, of course, there is the complete self-confidence of the Buddha, which is 'Absolute' self confidence.

Duncan Skinner: I wonder if many people speaking in an FWBO context feel tension between the desire to communicate the Dharma, and the desire to impress? I think - do you agree with me - that it would be useful when giving a talk, taking a class, to have somebody with you who knows you well, who if necessary, puts the brakes on your ego?

S: Yes, this is in fact one of the reasons why we do have Order members supporting, or even mitras, supporting those people who are taking or leading classes. It is at least partly for the sake of giving feedback afterwards. Because, it's very difficult for you to appraise your own performance. Not only classes; if you go into some outside situations, say, to a school to give a talk. It's very useful to have somebody go along with you, who not only knows you, but who

is reasonably intelligent, and even can estimate what sort of effect you had. Whether you went about it in the right way. It's very useful to have a person of that sort with you who can give you feedback afterwards. Otherwise you might perhaps not be sure that you struck the right note, you might have an uneasy feeling that, well, you somehow trod on people's [83] toes, and you don't quite know how. Or else you think that people weren't particularly impressed by the talk. Well, the person who accompanies you could then say, "Well yes, actually they were quite impressed." "That was why they were keeping quiet, you gave them quite a lot to think about". Or, on the other hand, you might be given some other criticism, some other feedback, such as you might be given at a speaker's class. "Well you plunged into the subject too abruptly. You weren't sufficiently aware of the audience", or "you went on too long", or "you got a bit too technical", all that sort of feedback is very useful, both in these outside situations, and as regards classes at the Centre. There should always be somebody supporting to give you that sort of feedback.

Duncan Skinner: I feel that we have to be careful that we aren't just stroking each other's ego.

S: Well, one hopes that that wouldn't happen. Sometimes people do need encouragement. One must not assume that positive critical feedback has got to be, as it were, really slashing. No, just a few quiet comments, which may be helpful. It may be that even the person who is supporting may not be very clear or very sure. Maybe the two people better discuss things, and come to a clearer understanding of what happened in that way. But very often the person who is just sitting and listening, or sitting and watching, can see more and understand more than the person who is more directly involved. So we should take advantage of that fact. So if you are leading a class, in your own interest, at least, make sure that there is someone supporting you with whom you can talk the class over afterwards. So that they can give you, if necessary, positive critical feedback, which will enable you to do better next time. May also help you in your overall development. Anything more?

Sagaramati: You talk about these four levels of mindfulness. Does that mean we have to apply the principle of regular steps?

S: I think I would more usually have called them the four dimensions of mindfulness, haven't I? To suggest that they weren't necessarily organized in a progressive manner. Obviously, one might say, that awareness of Reality comes at the top, but that even, that is only in a sense. Because it isn't as though one's other awarenesses are split off [84] from one's awareness of Reality. One can be aware of Reality through these other dimensions of awareness. So I think as far as I remember, that I deliberately chose that expression, 'dimensions of awareness', when I first spoke in these particular terms.

Sagaramati: We thought in our group, you could spend a day just trying to be aware of things, and then another day just being aware of your feelings. Would that be a good method to adopt?

S: Yes, you could certainly do that.

Sagaramati: It would seem to imply a certain degree of integration, to be mindful, as it were, multi-dimensionally.

S: Indeed. One could start off with whatever dimension of awareness seems to one to be

easiest. One may think that awareness of one's environment, awareness of nature, was the most easy. I've certainly noticed, taking that expression, 'awareness of nature' in its more literal sense, I've certainly noticed that city bred friends hardly notice what's around them if you take them for a walk in the country. Quite apart from them not knowing the difference between for instance wheat and rye, and things like that, or knowing the names of wild flowers, they're just not aware of trees and bushes, birds and insects and all the rest of it. They're just completely oblivious to them. I don't know whether this is because they are unfamiliar with such things, those who have been born and brought up in the city, or whether they are generally unaware. It's surprising sometimes how little some people are aware of their surroundings in that broader sense. Of course it isn't easy to combine these different dimensions of awareness. Because if you go for a walk, and you are trying to be aware of your feelings on that walk, it isn't very easy to pay very close attention to the scenery around you. So, perhaps it is a good idea to concentrate on one dimension at a time, even for one day at a time. It would perhaps be a good practice, a good exercise when one is on solitary retreat.

Vessantara: Suppose that you have some free time. You've got half an hour before meditation. You could either go and look at the roses, [85] or you could sit and recite your mantra, you could consider something in the way of study; are there any principles on which you can decide?

S: Well, presumably you should concentrate on that aspect where you consider your greatest weakness lay. That might be difficult! Or, do just what you felt like doing at that particular moment, if it's just a choice among a number of things, all of which were completely skilful, in a sense it doesn't matter which of them you take up. You don't want to spend your half hour worrying about it so that by the end of the half hour you haven't in fact done any of those things.

Sagaramati: Couldn't it even have a negative effect upon you. Say you are living in Bethnal Green. The environment there is pretty... it's not very pleasant! If you have to be aware of your environment there, couldn't that have a negative effect on your mind?

S: Not necessarily. It may make you more determined to do something about it. I'm sure something can be done about it. I mean the immediate surroundings of the centre; we ourselves could do more. I'm sure we could be more active in picking up rubbish and things like that, We don't have to leave it for days on end if there's rubbish blowing around the centre. Let's clear it up ourselves. And we can take more vigorous steps; I believe steps are already being taken, to try to get a pedestrian precinct created. And that isn't impossible. Brighten things up with a bit of paint. Well, things have been brightened up. There's quite a difference between the way things are now and how they were as regards our immediate surroundings in Bethnal Green four or five years ago. That's very encouraging. I must say, in a more general way, I am still very surprised, from time to time, how unmindful people are, And I mean people in the Friends. I'm sometimes really quite staggered'. When it comes to quite simple everyday things. Matters of day to day living. People don't do this, or they don't do that. They forget, or they don't bother, or they don't think. One is really quite surprised. I think we need to raise our level of practical mindfulness quite considerably throughout the Movement. For instance you see, someone goes into the kitchen in the [86] middle of the morning, cuts himself a piece of bread, butters it liberally. Well fair enough. But he goes away leaving the bread there on the table, leaving the butter dish uncovered even though flies are buzzing around. I've seen this in so many centres. This is an example of unmindfulness.

Almost, one might say, criminal unmindfulness. In view of the fact that flies do carry infections of various kinds. But this is the sort of thing that happens.

Devamitra: Mindfulness doesn't seem to be a very popular virtue.

S: It's one of the austerer virtues. It's one of the drabber virtues. People like the colourful virtues, You know, like 'spontaneity' and 'inspiration' and all the rest of it.

Sagaramati: May be nobody notices you when you're mindful.

S: They certainly notice you, at least sometimes, when you're unmindful because they have to suffer the consequences of your unmindfulness. For instance, I know at Padmaloka in the course of retreats how many cups and saucers and plates have been broken, it's incredible. Hundreds of items of crockery are broken every year I believe. People wash up so unmindfully. They don't even look at what they are doing sometimes. They are so busy talking to someone over there, that, their hands are busy in the sink, they let crockery slip, or they bang it against the tap, Something of that sort. No one bothers. They just throw it into the dustbin. This is also an example of unmindfulness. So I think we need a blitz on unmindfulness as it were. Or people borrow things from you and they don't bother to give them back in the way that they should, or the way they have promised. They are not mindful that your property is with them and you may need it. So that as soon as you have finished with it, you should give it back. People borrow a pair of scissors. They say, "can I borrow the scissors just for a minute". You never see them again. You may ask for them weeks later, but the persons forgotten where he put them. This is happening all the time in communities isn't it? In some communities anyway. A lot of people don't think. Again, talking about the FWBO. A lot of people don't think sufficiently before speaking. They aren't sufficiently mindful of what they are saying. And what the effect of what they are saying may be. That's also quite important. Since you are all going to be ordained, and will be Order members, it may be appropriate to refer to reporting in.

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I think you all know what reporting in is. At the monthly order meetings, whether regional or national, there is a reporting-in. You say what you've been doing. For heavens sakes think before you start blurting out this, that and the other. Because sometimes people talk about, I'm afraid, such trivial things that they are really of no interest or significance to the Order as a whole. It's often because they haven't thought before speaking, and they do speak sometimes without an awareness of the Movement, the Order as a whole. Because what you say at your Order meeting, in say London or Norwich, or wherever it may be, or in Poona, is going to be read by Order Members all over the world; so that needs to be born in mind. And what you say should be understandable to everybody, and ideally have a positive effect upon everybody. Shouldn't bore them. Some months ago, or some years ago, people seemed to be obsessed by communicating, if that is the word, their particular state of mind at the moment. I used to become almost irritated when I used to read month after month, reportings-in along such lines as, "I'm feeling a little stronger this month", or something of that sort. Sometimes said at length, and really it seems such a pitiful piece of reporting-in to lay before the whole Order as it were. So I hope that those present won't be contributing to reporting-in in that sort of way. Or someone reporting in, "Well I haven't really done anything this month". Well how do you think Order Members in India are going to feel who are working really hard spreading the Dharma. It maybe, yes, that you didn't do anything that month and were justified because

you've been working hard beforehand; that should be made clear. Otherwise, you as a very active, busy, Order Member, can almost be discouraged by opening your Shabda, and coming across a statement like, 'I haven't really done anything this month'. Or someone says, "I've wasted the last few weeks". Well why? You should give the Order some explanation. You owe it an explanation. You have no business to have wasted those last few weeks. It's almost a criminal offence. (Laughter). Or someone says "Well, I can't really tell, I don't know what I have done this month". As if to say that the whole month has passed in a sort of dream of unmindfulness. They don't know what they've done. Well what sort of reporting-in is that? Or someone, of course reports in, "Nothing to report this month". Well you're left thinking, "well, is he hiding something? Has he been wasting his time?"

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Or is it that he just can't be bothered? Well what's happening? Some people develop the unfortunate habit of, some Order Members, of when it came to their turn to report in, they said "pass". Is it from some card game where you say "pass" when you don't want to do whatever it is you otherwise might have done? Bridge? Well having never played Bridge I am obviously ignorant of those things. It seems so inappropriate that in an Order Meeting reporting-in, someone says "pass", as though it's some sort of card game. And what about Order Members like myself, and surely those in India, who have never played Bridge and probably never heard of it. Well, what are they going to make of this, "pass"? When I came across it the first time I was well, not exactly bewildered, but puzzled. What is this "Pass"? Does it mean "password" or does it mean pass me over"? I suppose it does mean something like that. Or was it meant as a joke. One can never be sure. So 'mindfulness' is one of the Buddhist virtues, it is an integral part of the 'Noble Eightfold Path'. 'Mindfulness' was one of the very last words on the lips of the Buddha himself before he passed into Parinirvana. It's surely not a quality that can be neglected. I hope it hasn't become the Cinderella among the Buddhist virtues.

Vessantara: I sometimes think that when, in general, mindfulness is talked about when you're giving examples of unmindfulness, or when people have fallen from a basic level of mindfulness; maybe not enough stress is placed on the enjoyment that you find with mindfulness and appreciation. Mindfulness, far from being the baseline, where you don't forget to do things, there is the whole level of aesthetic appreciation.

S: Yes, only too often people tend to think of mindfulness in terms of for instance, somebody being behind you and telling you, "don't forget to do this", and "don't forget to do that". Almost as when you are a child Mother says "don't forget to put away your toys in the cupboard when you've finished playing with them." It has all of those sort of associations, which is rather unfortunate. But I'm afraid that lots of people still, don't put their toys away in the cupboard when they've finished playing with them. Even people living in communities, which means that other people have to pick them up and put them away. Or some people break their toys etcetera. Perhaps you should urge upon people in classes, that mindfulness is fun. I think we've got the impression, some of us, [89] that mindfulness is a bit dull, as I said, one of the drabber Buddhist virtues. Not so colourful as some of the others.

Anandajyoti: Isn't it in the Dhammapada, doesn't the Buddha talk of the monk with mindfulness burning his way in fire through obstacles?

S: That's right. Yes. Great and small. Or subtle and gross. Yes.

Anandajyoti: So awareness of Reality can hardly be boring.

S: Right, yes.

Mike Howes: In our study group, there was a couple of us at least, including me, who saw mindfulness objectively as valuable, however it didn't seem very pleasurable. If you try to be mindful of yourself and other people and things et cetera all at once even though one can recall pleasure in mindfulness, it seems like really hard work. Really a lot of effort.

S: Well there's no doubt about that. The development of mindfulness does require a lot of effort. The following of the Eightfold Path itself requires a lot of effort. One can't evade that fact. Perhaps it's also connected with the idea of the image that people have of themselves, or would like to have of themselves. They would like to think of themselves as 'free' 'spontaneous', 'outwardgoing', 'positive, but 'mindful'? It doesn't quite come into the picture in the same sort of way, does it?

Sagaramati: One can't imagine a mitra saying "I really find that Order Member inspiring, he's so mindful". (Laughter).

S: Well, he might find it difficult to find an Order Member about whom to say that! (Laughter). But it can be inspiring when you realize that somebody is aware of you. In the sense of being aware of your needs, or being aware of where you are at, and not only being aware of it, but feeling some concern for that. Some sensitivity to that. That can [90] certainly be, if not inspiring, at least very encouraging. (pause). I wonder why it is that we are attracted by these more what I've called colourful virtues? There are what one might call 'graver' virtues, more solid substantial virtues, but they don't seem to have the same appeal, like sobriety, modesty, or prudence.

Sagaramati: They are all out of fashion perhaps. (Laughter)

S: Then perhaps we had better bring them back into fashion. For instance I was quite interested when I went into the office of the LBC one afternoon, and there on the notice board I saw a poster. A most dreadful poster. To my old fashioned view! It was a poster which was an advertisement for someone, a woman, to work in the photosetters. And to make it more appealing and attractive it depicted, so I understood, the sort of woman they were trying to recruit, or appeal to - and it was most extraordinary! I don't really know how to describe this female figure. But she didn't seem to embody any of the traditional virtues, Buddhist virtues, but it seemed to me that this is how some women in the Movement either saw themselves, or would like to see themselves. So I at once asked Khemavira to take it down and throw it in the waste paper basket. Which he quite happily did. But I was really quite shocked by this. Because it shows the sort of self image that people can have of themselves not only as Buddhists. If it had been in the outside world I wouldn't have thought twice about it. That is what one expects in the outside world. But here were people within the Movement having this sort of ideal image of themselves. Did anyone see this or take any notice of it? Or respond to it in any way? Or are you all just sort of hardened to these things?

Devamitra: I know it was refused to be put up at one or two centres.

S: Well, that's very encouraging.

Devamitra: It certainly was not put up in Brighton. I don't think it was put up in Norwich. I doubt if it was put up at Aryatara.

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S: Well, there is a bit of awareness of these things around.

Voice: What were the qualities of this drawing?

Steve Murray: Aye, what were the qualities of it?

S: Aggressiveness was one. It seemed to be the most outstanding one. Aggressiveness.

Martin Redman: I think it was meant to be a female Superman.

S: Yes, that's right it was Superwoman. Yes.

Martin Redman: ... a woman wearing Superman type gear, but female. A bit like Superwoman. I think it was meant as a joke.

S: Well, it's my old fashioned lack of humour. Even if it was a joke, which I doubt. But even if it was meant as a joke, what does that tell us about the sense of humour within the Friends. That's not funny. That's not funny, that sort of thing. That's quite tragic; that people can have this sort of self-image, or like, or want to see themselves in that sort of way.

Devamitra: I wondered if it was also in a way, if it was a demonstration of a certain attitude towards life. Something a bit undermining of a more serious ... Well, something which undermines what is considered to be a more serious, stuffy and formal approach.

S: Well it didn't just strike me as anti-serious or anti-stuffy, it just struck me as essentially quite negative. Not representing the sort of ideal female Buddhist that, apparently the person who designed the poster thought it represented. I don't know, but if one did have a lot of people like that around the Movement, first of all I don't think photosetters could contain them. They'd be bursting out through the window. (Laughter) Within five minutes! And if you asked them to do a bit of work, they would be more likely to give you a punch on the nose, or something like that. (Laughter). Or else try to seduce you. But I think we have to be much more aware, I'm glad some people were [92] aware of the sort of material that we put up. Because these images do convey their own message. This one certainly jumped off the notice board at me. I was quite startled. I said, "What's that?" Khemavira told me. I said, "Well you take it down!" So it went straight into the wastepaper basket. I was really quite shocked. I felt quite disappointed that people could descend to that sort of level, could be so crude and so unthinking.

Devamitra: You don't think it was engineered to provoke reaction? Because I must say I did wonder about that at the time?

S: Well, if they intended to provoke reaction, in my case they certainly succeeded. (Laughter). But is it your business to provoke reaction. You want someone to join your particular business. All right. You should go about it seriously and think what sort of person you want, and try to attract that person. Rather than, if it is in fact the case, to try to make a joke of the

whole thing or try to be provocative et cetera, et cetera. But talking of advertisements for jobs, I found something in a way even more shocking in one of the colour supplements. A certain job was advertised, I forget what it was, but it was the ordinary worldly job which someone would perhaps be very glad to get. Quite a big job. I think, in the Observer itself in their distribution office, or something like that. It was a big managerial job. And there was a job description, that the job was exciting, and all that, et cetera, and frustrating. And 'frustrating' was used as a very positive adjective for the job. And this really surprised me. In fact, it rather shocked me again. So that poster seemed to be in line with that sort of approach. I really wonder what sort of job expectations people have got in the outside world? How do they see the ideal job? Apparently the ideal job is one which is 'frustrating'. Presumably it keeps you on your toes. 'Frustration' is close to 'Exciting'? 'Exciting' seems to have been the 'in' adjective for many years. Apparently it is in the process of being displaced by 'frustrating'. We'll soon be advertising our meditation classes... 'come along to the meditation classes at the LBC, they're really frustrating!

Chris Pegrum: Maybe they're just being a bit more honest these days.

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S: No, they weren't in a way. Because the description taken objectively may be honest. Yes, the job is frustrating. But, 'that it was frustrating', was presented as an inducement, it was a desirable job because it was 'exciting', and there were lots of other adjectives like that. 'Rewarding', 'well paid', and also 'frustrating'. So that seems astonishing that we've got into such a state that frustration can be regarded as a positive experience. (Pause). So anyway, I suppose I shall go on reacting in my old fashioned way, and hoping I can spread the gospel of old fashionedness more and more among increasingly old fashioned people. Perhaps 'old fashioned' will become a term of praise eventually. They'll say, "The FWBO, it's really old fashioned." (Laughter). In America that would go down rather well from what I saw of American students at Yale. They loved these old fashioned English things. When they see them on a film they actually get carried away. I remember I saw with some of my students, (this is a bit off the track, but never mind), the film "If". I don't know if anybody saw the film, "If". These American students at Yale, they were absolutely enthralled by "If". Some of them saw it time and time again. What they really wanted to know was, "do you really have types like this?" "These old colonel types in Britain, do you really have them?" I said "oh yes!" (laughter). They were so pleased and happy to hear that, that you can actually go to Britain and meet these types. They really loved that idea. So, maybe this 'old fashioned' FWBO will go down well in the United States. Perhaps we should project it as a real 'old fashioned' English Buddhist Movement. (Laughter). Perhaps Manjuvajra and Vajradaka have gone the wrong way about things in the United States. They don't want to present the FWBO as exotic, oriental, and esoteric, and all the rest of it. Just plain 'old fashioned' English Buddhist Movement. But to speak, in a way, more seriously, recently we have been giving attention to qualities or virtues like say, fidelity, and co-operativeness, and reliability, thoroughness, these may not sound superficially very exciting, but they're absolutely necessary as the bases of human development. I even suggested some years ago that we ought to have a more positive appreciation of the term 'duty'. 'Duty' is usually regarded as a rather dirty word, isn't it? So maybe we should refurbish the concept of mindfulness. I won't say present it as more attractive, but show that it is in fact an attractive quality. Even an inspiring quality, being mindful.

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Mike Howes: I thought in the Sattipatthana seminar, Bhante, started to encourage quite a lot of interest.

S: Yes. The sort of qualities that seem to appeal to people are the qualities like spontaneity, creativity ... can you think of any others of the same kind?

Voice: Energy.

S: Energy. Yes! That seems very important for a lot of people.

Duncan Skinner: Vivaciousness?

S: Yes, that sort of thing.

Voice: Sense of humour?

S: Yes, sense of humour, that's absolutely indispensable! ... a sense of humour, however perverted.

Sagaramati: 'Amazing', that's the most used adjective.

S: Amazing? Not fantastic any more?

Chris Pegrum: I don't think anyone would dare to say the word 'amazing' now.

S: One young lady came to see me some months ago, and she kept using the word 'ginormous'. (Laughter). She said "oh yes that retreat was really ginormous". I couldn't make this out first. (laughter) "And I got hold of a really ginormous book". Yes, everything was 'ginormous'. 'Gigantic' and 'enormous.'

Ratnapani: How a retreat could be called that? It would have to have about five thousand people on it! (Laughter).

S: I think she was using it in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, but she kept using this word. I was tempted to ask her what it meant, but clearly I was supposed to know.

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Voice: Amazing (unclear) (laughter)

S: I'm just waiting to hear it from other people. I didn't hear it from anybody else. Just one particular woman. Strange! Perhaps it's a very passing fashion.

Devamitra: 'Neat', is a word which is increasing in popularity.

S: Yes that's true. I heard that years and years ago from Americans, it's just penetrating into Britain. I think that's about a decade old.

Devamitra: They seem to have taken quite a hold in New Zealand I think.

S: I think, being old fashioned, there are quite enough old words that we don't know without inventing new ones. The vocabulary of a lot of people is really quite shocking. It's very deficient, very defective. So when one picks up words like 'neat', and uses them on all possible occasions, like 'nice', just to save oneself the trouble of thinking and selecting the really appropriate adjective. What difference does it make when someone says "what sort of retreat was it?". You either say it was 'ginormous' or you say it was 'neat', well, you don't really tell them anything at all. "Well what sort of walk did you have?" "Oh that was neat too" "What sort of hair cut?" "Oh that was neat!" "What's that book like?" "Oh, it's a pretty neat book!" It doesn't tell you anything whatever. It just becomes a sort of sound. It saves you the trouble of thinking or learning and using your own language properly.

Ratnapani: You mention language, and reporting-in in Shabda. People might not know what on earth we're talking about. When we talk about a story or ... it might be gibberish. I think every Order member after being away has made that same point.

S: One should be careful about what idioms one uses even.

Mike Howes: You've talked about reporting in. Could you clarify what sort of topics should be in reporting in? In the context of the Order - Shabda.

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S: In a way that isn't easy. When one reports-in, what is, actually, one doing. Well, initially one is reporting-in to all the people at that particular Order meeting, one is communicating with them. One is letting them know either what one has been doing, or what one has been thinking, if one has had any thoughts of general interest to the Order. Or even tell them about a book that you've been reading that you'd like to bring to their notice. Because you feel it might be of interest to them. You can also speak about an important experience that you've had in the course of the month, or an important insight that you feel you'd like to share. Basically, yes, it's whatever you'd like to share with the Order. That you think is worth sharing with the Order. That you had a stomach ache last Friday, is not something, I believe, worth sharing with the Order. However much they might commiserate with you. Or, that you've been going through it a bit lately and you're feeling rather sorry for yourself. Well, is that something you really want to share with other people? I think this is what you must ask yourself. It's not that you must put on a false front or anything of that sort. Sometimes you may have to report something, even confess something, which is not entirely positive or very creditable to you, but at least it must be done in a positive way. So that you don't read pages after pages of reporting-in, and get the general impression of a lot of rather sick unhealthy people full of self-pity, who haven't really been doing much the last month. Sometimes, in the past, I'm sorry to say, that was the impression one has got. And it's not altogether an accurate impression even. Especially as regards a whole chapter. So one must be really mindful when one reports-in. And think "what do I want to communicate?" "What do I want to share with the Order? What is there of my life during the last month, my experience in the last month, which is worthy of being shared?" I usually find the India reporting-in the most interesting, and encouraging, and inspiring. Because the Order Members are all involved, on the whole, with a much more existential situation, than is the case with Order Members in Britain, and perhaps elsewhere. Sometimes the level of seriousness of reporting-in and relevance puts to shame, some at least of the reportings-in from elsewhere. So I really would like new Order Members in particular to be much more aware of this.

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Padmaraja: What do you mean by being involved in a much more existential situation?

S: Well, Buddhism is much more a matter of life and death for them. Maybe because it represents, among other things, freedom from these very, very degrading social conditions. No one in the Order in England has lived under those sort of conditions, or been subjected to the sort of treatment that those people have been subjected to. Some of our own Order Members who are not all that old have had to beg, in their childhood, for their food from higher caste people, and just be flung scraps in a very contemptuous manner. They've had that experience in their own lives. It isn't just something that happened hundreds of years ago. No one in the Order in England at least had that sort of experience, or been treated in that sort of shameful way. So Buddhism represents liberation from all that, not 'just' in inverted commas, a path to Enlightenment. So to be Buddhist, and to put Buddhist ideas into operation, Buddhism being against such things as the caste system, is a much more vital, much more urgent necessity for them. In England, perhaps even without Buddhism, most people still have a pretty good life. But our friends in India don't feel like that. Without Buddhism they wouldn't have much of a life at all. So the situation is, as it were, much more existential. And usually, even Order Members there, with families, wives and lots of children, and full time jobs, have usually got much more worthwhile things to report-in, what they've done for the Movement, and for the Dharma, than many people in England who are much more free, and have got much more time at their disposal, and many more facilities. (Pause). Anyway, the bell did go, so perhaps we should close there.

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Session 5 - Perfect Samadhi

Vessantara: I think, Bhante, that we've arrived at Perfect Samadhi.

S: Good. (Laughter.)

Vessantara: But I think that we still have some questions (). Sagaramati's group have some.

Sagaramati: It concerns the three stages of samatha. I mean the gross object etc. etc. How could we apply these three stages to the practices we do, especially the 'Mindfulness of Breathing' and the Metta-Bhavana? How would it manifest in these practices?

S: As far as I know there is no such correlation given in tradition. I suppose the real answer to this is that one should practice the Mindfulness of Breathing and observe in one's own experience. I mean, that would seem to be the easiest way of doing it, so to speak. So, looking at one's own experience what does one see, if anything, as a counterpart of those three stages?

S: In a way it would seem unnecessary to consult the book, so to speak, if one could, you know, derive the answer just by consulting one's own experience. Eh?

Sagaramati: Some of our experience seemed to differ.

S: Ah! Differ where?

Sagaramati: Well some people thought that it was the nose, the sensation just on the tip of the

nose, when that gets going, that was like the subtle counterpart ...

S: Well, the subtle counterpart is purely mental, isn't it? Whereas the sensation at the tip of one's nose is a physical sensation. So that would seem to correspond still to the physical object.

Sagaramati: What would be the rupa, then, in that case? What would be the object? If the object is a physical body does that mean, as it were, that you contact a, what you might say, subtler body?

S: Well it could only be that. If there is a subtle counterpart of the gross [99] physical breathing, presumably one encounters it or experiences it only after one has ceased to be conscious of the gross physical breathing.

Sagaramati: I think that in somewhere, the, I think it's in Conze's book on meditation, the Buddha says that the Mindfulness of Breathing, or the object in the Mindfulness of Breathing is the most subtle, subtle object.

S: But it is still a subtle physical object. So where does that leave one?

Sagaramati: Well, in your experience you do, your physical body, your experience of your embodiment becomes more refined, and therefore that is, as it were, the object.

S: But it would seem in order to correspond to the subtle counterpart, that is to say, mental counterpart, of other practices one would need to pass, in the case of the Mindfulness of Breathing, to an experience of subtle breath, so to speak, not of gross physical breath. I do remember a distinction which I think Mr Chen must have mentioned to me, between the gross physical breath, the subtle breath, and the 'wisdom breath'. But 'wisdom breath' is perhaps going a little too fast, a little too far. But as I said one really needs, in order to answer this question, to consult one's own experience, and to compare quite critically; because this is something, as I've said, which doesn't depend upon book knowledge. I mean one is practising that particular practice, one has been doing it for years. It is only a question of observing one's experience and seeing what happens, and then correlating whatever does happen with one's experience in connection with other practices, other methods. So perhaps one shouldn't answer questions which people could just as easily, if not much better, answer for themselves, just by observing their own experience.

Sagaramati: Sometimes it is good to know what is, as it were, beyond your experience ...

S: But this doesn't seem to be a question of beyond one's experience but rather correlating one's experience as associated with two particular approaches, or one or more approaches, to the practice of meditation. For instance, in the case of the kasina practice there is the, not only the subtle counterpart of the gross physical object of concentration but the luminous counterpart. What does that correspond to, say, in the Mindfulness of Breathing practice? There is that point too. Does one as a result of the Mindfulness of Breathing practice attain any experience analogous to that experience of the luminous [100] counterpart? Because, as a result of any practice of meditation, one should, sooner or later, have some experience of luminosity in some form or other, either in the form of sparks, or flash or a sort of diffuse radiance, or something of this sort. There are various traditional descriptions like 'fire-flies',

'lightening flash' and so on.

Vimalamitra: Does it have to be a visual experience?

S: Well in order to be a counterpart of that, a luminous counterpart in the case of the kasina practice, yes it would have to be visual. But on the other hand one does have of course experiences of another kind. I think I have mentioned that visual experiences seem to be the most common as far as I have been able to gather from people as well as from tradition, and auditory experiences come next and then tactile and olfactory experiences seem to come after them.

Vessantara: Does there seem to be any correlation between the practice you start off doing and the likelihood of a particular experience of visual or olfactory ...?

S: Well yes. Well in the case of the kasina practice that would seem to be the case. You've got, in a way, a much more definite object, even an object of a particular shape. In the case of the breath that would seem to be something more diffuse, more subtle, even in a sense more general - so perhaps there aren't such precise counterparts to that breath, that gross breath, in one's subsequent experience.

Sagaramati: Could it be just the pleasure you derive from the in-and-out breathing? I mean, on this level, breathing in and out isn't exactly, what you'd say, pleasurable, but sometimes in the Mindfulness of Breathing it becomes very, very pleasurable, just the in-and-out breathing.

S: One could of course say that in the case of the breathing process you couldn't very well have a subtle counterpart in the literal sense. That suggests a sort of, you know, literally a subtle body. It suggests literally subtle air, even subtle oxygen. Do you see what I mean? So, there is a sort of counterpart of the gross physical breathing process but perhaps one should be a little careful how one locates that or how one identifies that. Because in the case of the kasina practice it is a comparatively simple matter to close one's eyes and reproduce that particular physical object mentally, breathing, physical breathing, of course is still going on. So that would suggest that the cessation of the kasina as perceived externally can't really be considered [101] as equivalent to the literal cessation of the gross physical breathing process. So that again would suggest that the subtle counterpart of the gross physical breathing process doesn't necessarily arise on the complete cessation of any physical breathing process whatever but probably is equivalent to a subtler version of it. You see what I mean? That when your breathing process itself becomes very, very refined, very tenuous, that does itself correspond to the mental image of the kasina which you perceived. Do you see the point here? Because if the perception of the subtle counterpart of the kasina corresponded to the complete cessation of the physical breathing process, presumably when you envisage that subtle, that mental counterpart, of the original physical kasina, the physical breathing process would cease entirely; but it doesn't, hm? Of course it might or might tend to if you were really strongly concentrated on that subtle counterpart of the physical kasina. In the same way of course even the very subtle breathing process tends to subside, one might say, if one does concentrate on it very intensely. So therefore, one might say, that corresponding to the three stages of concentration in the case of the kasina practice, in the case of the Mindfulness of Breathing practice you've got a gross physical breathing process, a refined physical breathing process and then, after that, some kind of experience usually of luminosity, but possibly of an

auditory nature, or even of some other nature, that would be roughly the correlation but one must try to see this, as I say, in one's own experience. Also it is said with regard to the appearance of the luminous counterpart of the kasina that it sort of appears suddenly, it just sort of happens. So similarly, you know, in the course of the Mindfulness of Breathing practice, when you get very deeply concentrated, and when the breathing has become very, very subtle, almost imperceptible even, perhaps actually imperceptible, sort of something happens, there's a sort of jerk, and your experience reaches, almost instantly, a sort of deeper level, as though something had been switched on. That, even if there is no actual experience of luminosity, could be regarded as equivalent to that.

Steve Murray: Bhante, why is the kasina practice not taught in the Movement?

S: In a sense it is, because the visualization of the stupa is a sort of kasina practice. But within the Movement one doesn't in a sense, one can't teach all particular practices. One has concentrated on the basic ones, and one might say the 'stupa visualization' corresponds to the kasina practice, and when one comes on to the visualization of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas one incorporates the kasina practice in a much more meaningful form, one might say. But if one has difficulty visualizing forms and colours there's no reason why one shouldn't have recourse to kasina-type practices, say try to concentrate, [102] I believe some people have done this, on a red disc and then reproduce that visually, or on a yellow square, or whatever. But we do have this in connection with the 'stupa visualization', don't we, because we build up our visualization, where first of all the blue background, then we have the yellow square, then we have the white disc. These are actually kasina practices, one might say. I mean the later Mahayana come Vajrayana visualization practices have been built up from the simple beginnings of the kasina exercises.

Vimalamitra: But doesn't the kasina practice (unclear) supposed to start with the physical, kind of, object ...?

S: Yes, that's true.

Vimalamitra: ... you look at the, you know, picture of the stupa then you kind of ...

S: But in the same way you look at a picture of a Buddha or Bodhisattva and you familiarize yourself with the appearance of that Buddha or Bodhisattva according to traditional iconography in that way, and if one does find visualization difficult, well one can just sit in front of one's shrine, with the picture, say, of Avalokitesvara or Manjughosa on the shrine, and look at that. And if you have difficulty visualizing look at that picture for a while, then close the eyes and try to reproduce that picture, at least in a general way. If you find you're having difficulty, open the eyes, have another look, then close the eyes. In this way go on until you get a clearer and clearer and more and more vivid picture. This is one of the things that one can do.

Sagaramati: That was actually our second question. (Laughter.) We felt that, well I felt anyway, that this aspect of visualization is really overlooked in the Movement. I mean, there's no emphasis on actually getting your deity together and really looking at it, and looking at it maybe for an hour or whatever, and then having this relationship of looking at it, visualizing it, looking at it. In fact we thought that, as you said the other day, artists are two-a-penny in the Movement, in a sense there are very, very little thangkas actually produced.

S: In a way it does surprise me that this is so. I've been thinking about something recently in this connection, so I might as well mention it now. Something which is, in a way, more elementary than thangka painting, which more people might be able to do but which will be helpful. That is to say to, but perhaps I should even say, experiment. Experiment with the lettering of mantras, [103] especially bija mantras to begin with. Do you know what I mean? For instance, there is the bija mantra for Tara, which is tam. All right, one can visualize that according to the Sanskrit alphabet. But I think perhaps we should experiment trying to do it with Roman letters, and arrange the letters in a particular way. In fact I was experimenting myself and I worked out a few arrangements. For instance you can have an 'm', say at the bottom, interlaced with a vertical 't' and with an 'a' above the 'm' still interlaced with both the 'm' and with the 't'. Now you could start off doing this quite simply and quite big. You could, say, colour the letters of the bija in the appropriate way, and you could perhaps even ornament them, and you could produce perhaps quite large pieces of calligraphy in this sort of way, suitably embellished. They could be framed and put on the wall. And this would also be for some people a sort of devotional exercise. It wouldn't tax one's skill as much as, say, thangka painting would do. Maybe more people could do this sort of thing. Do you see what I have in mind? And this could be perhaps a step towards more people involving themselves in thangka painting.

Vimalamitra: You say Roman numerals rather than the Sanskrit or Tibetan?

S: Yes. To, as it were, naturalize the bijas and eventually the mantras themselves for visualization purposes. Because when you're visualizing, well, say, a tam is quite a nice bold thing to visualize, but if it's t, a, m, it doesn't look so good. But if you could make a sort of, almost pattern out of the letters, a sort of monogram as it were, that would be much more effective, and suitable. Do you see what I mean?

Sagaramati: Wouldn't you lose a little bit of the magic and mystery? To me the Tibetan characters have a certain ...

S: I think before very long there would be plenty of magic and mystery around your monogram. (Laughter.)

Ratnapani: Put another way I can take it then that you don't agree with something that someone said that Tibetans are supposed to maintain that the Tibetan character is the 'best', so to speak; then would be the Sanskrit, that would be the second best for a seed syllable and then would come anything else that you would care to think up, after that. This is something that was told to me as a Tibetan theory. Presumably, well obviously, you don't agree with that?

S: No, because after all the Tibetan script itself is a derived script, derived ultimately from the sarava script. And even, there are different scripts [104] in use in Tibet itself, for writing mantras. There's the (langsa?) script, which is, you know, quite different from the ordinary Tibetan script.

Ratnapani: It's just to our unfamiliar eyes they look like magic wiggles. To someone who knows the language it's lettering.

S: Yes. For instance, in all traditions they've endowed their own script with, you know, some

kind of magical efficacy. The Jews, and the Cabbalists especially, swear by the Hebrew alphabet. This is supposed to have some magical significance, almost, attached to it which no other script possesses. Similarly the Muslims speak of the Arabic script. Hindus speak of the Nagari script. Tibetans speak of their Tibetan script. And we can read and study different scripts. There are also the ordinary standard Roman characters, there are uncial characters, there are italic characters, there are Gothic characters. We can do quite a lot with these sort of things. I think this would be very worthwhile, both from the aesthetic point of view and also from a spiritual come devotional point of view.

Vimalamitra: So would bijas, do they necessarily kind of have to be letters? Could they be symbols for instance? That seems like it ... that's what ...

S: Well they are sounds essentially and sounds usually are symbolized by letters. If sounds are not to be symbolized by letters then what are they to be symbolized by? A sign, a notation which symbolizes or represents, rather, a sound is what we call a letter, isn't it? For instance, you've got 'a'. So you can either write 'a' down like this in our way or you can write it in the Sanskrit way. But whatever you write down is a visual notation, a visual equivalent for the actual sound 'a', so that when you see this in writing then you pronounce 'a'. So you cannot but have a letter, so to speak.

Sagaramati: A letter is a symbol.

S: Using the word 'symbol' quite loosely. That's why I used the word 'representation' or 'notation' as it were. Usually in the case of musical notation you still, at the beginning of the bar, or whatever it is, I believe, you have actually a letter to indicate what key it is in.

Does that suggestion of depicting bijas in this way, bija mantras in this way, appeal to anybody? I mean are there any artists among you who might even think of attempting ... It should be quite harmonious and balanced and you could decorate it. For instance I thought, this is just giving away some of my own ideas but never mind, I probably won't have time [105] to get around to doing it myself anyway. For instance in the case of the 'tam' well obviously the letters must be green, and one can represent the letters or the monograms as a whole, with a rainbow aura. You could frame them in a frame, for instance, of acacia leaves. Now I don't know what acacia leaves look like. I suppose you understand why acacia leaves? Because Tara is called khadiravani Tara, Tara of the Acacia Grove. So the acacia tree is especially associated with Tara. So, you could look up some book and find out what acacia leaves look like. And perhaps have a border of acacia leaves framing the whole composition. One could do things like that. Well, another sort of idea I had was the bija 'a' which represents sunyata itself, because 'a' is the privative prefix, it says, as it were, 'not this, not that', it cuts off all those concepts. So perhaps you could arrange three swords in the form of an 'a' to suggest that idea of cutting off of all concepts. There are so many things like this one could do if one was a bit imaginative and a bit inventive. So perhaps we should start in this sort of way, because thangka painting requires very great skill. You need, especially when it comes to facial expressions. It's just not at all easy. Some of our friends have tried and have failed really quite miserably. But almost anybody with some sense of colour and design and balance could produce quite beautiful representations of bija mantras, at least. I say bija mantras because they're the simplest, before going on to a full mantra like 'Om mani padme hum' or whatever. Experiment with bijas first. People could use this, frame them and put them up on the walls of their rooms and familiarize themselves with them. This would help with

visualization and then later on perhaps we can have more thankas, actually, of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. (Pause.) There are books of letters that one can get. I don't know if some of you may know about these things. There are whole volumes which give you alphabets in different scripts. One could study, perhaps, Medieval illumination where you've got all sorts of beautiful capital letters, very ornamented, and so on. They may give you some ideas.

Anyway, let's pass on to any further questions.

Sagaramati: There's one about, you mentioned it in the samadhi, samapattis and er, no, what is it?, samatha, samapatti and samadhi, they're in a progressive series.

S: They can be regarded so. The terminology isn't always consistent as from one text to another, but they could be so regarded.

Sagaramati: Because it seems that when you mentioned the samapattis it seemed that they could start even on quite a low level of samatha. That's true?

[106]

S: Yes, one ... what one might describe as minor samapattis. If one adopted that sort of progressive order then one takes samatha, in the sense of concentration, then one takes samapattis as the particular power, so to speak, or subtle qualities that display themselves as a result of that concentration. They would include things like clairaudience and telepathy and so on. And then, as the concentration deepens, it is able even to merge with different aspects of Reality, one might say, and then the term samadhi is appropriate, within this particular context, for that development. But sometimes samadhi is used in the sense of samatha. As I say usage differs from one text, perhaps from one tradition to another. One must just carefully ascertain the particular context, otherwise one will get confused.

Sagaramati: Do you think it's possible for a person to go all the way to the absolute samadhis without having experienced any samapattis?

S: That would seem to be the case according to tradition. For instance the classic example is Sariputra, who appears to have, according to, as far as we know from the Pali Canon, to have had no experience of any supernormal faculties, mundane ones that is, at all. But his friend Maudgalyayana had many such experiences, and could consciously exercise such faculties. I do believe, though, that in the case of someone who practices meditation at least some minor samapattis are bound to occur. I find it very difficult to believe that no samapattis at all will occur. Certainly some minor ones, I think, will occur, but they may pass unnoticed or one might not attach any importance to them, or not mention them. Or one might not realize that that is what in fact they are. But at least minor samapattis can be expected.

Sagaramati: And these samapattis that can 'pop up', you wouldn't, they wouldn't have any emotional effect upon one ...?

S: They might do, depending upon their nature, especially if you've been a bit sceptical about the possibility of such things before, well, they might give you even quite a shock if you yourself were actually experiencing a samapatti. Or it might have a special significance in some other way.

Vessantara: What would be an example of a samapatti which could go unnoticed?

S: Well, a sort of mild telepathic experience. You might think oh, it was, or just might not even think about it at all or, if you did, might think it was just a coincidence. But actually it might have been a sort of very minor samapatti. (Pause.)

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Anyway what else from you, your group. That's it? Good.

Vessantara: Ian has some questions from Anandajyoti's group.

Ian Wray: We were wondering if you had any thoughts about how the meditational side of the Movement might evolve in the future?

S: Well, yes, I've got several thoughts, (laughter) the main one being that if people meditate it will be sure to evolve. (Laughter.) I mean it's quite ridiculous for me to have plans for the meditative side of the Movement if people were not in fact meditating very much or very rigorously. So that's the basic thing. But what did you have in mind specifically? Did you have in mind, say, a college of meditation, or ...?

Ian Wray: Well, we were thinking of a large monastic community, something like that, or very long meditational retreats, or ... something similar.

S: Well, I would certainly very much like to see these things. I'm very happy with the progress that Vajraloka has made. I'm very happy with the fact that so many Order Members and others have been there and spent time there. That would seem to have a very good effect on everybody concerned, and I wish more people would make use of those facilities. But of course if even perhaps a few more people do, those facilities will need to be expanded, and they are hopefully going to be expanded through the development of Blaen-ddol. I'm not quite sure what the plans for Blaen-ddol are but at the very least Blaen-ddol will be a quasi-extension of Vajraloka. I don't know whether meditation will go on at Blaen-ddol in quite the same intensive way as at Vajraloka, I'm not sure of that. On the other hand it might be that it goes on even more intensively. Perhaps that is still all under discussion. But the acquisition of Blaen-ddol will represent in one way or another an extension of Vajraloka, and that's all to the good. What occurs to me in connection with increased meditation practice is that unfortunately it costs money, because even to go away to Vajraloka for a period can be quite expensive, so that means that if people are not to work and save up money in one way or another beforehand they've got to be supported, and that means they've got to be supported by the Movement. The Movement has got to be able to make enough money or acquire enough money to be able to support people in that way, as well of course as to support people who are studying. So I think from a practical point of view the crux is there. I do believe there are some few people at least who would willingly go and spend a year or two at Vajraloka but can't do so for financial reasons. Their 'mother' centre, or 'mother' [108] co-op' if they've got one, can't afford to finance them, and they don't perhaps relish the idea of going out into the world and earning the money in order to spend a prolonged period at Vajraloka. But sooner or later we have to find some way around this, and it should be possible for more and more people to spend longer and longer periods away. That might be all the more necessary for those who are not living in communities, or living for one reason or another in domestic situations and who do require much more of a definite break when they do go away. (Pause.)

Has anybody else got any ideas on this particular question?

Vimalamitra: Well Blaen-ddol might be kind of ... I don't think it will be too expensive to stay there. You know I think it will be just the basic running costs. Much more, suitably cheaper than say seven pounds a day you spend at Vajraloka.

S: What will be the reason for that difference?

Vimalamitra: Well the house would actually be bought whereas at Vajraloka of course the Movement is in the process of actually buying it. That's one of the reasons why it's seven pounds a day.

Paul Lynch: At Vivian Road, the property of Prakasa, the profit from that is going to go into Blaen-ddol to support the community () to keep down their running costs.

S: Also of course I have been strongly encouraging over the last two or three years the women in the Movement to launch a country meditation retreat centre but it does seem to be getting off the ground rather slowly. But I hope that they will have that facility also before long, so that means more men will be able to go to Vajraloka and of course the women themselves will be able to go to their own country meditation retreat centre whenever they feel the need.

Chris Pegrum: It does seem that the Movement's development has taken place largely in cities. I'm a bit surprised that there haven't been more projects set up in country areas.

S: It's a question of money, mainly, because if you set up in country areas first of all you've got to buy or rent the property and the people living there have got to have some means of support, and at present it would seem that support comes mainly from running retreats and so on. And there is a [109] limit to what is possible in that respect inasmuch as the size of the Movement is limited. I'm speaking of course about England. India is rather different. There we have to finance retreats. There all retreats make a big loss, but we have to accept that. People can't afford to go on them even though it costs about something like 70p a day.

Chris Pegrum: But I think a country co-op is just as likely to make money as an urban one. Obviously the nature ...

S: Well it would depend, for instance you couldn't run a restaurant except in an urban area, but no doubt there would be certain things you could do. But you still of course obviously need to keep up your contact with the city because that is presumably where your outlets would be. Unless it was something very specialized that people come to you for.

Chris Pegrum: Cream teas. (Laughter.)

Vimalamitra: One of the suggestions was, for meditating communities, that you have two communities, one community would be out making money while the other community would meditate and then change over.

S: Yes, that would certainly be feasible. Or for study likewise.

Vimalamitra: Yes, right, same kind of thing. There would be a connection between them.

They would get together at times.

S: Because the traditional solution obviously, at least in many parts of the Buddhist world, if not most parts of the Buddhist world, that you've got a monastic order which is totally dependent on the lay people, the lay people's support. But we have discarded that model for various reasons which you're probably well acquainted with, so we have to support ourselves, so to speak, as a Movement. But hopefully, within the Movement itself the co-ops and other enterprises can make a surplus to sufficient people at least in full time meditation and study, and propagating the Dharma. (Pause.)

It does seem, even talking about meditation, it seems to come back to this again, that we do need to make a lot more money, and we do need to be much more efficient.

Vessantara: Do you envisage any new forms of meditation practice being introduced?

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S: People do agitate for new practices from time to time, but I prefer to stress more thorough practice of the methods which we already have in circulation. I mean, in other words, 'more and more of less and less'. Perhaps we should think in terms of abolishing some practices. (Laughter.)

Sagaramati: You did talk once about an intermediate practice between, say, before you visualize Bodhisattvas you visualize an actual deity. You mentioned some Tibetan deity ... you know something that people will get more of a feeling for. A Bodhisattva is a bit far away ...

S: Perhaps I was thinking of some kind of angelic figure, I can't remember but perhaps I was. (End of cassette 1)

Vimalamitra: What about archetype? About archetypes, would that be a good (several words indistinct).

S: Well what archetypes, one might say?

Vimalamitra: Well, the wisdom goddess for instance.

S: Whence would one derive the iconography? Do people resonate to that particular archetype? Some might, I suppose, and maybe others not.

Vimalamitra: I mean, there's Apollo. That might be quite a good first step to Manjughosa.

S: I think it comes down to whether people have a strong feeling for these particular images, because if they don't, well, then they just encounter the same difficulties with them without your, sort of, Buddhist spiritual back-up, as you encounter, say, with Bodhisattvas.

Sagaramati: So if you definitely had a feeling for somebody like, say, Apollo, would you advise people to maybe well, just imagine Apollo in front of them maybe mentally, visualize the form ...?

S: One could try. I mean, I can't say that we've much experience of this sort but it could be tried. Think in terms of the 'sun god'.

Sagaramati: Because I got the feeling that at the time you were suggesting that we need to fill in this gap.

[111]

S: I think that was true. (Pause.)

Anandajyoti: Could you see in the future, Bhante, a meditation community being set up that would be, orient itself around say, something like the Four Foundation Yogas? That that practice could become a bit more widespread?

S: I think that as the Movement as a whole develops and as it became bigger, specialization would be inevitable on all fronts. Just as you'd get, say, groups of people specializing in the White Lotus Sutra you'd get groups of people specializing in 'Mindfulness of Breathing', specializing in the 'Foundation Yogas' and so on. I think that as the Movement develops and grows, that sort of thing is inevitable. (Pause.) On the other hand all the different specialists have to be careful to keep in touch with one another, otherwise there could be a certain amount of one-sidedness. You have someone spending his whole life perhaps, you know, devoting himself to the study of the particular languages in which the White Lotus Sutra was written. (Laughter.) Or someone else making a specialized study of the bhikshu's bowl (laughter), in Asia. Have a complete collection and write learned monographs on the differences between bowls produced in Ceylon and bowls produced in Thailand and so on. There is always that danger because one, even though one has a special interest one must think in terms of one's general, overall, all round development. Not just meditation but also work. Not just study but also teaching. (Pause.) And so on. Any further questions?

Ian Wray: You were talking about Hui Neng and Zen and that led us to wonder about the expression 'satori' and how that fitted into the samatha, samapatti, samdhi framework?

S: Satori, as I understand from works on Zen by modern masters and so on, satori is used very loosely as roughly equivalent to Enlightenment, but so freely that in my opinion the concept of Enlightenment is almost debased. Because one has got minor satoris, major satoris and temporary satoris and permanent satoris and weekend satoris. (Laughter.) So I think very likely 'satori' did start off originally as equivalent to Enlightenment but the term seems to be used among Japanese Zen people much too loosely, much too freely, in my view. It is difficult to say, therefore, what exactly it really does correspond to. It seems to correspond, in the broadest terms, to some sort of flash of Enlightenment. It doesn't seem to be a very precise term as currently used by Zen Buddhists.

Anandajyoti: Does it refer to a certain type of experience that seems to be [112] generated through that particular tradition?

S: That particular trad ... Well I was going to say 'that particular tradition stresses a sudden breakthrough'. That's not altogether true. It's perhaps more true of the Rinzai School of Japanese Zen than say the Soto School. But perhaps there is a suggestion of a sort of a 'sudden breakthrough' after a quite lengthy period of intensive effort and of course yes, one does have that sort of experience, there's no doubt. Whether 'satori' is the best term for it is

difficult to say. I have heard it said that the term 'kenshi', which is also used, corresponds to 'Insight', and that satori does not correspond to Insight in the same kind of way, but certainly the term 'satori' is used sometimes as though it does correspond to a sort of Insight. (Pause.) I remember reading Philip Kapleau's 'Three Pillars of Zen' which on the whole is quite a good book, but it did contain accounts of various people's experiences in the course, say, of a weekend sesshin and I was rather surprised to find certain people described as having had in the course of the weekend 'Enlightenment experiences'. I think 'Enlightenment experience' was used as the equivalent of 'satori', but it would seem to range from a feeling of breakthrough to a feeling of exhilaration or emotional release, or seeing through something. So you see what I mean? but I certainly wouldn't use the term 'Enlightenment experience' for experiences of that sort. (Pause.)

Ian Wray: Could we return to samapatti? A question that just occurs to me. Are all experiences that arrive through our spiritual practices necessarily samapattis?

S: Well samapatti is a very general term, a very broad term, a very loose term, so in that sense one could say 'yes', if one has got to have some collective term for all those experiences. One might as well call them samapattis of one kind or another. Perhaps distinguishing between minor samapattis and major samapattis. But all experiences of the nature of visions, voices and sort of sudden revelations and intense emotional experiences, and experiences of peace or blessing, all these are sort of samapattis, or anything of the nature of telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, levitation. These are all samapattis.

Sagaramati: Could you regard experiences in dreams as samapattis?

S: Indeed, one could. The word literally means simply 'attainment'.

Ratnapani: So it's anything which is a bit beyond, a bit above the ordinary?

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S: Yes, especially something which is not definitely a breakthrough into Insight or Enlightenment, but it's certainly not part and parcel of one's ordinary, everyday mundane experience. It covers the whole, the term 'samapatti' covers that whole intermediate band.

Ratnapani: It is perhaps the conditioned being 'shaken up' a bit.

S: Yes. (Pause.) Is that all from your group?

Ian Wray: We have one point. It's really just a point of information. As to which tradition the idea of the ekalaksana samadhi comes from?

S: This is Mahayana as far as I recollect. It's certainly not Theravada.

Ian Wray: Any particular branch of the Mahayana?

S: This I can't say off hand. I don't recollect. Sounds a bit Yogacara-like but I won't be sure. It's the 'Samadhi of One Characteristic' when you experience things as having one characteristic, say, that they all have the characteristic of sunyata. It seems to be a form of samatha jnana - the awareness of 'sameness'. (Pause.)

What about the other groups? Do they have questions?

Devamitra: I have one question actually. This arose out of experience in meditation. It's an experience which I've had many times and which it transpired, talking about it in the group, a number of other people have also had. That is of some ... quite often, especially shortly after having begun a practice you are clearly beginning to become quite concentrated and it looks as if you're heading for dhyana; then what happens is you fall asleep!

S: Oh! (Laughter.)

Devamitra: It's quite an odd sensation because on the one hand you've got the experience of sort of, an invigoration, and just as it's about, apparently, to burst into bloom suddenly I find I'm overcome by drowsiness and maybe for twenty or thirty minutes that's maintained, and discussing it in the group other people have a similar sort of experience. I wonder if you could ...?

S: I very vaguely remember in my own case, very many years ago having something like that, but not very much. Only the one particular period. But not to that extent, so I find it rather difficult to say anything from my own experience [114] and have sort of forgotten. That must have been more than thirty years ago. But my guess is that you're actually tired. You're tired and it's taken you quite an effort to get into that concentrated state. And that you've got, as it were, enough energy to get there but you haven't got enough energy to stay there, and therefore you fall asleep. This is my guess. But it's only an informed guess.

Vimalamitra: Does that suggest that because you've got to a slightly more 'real' state, you're more in touch with where you really are, and therefore you're ...

S: Yes, there could be that too. Yes, indeed.

Sagaramati: Does that mean the 'spiral-like' motion just doesn't help (unclear) if you go up a bit you drop down.

S: Yes, you haven't properly got on to the 'spiral' yet. I think it is also true to say that unless you are utterly exhausted, which is another matter, that if you remain aware and mindful, you really continue to make an effort, you can break through that barrier of tiredness and sleepiness.

Devamitra: It just seemed rather odd that it should be preceded by what appears to be a process of deepening concentration.

S: Well, if you are in the practice of concentrating and you 'know the ropes', as it were, so you don't find it very difficult to come to that point of concentration, but then you've used up all your energy in getting there. There's no further energy to sustain you. So you are tired and you fall asleep. You want to recoup energy, you want to recruit energy. Of course another more subtle possibility that occurs is that you are not very willing to face the experience of deepening concentration, and therefore you fall asleep as an escape from that. That is a more subtle possibility. But knowing people generally I would say that it is very often due to tiredness, that you don't have enough energy to sustain you at the point at which you've arrived, the point which you've reached. I know very often in the Movement, especially

people in co-ops and so on, are very often very tired, and more tired than they should be most of the time, especially perhaps when they are supposed to be meditating.

Ratnapani: That sort of subtle suggestion does seem to correlate with suddenly getting very concentrated when the bell goes; suddenly the pressures off, [115] you don't have to do it any more, and away you go. It's when you've got to do it there's lots of resistance to prevent you from doing it ...

S: Where does this 'got to' come from?

Ratnapani: Ah, well, that's an historical question.

S: Ah! It does seem important that people make sure as far as they possibly can that they are normally well rested, and aren't tired when they start doing something, whether it's meditation or taking a class, or working.

Sagaramati: I think often tiredness is brought about through conflict.

S: That's also true.

Sagaramati: It doesn't matter how much sleep you have had, it doesn't make any difference.

Ratnapani: It does ... when you think that it seems to be quite a common experience in the Movement, I gather, for people, saying so anyway, that their morning meditation is a pretty groggy sort of affair, not very clear or concentrated. Quite often, quite a few people say that that's the case quite often.

S: I wonder why that should be? Well, I have my own little theories, eh.

Ratnapani: Well it does feel like tiredness often, in my own experience, but there again ... and other people say that they feel tired. - But at the same time they do no more than other people in the 'outside world' who probably go out late, get up early and don't seem to be tired, and yet we've got people who are not going out at all hours of the day and night, and living a healthy life, and are getting up feeling very, very tired. That would suggest some sort of conflict or resistance, or something.

Devamitra: Could you say what your other theories are?

S: Well, one little theory was, or is, that quite a lot of people don't take sufficient care to get to bed by a reasonable time. They hang about in the kitchen chatting and having extra cups of tea or coffee and they don't get to bed until quite late, and therefore they are not properly rested by the time the bell goes for the morning meditation. I also think it's a mistake to [116] scramble into your trousers when you hear the bell actually go for meditation. (Laughter.) I know people do this. I don't know about here but - I don't think it does happen here, in fact they seem to be, there are some of them up at a surprisingly early hour here, (laughter) but I do know in communities it does happen and even also on retreats perhaps. That some people don't actually get up until they hear the last bell, and then they rush along to the shrine. This certainly can't be conducive to good meditation. You should certainly get up twenty to thirty minutes beforehand and well, just have a wash, preferably in cold water, and just sort of stroll

around and just adjust to the new day. I don't know whether it's a good idea whether people rush for a cup of tea as soon as they wake up. I'm really very doubtful about all this. Does one really need tea first thing in the morning? If so, why? Is one thirsty or what does one want?

Ratnapani: Stimulation.

S: Stimulation. Well what stimulation does one need, or should one need after a good night's sleep? You've got interesting things to do as soon as you get up.

Sagaramati: Could it be just habit?

S: It could be, I suppose, but then one must scrutinize all one's old habits and see whether they are any longer relevant. It's a bit of comfort, I think, a pleasant sensation, you feel the need of a pleasant sensation, and I think that is very suspect, or rather is very, is tell-tale. I mean, the sensation of waking up should be pleasant enough. (Laughter.)

Steve Murray: It tends to assuage hunger to get you through the meditation.

S: Pardon?

Steve Murray: It tends to assuage hunger for the hour of meditation if you have tea beforehand.

Sagaramati: Tend to what?

S: Assuage hunger. Hunger.

Sagaramati: Oh I see.

[117]

S: I mean, I do sort of fully allow for the fact that I'm older than anybody else and that my material needs may be less, but I have sort of noticed that people seem to feel the need very often, in many communities, of a quite solid, substantial snack just before retiring for the night, even though they've had a good meal at six o'clock or six-thirty. Even though they've had substantial 'seconds'. Quite a lot of people I see have, from my point of view, a double meal. They have exactly twice as much. In fact I did notice on one Tuscany some people were eating in fact three times as much as I was eating. (Laughter). Oh yes, literally three times as much. I was a bit surprised, because I thought "Well, they are young, you know, (laughter,) maybe much more active physically than I am, and as you get older you do eat less, so maybe that is quite natural and understandable." but I'm a bit surprised if one has sort of eaten properly the previous day, one feels hungry to that extent early in the morning, so hungry that you have to blunt your hunger with a cup of tea. But is that exactly what happens? Perhaps people are more healthy and vigorous than I realized. (Laughter.)

Devamitra: I must say that I feel that the effect of a cup of tea, early in the morning, on me is to make me feel slightly nauseous. It doesn't help to assuage any feelings of hunger I have.

Sagaramati: I think biologically you actually switch to an internal source of food during the night, so when you get up it's a bit unnatural to feel hungry, because you should still be in that

... well that's why you do a fast, and if you don't have breakfast you can just carry on. You just don't feel hungry, because it doesn't make that switch to an external source.

Vimalamitra: Well, I think even though you should wake up quite well rested and fresh, if for some reason you don't then sometimes a cup of tea does help you actually 'arrive'. It is ...

S: Well, fair enough as a sort of emergency measure, but not as a regular standby, if you see what I mean.

Sagaramati: It couldn't be that some people just take longer to wake up than others? Some people are naturally quite bright in the morning and to somebody who spends a long time waking up it could be a real source of annoyance. (Laughter.)

S: And vice versa. (Laughter.)

[118]

Ajita: It's usually late night books or...

S: I thought you were going to say 'booze' (laughter)

Ajita: Late night books, or late night snacks. I think before you have to burn it off in sleep. You use up energy () burning up food, which can leave you tired.

S: I think one has to be much more mindful about everything that one does and see what effect late night meals have on one, how one feels in the morning whether one does feel better if one hasn't eaten during the whole evening, that is to say after six-thirty. I don't like to generalize or lay down the law too vigorously because one realizes that younger people maybe have different requirements. Some of you aren't all that young any more! (Laughter). And there was a time when I was eating only before twelve o'clock for years on end and I don't think I did any less work then than in a subsequent period.

Paul Lynch: I myself, what I eat has an effect on my vitality. In pujas just feeling "ugh", "splurged", you're still a bit blocked, bloated out, and can't really experience the Puja and it even carries on to the next morning's meditation.

S: I think I have found in many communities, or at least in some communities, that the diet is much too heavy. It's certainly too heavy for me, usually, and I wonder whether it isn't too heavy for other people too, in some cases. It seems to be much too starchy. That's understandable if you're doing heavy physical work all day, but not everybody is doing that. I even noticed here, there maybe some little explanation for this, on the work day, there was a work day a few days ago, the diet on that day seemed particularly light, whereas I would have thought it would have been the other way round. Do you see what I mean?

So one should bear all these little things in mind, and try to adjust food accordingly without being too precious of course, so that when people are spending most of their time meditating don't give them lots of heavy pies and puddings, then when they are doing a hard day's work, at the end of a long work period, don't give them a bit of light salad. Unless you're proceeding on some sort of principle which is not really intelligible. (Laughter). Or it could be that you've just run out of this or that and you just have to make use of what you had to hand, that also

does happen sometimes obviously.

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Ajita: Some retreats I've had in Scotland I've scotched the menu from midday, especially when there's going to go on meditation, like seven or eight hours, or nine hours meditation. We found that actually in the evening you're much more awake because you've burned off your food in your daily work, for instance, or the work period. In the evening you feel a lot more alive. I find on this retreat ...

S: Well, we should certainly give thought to these matters. I think many communities don't give sufficient thought to them. It is quite interesting that when the women took over Padmaloka, I think it was the year before last, for a study retreat, whoever it was, before the women arrived and before he went away, ordered the usual quantities of everything, and it was found that for the women the quantity of bread was three times bigger than they needed. They ate exactly one third of the bread that the men, that a similar number of men would have eaten. But a little more fruit, which I thought rather interesting. I suppose partly women are a little smaller than men and also they don't perhaps do so much physical work but none the less it seemed a very big difference, almost as though men were eating a bit too much bread. Because every man who could come to Padmaloka on retreat eats exactly three times as much bread, apart from other things, as women who come on retreat at Padmaloka.

Devamitra: They have a third of a loaf per day, apparently. That was what Vajrakumara calculated for male retreats, a third of a loaf of bread, per head, per day.

S: I think it's often more than that. I'm sure it has approached one loaf of bread per day. (Laughter.) I'm sure of this! Quite apart from swilling great bucketfuls of milk and all the rest of it, late at night.

Devamitra: I think that might be a slight exaggeration, Bhante.

S: Well the bucket might be, a bottle not. Well one just needs to correlate one's food intake and the kind of food one is eating with what one is doing, surely?

Chris Pegrum: When I was housekeeper at Padmaloka, Bhante, there was one point where we were eating, or I should say drinking, five gallons of oil every week!

S: Some people, I know, overdo it, I sometimes found at Padmaloka, though [120] the vegetables were actually swimming in oil. This didn't seem necessary at all. Someone seems to have a thing about oil. I'm sure on Indian retreats they consume enormous quantities of chillies, or at least, several bushels per retreat, half a pound per head per week.

Devamitra: We are getting through about two litres of oil a day.

S: I must say I haven't been conscious here that the food contains too much oil.

Anyway any final questions about meditation? Any question we didn't deal with? (Pause.) But I have mentioned before we do come to that, I have mentioned somewhere or other that in connection with meditation it is traditionally said in India that there are three things that need to be controlled, or perhaps 'regulated' is a better word. Food, sex, and sleep. So one needs to

harmonize all these things so that they don't get in the way of your meditation.

Anyway, any further questions? Final question? Wasn't there another group'? No, no questions from that group, good. All right, we better go mindfully to our lunch, then. (Laughter.)

END OF TAPE

Transcribed by Advayacitta

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Vessantara: So as today's the last session it will be a bit more of a general one, so the questions might be a bit miscellaneous.

S: All right.

Vessantara: Martin's going to start.

Martin: A general question. In classes we tend to say that the Puja has two purposes. Firstly that it is a devotional ceremony, secondly that it's a means of refining the emotions. Given some of your recent comments in the Perfect Emotion Mitrata on the type of music that is most suitable for the Puja; that is you suggested a more primal type i.e. Tibetan music rather than more refined music such as Bach's masses and the like, do you think our approach to and presentation of the Puja needs changing or developing?

S: I really can't say because I'm not much around the Centres. I don't think I've actually led a Puja at a public Centre for quite a long time now. I must say I don't really know whether there's been any change or much change. Maybe those people who've been around maybe eight or ten or twelve years, especially Order Members, could offer some comment here, personally don't really know. Though I must say, as far as my experience at Padmaloka and at the three 'Tuscany's', well the two 'Tuscany's' - as I haven't taken part in a Puja here yet, so far as that experience of mine goes, those Pujas represent a considerable advance on what I remember of Pujas in the earlier days of the 'Friends'. They seem to be more refined, one might say. More care is taken over the decoration of the shrine, and so on, and altogether people are, so to speak, better conducted and more mindful. Certainly on those occasions, I mean, at Padmaloka especially on the occasions of Order Weekends and here at Tuscany. What the situation is around the public Centres it's rather more difficult for me to say. Also ... yes I have led one or two Pujas on the occasion of big celebrations but they may not be very characteristic. Perhaps one is thinking more of the more ordinary weekly or daily Pujas, or Pujas at the end of beginners classes and so on.

Ratnapani: Weren't you asking, Martin, should we change it from where we are now, in align with this?

S: Well there should be always constant improvement. I noticed that Martin made a distinction between primal music; I think I called it primordial, and what he calls the more refined music of Bach. I didn't actually make that antithesis myself. It's more that I felt you couldn't just play Bach in the [122] course of a Puja and that would be that: because it was very good music, therefore it was automatically suitable. I don't think it follows quite in that

way. I think we still do have to experiment, in the light of those general remarks that I made.

Ajita: The feeling I get actually with Pujas, and I've shared the feeling with other people is that Pujas ... they may be quite good and inspiring but they only seem to affect a certain amount of you. They don't move you like ... your hair doesn't stand on end with tremendous vibrancy. I feel we could have some instrumental involvement in the Pujas ... (few words unclear)

S: You could, but I've already expressed myself in that particular Mitrata, or on that particular occasion reported in the Mitrata. I think we should proceed cautiously. I don't think we can just introduce into the Puja some music that we might find uplifting, on some other occasion. I think that would not be the way to do it. We have to feel our way. Also I commented perhaps on people's need to get out of the Puja the sort of emotional experience that perhaps the Puja is not intended to give. In fact one might say in the case of the Puja essentially it is a question of giving, not of receiving and you only receive to the extent that you give. To go along expecting a great emotional experience without your actually having committed yourself is really ridiculous. Perhaps only an Order member has the right to expect very much from a Puja. Do you see what I mean? Because the Puja is the act of giving something, or giving yourself, to the Buddha. This is the essential part of it. If there is a feedback in the form of some emotional experience for you, well, so much the better, but that is not the purpose of the Puja, to enable you to enjoy some kind of ecstatic emotional experience. If it comes, all right; if it doesn't, still all right. The main point is that you should give yourself. You should offer yourself in that particular way.

Ajita: Do you think there's actually room for experimentation within ...?

S: Well, yes and no. Because experimentation in what? In a way there's no room for experimentation. There's just doing it better. You just have to offer yourself and you have to make sure that whatever you do and the whole arrangement of the shrine assists you in the feeling of offering yourself. You may get a great emotional backwash from it or not; in a sense that's almost irrelevant. But to go along expecting an experience in a gluttonous sort of way, as so often people do, is I think, entirely wrong.

Ajita: It's more from the point of view of maybe musical accompaniment. If [I23] it was eh ... room for experimentation. In fact ...

S: I think we must be very careful that we don't end up trying to jazz it up because people are just not doing the Puja in the sense of not actually offering themselves, which is the main thing. In fact I'd rather, in a sense, that the Puja was a bit dull, rather than have it just jazzed up.

Vimalamitra: Maybe it's a question of thinking about producing another Puja a kind of musical Puja ... rather than changing the one we've got because I think the one we've got is very invaluable for people coming into the Movement.

S: But what would the idea be behind changing the Puja? What would one be trying to achieve that one couldn't achieve perhaps with the present 'Sevenfold Puja'?

Sagaramati: I mean, in a sense of the experience. I've done our Pujas and I think they're good

etcetera but having been to Pujas in Ladakh and experienced that I cannot see a continuous connection between our Pujas and that experience. The experience is like ... well you really feel you are in tangible contact with something and it's not just a pleasurable ... it's not just a pleasurable thing. It's something that does invoke ... well you really feel in the presence of something great.

S: But then that has evolved over hundreds of years, you see, so we're not going to be able to produce something corresponding to that merely by taking thought in just a few years. It's not going to be possible.

Sagaramati: Even my nervous system, as it were, responded to something I had no expectation of. The sounds of the instruments ...

S: Perhaps that was also a significant feature, that you had no expectations.

Sagaramati: But isn't there definite qualities of sound that do have this effect?

S: Well here we could experiment; but carefully, but not thinking in terms of what I call just jazzing up the Puja.

Sagaramati: We shouldn't do this from just a lack of feeling for the present Puja.

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S: Well, no, not as a substitute. What is more important, not as a substitute for the actual giving of ourselves. Not trying to make the Puja into some kind of entertainment or just essentially an emotional experience.

Anandajyoti: Could you see, Bhante, our practice of Puja evolving so that perhaps within the context of the Order at least there were Pujas that were specifically associated with specific Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?

S: Well there will always be a certain variation. We have 'experimented' a little with that sort of thing in the Tuscanies. For instance, I don't know what's been done this year but last year there were different coloured cloths on the shrine for different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Anandajyoti: Perhaps over a period of time you could see those evolving specific ... eh ... you'd have a Puja that would have a specific form, say, that was associated with Amitabha, and a slightly different form that was associated with ...

S: Could be. I can't say that I'm very worried about all this. I'm only worried that people might try to force the pace artificially because I've seen such a very great development in this aspect already. I can remember when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and very tentatively and apologetically almost introduced the 'Sevenfold Puja' once a week for those who wanted it. This had to be emphasized. It wasn't compulsory and I got seven or eight people along once a week who did enjoy this and we did just repeat it in front of the shrine everybody of course sitting on chairs. So I've seen things come a long way from then. I remember my experience of the Buddhist Society summer school when I suggested to Christmas Humphreys that we might have a little Puja in the evenings, just a bit of chanting in front of an image having lit a few candles - that's all it was. He expressed considerable doubts about

this as I've mentioned before and said he didn't think many people would want that sort of thing. It was clear he didn't think much of it. He had no time for Puja at all. But anyway it was announced that in the evening after the evening lecture for those who wanted it, the weaker brethren eh (laughter), there'd be a little Puja led by Bhante in the Oak Room but actually practically the whole of the summer school came rather to the surprise of Mr Humphreys I think. Practically the only people that didn't come were Mr Humphreys, Mrs Humphreys and their immediate entourage, about six or seven. (Laughter.)

Everyone else, practically a hundred people were there and it was repeated and people clearly got something out of it. I've seen things evolving from those [I25] beginnings. I've known Theravada bhikkhus apologize for Pujas and say that they were only for lay people, unintellectual people. Intellectual people, and of course Westerners were supposed to be honorary intellectuals, didn't need them at all. What was important was the intellectual understanding of the Dharma. I've even heard Buddhist bhikkhus say "Well we don't really do Pujas. Bhikkhus don't do Puja. It's only lay people that do it." So to say, it's very much for the weaker brethren.

So I've seen things change in England to such an extent that I'm not worrying about further progress. I'm quite sure there will be further progress. But I become a little concerned when I feel some people might be becoming a bit impatient and expecting something from the Puja which, as it were, they are not putting into it, as though they had the right to go along to a Puja and have some wonderful experience laid on almost, for them by the Puja. But essentially Puja does mean the expression of your own devotion, your own reverence for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

I must say I've been having further thoughts about little improvements; very modest little improvements but you know, many a mickle makes a muckle I believe. (Laughter.) What I've been thinking is this: we've got everybody, at least on some occasions, sitting nicely haven't we (laughter) in parallel rows. Well that's a great improvement. And why is it an improvement, especially in the case of the Order? Well you've got the Buddha in the form of the image there on the shrine and you are the Sangha, or at least you are the symbols of the Sangha. Just as the Buddha image of wood or stone or metal symbolizes Enlightenment itself, in the same way, you sitting there in flesh and blood symbolizes the Arya-Sangha even if you are not yourselves Aryas. Do you see what I mean? So you are not just an audience, not just spectators, you are incorporated into the structure of the Three Jewels at least symbolically. But where does the Dharma come in? Where are the symbols for the Dharma? This is what I've been wondering. Do we have any symbol or symbols for the Dharma as we have the Buddha there on - let's not call it the altar - the image table one might say, and there are the Order Members sitting there symbolizing the Sangha? So where's the symbol or symbols for the Dharma? We don't have those. So it occurred to me that perhaps to make the symbolism complete there should be a scripture on the so-called altar. In Tibetan shrines you have the volumes of the Kangjur and Tangyur, or at least the Kangjur, usually in the one hundred and eight volume edition, in sort of cupboards, glass-fronted cupboards, almost like book cases, on either side of the main shrine. It may not be necessary to do that. It may look rather odd in the West, this combination of library and shrine as it were. But it did occur to me that we could have one or two or more important texts actually placed on the steps of the shrine. Then I further thought that perhaps the [I26] texts could be bound very beautifully in some kind of silk brocade or possibly that it could even be hand written by somebody. So this could perhaps be a further development. Then you've got the symbol of the Buddha, the symbol of

the Dharma, and the symbol or symbols of the Sangha. It does become more complete, as well as more genuinely traditional.

There's also another set of symbols which might be combined, though we don't want to become over elaborate. There are appropriate symbols for the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya of the Buddha. Here traditionally for the Dharmakaya the symbol is a sphere, either a sphere of crystal, you know like a crystal ball that the medium gazes into, a sphere of crystal or a stupa, a model stupa. That's for the Dharmakaya. For the Sambhogakaya; a volume of scripture; and for the Nirmanakaya a small image. (Pause.) So in this sort of way we can elaborate a little perhaps or make the Puja more complete.

Devamitra: So the image symbolizing the Nirmanakaya would be a smaller image? It wouldn't be the main image; it would be a separate image?

S: Yes, if you did have three separate symbols for the Three Kayas then it would be a separate small image of Shakyamuni

Sagaramati: These would be tiered?

S: Presumably, yes.

Mike Howes: As you were talking it occurred to me that the fact that we all walk down an aisle together and make offerings, two of us at a time, that in a way, symbolizes the path, walking amongst the Sangha.

S: That's true, yes.

Padmaraja: What about robes? At least amongst the Order.

S: Someone is experimenting at present. One of the women mitras is designing a sort of meditation robe in rather nice woollen cloth - blue. She showed me some examples and I was quite well impressed with what she'd done. She's going to pursue the matter further and experiment more. Her point was - I can't at the moment remember who it was, but anyway her point was - that at present Order Members and others on various occasions sit draped in all sorts of tatty old blankets (laughter) and she thought this didn't enhance the beauty of the shrine, quite rightly, and therefore it would be better if there was a standard [I27] colourful poncho-type robe that people could wear in the shrine room, especially in cold weather for meditation, while they were meditating. So perhaps something like that could be pursued. I don't remember why she chose blue, but she'd got a very nice blue woollen cloth. It was a really beautiful deep blue. This seemed to fit in with what we do in India where Order Members, of course, wear blue shirts, under their white kesas, blue being the colour that is especially associated with the ex-untouchables. It's their, so to speak, party colour. (Long Pause.)

I think I have mentioned that when I went to Auckland on my first visit - Auckland, New Zealand - I found there that it was the custom for people to put on especially colourful dress for Pujas. They used to garb themselves in quite colourful kaftans. On my second visit I found most of them had stopped doing it. But this was their practice on my first visit. And that did look quite colourful, New Zealand being a bit tropical, as it were. It seemed in some ways a

bit more suitable there. They needed something very light and flimsy because it was so hot.

I also think, now we're on the point, this is just in passing, those who are leading classes should be encouraged ... should see to it that women attending classes are encouraged to cover themselves decently because this sometimes is not appropriate, that they don't. Sometimes it's done best through the women Order Members, but if there's no woman Order Member present you yourself may have to say a few words tactfully. (Pause.)

Anandajyoti: Wearing a robe of some sort in the Puja would go along with emphasizing the collective or almost transpersonal nature of the practice of Puja.

S: It would also emphasize the fact that the congregation so to speak was part of the shrine, in a manner of speaking. Also because it did occur to me that just sometimes looking around a shrine room, there's a quite beautiful shrine, a quite beautiful image, lovely flowers, everything has been done really beautifully but you look at the congregation so to speak, (laughter) they sometimes look pretty awful as regards dress. They look bright enough - sometimes they've even had haircuts - but (laughter) so much tatty old shirts and coats. Well it's understandable that some people are too poor to afford much of a wardrobe but if one just had something really pleasant and colourful that one just slipped on when one went into the shrine that would solve that problem. So one can think about that perhaps. (Pause.) I must say I don't have very definite or very strong ideas as to whether it should be red or blue or yellow. I'm quite happy that people should agree among themselves as to what it should be. (Pause.)

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Anandajyoti: Is there any particular figure, Bhante, that is associated with the Order do you think, specifically? I've been starting to read *The Cult of Tara* and I've been just aware of the developed ritual aspect particularly in Tibetan Buddhism.

S: I've sometimes said that I've felt that the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara was the figure that could be especially associated with the Order, because the eleven heads represent the eleven directions of space including the centre point and the Order is, so to speak, universal, it's looking in all directions, it's outwardgoing, and the thousand arms stress that even more. Every Order Member is an arm, as it were, attached to the main body, the central trunk. This is not to be understood too literalistically of course. (laughter.) I'm not suggesting any submergence of the individual in the group here.

Anandajyoti: So one could evolve a Puja that would be centred around that particular figure of Avalokitesvara?

S: One certainly could. One certainly could.

Anandajyoti: What about a protector? A particular figure could be the protector of the Order.

S: Well perhaps that also has to emerge naturally. I can't say I've any definite thoughts about this. But the thousand armed Avalokitesvara as representing or symbolizing the unity, the unified function of the Order I think is very appropriate. (Long Pause.) That's quite appropriate. It's only a praying mantis because we were talking about prayer and Puja, I suppose. It's quite harmless. There seem to be quite a few of them around.

Mike Howes: Whilst we're on the subject of Pujas, my question comes from a different direction. Leaving the Puja as it is at the moment, I've found in the three years that I've been involved with practice that Puja has been really the most weakest area. It seems the area where I sometimes seem to progress but mostly seem to be almost out of it. I wonder if in a general way you could give guidance, summarize what you may have said before perhaps, about how one can improve that area. It does worry me somewhat.

S: I suppose it's a question to some extent, of what is coming in the way. Maybe, I don't know, I'm not referring necessarily to your case, one has got [129] false expectations of the Puja. It seems to me that it's enough that you do it. Everything else is just extra. You see what I mean? Because what is one doing when one goes into the shrine and performs a Puja, you're expressing your devotion to, reverence for the Buddha.

Mike Howes: I think my problem is that I may get through to the third verse and then it's suddenly the ending mantras or it's the Heart Sutra or something.

S: Do you mean to say your attention wanders? (Laughter.) Well perhaps it isn't just connected with the Puja. Perhaps you do have a wandering mind, and perhaps it wanders during study too. Do you find you start thinking of some particular thing other than the Puja?

Mike Howes: Well I think it's more a lack of connection, somehow. I'm not quite connecting always. Sometimes I am fully connected but eh ...

S: Have you had any experience of leading a Puja?

Mike Howes: Yes I have, and I enjoy it.

S: That makes a difference?

Mike Howes: Oh yes, it concentrates you. I sometimes feel - I know Pujas aren't individual things - but I've sometimes found Pujas on my own to be very good, Pujas with half a dozen people. Pujas with sometimes twenty-six people - sometimes I'm lost half way through the Avalokitesvara mantra. I realize that I shouldn't but that's the way it is. I'm hopeful that as my practice develops then my contact with that particular aspect will be better.

S: It is perhaps significant that one doesn't have so much of a problem when one is leading or doing it on one's own or with a few other people. It's as though when doing it with a lot of other people and you're just responsible for the responses with others, you feel perhaps that you're just one of the crowd, your particular saying of the Puja, repeating of it doesn't make much difference. But perhaps it doesn't in terms of actual sound but it is your Puja; it is something that you are doing, something that you are saying. Perhaps you need to feel this more strongly or to tell yourself this more decidedly. (Pause.)

Well, I also think it's good, I think it's generally helpful, that we should have from time to time really big Pujas. I think we sometimes do around the Centres don't we? I mean quite well organized Pujas with beautiful [130] decorations and so on. I think we still should be careful they don't go on too long because sometimes people in their enthusiasm plan very long Pujas only to find a lot of people present just start getting tired after the first two or three hours. (Laughter.) Do you see what I mean? You have to bear that sort of thing in mind too. Because

the Tibetans have very long Pujas but there are breaks and also light refreshments are served at intervals. So one must remember that too. I don't suggest that you should serve light refreshments in the shrine room but if the Tibetans are your model don't be under any misunderstanding or any misapprehension. Don't think that they sit there solidly in the shrine without a drop of tea for five or six hours at a time. No they don't. Tea is served every forty-five minutes. (Laughter.) They're chanting away vigorously; they need to moisten their lips perhaps, so someone comes round and fills their bowls with tea. It's all part of the Puja.

Sagaramati: The one I went to it was about every fifteen minutes.

S: Ladakh is very far from Lhasa so standards have probably slipped! (Laughter.)

Anandajyoti: We tend to have Pujas in the evenings even if they're quite big ones. I was thinking we needn't necessarily, on retreat. If we were having a special Puja you could have it as the main feature of the day.

S: I must say I've personally often found it quite unfortunate that Pujas come at the end of a long and busy day when you are a bit tired and I think this can sometimes put some people even a bit off Pujas if they only experience Puja under those circumstances. I think the morning time, say after breakfast, is an excellent time for Pujas. That's why, for instance, I usually find that when there are public ordinations say at eleven o'clock and they're preceded by a Sevenfold Puja, that a Sevenfold Puja is nearly always noticeably much more vigorous than any Puja we have late in the evening, just because people are more rested and more fresh at that time of day. I think it is, on the whole, most unfortunate that Pujas almost always come at the fag end of the day; and it really is the fag end in the sense that you're fagged at the end of the day.

Mike Howes: I think that's been part of my problem, that I want to go to bed very often.

S: Ah, yes. (Laughter.) I think, perhaps, Centres and people on retreat should very seriously consider that, whether there should not be a very early evening Puja or even a late afternoon Puja; or even a morning Puja, so that [131] one doesn't assume that you always conclude with Puja otherwise your experience of Puja may be always associated with a feeling of tiredness. You may never enjoy a really fresh Puja which would be unfortunate.

Vimalamitra: Or at least people could make sure that if they're going to do a meditation and Puja they do the Puja beforehand.

Ajita: One of the best retreats I led in Scotland was three Pujas a day; one in the morning, a short one, and a twelve noon Puja which was a 'Sevenfold Puja', and then an evening Puja. I found the twelve noon Puja was much more inspiring actually. (Pause.)

Sagaramati: I must admit I think with me anyway the evening is more significant.

S: It is a good way of closing an evening if you're not tired. Also I think we have to be very careful when you've got a lot of people present and one has so many individual offerings. It is good to have individual offerings but sometimes it lengthens the Puja to such an extent that everybody is very tired, so you have to consider that also, because sometimes it happens, say, at Order weekends, if you've got sixty, seventy, eighty people all coming forward and making

individual offerings, in a way that's grand but if it's quite late in the evening after a quite full day it perhaps isn't appropriate to lengthen the Puja to that extent, because it can add forty, forty-five minutes on to the Puja. So one has to be sensible. It's difficult to feel very devoted or very devotional if at the same time you're quite tired and ready to go to bed.

Devamitra: Can I suggest possibly that we move on to some other questions because there are in fact quite a number of other questions.

Martin Redman: A question which maybe slightly related, we wondered if you thought darshan has a place in the FWBO, say as regards yourself and/or Order Members? (Laughter.)

S: Well, it's always nice to see one another isn't it? (Laughter.) I think people are glad to see one. I think for the present at least, under social conditions in England and bearing in mind all the English inhibitions, I think people would be quite embarrassed either at sitting and gazing at someone's face or if someone was sitting and gazing at their face. I think we've a long way to go before that becomes sort of natural, as it is in India. But yes, I think people are glad to see their spiritual friends and that's right and [132] proper. But darshan in the more formal Indian sense, I don't know. I'm a bit doubtful about that. I don't mean that the Movement should be indefinitely restrained by English inhibitions; I mean if they feel like doing it in Scotland that's fine by me. (Laughter.) They might see things in quite a different way there, or on the continent. But I don't think English people to begin with, at least, would be very comfortable with this, and it's got to be an expression of a genuine feeling, obviously.

Duncan Skinner: There are a few people, certainly on this retreat, who get a great deal from looking at you. That question would be of most interest to me with reference to yourself. How do you feel about giving darshan? (Laughter.)

S: Well, you see, when I'm in India it's happening all the time. I mean there are thousands of people just flocking to see me; so if a little of it happened, if people were taking a sort of surreptitious peep in Britain that wouldn't bother me very much. (laughter) Well, for instance, I know this is going to happen when I go next month to Poona. I'm going to be sitting there in my room and Lokamitra's going to say, "Well there's twenty people just arrived from such and such a place. They don't want to say anything, they just want to see you, they just want to take darshan." So in they all troop and make their usual salutations and beam at me and I maybe speak a few words to them and off they'd all go. And they'd be perfectly happy. There were no questions to ask. No problems. (Laughter.) If they've anything to say it's "Please visit our village" and then nothing more than that. And in that way one keeps so many people happy. And maybe after a lecture, after a meeting a lot of people may come forward, even several hundred people, to get a closer look, just to greet you, but not to engage in any conversation or discussion, they just don't expect that. They're quite happy just to see you. And very often if you're just sitting up there on the platform at a meeting people see you under those conditions. Most are quite happy just with that. It is very important that they see you; and Indians do attach a lot of significance to this. No doubt it's understandable. It represents a sort of more personal contact. They're not satisfied with hearing about you or reading what you have written assuming that they can read, they want actually to see you, if possible at close quarters. (Pause.) Anyway, does that answer the question?

A Voice: Yes.

Devamitra: I've got a question about Dharmaraja. Traditionally it's considered [133] that someone who perfects punya but who does not develop jnana would be reborn as a universal monarch. My question is: why a universal monarch? For instance, why not Brahma? If the perfection of punya represents the perfection of the mundane it would seem reasonable to suspect that that might lead to be reborn as Brahma as opposed to a universal monarch, and I was just wondering if you'd ever had any thoughts upon that particular subject?

S: Well the Buddhist tradition is that the Dharmaraja or cakravarti-rajā occupied a very important position in the world, as it were. We probably haven't had in the world literally anything approaching a Dharmaraja just because the world has never been completely unified under one government; though there were people in the last century, Buddhists in the last century, who did regard Queen Victoria as something of a Dharmaraja, even though technically, according to Buddhism a woman cannot be a Dharmaraja, they regarded her as approximating to that because one, she did rule or at least reign over a very large portion of the earth's surface and secondly, because she was believed to be personally a very good woman with a strong ethical character and so on and so forth. But strictly speaking we haven't had a Dharmaraja in the world. Dharmaraja, one might even say, is a relative term for a righteous ruler over a certain portion of the earth's surface. But a person in that position exercises an enormously important function, perhaps even more important than that of Brahma one might say; certainly more important and more significant for the human race, so perhaps that is a reward, so to speak, for skilful actions, even greater in a sense than the reward which one would get by becoming a Brahma. I don't know whether it is actually stated in so many words in tradition that you require even more merit to become a Dharmaraja than to become a Brahma, I'm not so sure of that, but one can understand that the Dharmaraja is a very very important function for human beings generally.

Devamitra: But if the perfection of punya leads to the arising of a Dharmaraja what is it that leads to the arising of a brahma, if it's not the perfection of punya?

S: Well one could say that punya is of various kinds accumulated in various ways. Perhaps someone who has meditated much, and especially experienced the arupa dhyanas, would have an affinity for the Brahmālokas; but someone who perhaps had led a very ethical life would have a greater affinity for being reborn as someone like a Dharmaraja in as much as ethics has more of a sort of social reference than does meditation in a way.

Devamitra: So you seem to be suggesting that Dharmaraja is more concerned [134] with the object and ...

S: One could put it that way.

Devamitra: ... that Brahma is more concerned with subject.

S: One could put it in that way. I don't know whether Buddhist tradition does, as it were, adjudicate on the relative amounts of punya needed to become a Dharmaraja or a Brahma. I'm not so sure about that. Certainly a Brahma is a more refined being but he is also a less effective being; and in some ways one might say, so far as ordinary human beings are concerned a less useful being. So perhaps to become a Dharmaraja gives one greater opportunities of service than to become a Brahma.

Devamitra: It would seem that the Dharmaraja was closer to the Bodhisattva, perhaps.

S: Perhaps.

Sagaramati: What you said in the Three Jewels about the human realm and its centrality to the others, it's as if Brahma would just be the experience of vipaka whereas the Dharmaraja would be both.

S: One could put it in that way. (Pause.) Though again Brahmas actually are represented as exercising volition, and because Brahmas are represented as practising metta bhavana aren't they?

Sagaramati: So does that mean there are, as it were, other dimensions to the god realm other than the traditional one?

S: Brahmas seem to be rather different from gods in the ordinary sense.

Sagaramati: So there's devas and brahmas'?

S: Devas and Brahmas are sometimes distinguished as different categories, though again sometimes Brahmas are included in the category of devas.

Sagaramati: So there is room, as it were, in the hierarchy for beings over and above human who exercise both Karma and Karma-vipaka?

S: It would seem so. Well certainly as I've said there are Pali Suttas [135] which represent brahmas as practising metta Bhavana. That would clearly be positive skilful volition.

Sagaramati: So they wouldn't have to come back to the human realm to gain Enlightenment?

S: Well anagamis and sakradagamis do not have to return to the human realm so it wouldn't be anything anomalous if they didn't. Maybe Devamitra's wondering whether to aspire to be reborn as a Brahma or as a Dharmaraja. (Much laughter.) I suggest a Dharmaraja because it would make, I think, the work of the FWBO in the future probably much easier. (laughter.)

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

Ajita: ... that no one else in the Order understands the full implications of the FWBO except yourself. Is that true? Did you say it?

S: I don't remember saying it. I might well have said it. If I did say it I don't know when I said it, and there is the possibility, of course, that even though it was true at that time it's no longer true. (Laughter.)

Ajita: If you do understand, I'd be interested to hear the full implications. (Laughter.)

S: I didn't catch that.

Ajita: If you do understand, I'd be interested to hear what the full implications of the FWBO are.

S: Full implications? I'm not quite sure what that phrase means because it can mean 'significance'; it can mean 'possible consequences'. Because for instance at the very beginning of the FWBO I certainly had a sort of strong general sense of the direction in which the FWBO should move but I certainly didn't have a detailed blueprint, and different possibilities emerged as the Movement itself developed, so I don't think I could claim to understand the full implications of the FWBO in the sense of seeing or understanding now exactly what the FWBO will be doing, how it will have expanded in say thirty, forty, fifty years time. First of all one doesn't know what course history is going to take; one doesn't know what sort of opportunities might arise. One just doesn't know any of these things. Again one has this sort of just [136] general sense of the way in which the Movement is going and should go or could go. I certainly feel that there is going to be increased expansion. It seems to me very much that the expansion, not only the expansion but the deepening of the Movement, is very much bound up with the establishment of men's communities, and with single-sex communities generally. That is something which we didn't even think about in the very early days of the Movement. And co-ops were something I didn't think about, though I did have quite definitely the idea that we should not be dependent on dana exclusively. I did have that idea quite strongly in the beginning. But it's more a question of, as it were, maintaining one's basic commitment and being sincere in that and being constantly on the look out for possibilities of expansion and furtherance of the Movement. And certainly not getting lost in one's own personal problems and petty difficulties and petty differences, or just confining oneself exclusively to one's own Centre or one's own community or one's own co-op; keeping as wide an outlook as possible. I think, speaking more generally, the implications of the Movement could be very great indeed. Whether they actually do work themselves out, that depends upon all the Order Members; but if all Order Members were to take themselves and the Movement seriously, then if the Movement were to spread to any appreciable extent it would result in a very radical transformation of society, and it is quite interesting to see that in the case of our biggest Centre which is, of course, the LBC, there has been some, quite noticeable change in the immediate surrounding area and I'm quite sure that without a very great deal more effort the effect of the LBC could be felt throughout the Borough of Tower Hamlets and the Borough of Hackney. It could become a very well known local institution with a very powerful effect on many different levels including the political; at least the local political if not the national political. I think that is well within our reach. (Pause.) I mean already we have amongst quite a few people, quite a good name, quite a good reputation. We must be very careful to keep that up, especially as regards our co-ops and our business dealings with people, make sure that we do achieve and maintain a reputation for reliability, honesty, integrity, you know, all those sort of things. (Long Pause.)

I think broadly we need to make a much more determined attack on society, so to speak. I think we should be, perhaps, much more outspoken, much more critical, though in a positive sort of way and ourselves not going along with so many different current trends which are not healthy, which are not skilful. We did speak about these things a bit the other day in connection with, say, vegetarianism and, I was going to say pub-crawling, but you know what I mean.

Anyway, what other more general questions?

Duncan Skinner: Yes, I've got one which continues from your answer to that [137] question. When we were discussing - you were answering questions on - Right Livelihood on Sunday, you were talking about our political influence. I think you said you don't rule out the Movement having political influence. Do you see the Movement as such becoming political? And I'm wondering how you feel about, for instance, a couple of years ago the LBC organized participation in a CND march with posters on which were printed Buddha figures and pamphlets entitled 'Buddhism and the Bomb'? I sort of think this is the thin end of the wedge, but how do you see this?

S: I think we have to be quite careful, because it's also a question of priorities, but I'm not against in principle Order Members and others involving themselves in this sort of way. I'm not so sure about CND particularly, because with regard to that particular matter, that is to say nuclear disarmament, I think that if we do express any opinion or adopt any stance, we have to be careful we don't do so in a partisan sort of way, which doesn't really help. For instance - I have talked about this recently I think at the LBC - I think if people do feel strongly about nuclear disarmament and it would be surprising if they didn't, and if they do feel inspired say, to take some positive active steps themselves, I think it's important that they shouldn't get involved in arguments with other people also in favour of the abolition of nuclear weapons about the exact way in which it should be done or the exact steps. I think what is important is that the matter is brought very, very strongly to the attention of all governments concerned and that people should insist that they do engage in dialogue and constructive discussion to the end of eventually abolishing nuclear weapons; in fact abolishing the settlement of any dispute by any form of violence; but that one should not get bogged down in discussions as to whether it should be unilateral or multilateral and divide yourself say into two or more parties that are so busily debating this issue that you don't actually say anything, so to speak, to the government, or to those who are, so to speak, in power and who have actually to do something because you can't do anything, except insist that your government does something. So I think we must be careful how we go about these things, and also, as I say, whether it's a priority at the moment, for us.

Duncan Skinner: So you don't mind the Movement as such ...?

S: Well no, there's no question of the Movement as such because in a sense the Movement as such doesn't exist. I mean there are individual Order Members who can follow their own consciences and individual Centres may decide that as Centres they will organize a particular support or whatever. For it to be done Movement wide it would have to be discussed and decided etcetera et cetera [138] by the Chairmen. But there's also the point in the case of Centres they must remember that they are religious charities, and religious charities are not permitted to engage in any form of political activity. So Centres could probably not organize anything of that sort without danger of forfeiting their charitable status. So that needs to be born in mind too.

Duncan Skinner: So in principle you've no objection to a Centre as such, being...'

S: Well, no, I couldn't say that because a Centre could not organize a political activity without risking the forfeiting of its charitable status and I would not wish a centre to run the risk of forfeiting its charitable status, but there's no reason why individual Order Members should not take whatever steps they think fit and if they happen to be associated with a particular Centre well that's a different matter. It is not the such and such FWBO that is organizing or

sponsoring anything. But again I really don't like the idea of uninformed people just impulsively plunging into things without realizing what they're doing. There's enough people of that sort involved in politics already, so if we do individually, or a number of individuals together, take any such stand or any such action it should be only after thorough discussion and consultation including discussion and consultation with me, and knowing really what we are doing and why, and being reasonably confident that it can do good and not just create greater confusion. But I don't rule out in principle any involvement in political matters. I don't think one can.

Sagaramati: Do you feel that, say, this 'ban the bomb' thing, for an individual is a very clear cut issue? Is it something that a responsible individual would support, considering what the consequences might be if we did actually ban the bomb?

S: If it was a simple matter of 'ban the bomb'; if there was a simple movement just urging upon the government, say the British government for example, in the case of people living in England, that the government should enter into urgent discussions with other governments of other countries with a view to banning the bomb, I think we could not but support that; but unfortunately often movements get bogged down in discussing and arguing about ways and means, and that is such a pity. Or side issues come up. For instance in the case of some demonstrations recently in England, I mean a lot of women were involved in the demonstrations and it became a sort of feminist demonstration, so it's as though they were taking advantage of the 'ban the bomb' issue to advance the cause of feminism, so I think that should not be done.

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Sagaramati: If the world did actually blow itself up, would that be seen as a real disaster for evolution or ...?

S: We don't know. I mean the dinosaurs became extinct. Was that a disaster for evolution? We don't know.

Sagaramati: I'm just arguing the other point. I imagine if the bomb was banned then what would happen would be that there would be more and more wars ...

S: That is quite possible. That is a possibility.

Sagaramati: ... which doesn't solve anything.

S: That's why I said a few minutes ago that not only should governments engage in discussion with regard to the abolition of nuclear weapons but also try to create some machinery whereby all disputes between nations at least, could be resolved non-violently. (Pause.) But it's a very big issue and a very difficult issue.

Steve Murray: Do you think that the charities commission would be entitled to view the nuclear issue as being a political one?

S: I think they would take that view.

Sagaramati: Because it really is a political issue between the Socialists and the Conservatives.

S: That is not to say if a group of Order Members felt strongly and wanted to take organized action, there's nothing to stop them setting up a quite separate organization which would not enjoy charitable status. There's nothing to prevent that at all, if they felt there should be an FWBO-based anti-nuclear movement.

Duncan Skinner: That's not creating, as it were, a spokesman, for the Movement; a spokesman in a particular area but still a spokesman for the Movement?

S: There would not be a spokesman for the FWBO, but he could certainly say he was speaking for Buddhists and the Buddhist point of view. But he wouldn't be the official spokesman of the FWBO. Of course he could be the official spokesman, if they agreed, of the Order, because the Order has no legal existence. It's only the FWBO that have a legal existence. I hope this point has [140] been explained to you all. I mean the Order has been deliberately so far kept without legal existence. I've seen it as an advantage, at least so far, rather than a disadvantage. Only the FWBOs have legal existence.

Sagaramati: Does that mean you can have a representative of the Order whereas you cannot have a representative of the FWBO?

S: Well, yes. Well you can have a representative of an FWBO, or all the FWBOs if they agree, but that could only be a purely religious representative. But you could have a spokesman for the Order who did not confine himself to religious matters. The Order could have political views. (Pause.) I hope I'm not going to get misreported in all sorts of garbled versions put into circulation. I can see all sorts of perils here.

Mike Howes: Presumably then, each Order Member would have to agree to ..?

S: Yes, it would have to be agreed to at a Convention. (Pause.)

Martin Redman: We have a question left over from the Perfect Action discussions. We believe that you have said in the past that there may be certain circumstances in which capital punishment may be a suitable or appropriate punishment for certain actions. If this is the case, that you said this, could you explain your thinking for it?

S: (Pause.) I don't see how it's possible for a government, let's say, to function without recourse to force. I think maybe the issue of capital punishment is a bit of a red herring; that's the extreme of force. But so far as I can see, on the one hand you've got the spiritual community: within the spiritual community there's no possibility, there's no question of force or coercion. It would negate the nature of the spiritual community. But you can't treat society as a whole as a spiritual community. It would seem that human beings being what they are at present, many of them, there can be no ordered society without coercion, that is to say, without a police force, possibly without an army, without courts etcetera et cetera. This is why of course, in the case of Buddhist tradition, the bhikkhu being the member of the spiritual community in the highest sense cannot commit any act of violence, and cannot coerce; cannot even bear witness against anybody in a court of law if it would result in them being punished. But the Dharmaraja is expected to maintain the law and even to punish and even execute. This is according to Buddhist tradition. Now whether there's any inconsistency here, as some people argue, that's another matter. But Buddhist tradition certainly does not envisage the withdrawal of the [141] capital sanction from society as a whole. There are, as I

say, not only inconsistencies, there are even problems here. One can argue pro and con, but that is the traditional Buddhist view. (Pause.)

Sagaramati: Say, as you said, New Zealand could possibly become, like, a Buddhist state. Would that state need to protect itself, i.e. would it need armed forces? Everybody wouldn't be committed, as it were, as Order Members, but people would be sympathetic to the principles of Buddhism and could those people with our backing, as it were, have an army and navy; protect the island from say Communists or Right-wingers or ...?

S: It's probably not as simple as that any longer, because can one protect oneself any longer, or could one protect oneself any longer in that old-fashioned sort of way? Even in the Buddha's day the Sakyans opted not to protect themselves; not to defend themselves against the kingdom of Kusala, and as a result they were all wiped out. Now one might say that was regrettable, but under the law of karma, well, what happens to all those people who decided that it would be better to be killed than to kill? One can only assume that they were reborn under very positive circumstances indeed, as a result of their action. One has to take, perhaps, that wider view as well. It could be that the meek do 'inherit the earth'. (Laughter.) I mean, the human race is an example of that, descended from a very miserable little mammal that just was nothing at all in the days when the dinosaurs roamed the earth. (Laughter.) But we've inherited the earth virtually. Where are the dinosaurs today? (Laughter.) Things seemed to have changed so much, have been changed so much, as a result of nuclear power, nuclear weapons, it's as though the old standards in many ways no longer obtain. It seems to me that nuclear weapons are probably going to be with us for a long time. It probably is true that the fear of nuclear war is restraining people from conventional war. I think that sort of situation can't last indefinitely because at the very least there could be an accident, so it seems to me that it isn't even just a question of persuading governments to relinquish nuclear weapons, I think you've got to persuade people generally to relinquish violence, which is if anything an even bigger task. So I think the propagation of the non-violent point of view, or the ideology, let us say, of non-violence, is very, very important. That includes the abolition of nuclear weapons. But I don't think it's very realistic to campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons leaving nations and governments free, in a sense, to fall back on conventional weapons, which are pretty dreadful anyway, though not nearly as dreadful of course as nuclear weapons. I don't see how one can honestly, consistently, campaign even for the abolition of nuclear weapons while still having recourse to violence in one's personal [142] life. So I think the basic issue is the long term Issue, one of non-violence. Perhaps the short term issue is one of the abolition of nuclear weapons to give us a breathing space but we haven't really solved things when we've abolished nuclear weapons. And many of the people who are involved in the campaign for nuclear disarmament aren't genuinely idealistic in my opinion. It's almost as though they just don't want to suffer the inconvenience of nuclear war. One might even go a little further than that and say, well, does one really believe that life as lived in most of the countries in the world, especially in the West is almost in a sense worth saving from nuclear war? It's not going to be worth saving unless it's greatly improved. So there is that point of view too. That brings one back to the propagation of a different ideology altogether; one based on human growth and development or the ideal of human growth and development. When one hears how maybe millions of people are living in some countries of the world, especially America perhaps, one really wonders well, you know, is it worth making much effort to preserve that sort of way of life. It hardly seems worth preserving. I suppose while it continues there's always the hope of some change, but all right let's try more vigorously to bring about a change; and make the human race, as it were, worth saving from disaster,

otherwise it might, in the long run, be better, one might say, speaking, say, very extremely, to, well, let a nuclear war happen and hope there will be a few survivors; and let's hope the radiations around produce mutations and that a much better species of superhumanity will emerge. I mean that is also a possibility. But to save the world from nuclear war so that people can go on doing the sort of things that they are doing, and living in the way most of them are living seems hardly worth while. (Pause.) Well does it really seem worthwhile to save people from destruction? (they've got to die anyway in the long run) so that they can spend another thirty years watching third-rate TV programs. I mean is it really worth it? Maybe we'd be better advised concentrating on our meditation and our study so that if there is a big bang one day, or when we die, as we are going to die anyway, well we are fully prepared for whatever happens afterwards having assured ourselves of a decent rebirth somewhere or other, if not in this world, then in another world. But what I'm not too happy with, though yes I feel certainly nuclear weapons should be abolished, war should be abolished, but I don't feel very inspired by the prospect of merely abolishing nuclear war so that everything can go on, you know, exactly as before. We need at the same time that we, if we do, campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons simultaneously to campaign [for] a better order of human life, a better way of human life.

Mike Howes: Can we do this by direct action or is it purely by developing our 'New Society'?

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S: Well, I think developing our 'New Society' is the most direct action that we can take. When that is developed to an appreciable degree, when there's a good strong nucleus of a New Society within the old, well perhaps we can act upon the old more directly, especially if we are seen to be successful in human terms. (Pause.)

Anyway any further points about all that; we've got a couple of minutes left? I don't know if we've strayed from the Eightfold Path or whether we've merely considered some of its broader implications. (Pause.) I think one of the things we must do, speaking more generally, is combat micchaditthis. I'm really surprised what a lot of muddled thinking there is, false thinking that there is, in the world, and even still within the FWBO. We've got to learn to think much more clearly, and this is especially necessary if one is going to intervene in public affairs. More people with good intentions but muddled thinking are just not needed.

Mike Howes: What do you see as the major micchaditthis then?

S: That's very difficult to say. Probably they're all connected in one way or another with the micchaditthis of 'equality': that everybody's the same, or should be made the same. I suspect that the modern or contemporary micchaditthis mostly revolve around this one:- the negation of the principle of natural spiritual hierarchy. (Pause.)

All right then, let's leave it there.

END OF TAPE

Transcribed by Anandajyoti

Spellchecked and put into house style, Shantavira November 1989