

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH SANGHARAKSHITA

UNITY OF THE ORDER AND LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ORDER

WOMEN'S ORDER CONVENTION 1987

Present: Vimala, Dhammadinna, Sanghadevi, Vidyasri, Vajragita,
Vajramala, Jayaprabha, Padmasuri, Ratnadakini

Sangharakshita: You seem to have come up with more questions under this particular heading than all the other sessions put together. I don't know to what extent we're going to be able to deal with them. We'll be able to deal with them, I think, only quite briefly; perhaps we'll have to try to avoid digressing, and not discuss things which are reasonably clear.

All right, 'Unity of the Order and Leadership and Responsibility in the Order'.

In discussing how the Order could take account of the diversity of nations and cultures, a number of questions arose concerning 'Shabda'.

Fair enough.

'Shabda' is the organ of Order communication in different cultures and countries. Is reporting-in the best use of 'Shabda'? How can articles we contribute be sensitive to other people's cultures as well as being true to ourselves? Do you think it would uplift 'Shabda' if you contributed to it regularly, i.e. things you had been thinking about the Movement, or dharmic points, so that they were transmitted more directly, rather than matters sometimes being heard secondhand or not currently, as well as possibly being misconstrued? Do you think it would ever be necessary to have different Shabdas for different cultures?

Perhaps some of you aren't aware that we do have a Hindi 'Shabda'. Were you aware of that? (Murmurs of Yes.) It is rather a skimpy version of the 'Shabda', in the sense that it doesn't contain many pages, but no doubt it will expand in due course. I think it consists mainly of reportings-in. It's not so much for a different culture as for a number of people not speaking English - the majority of Indian Order members don't know English, so 'Shabda' isn't accessible to them, they need some medium of Order communication, hence there is a Hindi 'Shabda'.

There's recently been a demand, I believe, for a Marathi 'Shabda', because some of our Marathi-speaking Indian Order members don't really know Hindi very well, even. That's just by the way. So:

'Shabda' is the organ of Order communication in different cultures and countries. Is reporting-in the best use of 'Shabda'?

Well, it's certainly a use of 'Shabda' - reporting-in in 'Shabda' has gone on for a long time. People do attach great importance to it, I know. I personally always read the reporting-in sections with quite a lot of interest. I never miss a single item, I think. Whether it's the best use of 'Shabda' is another matter, but I think it's a good use of 'Shabda' - assuming, of course, that people report in responsibly, which certainly hasn't happened in the past always.

Vidyasri: In what sense do you mean that?

S: Well, in a way the next question really deals with that. *'How can articles we contribute' - and presumably that includes reporting-in - 'be sensitive to other people's cultures as well as being true to ourselves?'* I suppose you have to know something about other people's cultures before you can be sensitive to them.

I think, if you're really in touch with the Dharma, that itself will give you in principle a sensitivity to other people's cultures. For instance, in some cultures people might not appreciate the crude, semi-obscene, language that sometimes even Order members in England indulge in, but I think if they were really sensitive to the Dharma or imbued with the Dharma, they wouldn't use that sort of language anyway, because of the speech precepts. So I think the main thing is not so much to be thinking about sensitivity to other people's cultures but just thinking in terms of reporting-in or writing your article in accordance with the spirit of the Dharma. If you did that, there'd be no likelihood of your hurting people's feelings or treading on their toes, I think. And if you were sufficiently in touch with the Dharma that if you did betray some ignorance of certain local customs, the overall tone of your communication would be so positive that hopefully other Order members living and working in the midst of some other culture wouldn't be offended. They'd know that it was just inadvertently that you'd perhaps trodden on their toes. But I think even that would be unlikely, if your reporting-in or article was really imbued with the spirit of the Dharma; I think that's the main thing.

Jayaprabha: So, Bhante, just briefly, in terms of some cultures like India have marriage, and relationships outside marriage would be seen as quite, unskilful? - so, in that respect, eventually they're going to have to confront

the fact that this is what happens in the West.

S: I think they already know that. They know it's general in the West - well, they see Western films. There's been so much reporting-in in 'Shabda' about relationships, and references to boyfriends and girlfriends - I think the Indian Order members are well aware of these things - as far as I know. Because there have been such references, haven't there? - repeatedly.

Padmasuri: I've felt in India - certainly the English-speaking ones that read 'Shabda' do know that. I'm not so sure about the ones who don't read.

S: But then presumably we're talking about the English 'Shabda'?

Padmasuri: Yes. Yes, but then Jayaprabha's question was almost - should that be more widely known, that kind of thing, anyway?

S: Well, I think it's inevitable. And I think perhaps, if one feels it necessary, one has to offer an explanation. For instance, I think quite recently I saw a reporting-in, someone said they'd ended their relationship with somebody. Well, perhaps one could make it clear that one had taken that relationship seriously or that maybe one should make it clear that in the West, or even in Buddhist terms, it was the nature of the relationship that was important, not its legality in a narrow sense. This is something that could be quite acceptable from a Buddhist point of view; in fact, I tell this story about the occasion when I was translating for someone who was talking to a Tibetan, and that person, a European, wanted to say that two people were living together but weren't married; and when I tried to explain that to the Tibetan, he said 'But if they're living together they are married.' So I think Indian Buddhists could possibly understand things in that way, if it was properly expressed. Or one could even say, 'We have been virtually, or in effect, married, though not actually living together, for several years, but we've now decided to terminate the relationship' - if you wanted to report that in in 'Shabda'.

Vidyasri: Do you think that people should not report in some things like that if they think it may be difficult for someone from another country to understand? - for instance, if two women have a relationship together, that might be difficult for an Indian to understand?

S: It might be.

Vidyasri: not report in, or that we should, but explain?

S: Yes, it's very difficult to say, isn't it? Because if one is going to have one Order and one Movement, one can't to any great extent divide it into

separate, watertight cultural compartments. Sooner or later there have got to be general attitudes accepted and understood by everybody; and Indians have got conditionings to get over, as well as we have. One can't rush things, but I think eventually one ought to be able to be completely open with all other Order members. Perhaps this is something that needs to be made clearer at the time of ordination, when there's a sort of Order briefing afterwards - that the Order now embraces people of different cultural backgrounds, and that one must appreciate the fact that they do in some cases, for that reason, see things in a very different way. They see the family in a different way, they perhaps see sexual relationships in a different way, perhaps they see politics in a different way.

To change the subject, in a way, our Indian Buddhist Friends, Indian Order members, see involvement in politics in a quite different way from what we do, usually. In England, at least, the attitude of Order members has been to opt out of everything of that sort, but our Indian Order members don't see things in that way at all. They think very much in political terms, for obvious reasons - or reasons which should be obvious, especially if you've read 'Ambedkar and Buddhism'.

So perhaps this is a point that could be made. Perhaps in the course of the Order briefing after ordination, this is an important point that could be made, that Order members should expect Order members in another country with different cultural backgrounds to have different attitudes towards certain things. For instance, in this country we don't feel any animosity towards Hinduism; we will quite happily quote a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*. But our Indian friends wouldn't be at all happy with that. They might quote a verse from the Bible and think nothing of it, but we might not like it!

So perhaps, at the time of ordination, new Order members have to be made aware of these things and asked to exercise tolerance and forbearance. I think this is perhaps quite an important point.

For instance, in India I was sometimes asked about my family or my parents, and my parents were divorced and both had married again, but I often didn't mention that fact to Hindu friends because I knew it would scandalise them. Especially a woman marrying for a second time after divorce, while the first husband was still alive: a lot of orthodox Hindus would consider that quite disgraceful, so I didn't mention it. But it should certainly be possible to mention these sort of facts within the Order, and it should be possible for Indian Order members to accept that divorce and remarriage is a common thing in the West, and not considered disgraceful. In the case of our ex-Untouchable Friends, that's much more easy, because divorce and remarriage are pretty common among them; not as among the caste Hindus - attitudes are very different.

Another thing is alcohol. Alcohol is completely incompatible with any form of spiritual life in India. We don't see things like that. Our associations are very different, if for no other reason because of our Christian background, where wine has got very definite religious associations. You don't find that in India at all. Wine is something disgraceful and dirty and associated with foul dens on the outskirts of the village - yes! - where men slink off in the evening, very ashamedly. Those are not pleasant, sociable pubs, there's no such thing in India; drinking doesn't have those associations. It's unthinkable for a spiritually-minded person to drink in India. Indians would be quite shocked - even Indian Order members still - if they were to know that English Order members went along to the pub. Well, perhaps they'd be right to be shocked, because there is a precept involved here. But even if one was just to drink a little bit of wine on someone's birthday, I think many of them would still be quite shocked.

So I think, yes, it is good to spell out in advance cultural differences, so that Order members coming from different cultures can understand one another, and as I said exercise tolerance and forbearance. Because it is important - the question also mentions being true to ourselves - it is important that we are able to be true to ourselves and not feel inhibited when reporting in.

'Do you think it would uplift 'Shabda' if you contributed to it regularly, i.e. things you had been thinking about the Movement or dharmic points, so that they were transmitted more directly, rather than matters sometimes being heard secondhand or not currently, as well as possibly being misconstrued?'

I think it would be a good thing if I did contribute to 'Shabda' regularly, whether to uplift it or otherwise. [Laughter] It's a question of time. It does occasionally happen that someone does transcribe and edit, and then I check, something that I've said on a seminar, and put it in 'Shabda'. This happened after the last Tuscany. What was that? Someone thought it especially important, and took the trouble to transcribe it and edit it in Tuscany itself. I think Mokshabandhu did it - no, Cittapala did it - and then I checked it, and it was published forthwith. Was it - ah, I remember what it was: it was something about teaching meditation to beginners. (**Voices:** Ah, yes!) So I would rather suggest that people on retreats, or on seminars with me, if they feel that something should be put into wider circulation, [would] transcribe it, either edit it themselves if they're able to or get someone else to edit, then send to me for checking - never send it to 'Shabda' without first sending it to me for checking, so that I can be sure that it is exactly what I wanted to say, and make sure that someone hasn't misheard a word or two. So I'm quite willing to check that and to let it be published forthwith in 'Shabda'. That would perhaps help.

_____ : Also maybe some of your secretaries, maybe they could do that occasionally, could they?

S: Dharmadhara has done it, I think, once, or at least he's reported a discussion. But they are very busy people. But Dharmadhara is especially interested in doing that sort of thing. What was it - I'm not sure what it was - I think he put something in 'Shabda' a few months ago. Yes, I'm not sure. But yes, I could certainly do that. If I didn't have so much else to do I wouldn't mind publishing a monthly article, but I am so very busy. But I do see that in a way that that is a lack, that there's no contribution from me. But I think it could certainly be remedied if something could be transcribed and edited from a recent seminar, something which somebody thought was relevant. It need only be a page or two pages, or if there was time four or five pages - I don't mind. It's no bother to me to check or even re-edit a bit or tidy up. It should be, of course, some point of general interest, obviously.

All right, let's pass on.

Section 2: Creating greater unity in the Women's Wing of the Order.

We wondered if it could be useful to have an overall Women's Order Convenor to keep in direct contact with you and other women Order members, as well as organise functions etc.

I think this is entirely up to the women Order members. If they think it would help, I'm quite happy that there should be an overall Women's Order Convenor. It will be up to her, it'll be her responsibility, to see to it that she keeps in touch with me. I'd be quite happy about that. It probably would help. I don't think I need say more about that, just leave it with you.

We also felt that we should take more initiative in instigating more direct communication with you.

When you say 'we', do you mean individually or collectively?

_____ : Collectively.

If we organised study leaders' retreats and chapter convenors' meetings, could these people meet with you regularly?

I'm really not sure, because I'm trying to dissociate myself from all this. I've taken the men's study group leaders now for three years, and that's

going to be it; they'll be on their own. Well, they've already started apart from me. I'm very reluctant to involve myself in anything on a regular basis, as it does in a way tie me down - though I'm happy to do these sort of things, in a way.

Dhammadinna: I suppose 'regular' could be infrequent, if you see what I mean.

S: I find it very difficult to say, especially as this whole question of Spain is undecided, and how I'm going to find it there and whether I shall be spending more time there, if so how long - everything seems a bit in the melting pot. My present inclination is very much to get on more and more with my writing, and though I enjoy taking study and answering questions it does get in the way of that literary work.

I think I'm probably more happy with short-term arrangements, because long-term arrangements tie me down well in advance and prevent me doing things, possibly. I prefer seeing people in that way, as you probably know. I'd much rather someone rang me up and said 'Can I come and see you the day after tomorrow?' rather than 'Can I come and see you on such-and-such date in six months' time?' So I think it's much the same with these sort of things: you could, if I'm around, ring me up and say 'Well look, next weekend we're all getting together at such-and-such place, could you come and take some question and answer sessions?' The chances are I might say 'Yes, fine.' But if you were to ask me to commit myself six months in advance, I would be quite unwilling to do that. So I think it will have to be done on that sort of basis, if at all.

And although there are channels of communication, i.e. by a chairman etc., we do not feel these channels always work -

- do you mean as regards the women Order members? (**Voices:** Mm.)

Also the topics the Women's Wing might need to discuss with you might be different from the men.

Well, that is obviously so. Again, it's a question of ringing me up and saying 'Three of us, on behalf of all you women Order members, would like to come and discuss such-and-such topics with you. Can we come up next week?' I think it's a question of doing it like that.

Do you see more women Order members working associated with the Order Office in the future, in the way that Subhuti works -

Ha, Subhuti isn't working so much now, he's doing so many other things.

- acting as a channel of communication between you and the women's wing?

I don't see it at present, because it would involve such a big reorganisation or reconstruction, I don't see it happening at the moment. Partly because I'm trying to dissociate myself from the Order Office anyway, as it at present exists. Sridevi has certainly been very useful and very helpful indeed, but she hasn't really functioned as part of the Order Office in the stricter sense. She's been doing personal secretarial work for me, almost entirely dealing with my correspondence with women Mitras and Friends. She hasn't been involved with any of the wider issues that the Order Office deals with.

_____ : If we did have certain things that maybe we wanted to put in your ear quickly, maybe we could do it through her - or someone like that?

S: That's possible, yes. But I must also say that Subhuti and Dharmadhara are always willing to help. There are certain areas where their advice is more useful than mine, certain practical matters. I think Sanghadevi has sometimes consulted them, haven't you, in the past?

Sanghadevi: Subhuti.

S: Yes. But they are always willing to help in any way that they can, any sort of especially organisational, legal, financial matters; they are much better informed than I am. And you should consider that they are just as much at your service as at the service of any other Centre or group of Order members. I'd prefer to be consulted more on dharmic matters. I'm trying to as it were disentangle myself, a bit at least, from organisational matters.

You gave an indication a couple of years ago that you would like more extended contact with senior men Order members. Do you think it would be valuable to have similar contact with senior women Order members?

Well, I suppose it would be. I suppose I'm having it now, to some extent! [Laughter] I'm not sure what you mean by 'extended contact' - I don't have much -

Dhammadinna: I think it was a comment you made about encouraging senior Order members to actually go and live at Padmaloka for a while.

S: Ah yes, that's true. Two or three of them do come for the odd day or two; that's about as much as has happened, I'm afraid. It's partly because

I'm busy and not easy to see, but partly because they're busy too.

Vidyasri: I suppose that you're meeting them so that they will get to know you and equally you could get to know them, so that that could then feed into - and.....

S: Right, yes. It hasn't really happened very much. The people with whom I have the most regular contact are, of course, Subhuti and Dharmadhara, though in Subhuti's case, of course, he's been away in Spain for the greater part of a year and three months. We hope to resume contact. So something does filter through. In some ways it's somewhat unsatisfactory from the women Order members' point of view that I don't have more, as it were, continuous contact with them, or they can't come and stay in the same way that men Order members come. But the only real solution to that difficulty is having a mixed community, and obviously one is not happy with that. I wouldn't mind it personally; I've sometimes thought about it. But I really wonder whether men and women Order members could work together in that way, unless they were all quite a bit older and more mature.

_____ : In Spain, it was talked about women getting a place in Spain. If we were able to get somewhere close, would you be able to come and visit?

S: Oh, I expect I would. But bear in mind that Bhante is getting older and he really likes to settle in one place and have a regular routine, and just get on with his writing. He is very happy to see people, whether men or women, but he'd rather not move around too much, and that's going to be increasingly the case. But, yes, if the women do get a valley of their own I'll be only too happy. Yes.

Dhammadinna: I think that's part of the next question as well.

Since you will possibly soon be spending six months of the year in Spain, -

- yes, possibly! -

how can we maintain and extend our contact with you?

Well, you can either try and do it for the six months when I'm in England, or come over to Spain, I suppose. But that is all so much in the air at present, I don't feel I can really say very much. I don't even know how I'm going to feel there, staying for an extended period. I'm going to try and get on with writing my memoirs there, probably. We'll see. I did fantasise once with Subhuti, or we both fantasised, about having an entirely new

Order Office and headquarters, in a large estate with a building in the middle for me and a couple of hundred yards to that side, a men's wing and a couple of hundred yards to that side, a women's wing, with me in the middle as it were -

_____ : Barbed wire in the middle!

S: No, I think if barbed wire was necessary I'd give it up as a bad job!
[Laughter] You'd all be having pairs of wire clippers, obviously!
[Laughter]

Dhammadinna: I suppose all those questions come out of a question as to how to have the best contact with you, given that it's the women's wing and you live in a men's community.....

S: Though, actually, if you take the men as a whole, I probably have less contact with them than with the women as a whole. I have fairly regular contact, I think, with pretty well every woman Order member, but it's not the case with the men Order members. Partly it's because there are fewer women Order members, and it's easier to have contact with them; also, I think, to speak frankly, women Order members seem to attach more importance to personal contact with me. Quite a lot of the men Order members seem to think that they can get along quite well without it. Well, they may be right. But there is that difference to a considerable extent. I do sometimes say at Padmaloka that if things don't improve I'll go and stay in a women's community!

_____ : We'll get better valley in Spain!

Vidyasri: I can see that that could be true, that probably more of the women Order members are in contact with you than the same percentage of men. But you are in good regular contact with a few men, ..

S: That's true.

Vidyasri: ... in a way that you aren't with any women, so I suppose.... that's part of the question, in a way: does that matter? Is that important?

S: Well, I think to some extent it does - in a way, unfortunately - because it does in a way create a practical problem. I try to make up for it by being on occasions like this, because I certainly won't be participating in the Men's Convention in the way that I'm participating in this one, if only for practical reasons and because there's so many of them. But, whether fortunately or unfortunately, the number of women Order members is such that I can still participate in this way; if there were two hundred of you, I couldn't. So maybe we just have to take advantage of these opportunities.

Sanghadevi: I think we do all appreciate these meetings.

S: But I can see that, from the women's point of view, it does, or might sometimes, seem that they are left out, as it were; though I think it's more in appearance than in reality - left out in the sense that they can't come and stay at Padmaloka or just be around for a few days in the way that some men Order members can.

Dhammadinna: I think the question that arose also out of trying to look at year by year.....

S: Unfortunately, I or whoever takes my place is, at least to outward appearances, a member of this sex and not of that. If it was a woman Head of the Order, the men would have the same problem that the women now have, unless you had a hermaphrodite, but that wouldn't be very easy to find anyway! Especially one who wanted to be a Buddhist! [Laughter]

_____ : We'll start looking!

_____ : I think it sounds encouraging, if we can organise ourselves to the extent that we can make the effort to come and see you, and ring you up,..... we could actually make sure that we do get into more contact that way.

S: Sometimes in a way I find it a nuisance that at this stage, at least, it seems necessary for the men and the women to be so separate. From my personal point of view, it is sometimes a bit of a nuisance, because it makes it a little more difficult for me to function. I don't quite know how it would work, but I don't think I'd mind having a mixed secretariat; so far as I am concerned personally it would probably work quite well. But I don't see it working all that well from the point of view of the existing Order members likely to be involved. We did have, in addition to Sridevi, we did have for a time a woman Mitra coming along to the Order Office, but one particular Order member reacted quite violently to her presence; he found it very difficult to cope with, and we had to discontinue it. Fortunately, everybody finds Sridevi very acceptable, and they get on with her well.

_____ : So it might be better if at some point the Order Office was separated from the community, would it not.

S: Subhuti has all sorts of plans for the future. I just don't know whether I'm going to live long enough to see them all implemented! But this is something that is going to be very seriously discussed at the next Chairmen's get-together. Maybe some of you should talk with Subhuti

about these things, to keep posted. Or I think you'd be informed anyway, sooner or later.

_____ : I did just get the letter today and quickly read it out before we came in here.

S: Ah, right, good, good, yes. Because Subhuti is thinking very roughly in terms of - first of all, there's my personal secretariat, which might just be one or two people with me wherever I happened to be, just to handle personal things, as it were. And then an Order Office, separate from that, to handle everything to do with the Order as a whole. And then a sort of FWBO secretariat, to handle everything to do with the interrelationships of Centres. And the Order Office, as distinct from my personal secretariat, would be dealing among other things with relationships with outside Buddhist groups and authorities in general, legal matters, and so on: everything affecting the Order. So that would seem to be a sensible arrangement.

Vidyasri: Bhante, you said a minute ago this comment that some men Order members seem to think they can get on quite well without you -

S: Well, judging by appearances, as it were. The women write to me much more. They want to come and see me much more. But there are quite a lot of men Order members who don't write to me very often, if at all, and don't seem to feel any need to see me personally.

Vidyasri: What I was going to ask was, in terms of the women thinking they do need to....., do you think that that is healthy?

S: I think it is. I think in the case of the men it's not always unhealthy. Sometimes they feel: 'Bhante's very busy, we can talk with Subhuti', or nowadays some are thinking 'We can talk with Dharmadhara.' There is that. But there are others who I think just feel self-sufficient in a not completely positive way; don't appreciate the importance of vertical kalyana mitrata. There might be even a few that the idea of vertical kalyana mitrata makes feel slightly uneasy. This doesn't seem to happen with women. Anyway, I don't want to generalise too much; but I certainly do notice that women Order members on the whole seem to attach more importance to keeping in personal contact with me than do men Order members on the whole. And I think the women Order members on the whole, and women Mitras too, want to keep in personal contact for, very largely, quite positive reasons. I don't think it's due to lack of confidence and all that sort of thing; I don't think it's that at all.

Section 3: Men's and Women's Wings [flap, flap!][Laughter] and Unity.

Well, every bird requires two wings.

We agreed that the Order should be one Order with two wings, in which spiritual hierarchy is recognised in terms of individual commitment, and not in terms of gender.

You appreciate that we've made quite a break with Buddhist tradition here. Do you appreciate this?

_____ : We do, yes.

S: That in the traditional bhikkhu and bhikkhuni Sangha, the bhikkhuni Sangha is entirely subordinated to the bhikkhu Sangha. This is why you find, in places like Chithurst, the so-called nuns who are not bhikkhunis are very much under the control and direction of the bhikkhus, quite regardless of relative spiritual experience; but in the Order, as no doubt I hardly need to tell you, it is one Order with two wings.

However, we felt the question as to whether there should be one or two Orders keeps arising because some of the men are unclear as to whether the women's wing should be subordinate to the men's wing.

I must say this is news to me. I've always been under the impression that it was well understood that there was one unified Order, and that there's no question of the women's wing being subordinate in any way. In that case, I am certainly learning something; because if there are some men who are unclear about that, they need to become clear, quite definitely. But in what way could the women's wing be subordinate? And why should it be subordinate?

_____ : I think the question goes on -

S: Ah, all right.

_____ : I think it's - we looked at Subhuti's questions from March '87 'Shabda' about the unity of the Order, and there was a question on this yet again, actually: what should be the relationship between men and women in the Order? - which we discussed. Should there remain one Order, or should there be a men's and women's Order, and what is the difference between the two choices?

S: In my own mind there's never been any question of there being two Orders. I've never thought in those terms at all. From the very beginning I've thought in terms of one Order, and I've never seen any reason to modify that position. No, certainly not.

But is it a question that some men are unclear, or that some men actually think that the women's wing should be subordinate to the men's wing? And if so, why do they -

_____ : If you read the next question it might make it a it clearer.

S: OK. *We felt this leads to unclarity and possible schism in the future. Could you comment upon and clarify this matter?*

Well, if some men are unclear, and if some men do think that the women's wing should be subordinate to the men's wing, if there's enough of them thinking in this way, it could lead to a division into two Orders, which I think would be a great pity. But I see no really Buddhistic or spiritual reason why this should happen, and as I said I'm quite surprised that some men are unclear or do think in this way. But have you heard actually anybody express such views?

_____ : Yes. In the next question -

S: Ah. It conforms(?), does it? All right.

Would there be differences in this area in different cultures, i.e. India and Malaysia?

Do you mean differences in people's attitudes, or differences in how we organised ourselves?

_____ : Differences in how we organised ourselves -

Padmasuri: I was just wondering - I think the next question is something about if this happened in leading Order events, and some of the men weren't happy about women leading those Order events and Pujas, and I thought you might have one thing to say about that which might be slightly different, possibly, say, in India or Malaysia or somewhere else. I don't know, because I don't know what you're going to say about it.....

Dhammadinna: This general question arose out of the fact that it does seem to arise as a question - should there be two Orders? - and the fact that it was in Subhuti's..... March 1987 - made me think why is it being raised as a question... ?

S: Yes, -

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- surprising, in a way -

Dhammadinna: think it's being sorted out...

S: So far as I am concerned, it never has been a question, any more than the fact that what makes you a Buddhist is Going for Refuge; that's never been a question, so far as I am concerned.

Dhammadinna: I think - I can't say that we do, but I think in various discussions it's sometimes raised: should there be two Orders? And it's hard to imagine how that would work in a real sense.

S: Yes, because if you're a Buddhist by virtue of your Going for Refuge, and if you're a member of the Sangha by virtue of your Going for Refuge, and if men are capable of Going for Refuge and if women are capable of Going for Refuge, why do you need more than one Sangha or more than one Order? You may need to separate for certain specific purposes; that is quite another matter. But the Order remains one Order. So far as I am concerned, there has never been the slightest doubt about that.

Anyway, let's carry on and see if it does become clearer.

Would it be helpful in the future for these sort of matters to be noted down in a constitution?

Subhuti is going to be drafting a little booklet about the Order, which will describe, as it were, current practice; and I'm sure these things will be mentioned. I'll be going through it, and I think the point will be very strongly and definitely made that we are one Order with - I don't even know whether it's necessary to mention that there are two wings, but we will see about that. But certainly it should be clearly stated that there's only one Order.

But since there is quite considerable opposition within the men's wing of the Order from individual Order members, some of them being in positions of influence in the Movement, against women Order members leading either mixed retreats or mixed Order events such as a Puja, how - if we are to continue to do these things when appropriate - are we to prevent this becoming a disunifying effect on the Order?

I think it's a question of a good understanding between men and women Order members. Obviously, this doesn't develop without personal contact, and for younger Order members in particular, personal contact can bring its own problems. Perhaps - here I'm just thinking aloud, so don't perhaps take it all that definitively - perhaps it'll be up more and more, or will be the responsibility more and more, of older Order members - older in terms

of ordination and also in terms of years - to make a special effort to keep the Order together by cultivating personal contact with one another. It's difficult to believe that 60 and 65-year-old men and women Order members can't get together without the question of sex coming in, especially if they are anagarikas. Maybe I should let out a little bit of my current thinking, which I haven't done before, on this particular topic.

There are going to be more and more anagarikas, both men and women, and I had been wondering whether there couldn't be some occasions on which men and women anagarikas got together for certain purposes, even had retreats together. Because if they can't be together without being disturbed by sexual thoughts, well they are not ready to be anagarikas; and most of the anagarikas are and will be relatively elderly. Perhaps they could act as a unifying factor. This has certainly occurred to me.

_____ : Bhante, just to follow that through. It seems that on one occasion, I think it was Parami was leading the Battle retreat, and it wasn't advertised in her Centre; which has a repercussion. If it's normally advertised in a Centre it has a repercussion not only on Parami's confidence and so on, but on the fact a lot of people wouldn't have heard about the retreat that might have done. So, in that respect, it seems that that could cause quite a lot of trouble.

S: True. I think it has to be hammered out in the Chairmen's meetings, because each Centre is autonomous as a Centre - but then there is the Order as a unifying factor. I think it would be regrettable if there wasn't a common policy.

Dhammadinna: Well, do you have thoughts about I know women have been asked to lead mixed retreats,..... there's sometimes other times when I've been leading a mixed

S: Well, I think it's a quite difficult issue. If one looks just at spiritual principle, there shouldn't be any difficulty at all. But unfortunately difficulties do arise. People seem to have, in some cases, quite strong feelings, and even if those feelings are not always positive or skilful, presumably they have to be taken into account; but as a concession, as it were, in the sense that it ought not to be so. And if one does accept that sort of position, it is very much as a concession to people's existing weaknesses, not as a matter of principle. In principle, any qualified Order member ought to be able to lead anything. It shouldn't really make any difference. I think perhaps, as we get more and more older Order members, especially anagarika Order members, it will become easier in that respect. I think - I hope I'm right - that very few Order members, very few men Order members in this case, would find difficulty in accepting a mixed situation being led by an elderly woman Order member who was an

anagarika. They shouldn't find that difficult, surely? (*Some doubtful laughter*) Assuming she was otherwise suited. The fact that she was elderly and an anagarika and therefore above sexual polarities should make it much more easy for her to be accepted as the leader of a mixed situation.

_____ : So really the question comes about whether the individual people that have refused to attend a Puja or whatever, an Order mettā led by someone...., whether they're doing it out of what they think is principle or whether they're doing it - because these people are people who are around the LBC, for instance, mixing with women all the time. So presumably it wouldn't be because they were afraid of sexual polarity; it probably is a question of principle on their part.

S: I don't see how it could be a question of principle, really. But perhaps people who do have these strong feelings should be encouraged to examine their underlying attitudes.

I think in some cases women Order members have gone by default in mixed situations, or leading mixed situations, because there are so few, or have been so few, women Order members; they haven't been able to play their proper part, for purely numerical reasons. But as we have more and more women Order members, and in the course of the years more and more senior and experienced Order members, these questions will arise more and more, and will need to be settled. But I think if there are some elderly women anagarikas, that will help very much.

Should women Order members, knowing the opinions of certain men Order members, refrain from coming forward and standing out in this way?

Well, perhaps as a temporary skilful means; but if the men Order members do entertain a definite *micchaditthi* it will have to be sorted out, and perhaps the women will need to approach them and insist that they discuss the matter.

Section 4: Head of the Order.

Do you think it would be desirable to have a single Head of the Order after your death, or do you think it preferable the leadership be shared among several senior Order members? Would this involve both men and women? Would it be a body other than the Chairmen?

I must say my thinking isn't really crystallised. I am still very much thinking about this. I'm not sure that it would be desirable to have a single

Head of the Order after my death; I'm not sure - I'm certainly not convinced that it would necessarily be the best arrangement. So the alternative would be a sharing of leadership among several senior Order members. But I haven't yet been able to see how this might work practically, so I really don't know at present. Traditionally in Buddhism, especially if we look back at the early period, there's never been a single head, there's never been a Pope or anything of that sort; local communities have been autonomous to a great extent, just unified by their allegiance to the Dharma. The Buddha himself said 'The Dharma will be your leader after I've gone'; so that is quite important.

So I don't feel - I certainly haven't decided that I ought to arrange for a single Head after me, say, in the way that Trungpa has done: he appointed a Vajra Regent, and that regent presumably has now taken over. I'm not convinced that that's the best way to do things. Unless the Head is just a figurehead, as it were, symbolising the unity of the Order. One could possibly have a compromise between the two. I've even wondered whether we shouldn't have - this is just thinking aloud, don't think 'This is what Bhante is going to do' - I've even wondered whether we shouldn't have, say, someone like the Moderator of the, I think it's the Free Church of Scotland - where he takes the Chair as it were and is Moderator for a year, or the office is rotated among a number of senior and experienced people. That is a possibility. But I really have to think about this a lot more, and maybe discuss it with people a lot more.

Section 5: Leadership and Responsibility.

What is the responsibility of Order members apart from the obvious one of practice and of keeping in touch, and what is the responsibility of Order members to each other?

I don't know whether one can lay this down in detail. I think they will have to be guided by their feeling. Supposing you see another Order member sick, or in dire trouble - well, your impulse, hopefully, will be just to help them in whatever way you can. I don't think one can lay down rules in the sense that if an Order member is in such-and-such difficulties you should help - and then have a whole list; because then somebody might think that if something wasn't included in the list they didn't have to help! That's the danger of having rules. I think the responsibility of Order members to each other will be determined by the depth of their experience of the Dharma. The deeper their experience of the Dharma, the more deeply they'll realise their responsibility to one another, and find ways of expressing that.

Is it desirable for someone, after entering the Order, to thereafter only have contact with Order members?

I'd say probably it isn't a bad idea if, for a year or two after ordination, Order members have as much contact with other Order members as possible, and don't have too much contact - again, if possible - with people outside the Order, but as they feel stronger and more confident then, of course, gradually extend outwards. I'm really thinking in terms of Guhyaloka. I think it would be a really good idea if newly-ordained Order members could stay on for two or three years, consolidating their commitment, and then return to Centres and communities. At present it isn't a very good arrangement that they do that after three months, or in the case of women Order members after a much shorter period.

_____ : I started work the following week!

S: Yes. We have just to work towards a more extended period of intensive practice and contact with other Order members.

Are Order members under any obligation to communicate with Mitras?

Well, I suppose you should say hello and good morning. (*Laughter*) Well, even to the odd man Mitra if he looks safe! - harmless! But what does one mean by 'obligation'? I think the average Order member, just out of their experience of the Dharma, will want to communicate with Mitras, if they feel that they are able and qualified to do so. I don't think there's any question of there being a sort of obligation in the legalistic sense.

When discussing leadership, we had a rather negative view of charisma, and thought people with charisma were using power to gain appreciation from others. On looking it up in the dictionary, we found it meant 'a spiritual gift, an ability to inspire great trust and devotion; supreme gift of leadership, high artistic genius'. Is what we normally mean by charisma a near enemy of the qualities outlined in the dictionary?

Yes, one could certainly look at what we normally mean by charisma in that way.

Could you comment on leadership and charisma?

I think if you really are a leader, a bit of charisma is a useful adjunct, but I think some people try to lead by charisma.

Dhammadinna: What do you mean by charisma in that sense?

S: Well, as I've normally been using the term, I do tend to use it rather in

a negative sense. It means almost dazzling people with a display of perhaps rather superficial positive qualities, and in a sense leading them astray because of that - because, if you have got charisma, you can do almost anything with people.

_____ : They'll be attracted to you rather than to the Dharma.

S: Yes, they're attracted to you rather than to the Dharma or whatever else it is that you happen to represent. An artist may have quite great charisma as a person, and therefore his type of art may become popular and widespread, not because of its own qualities, not because of its own value, but just because of that particular artist's charisma. Politicians sometimes have charisma, so people follow them. Hitler had charisma.

_____ : That was the way in which we understand in which we understood it, so were surprised to read the dictionary definition.

S: Yes. So we could certainly say that 'what we normally mean by charisma is a near enemy of the qualities outlined in the dictionary.' So you should always ask of a person who has charisma: 'Is he using his charisma to advance the Dharma, or is he using his charisma to advance himself, in one way or another?'

Sanghadevi: And presumably that depends on that person's spiritual maturity; because they may not consciously be using their charisma to assert themselves.

S: Yes, indeed. Yes, they may be dazzled by their own charisma. So 'Could you comment on leadership and charisma?' Well, they're obviously different things, aren't they?

Dhammadinna: In the sense we generally use the word charisma -

S: Charisma in the truer sense can help you exercise leadership, but it can't be a substitute for genuine leadership at all.

So do you think the questions have been dealt with, more or less?

Vidyasri: Yes - I just wanted to ask you a question again about the Mitras, contact with Mitras. You said an average Order member would want to have contact with Mitras, but could you imagine someone being an Order member and being fully an Order member but choosing to never have contact with....

S: Oh, I'd be very suspicious of someone who made it a rule that he or she was never going to have contact with Mitras, if he or she was around a

Centre, or even possibly living in a community, they could hardly avoid having contact with Mitras.

Vidyasri: But I suppose they could live in an Order community somewhere?

S: Yes, that's possible.

Vidyasri: - and write or meditate. You could imagine that.

S: Yes, could be. Could imagine that. But they'd have to examine their motivation quite carefully.

Vidyasri: In what sense they wouldn't be wanting to - (?)

S: Well, might be due to lack of - wouldn't be wanting to help people, would be devoid of compassion. Unless they were really convinced that they could help people best, say, through their writing, or even their solitary meditation. Those things are not incompatible with compassion, certainly; but the person concerned would need to be sure about that, and that the compassion was there, even though they didn't want to have contact with Mitras. Certainly it might be not a bad idea for Order members from time to time to just be in a situation where they were in contact with other Order members; it's usually much less of a strain. You can be yourself to a much greater extent, and be more inspired, and perhaps, when you move into another situation where there are Mitras, you can then help those Mitras to a much greater extent.

Dhammadinna: I think we found that from the month we spent at Muck together.

S: Hmm, yes. Seems to have been a bit of a turning point.

Dhammadinna: Yes, I think it was.

S: From that point of view, it's not unfortunate that your numbers permitted you to do that. The men can never do that, I think.

Dhammadinna: I think the rate of ordination has increased after that point,.....

S: Yes, you might find it a bit more difficult now.

Dhammadinna: I think that's due to a number of factors, but it might be due to the fact that we also spent time together.

S: Indeed - yes.

Dhammadinna: Because I suppose most women Order members spend a lot of time with Mitras and Friends, and proportionately less time with Order members.

S: What to speak of children, eh?

Dhammadinna: Not to speak of children!

S: How many mums? Two?

_____ : Only two.

S: Only two. Oh well.

Dhammadinna: Only two, but about fifty per cent of [women] Order members.

S: Hm - yes, that's very interesting. I don't think you'll find fifty per cent of men Order members are fathers - not even if you include all the unofficial ones! [Laughter]

Jayaprabha: Can I just ask you one question? You said you'd like now to have more dharmic questions. So does that mean, on events like this, you'd prefer us in future to study something and then ask you questions?

S: I personally feel happier with dharmic questions. If I have to deal with other questions, if it's necessary, fair enough, I will do that; but if people can sort practical matters out among themselves I'd be better pleased.

Vidyasri: Well, questions like this would you consider those dharmic or practical?

S: I think questions - well, dharmic questions can be practical. I do consider questions about the Order as dharmic questions. If sometimes people ask me - sometimes individually - questions, quite detailed questions, about the running of a co-op, I don't really often feel competent to deal with those; I don't know the particular situation sufficiently intimately. Sometimes people have asked me quite complex questions about the runnings of *Phoenix* - again, I just don't know. I have to say that I can't really say very much, because I'm not so intimately acquainted with the situation. To give an informed opinion, or advise, I'd need to delve into things to an extent that I'm not in a position to do, so I have to content myself with laying down general principles and leaving it to people's common sense and sincerity to apply those principles in particular

situations. And, as I said before, there are certain matters about which Subhuti and Dharmadhara are much better informed than I am. It would be better to consult them.

So do you think we've clarified things a bit, where they may not have been so clear?

Voices: Yes.

Padmasuri: Are there any other areas that you feel which we haven't discussed or which haven't come up, that could contribute to the unity of the Order?

S: I can't think of anything offhand, though I think the fact that we have a common three-year Mitra study course, common meditations, a common approach to the Dharma - all these things are tremendously unifying factors. It's not as though the men and the women have got different approaches to the Dharma. The more deeply men and women Order members get into the Dharma, the more their attitudes converge, I'm sure, and differences of approach brought about by differences of gender, I think, gradually dissolve.

Dhammadinna: In our own discussions we did about maintaining unity we did come back again and again to the chapters as being very, very important -

S: Ah, yes. A lot of work needs to be done in that area. Well, I assume it's so with the women; I know it's the case with the men. A lot more work needs to be done on and within chapters and regional meetings, and even national meetings.

How many women chapter convenors are there? I suppose that means asking how many women's chapters are there - yes, in England.

_____ : There's Norwich; Croydon and West London is one; two in East London; and Taraloka. That's five. We met today, all the chapter convenors, plus Gunavati.

S: Well, sometimes women chapter convenors could get together with me. The men chapter convenors do every two months, when I'm in Padmaloka - that is, on the National Order weekend. We just get together for an hour, it's usually not more than that, just for a chat; and I just ask them to report in very briefly, sometimes, on the way things are going in their chapters. So I could see the women chapter convenors from time to time, too.

_____ : We found it very useful meeting, anyway; we've not met

before,..... we've grown and now we haven't..... We had ideas in our discussion to maybe adopt or affiliate some English chapters with people who are isolated abroad, so that we can keep in touch, say one chapter keep in touch with Vajragita.....

S: Hm, well, that's interesting, yes. Well, you should report in about that in 'Shabda'. That's of general interest.

Vidyasri: An area we seemed to mention a few times was that on the whole women Order members could communicate more what we are thinking and doing in 'Shabda', yes.

S: That's true, yes.

Vidyasri: - I think we don't use it as much as we could.

S: That's true. You could have a very positive influence, because men Order members sometimes tend to be controversial; but women Order members don't usually seem to take part in these controversies. But if they were to write in and -

_____ : We do! But we don't often write it in 'Shabda'.

S: Well, perhaps that's wiser, eh?

Dhammadinna: If ***** [name edited by Silabhadra] writes and says women should be beaten up, I think we should just ignore it?

S: Oh yes, he wrote in that, didn't he? That was quite extraordinary. One could react, but then it's a very silly thing to say, frankly; this is going on tape, but never mind: [*Laughter*] it really is a silly thing to say. But one ignores silly things, I think that's better; it's a more mature attitude, just to ignore them. Just think to yourself, 'If I was his mother I'd spank his bottom.' [*Laughter*]

Dhammadinna: I think we tend to communicate maybe amongst each other what we're doing, and not necessarily put it into 'Shabda', not think it might - well, it would be a better thing to the Order at large, some of the things we do talk about.

S: And some of your ideas, and - well, things you've done. There is certainly a general appreciation among the men Order members as regards Taraloka; there's no doubt about that.

Dhammadinna: Yes, we're trying to encourage Sanghadevi to report in to 'Shabda' - she's been too busy.

S: But you did give the Chairmen some account recently. I got quite a bit of feedback about that, and the chairmen all said that they were very much impressed by what had been done, and quite impressed by Sanghadevi personally - blush, blush! Yes! I think a few of them might have been quite taken aback by her confidence and clarity of presentation and all the rest of it.

_____ : Maybe that's why people should have more contact with other women Order members in future.

S: Hm. Especially as some get more experienced and older.

Dhammadinna: It's nice to think it's going to get easier..... anyway, so -

S: I think, yes, from this point of view - as Order members get older, both men and women, tensions between the sexes are bound to relax, especially if both are practising the Dharma, they cannot but relax. So I think by the time you get to middle age you should all have very easy and tension-free relationships and contacts with Order members of the opposite sex. It would be a very great pity if that didn't happen.

Vajramala: I find it's got easier since I became a mother.

S: Is it so?

Vajramala: I wouldn't say totally, but I would say it's certainly got a bit easier; quite a few men seem to have relaxed considerably in my presence since I became a mother.

S: Well, perhaps they see you more as a mother and less as a woman, so to speak. Do you see what I mean?

Vajramala: Yes - I think it will do in the meantime! I think it's hell till you get old. Yes, if it's helpful, it's not such a bad thing.

Dhammadinna: I'm not going to take it up as a practice! *[Laughter]* I think I'll wait for old age!

S: Well, you can produce intellectual offspring. See how that affects things. This is something I've been talking about - oh dear - but I'll just mention it: I would like to see more women writing and publishing in the way that some of the men have been doing or trying to do. I think I've talked about this in Rivendell, so I hope the word will get around. I was saying that maybe women Order members should get together and write some autobiographical sketches about their lives, and how they came into

the Dharma, and maybe 12 or 14 of them have a volume. I think it would be very interesting indeed. But apart from that, the more women write about the Dharma, and maybe about the arts, the better.

OK, we'd better end there.

Voices: Thank you.

End of Session