SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

Interview with Nagabodhi

20th Year in the U.K.

Nagabodhi: ... so I'll start. In the lecture, "The Nucleus of the New Society", one of the Brighton talks, you say that until you receive the invitation from the English Sangha Trust you had no plans at all of returning to the West. Is that really true? You'd never thought of returning ...

Sangharakshita: Yes. Not only had I never thought of returning. I'd quite consciously and deliberately and definitely made up my mind that I would be staying in India. This is what I wanted to do. So that being the case, no I didn't have any plans for returning to England at all or to the West at all.

Nagabodhi: Did you never miss England or the West?

S: I can't say that I did. I certainly never felt homesick for England at any stage. If I did miss anything I missed certain cultural facilities. Access to libraries and books.

Nagabodhi: When you say you quite deliberately decided to stay in India was that because you had formulated a definite life plan which was set in India, for example your work with the ex-Untouchables?

S: I think it was mainly that I liked India and I liked the Indians and it was after all the original homeland of Buddhism and I was quite happy with my whole way of life there, and what I was doing, except perhaps to some extent towards the very end, but I might be able to say a little about that in connection with another question.

Nagabodhi: So you did come back originally on a just a visit and then ...

S: Originally it was to be just a four month visit but I was talked into this. I was talked into it by Bhikkhu Kantipalo, because when I received the Sangha Trust's invitation, or when I received perhaps some intimation that they would like to invite me, my initial response was to say no. I hadn't even thought in those terms. But it was Kantipalo who put it to me that perhaps I did have a sort of responsibility, even a duty, towards the Buddhist movement in England. At that time there were quite serious differences among Buddhists in, I was going to say England, but perhaps I should say simply London.

The Buddhist movement in London was divided into two camps one might say which were not on very friendly terms. There was a lot of tension between them and Kantipalo put it to me that a visit from me could perhaps help to heal the rift that had developed and he moreover put it to me that I had a sort of duty to do what I could. So in the end I allowed myself to be convinced. Well, I felt that I hadn't been back for so many years perhaps it would be a good idea to pay just a visit. So initially I was going simply for four months because I didn't really want to be away from India any longer than that.

Nagabodhi: And had you been kept closely in touch with developments in the West? Had you pursued an interest?

S: I had been kept in touch. I did receive for instance 'The Middle Way'. They sent that to me regularly, so I was reading that year after year. I was in correspondence to a limited extent with Christmas Humphreys and a few other people like Jack Austin. Also Christmas Humphreys had been out to India twice. I met him when he had been up to Kalimpong. I was in correspondence with Dr. Conze, with Mrs Bennett. So I had these contacts though I thought at the time that they gave me a quite good picture of what was happening in England but after my return I found in fact that wasn't the case at all.

Nagabodhi: What were the main variations?

S: My main source of information was very definitely 'The Middle Way' and from this I got the impression that the Buddhist movement in Britain was very much bigger and more vigorous than it actually was. In other words 'The Middle Way' was, for its time one might say, quite a good Buddhist magazine, quite a good English Buddhist magazine. There were good articles and so on. But I discovered after my return that 'The Middle Way' was not really the product, not really the organ of the British or the London Buddhist movement at all. It gave a quite false impression. It drew on a much wider range of talent than was actually contained within the active Buddhist movement. For instance people like Dr. Conze had virtually nothing to do with the Society or with the active Buddhist movement. Nonetheless he, like other scholars, contributed quite good articles.

Nagabodhi: Did you feel when you returned to England and found the situation was other than you'd been led to believe, did you feel a bit put upon to have been invited?

S: No, no, it wasn't that anybody deliberately misled me. This was just my own reading of the material that I'd received especially 'The Middle Way'. I did feel disappointed but I can't say that I felt put upon. I certainly didn't feel that it was anybody's fault. If it was anybody's fault, well it was my own for sort of misreading the signals. But they couldn't be blamed for that. But I certainly didn't feel put upon, though definitely disappointed that the Buddhist movement in Britain was no bigger and no stronger than it actually was.

Nagabodhi: Just leaving the <u>Buddhist</u> world for a moment, did you feel that England, that the West had changed a lot when you got back? Did you feel able to adapt, fit in to the West just culturally on your return?

S: Well, I think to a great extent the question didn't arise because I was staying at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and I was operating almost exclusively within the confines of the British Buddhist movement with a few excursions out into the Theosophical Societies and spiritualist groups and so on. So I can't say that I really came very much into contact with the West. I was aware of some changes. After all I had left England during the war or towards the end of the war and I certainly noticed a very big difference between England as it was when I left and England as it was when I returned. And also a very big difference between England and India, mainly in respect of its prosperity. When I returned everybody seemed much more prosperous than they'd been when I left and also of course much more prosperous than people who are in India. This I think was the thing that struck me most, or struck me most immediately. And when I started visiting my own relations everybody's standard of living seemed to have gone up several notches in the interval.

Nagabodhi: You didn't feel that you were leaving the, you have this cliche, comparison with the spiritual East and the material West. Did you feel any ...?

S: I didn't feel that at all because I've never felt that India was especially a spiritual country in the way that they like to think that they are. I'd never been under any illusions about the spirituality of Indians as a whole even though, yes, there are very strong spiritual traditions there but Indians are no less materialistic really than most people in the West.

Nagabodhi: When you came to England and you immersed yourself into the Buddhist world did you find that the rifts and the difficulties were as serious as you'd been led to believe? Was that side of your impression at least true?

S: I don't find it very easy to recall. I think what I found was that the rifts were much more complicated or the rift was much more complicated. It was not that there were two bodies divided over a certain, very clear-cut, definite issues. There were on the whole sort of two camps. One based on the Buddhist Society and the other based on the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara but there were several people who had a foot in each camp as it were without necessarily always even agreeing among themselves. And also there were complicating factors like the Chiswick Vihara, that is to say the Maha Bodhi Society's centre and also the Thai bhikkus. So it wasn't a question of a rift over one clear-cut issue. There were quite a number of rifts over a number of issues, some of which overlapped and sometimes it was quite difficult to get to the bottom of things and find out what actually was the matter, what had gone wrong. Personalities seem to play quite a part. But very broadly speaking the two main camps really were the Buddhist Society and the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. Very broadly speaking the Buddhist Society stood for a more ecumenical approach to Buddhism and the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara stood for an exclusively Theravadin approach.

But of course to complicate matters there were some people connected with the Buddhist Society, and in a sense belonging to that camp, were quite strongly sympathetic towards the Theravada and there were one or two Theravadins who had Zen sympathies in a rather inconsistent sort of way and of course there were people sort of involved with psychological approaches of various kinds. And I also found, this is perhaps one of the things that surprised me - that the people who seemed to be most sympathetic towards Christianity and who seemed to resent most any criticism of Christianity, were the Theravadins. I mean some Theravadins seemed to take an unexpectedly strong interest in Christian mysticism especially say Master Ekhart. Yes, another point I should mention.I have to do quite a bit of sorting out - is that quite a big issue when I arrived, especially as between a lot of people from the Buddhist Society and a lot of people at the Hampstead Vihara was the question of vipassana meditation by which I mean the so-called 'vipassana' between single inverted commas. This was a quite big issue and some people at the Buddhist Society were seriously worried about this and I think quite rightly, because the way in which it was being taught by some of the people connected with the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara was certainly very, very extreme and they had had quite a number of psychological casualties, quite severe ones. So this perhaps tended to crystallise the issue between the two groups, two camps.

Nagabodhi: Did you see yourself as having a specific job to try and heal the rift and get back as soon as possible or did you not see things in such specific terms?

S: I didn't see it in such specific terms but certainly one of - probably the main reason - for my coming was that it was put to me or had been put to me, that I could be of help in resolving this rift being, as it were, an outsider, a British Buddhist, or Buddhist of English origin of some standing and

fairly well known and some seniority in the Order. But actually it didn't work out quite as simply as that.

Nagabodhi: Though again in that lecture "The Nucleus of a New Society" you suggest that one of the reasons why you brought some trouble on yourself later on was because you did in fact heal the rift.

S: Yes, that is true. Because in both camps, both at the Buddhist Society and the Hampstead Vihara, there were moderate and reasonable people and there were extremists. For instance, there were people connected with the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara who didn't in the least like that I used to go along to the Buddhist Society, was on friendly terms with them. And not only that was taking classes and giving lectures there. Some people at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara just didn't like this at all and they were very displeased with me (?) in that way. On the other hand there were people at the Buddhist Society itself who were very displeased that someone from the enemy camp as they saw it, because after all I was living at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara was actually having the audacity to come to the Buddhist Society and take classes and give lectures there. They didn't like that at all.

So though I succeeded in bringing together the moderate people I think I can say in the course of two years I offended the extremists in both camps and I think I can say that subsequently a part of the troubles that I experienced, was due to a sort of ganging up, strange to say, of the extremists on both sides. (Laughter) They sort of made common cause.

Nagabodhi: Let's move forward a bit. Let's move forward a bit to the letter you received in '67 when you were back in India discontinuing the invitation suggesting that you stay in India. You've said that as soon as you received that letter you realised that it meant a new movement in the West. Was this because while in England you'd seen already the need for a new Buddhist movement?

S: Oh, yes, I'd definitely seen the need for that before going back to India. I hadn't really been able to see my way though to starting anything, or getting a new movement going at this stage. Though actually I had talked about the matter with several friends and had even made some provisional plans to start what might turn into the beginnings of a new Buddhist movement. What actually had happened - I discussed the possibility of perhaps myself with a group of friends, my sort of closest supporters at least hiring a hall and having meetings which were not under the auspices of the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara or the Sangha Association. This possibility had been discussed because I was definitely feeling the need for some kind of new departure. But I knew quite well that the situation in London was such that even my strongest supporters would not welcome the idea of a new Buddhist group or a new Buddhist movement. The general feeling was, well, it's unfortunate that the Buddhist movement has split already and that there are already quite a number of groups some of which are not on particularly friendly terms, we don't want another one, even if it's a good one. That was the general feeling.

Nagabodhi: So in a way that letter cleared the ground.

S: So that, why I felt that this means a new Buddhist movement, is I now had so to speak, the perfect excuse. No one can blame me.

Nagabodhi: Had you thought though in terms of a new kind of Buddhist movement even before your return to the West. In some ways what you've done here is a response to the specific problems that you encountered but I wonder, looking at some of the articles you wrote in India, whether you'd

already formulated a blueprint?

S: Well, I had thought about it quite a lot. For instance there are those two articles of mine called *"Wanted: A New Type of Upasaka"*, and *"Wanted: A New Type of Bhikkhu"*. Those were written in the early sixties and they were published and republished in all the eastern Buddhist magazines and attracted quite a lot of attention and comment. So those two articles alone show in which way my mind was moving and then even earlier there were all the strictures, especially on the Theravada in my *Survey*. But perhaps I should say that even those two articles on *"Wanted: A New Type of Upasaka"* and *"Wanted: A New Type of Bhikkhu"* were sort of reformist rather than, to use the term, rather than sort of revolutionary. They didn't represent thinking in terms of a new Buddhist movement so much as in terms of updating the old Buddhist movement.

Nagabodhi: Even in the context of your work among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists, because Doctor Ambedkar also saw the need for a new kind of Sangha. Do you think there was a tie in there?

S: I was thinking, I think still at that time more in terms of a reformed Sangha rather than a Sangha built on a completely different, that is to say the original basis as we have now in the Western Buddhist Order.

Nagabodhi: Do you think if you'd stayed in India, let's say working closely with the new Buddhists perhaps over the years you would have continued the reformist tendency or do you think you would have become the revolutionary that you became in the West?

S: Well, this brings me to the whole question of why I did change my mind and stay on and decide to stay on in England and also to stay longer than I had intended and also what I said at the beginning about doubts and reservations that I started having with regard to my work in India, especially among the ex-Untouchables. I could see what was needed to be done among the ex-Untouchables but there were two big difficulties. One was their own leaders who didn't really - that is to say, their political leaders who also regarded themselves as their religious leaders - who didn't want any outsider, and they really regarded me as an outsider, acquiring any influence with the new Buddhists. So that it was very difficult to work among them in a more than sort of piecemeal fashion. And also there was the financial angle because I couldn't work without money. I couldn't really do anything among the ex-Untouchables without money. I had no independent source of money. The caste Hindus weren't going to give me money. The old Eastern Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, (?) weren't going to give me money. In fact they'd never taken very much interest in the ex-Untouchables at all. And it would have been quite impossible to raise money from among the ex-Untouchables themselves because that would have really increased the opposition, even hostility of the so-called leaders who wanted to get their hands on whatever money was going, as I saw on so many occasions, some of them were completely unscrupulous in this respect.

But again there were other factors connected with my coming back to the West, in connection with my attitude towards India. I think these are things I haven't mentioned very much before. One was my sort of feeling about India as a whole. When India became independent in 1947 I was of course very pleased indeed that India became independent. And I had quite an admiration for people like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru and, well, for the Congress Party generally inasmuch as they had achieved Indian independence. And I had very great expectations of the Free India because after all the Free India did adopt the Dharmachakra and it did take the Ashoka Lion Capital as it became, and they did profess very high ideals indeed. So I tended to expect that the new India was going to be really based on ethical principles and that their politics was going to be very high-minded. And in a

sense it was for a while, at least as regards words. But over the years and after all I was there for well over a couple of decades, I lost faith in the Indian government, that is to say I lost faith in the Congress Party and the Indian government and I started to feel that it was no better than any other government really in principle. And in other words I did feel somewhat disillusioned and there were three definite incidents that made me feel that India was no better than any other country. It's not really based on its policy and especially its foreign policy, it's not based upon ethical principles but sheer power politics and opportunism.

The first was when Pandit Nehru had not a word to say in condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Hungary but was loud in condemnation of the Suez invasion of about the same time. This was a bit of an eye-opener. This sort of double-standard. And then of course despite all India's profession of non-violence and non-aggressive foreign policy they did annexe Goa by force. Goa was invaded. So this disillusioned me too. And then of course there was India's failure to do anything at all about the invasion of Tibet. India really let down the Tibetan people, even though India had inherited so to speak the interests which the British had left with regard to Tibet. But India was so anxious for friendship with China that it really quite almost cynically, or perhaps with a certain measure of blindness, sacrificed Tibet. So on account of these sort of incidents - these were the main ones - and also because I been aware of the growing corruption of political life in India I felt that India was really no better than any other country.

So this in a way lessened the attraction. There was, in the beginning I'd liked very much the idea of living and working for Buddhism in a country which was dedicated in its public life to certain ethical principles, as embodied in Gandhism and so on. But I found it was just no better. Well the original idea evaporated very, very quickly. Then of course there was the fact that life in Kalimpong was becoming increasingly uncomfortable because I was never myself actually bothered by the authorities but one became increasingly aware of an atmosphere of suspicion and that a lot was sort of going on and, well, that one perhaps might even have to leave Kalimpong. At sometime I became aware of that possibility. But I had no actual reason to think that the government of India would ever ask me to leave. I felt well, maybe I just won't <u>want</u> to stay in Kalimpong. I didn't really see where else in India I could sort of base myself effectively.

Nagabodhi: Not in Maharashtra?

S: Well, how? Because first of all where? I mean I didn't want to identify myself with any particular group. At <u>that</u> time I didn't have the wherewithal to set myself up independently. It would have meant allowing myself to be adopted by a particular group. I didn't want to do that. So there were these sort of things. It's not that they were very strong or definite or clear-cut. But having made that trip to England and seen that, yes, there were possibilities. The fact that I felt in the way I did about India and my work among the Untouchables weighed with me quite a bit and I felt, well, perhaps I can be more useful in England.

Nagabodhi: When you came and, well, obviously you weren't going to be working within the Sangha, if you're setting up your own movement. So how much could you say you had thought through how you would set up a movement in the West? To what extent did you find yourself following circumstance, devising the movement as you went along? To what extent could you say you had thought it through?

S: I can't say that I followed circumstances. On the other hand I can't really say that I thought it through. Because looking back on my life it doesn't seem that I've operated in either of those two

ways actually.

Perhaps I can illustrate it like this. Some years ago somebody cast my horoscope and, I don't know anything about astrology and I don't have any particular faith in it and as I'm not really a believer, I just find it of some interest and nothing more than that. But nonetheless something that was of interest in my horoscope as cast by this particular person was that, I suppose it would be in my horoscope as cast by anybody but apparently most of my planets are below the horizon.

Nagabodhi: You'll have to enlighten me!

S: So I gathered that this means that the sort of major forces, the major influences in one's life, are conscious rather than unconscious; they're beneath the threshold of consciousness. So what this means, I took this to mean that I've always had a very sort of strong sense, a very strong general sense of the direction in which I was going but I've never been bothered about the details. So that when I look back over my life I can see that, Oh, yes, I'm very definitely moving in a certain direction but I very rarely sort of bother to think in what direction I was moving in any sort of very specific way. It was though if I did what just lay to hand to do, the fact that I had certain overall ideals or principles would lead in any case to the creation of a pattern. I didn't need to bother very much about the pattern itself in any conscious or deliberate way. So I wasn't simply reacting to circumstances nor did I have a sort of clear-cut plan thought out in advance. But there were you might say these sort of archetypes operative within me in accordance with which I responded to circumstances and which therefore resulted in the creation of a certain kind of pattern and the creation of a certain kind of movement.

Nagabodhi: Well, we'll come back to this. I would think of you as a thinker, nevertheless. You ...

S: Well, one does think but whether one is a thinker, that's another matter, it's difficult to say.

Nagabodhi: Well, maybe we'll come back to that in connection with another question. Did you feel that you were breaking new ground? Were you clearly aware at the time as to what a unique project you were engaged in?

S: I was certainly aware at the beginning of it being different. I think perhaps I was more clearly aware, more consciously aware at the beginning of what I <u>didn't</u> want the FWBO to be like and what I wanted it to be like. Though perhaps even that statement has to be made with reservations because I certainly saw the FWBO as a traditional Buddhist movement because by nature I am, you might say, a traditionalist. I don't think of myself as an innovator or revolutionary or anything of that sort. That isn't really in accordance with my temperament. If I am a revolutionary it's a reluctant revolutionary. A revolutionary by force of circumstances. But I was very conscious of on the one hand of certain things that I just didn't want to be or didn't want to happen in the FWBO. I was quite conscious that I didn't want it to be a sort of Buddhist movement or Buddhist group that I had experience of hitherto. I was very, very clear about that. And of course on the other hand I was very clear about the basic Buddhist principles that I wanted to implement.

Nagabodhi: It seems at the time that you were very much working alone. Did you ever feel a sense of, I suppose you could say, spiritual community or companionship with people like Trungpa and Chime, (?) and Kennett?

S: I can't say that I felt anything of that sort with them at all. One must also remember that I was

quite accustomed to functioning on my own in India. It wasn't as though I had the support of a very strong Sangha there. Far from it. I mean I had very worthwhile contact with certain individuals like Bhikshu Kashapa and later on Dhardo Rimpoche and other Tibetan teachers, but I certainly never functioned as part of a team. So I was quite accustomed to functioning on my own and I certainly didn't feel any particular kinship with any of the Buddhist figures who were around.

Nagabodhi: Did you feel ever burdened by the responsibility of being on your own?

S: No, I can't say that I've ever felt that.

Nagabodhi: I've got this question. I've been intrigued by this painting, The Scapegoat, by Holman Hunt which you have here and in your office in London.

S: I have it here?

Nagabodhi: I've seen it here. A smaller copy of it. Does that in anyway tie in in this context?

S: After reading your little sheet, I thought about this and I must say, I don't, I've never had any feeling of myself being a scapegoat or anything of that sort. I think in connection with that particular picture in my study I think one mustn't attach to much significance to it. First of all because one can't always get the sort of reproduction one wants because one goes along say to a gallery in this country or on the continent and you can see pictures that you really like and want a reproduction of, you just can't get them. The range is very limited. So you have to get the best you can. I think has to be borne in mind. To bear in mind I like the pre-Raphaelites generally and I like their use of colour and I think if there was anything that attracted me in that picture of The Scapegoat, more than anything else, it was the colours of the landscape.

Nagabodhi: So it has no symbolic connection with your destiny?

S: I don't think so. I certainly don't feel that. Also the version I have on my wall is not the version I really wanted. I wanted the other version which shows a white goat. But no large size reproduction of that exists.

Nagabodhi: Ah, well, I thought it was worth asking.

In India when I've heard you teaching among the new Buddhists, the sort of medium of communication for the Dharma seems to be predominantly social. The Dharma as a force in the social life of people, of communities, including the individual but on quite a social sort of level. Here in the West the language has been predominantly personal, individual, psychological, the language of individual growth. Do you feel this is your own approach? Do you feel that this is something...?

S: Oh, no, not at all. I think by nature, so to speak, I'm not especially sympathetic to the psychological approach nor am I particularly sympathetic to the social approach. My own interests are definitely sort of spiritual, doctrinal, metaphysical, mystical and I get onto those sort of topics as quickly as I can, using the psychological and the social as means of approach. I certainly don't think that Buddhism is all about psychology in the modern sense, nor do I think that Buddhism is all about social life again in the modern sense. Those are just points of departure so far as I'm concerned.

Though having said that I must say that after coming to England I did develop some limited interest in psychology and did study a little of it, similarly as a result of my contact with the ex-Untouchables I did become more aware of the whole social dimension of Buddhism which I think is definitely a dimension of Buddhism. Though whether I would have taken as much interest in that had I not had that contact with the ex-Untouchables I really can't say. It wasn't an interest I had from the beginning. It wasn't an interest that wasn't as it were natural to me.

Nagabodhi: I would have said that redowned even more to your credit that you.... it would seem that you did create a language, even if it is a point of departure, it's a point of departure that you've had to spend a lot of time ...

S: Well, even now, for instance, one might say, I get a little sort of, in a sense, tired having to deal with people's sort of psychological problems. To me this all seems to have very little to do with the Dharma. I'm much happier when I get onto broad philosophical principles or questions of spiritual experience or mystical insight or things of that sort. But people who are interested in those sort of things, in the West, among Western Buddhists, even in our own movement, some of them in England, are comparatively limited(?)

Nagabodhi: Did you ever feel frustrated looking around at the available supply of conceptual models, cultural keys that you could work with in the West? Did you ever feel frustrated that really there was nothing available that you could use as a bridge, as a means of communication?

S: No, I can't say that because I did use the evolutionary model, I have used the evolutionary model. No, I can't say that I felt frustrated because of lack of models. If I've felt frustrated by anything it is simply lack of time, including lack of time to acquaint myself with all the various modes of Western thought.

Nagabodhi: Originally you did cast your net quite widely. You would quote from the Gospels, you would cite Jung, Fromm, Maslow, various ...

S: Well, those names were very much in the air at that time, and a lot of the people who came along to classes and lectures had read those particular authors. So I just wanted to create mainly a sort of atmosphere of being at home with those authors, recognising a certain amount of common ground, using them as bridges even. I must say my personal interest in all these people rather quickly waned.

Nagabodhi: Do you think you were using them or were you to some extent waving a flag, addressing yourself to a specific community of seekers?

S: I think they were part of the current language and I was quite happy to use that language so long as it was necessary.

Nagabodhi: Except that they were, they were part of the current language of a particular sub-cultural force in the West at that time which moves us on a bit to the hippy era. I mean, in some way you made yourself it would seem from around the time, say that I got involved, in 1970, 71, that you were addressing yourself, or at least making yourself quite accessible to that sector of the aspiring community, of spiritual seekers.

S: Well, you use the word "spiritual seekers" but clearly one was addressing people who were looking for something which suggested that they were people who weren't able to find what they

wanted, or what they needed, within the existing social system or religious framework and so on. So in a sense one was addressing people who had to some extent dropped out. I think the majority of people who were coming along, they weren't hippies in the more literal sense but people who were looking for an alternative and they, in some cases, had already looked at various alternatives and sometimes they saw certain alternatives as sort of all hanging together. I remember at one stage Piema Martin(?) was a very well known name, a very popular figure, the author of "Experiment in Depth". One never hears about him now. One hasn't heard about him in the FWBO for many a year but he was very popular at that time.

So one tended to refer to these people, to these books and quote from these books, use the sort of language that was current at the time, simply as part of one's medium of communication.

Nagabodhi: As some people, you feel sometimes do, you were in no way setting up, creating a synthesis between the Dharma and these ideas. You were more using the names, using their language.

S: Yes, I never had the idea of creating a synthesis between the Dharma and these. I never saw these things as being on anything like the same level as the Dharma. I think the idea of creating a synthesis which if I'd thought of it at all, which I don't think I actually did, would have seemed utterly ridiculous. Well, if you think the Dharma being the expression of an enlightened consciousness and these other things however interesting being the product of the groping of the unenlightened mind, the idea that a synthesis between the two would have seemed really quite absurd. So my only interest was to communicate the Dharma and these things were not part of the Dharma, they were part of the current language that I was using to communicate the Dharma with, though perhaps some people might have thought I was trying to create a synthesis. I remember quite early on, I think when I was, even while I was I think staying at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, Gerald York. He was trying to annoy me by regularly referring to my personal synthesis and I tried to explain that I had no personal synthesis in that sense but he seemed quite unable to appreciate the point.

Nagabodhi: People did think at that time that you were a bit ... people would have said, selling out or getting a bit to close for their comfort at least to this kind of hippy generation and even now people still sometimes think of the FWBO as a bit of a hangover from that era.

S: Well, I do remember that in the early days of the FWBO one of our friends, in fact, an Order Member who afterwards resigned and who is now dead, became very, very upset about what he referred to as the hippies taking over the FWBO. He became almost hysterical about it. So one day I sat down with him and discussed it with him and I went through all the people who were coming to classes, there weren't all that many in those days, and asked him, "Do you think he is a hippy? Do you think he is a hippy? Would you identify her as a hippy?" And he had to say, "No", in every single case except one and that was a young American who had come over at that time. So then I said, "Well, look, how can you say, on your own admission you can only identify one hippy. How can you say that the hippies have taken over?" So I think it's a bit like some people seeing an international Zionist conspiracy to take over the Gentile world - something of that sort. I think it is almost entirely projection. But in the case of this particular person, clearly he saw the hippy as wild, undisciplined, dirty, erotic and all those things which he had suppressed I think in his own life.

Nagabodhi: Nevertheless would you acknowledge that the movement's growth, the speed with which it's grown, at least materially in terms of establishing co-ops and communities owes something

to the fact that you established the movement, you began to establish the movement in the latter end of the sixties rather than the fifties?

S: Well, clearly one is not going to recruit one's member from convinced Christians or regular church-goers. You've got to recruit from people who have, as it were, dropped out. They still have their jobs and their families but spiritually speaking one might say that they've dropped out. So you've got to create your movement from those people who form this sort of alternative pool, one might say. So I mean the mere fact that you have a Buddhist movement at all means that you recruit from those people. We're not going to recruit from people who are already committed to something else ...

(End of side one Side two)

S: So any Eastern tradition or teaching that takes root in the West necessarily, by definition is alternative, draws on that pool of alternative people. So to say that the FWBO is a branch of the alternative world, well, it is a truism. So is everything that isn't Christian in this country. Every kind of religion is alternative until of course it becomes the majority. How can it be anything else? I mean the Buddhist Society itself is alternative.

Nagabodhi: As you've worked to create bridges to make the Dharma relatively accessible within the Western culture, has your own appreciation, your own personal experience and appreciation of the Three Jewels, been transformed by that specific aspect of your own work?

S: Not in themselves. One might see greater possibilities of application but not my appreciation of them in themselves.

Nagabodhi: That would go deeper than the work you've been doing.

Still talking about the Three Jewels, but a different Three Jewels, on the dust jacket of the book, *The Three Jewels*, you're semi-quoted as saying that you intend to divide your time equally between the West and the East. When did you realise that, at least for the time being, that wouldn't be the case that ...?

S: I think I probably realised even at the time. I think that that was more an expression of a pious wish than an actual declaration of intent. I think this is what I would have <u>liked</u> to be possible but it wasn't possible for several years if only for financial reasons because such trips cost money. But I think I would have liked that to have been possible and I don't think I ever sort of formally, so to speak, gave up the idea of dividing my time between England and India, perhaps I haven't even really given it up now. I still sometimes think in terms of spending a few years perhaps in India.

Nagabodhi: Well, in fact now, even though you're here a lot of time, you are equally involved in the Indian situation. Yet when you decided to start things in the West you must have had to at least imagine the possibility of not ever being able to do that again or did you ...?

S: Again this comes back to what I said earlier on about these, as it were, unconscious patterns (?). I wasn't as clear cut as that. I just put it aside without actually, definitely thinking that well, this means I'll never be able to go to India again. So one could put it in this way. When I was in India I definitely had the idea that I was in India and only in India, and would never come back to the West. But I've never had in the West the idea that I would never go back to India.

Nagabodhi: Yes.

S: Maybe, I mean, maybe that's not unconnected with another point. I remember that when I returned to England after a twenty year absence in August of 1964 I felt no excitement whatever as I landed at Heathrow. And I noted this in myself. I didn't experience the slightest stirring of emotion. It was completely matter-of-fact, but on the other hand when I went back to India in 1966 I did in fact feel quite excited.

Nagabodhi: Is that simply because the emotional climate of India is warmer?

S: It could be that but I think maybe my own emotional ties with India are strong. Though of course that is still many years ago but I think I still in many ways feel more at home in India.

Nagabodhi: What about when you returned to England in '67 knowing that this time you were coming back to start a new movement. Did you feel an excitement, a racing of the pulse as the plane hit the tarmac?

S: I can't remember anything like that.

Nagabodhi: Did you not feel, did you identify yourself with Bodhidharma, or Padmasambhava, did you ever feel that kind of kinship with these ...?

S: I don't think I did. I think I, my attitude was sort of quite matter-of-fact. When I returned to England, I mean the second time, I think what I was most conscious of was the nature of the situation and the fact that, strange as it may now seem, a lot of people thought I just wouldn't dare to come back because Mr Humphreys had said he didn't want me back. He sort of sided with the Sangha Trust and the vast majority of people up to that point thought, "Well, whatever Mr Humphreys said goes" in the British Buddhist world. No-one would dare to go against his wishes and how could even Sangharakshita possibly survive in England if he was to come back without Mr Humphreys' agreement and permission. Do you see what I mean? So I think I was most conscious of that aspect of things but I was doing what a lot of British Buddhists would regard as an unspeakably bold thing and I'm quite sure that that action of mine made a big difference to Christmas Humphreys whole position in the Buddhist movement, because people saw that you could defy him and get away with it and I think this is quite important.

Nagabodhi: Well you did. Do you feel that, forgetting your act of defiance that what you've done, do you ...?

S: I didn't by the way myself feel it as an act of defiance. I was just exercising my perfectly natural right to come back to my own country as I wanted to. And I was really astonished that people could even think that I needed anybody's permission to do that. That seemed to me extraordinary, it seemed to me that I mean Christmas Humphreys had got a sort of grip on them which was quite sort of ununderstandable.

Nagabodhi: You came back, you set out the FWBO, time has gone past. I mean, has the FWBO developed as you expected? Maybe that question is no longer relevant.

S: I think in a way I've answered that question.

Nagabodhi: You didn't really have an expectation.

S: Not in the way that perhaps the question implies.

Nagabodhi: So let's rephrase it. Are you content with the way things have gone?

S: Well, again yes and no. So far so good but of course I feel things haven't gone nearly far enough yet. I mean there are a lot of things I'd like to see happening. The women Order Members emerge at a much slower rate than I would like to see. We haven't really effectively covered even the United Kingdom, what to speak of Europe, what to speak of the world. We're mainly established in the south-east corner of England, and we've got a long way to go yet even with regard to our actual coverage of England, not even of the United Kingdom.

Nagabodhi: Have you ever felt frustrated at the rate of progress?

S: I can't say that I've felt frustrated in the sense of having a sort of feeling of frustration gnawing away at me but I have sometimes rather wondered why progress isn't quicker. It seems to me that sometimes progress has been unnecessarily slow especially when I see people who've been exposed to the influence of the FWBO for quite a while or even perhaps Order Members but who don't seem to have such a great appreciation of the urgency of the situation as one would think or as one would expect.

Nagabodhi: Just going back historically just for a moment. You took that year off, or that year away from involvement in centre activities at Pundarika. It's sometimes said that in some way that was an expression, if not of frustration but there was a bit of an ultimatum involved there, that if we didn't pull together and make something happen you were open to the possibility of returning to India at that point.

S: No, I don't think that possibility crossed my mind. No, in fact I'm sure it didn't, and there were also various other factors that perhaps people didn't appreciate. One was that I had been fully involved in active Buddhist work for quite a number of years. That before my six years of the FWBO there were the two years very, very busy and active years, of the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and before that my work in India and also one shouldn't forget that I had my memoirs unfinished and one of the very important reasons why I withdrew to Cornwall was I wanted to finish my memoirs which I did.

Nagabodhi: So you wouldn't say that that sabbatical wasn't in any way an expression of frustration?

S: Oh, no, not in the least.

Nagabodhi: It's good to know (?). You've said I believe recently, I think on a Tuscany retreat that you have often felt surprised to keep realising or re-realising how hard people find it to change. Is that something like what you can remember saying?

S: I think perhaps I should say that I have been surprised how hard <u>some</u> people find it to change. It does seem that within the FWBO, and I speak of the FWBO because obviously my contacts are closest within the FWBO, contacts with people, but I do know that there are quite a number of quite sincere people who've been involved with the FWBO perhaps for five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten

years or more who try quite hard, who struggle quite hard but who nonetheless seem unable to change very much at all. This does sometimes surprise me. Though, of course, on the other hand there are quite a few people who as a result of their exposure to the FWBO and involvement with things like meditation and Dharma study and spiritual friendship do change sometimes quite dramatically.

Nagabodhi: You seem to be one of those if not something more. I mean from everything I know about you it seems you've always been a hundred percent clear, a hundred percent committed to the extent that sometimes you find yourself wondering, or I've found myself wondering, "What's different about him? When did you struggle, when did you have trouble with your commitment? Can you remember a time of struggle? Is it just that since you've been in the West, well, this is how you've been? Do you ever feel that, do you feel, I suppose I'm asking, a kinship with us in our struggles sometimes or does it just surprise you?

S: I must say that quite often it does just surprise me. I mean I can certainly look back and remember things with regards to which or in connection with which, I had to make a definite effort or even struggle, for instance with things like mindfulness. I've worked on mindfulness, for years and years together. Not that I was especially unmindful, I don't think I was but I was very, very conscious that I needed to be very much more mindful than I was. So I can certainly remember having to struggle with certain things. But I've certainly never had any sort of doubt as regards my overall direction, let us say or about my, say, for want of a better term, involvement with the spiritual life, never had any doubts about that.

Nagabodhi: You told <u>me</u> once that right from the start of your interest and involvement in the Dharma you could honestly say that you've never really experienced a fundamental doubt about the Dharma. You felt an intuitive understanding ...

S: I think I can say that. I think I can say that whenever I exercised my mind I was able to understand the Dharma and I think this is one of the things that surprises me most about, for instance, their lack of clarity or even <u>inability</u> to think clearly. I think I can say without claiming too much that this has been natural to me. At least, that I've known the difference between clear-thinking and not so clear-thinking and people's inability as it would seem, to think clearly even within the context of the movement, does surprise me quite a lot. I mean if I just listen to the radio, if I listen to the news programme on the radio, well, of course, there are examples of unclear thinking every few seconds. Well, one doesn't, perhaps I shouldn't even say one isn't surprised, I'm even surprised there because one feels surprised that human beings can sink below a certain level of clarity. Sometimes it's as though they don't want to be clear as though they were almost deliberately unclear. They've got a definite in a sense a reason to be unclear, a reason with a certain self-interest or group interest.

Nagabodhi: But again it seems to be remarkable about you so far as one gathers that you don't seem to suffer from, or have suffered from, the kind of emotional unclarity and conflict that perhaps gives rise to woolly thinking in a lot of us.

S: I'm not quite sure what you mean by emotional conflict?

Nagabodhi: Well, a lot of unclear thinking has an emotional base.

S: I think one thing I can say is, I can't say that I've been as strict in the ordinary sense. I think I can say I've always as it were had confidence in my own basic direction. So I think I can say therefore

that I wasn't over scrupulous, at least not as the years went by. For instance, about say my interest in things like poetry. Well, some people whom I knew clearly regarded that as a sort of deviation from the spiritual path. I didn't really think that though I was influenced by that sort of way of thinking for a while. But eventually, well, I had sufficient faith in myself to feel that my interest in poetry is not inconsistent with my commitment to spiritual life. So I think I was to a great extent free from emotional conflict because I had this confidence in myself within the fact that the direction in which I was moving was in fact the right one. That in fact, whatever I did was right. I think I had this sort of feeling very, very strongly.

Nagabodhi: Do you see the possibility of, well, the root of that confidence being perhaps in effort put in in former lives. Do you ever think in those terms?

S: Well, it's a possibility. I do believe in former lives but I can't say that I actually perceive any direct connection. I think it might also have something to do with my bringing up. The fact that I did have quite positive parents, especially a quite positive and quite encouraging father. I certainly never had the sort of problems that I know a lot of our friends have had.

Nagabodhi: Yet to transform one's nature in line with the spiritual vision even with a good upbringing is something that most of us seem to find extremely difficult and yet again I get the impression that you somewhere have had an easier ride? Or is that just a projection?

S: I think it is true (?). I would say that the more I've been left to my own devices and the less I've had to do with other people the easier ride I've had. So that means in a sense that the latter part of my life has been the least easy because I've become increasingly involved with people and therefore increasingly involved with their problems and difficulties which were not my own and perhaps have never been my own. And again, to go back to what you were saying earlier, often I really am quite surprised about people's or by people's sort of lack of conscientiousness, their dilatoriness, their unreliability and so on. Again I'm speaking of people within the movement itself.

Nagabodhi: So, looking at a few, perhaps minor details, your decision, for example, to discard the robe in the West except on ceremonial occasions, to grow your hair, to eat at unseasonable hours and so on. In some way based on a more thorough knowledge of the written Dharma ...?

S: Well, also of course with greater confidence in myself because for many, many years I adhered to the rules very, very strictly. And I feel that, for most people, there is a period when you need to do this. But more recently I have felt that I can trust myself sufficiently that I don't need that sort of support. For instance in the matter of food, I'm quite sure I can go back to the old sort of pattern of eating quite easily, as I do very often when I go back to India. So I've no doubts about that. I'm quite sure that I'm not sort of addicted to food, I'm not greedy where food is concerned. I have that within control, even 'control' is the wrong sort of word. So I can trust myself in that area. This is what I feel.

Nagabodhi: How have you managed to avoid - perhaps the answer's obvious, but I'll ask you - how have you managed to avoid developing quite a cynical attitude to us, to people who you've been working with, who perhaps do constantly fail their own higher vision, who do full short of their own ideals, quite apart from yours? Have you had to work quite hard not to become quite cynical, disillusioned with us perhaps?

S: No, I can't say that. I can certainly see the possibilities of cynicism. I can understand people

being cynical but then again the question arises, well, what is cynicism and I think cynicism arises when there's a lack of emotional positivity. So I think I've always been able to maintain sufficient emotional positivity to safeguard me from cynicism as regards to people. I also see that despite all their lapses and backsliding and stumblings and straying, people do very often make - at least intermittently - a very sincere effort, so one appreciates that too. It's not as though backsliding is the whole of the story.

Also I'm very conscious of the fact that a lot of people had a very unfavourable start, that is to say they started life under very unfavourable conditions. I'm been feeling this more and more, even over the last few months. I feel this especially in connection with the women. They seem to have had a much harder time in many ways, as with troubles within the families and difficulties with their father, very, very traumatic experiences even amounting to rape and experience of incest and things like this. So as one knows people better and better one comes to know what they've had to go through, especially as I say, perhaps the women. Women even more than men. So one can't help feeling for them and understanding certainly some cases why it is they do find it so difficult to make progress and why there are all these things to be sorted out. It's not surprising. So I didn't have that sort of start. Maybe that has also played its part.

Nagabodhi: OK. Over the years while you've been working, creating the FWBO, I would suggest that the first few years were devoted to explaining Buddhism, introducing Buddhism to us. Then a period has followed where you were putting a lot of thought and direction into the more material superstructure, advice on centres, co-operatives, communities and maybe more latterly perhaps your main input has been tracking down woolly thinking, micchaditthis, wrong views and so on. Is that simply historical, that's how the movement has developed and therefore that's where you've turned your attention or would you say that that order of thought represents a hierarchy of priority in your mind as you worked?

S: It didn't represent a conscious hierarchy of priorities in my mind. In fact I don't think I had any idea that I'd have to direct my mind to things like co-ops. I'd not the slightest interest in co-ops. They were sort of structures on the economic side of life. I directed my attention to those things because that seemed to be needed. I'd prefer to study another poet or something of that sort.

Nagabodhi: What about now? Do you think, can you see the next thing that's needed? Can you see maybe a fourth major area for your attention?

S: Oh, yes, I can see a number of such areas. I'm simply unsure whether I actually am going to have enough time to give proper attention to all of them. At present I definitely want to produce more in the way of literature for the movement. I see that as a very, very big priority. I think that is the immediate priority and also I want to be quite sure that there is a nucleus of more experienced Order Members able to take over from me the responsibility of giving ordinations and that's another very important priority. And then there are all sorts of other sort of areas I'd like to open up. I'd like to have contact, personal contact, with various groups and movements and traditions outside the FWBO, outside Buddhism even. I'm hoping to be able to do something of that sort.

Nagabodhi: Coming back to that perhaps in a moment. [Pause] I once had a talk with you, a long time ago, and I think I was asking you about whether we would ever be able to make use of Christian symbols or Christian symbolism and you said, "Probably, perhaps, we will but not for a while", and after a pause you said, "Perhaps in three or four hundred years time", and I realised that, in some way, whether this is an intuitive thing or a conscious thing you think or look at the future of the

movement in those sorts of terms. Would you agree?

S: Oh yes I would agree.

Nagabodhi: Again, that must add to a feeling of responsibility in that when you're presented perhaps with quite important decisions to make, you have to think that far ahead.

S: I think that there's quite a lot of things that I say, well, things that we say in the FWBO or which we do in the FWBO, the implications of which, the more far-reaching implications of which hardly anybody realises apart from myself but I suppose that is only natural.

Nagabodhi: Again, is that a conscious thing or is this again tied in with the feeling for a pattern?

S: This is a more conscious thing. I think, this is tied up with quite historical sense. I've always been interested in history even as a boy. I think I can say that my historical sense, my sense of history, is quite well developed and I'm very conscious therefore of the position of the FWBO, of the WBO, in the broader context of the history of Buddhism itself. And within that context twenty years seems to me a very short time indeed.

Nagabodhi: Do you think it's been long enough for us to come up against the major obstacles that we will have to face or do you think we've hardly scratched up against?

S: That's very difficult to say except that we have to bear in mind that we've limited ourselves to a great extent. We've started the movement in a country, i.e. England, which is perhaps the easiest of all countries to start something like the FWBO in. I mean if we tried to start in say a Communist country or Islamic country it would have been a very different matter. So we have had, in a way, a very easy time so far, in the sense that we haven't come up against any real opposition at all. But that's only because we've chosen to operate within those areas where that sort of opposition is unlikely to be encountered. But clearly we have to move into more difficult areas.

Nagabodhi: Employing your historical sense, could you envisage us reaching a point where, willy-nilly, we'll encounter more obstacles than we have even here in the West, even here in England say?

S: I don't have any sort of definite picture of us as encountering difficulties in England. I mean for that to be possible, in a way, would require quite a radical transformation of English life in all aspects, especially the social and political. I hardly see that as very likely to come about.

Nagabodhi: So far for really all of its history the FWBO has been quite a small movement, financially poor, low profile in terms of its public image and in a way therefore quite dependent on input from people with quite high active commitment. In a way you could say that the movement has not seemed very broad. People have either been right into it or not. As time goes by for simple historical reasons we're getting bigger. I think we're even getting richer and we're broadening out. There are more levels of involvement. I think you've said in the past whenever I've talked to you that this is something that you really welcome, this broadening out and something we should on with excitement and enthusiasm. But I at least envisage difficulties of transforming, from being perhaps quite a small and high densely committed Sangha into something bigger and broader. How do you see us guaranteeing that we'll maintain the integrity, the radical spiritual integrity of the movement as we broaden out?

S: Well, one can think of broadening in two ways. First of all there's broadening in the sense of dilution. That is to say the average commitment becomes less. I don't want to see that sort of broadening. The other kind of broadening is broadening in the sense of the small committed group operating across or along a broader front. That I see as something quite different. So when I say that I'm happy to see the movement broadening out what I mean is I'm happy to see the committed nucleus operating along that broader front. I do not mean that I'm happy to see a larger number of people which would mean a diluted commitment. Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: Do you think it's not inevitable in some way that our centres will attract into their orbit people whose commitment is going to be less than that say of Order Members? Is some kind of dilution not inevitable?

S: I don't think that that need represent dilution because the whole structure of the FWBO, or the FWBOs, is such as to keep, for want of a better term we call power, effectively in the hands of Order Members so that they have a deciding voice in everything. So I think as long as we maintain that principle and that kind of structure, there is no danger of dilution however many people are involved with the movement. That is of course provided also that the Order itself maintains its character. And there can be no sort of built in guarantee for that because that rests upon the sense of responsibility and spiritual awareness of each individual.

Nagabodhi: Is there not, again keeping on the theme of dangers a bit, the danger of the, well if not monk-laity, the strongly committed and the laity split some kind of split developing?

S: I think there is that possibility. I think that possibility is there all the time. When one does have radically different life-styles. I think that split will not develop if people maintain the same level of commitment regardless of life-style. I think that the danger very definitely lies with those who are committed to, for want of a better term, the family and domestic life-style. I think there is a definite danger that due to that sort of life-style, due to that sort of situation there will come about some weakening of their commitment and if that happens, if there are too many people involved in that sort of life-style and with a weakened commitment for that reason, there <u>will</u> develop a split, for want of a better term, between them and those people who are not following that sort of life-style and whose commitment is more rigorous and more alive. So I think the first point is that the split will not come about if all Order Members equally regardless of their life-style keep up a full commitment to the Three Jewels and, two, if those who are involved with a family/domestic type of life-style <u>especially</u> are very careful to see that they nonetheless do maintain their full commitment.

Nagabodhi: Do you think that you will be playing a part in perhaps giving direction to that? Part of the broadening out now probably will be the arising of people involved quite deeply, involved in the movement, living in a family life. Do you think this is something you envisage us doing for ourselves or do you think that you will intervene with lectures, writing?

S: I think it will all have to be done through the Order Chapters because every individual Order Member I trust belongs to a Chapter and within each Chapter it's the responsibility of the Order Members concerned to just help one another in keeping up to scratch. I think this will be one of the main functions of the Order Chapters. So where the Chapters are not as it were coterminous with a single-sex community it'll be quite good to have a sort of mix of people in the Chapters, a balance of people, that is to say, those who are living in small single-sex communities and those who are living at home with their spouses and families.

Nagabodhi: Over the next twenty years do you, if you envisage things in this way, would you envisage pretty much consistent, steady growth along the lines that we're witnessing at the moment or would you envisage within the next twenty years any kind of quantum leap whether it's to do with our numbers, with the social organisation around our centres or something on the spiritual level. You mentioned ordination a while ago?

S: I'd like to see a few more quantum leaps. I think they can be expected from time to time in the life of a movement just as in the life of an individual. I think it would be surprising if there weren't any quantum leaps from time to time. I think a quantum leap did take place with the creation of Sukhavati, that is to say the whole LBC complex. I think one did take place then and again a quantum leap took place with the establishment of our work in India, again There's a quantum leap. Well, you could say that the whole Aid for India project represented a quantum leap. So I'm hoping that there will be sort of quantum leaps, but it seems to me that those quantum leaps are likely to be associated with particularly capable or gifted or talented individuals and we don't seem to have so many of them around, if you see what I mean. We don't seem, as yet, to have attracted people who are outstanding for natural genius or better say, talents in an ordinary sense of the term, or just capacity.

Nagabodhi: How precisely would you see them playing a part in that kind of quantum leap? Would you mean in the way perhaps Subhuti spearheaded Sukhavati or Lokamitra, India?

S: That's sort of way, yes. Of course, I'm thinking not only organisationally but say someone perhaps becoming involved with the FWBO, becoming an Order Member who was a very, very gifted poet or a novelist, and was widely recognised as such, and who through his poetry or through his fiction did achieve a breakthrough into the whole world of literature for the FWBO, or in the world of film for instance. Do you see what I mean? Or into the world of business, economics, co-ops.

Nagabodhi: What about in the more directly spiritual dimension? Kamalasila still feels frustrated at the, well the degree to which he feels meditation is still not taken that seriously or wholeheartedly by enough people, and if you're thinking in terms of Order Members taking over the process of ordination from you, is not some quantum leap going to be required in that area?

S: I think so. But I wouldn't be restrict it just to meditation. I think it would have to be an all round quantum leap. And perhaps that leap would occur only when people took on the responsibility. One does find that sometimes because this is not apparent in a way that say poetry or such things are apparent. This is a matter of general all-round human development.

Nagabodhi: The quantum leaps are phenomena that we can simply wait for or do you think we could be doing more to create the conditions?

S: Well, I think the more alive the movement generally is, the more alive will be the people who it attracts and certainly the standard has improved over the years. I think from all that I can gather we're now attracting more healthy, capable, balanced people than we were formerly. So it is to be hoped that we likewise can attract in the future more and more people who are positively talented and highly skilled and highly gifted and that will represent a very great sort of increment to the movement.

Nagabodhi: Do you think it's possible in any way yet to isolate trends taking place within the

FWBO that give a clue to the final nature, a more final nature of Western Buddhism, or do you think it's too early to make that sort of ...

S: I think it's probably too early. I would like to see single-sex communities multiplying much more than they have done and I'd like to see the women's retreat centre emerging. I'd like to see much more activity along that sort of line.

Nagabodhi: Until those sorts of things are reaching fruition it's still too early to?

S: I think.

Nagabodhi: So in a way it's as if we still don't have, there are still elements of basic equipment and basic facilities that we don't have in the movement.

S: I think we need quite a few more writers to popularise the message, so-to-speak, of the FWBO through the written word, in such a way that it reaches people who might not have had any personal contact with us at all.

Nagabodhi: Looking back over the last twenty years personally as well as the institution, organisation, are there any particular moments or eras or periods of time which particularly stand out in your mind as being the most interesting or the most enjoyable, the most significant?

S: That's very difficult to say. I mean there are all sorts of things that stand out in my memory, whether that's because they've any special significance again it's difficult to say. I remember some of our early retreats at Keffolds and at Quartermaine. I very much enjoyed those. They stand out. I remember some of the lecture courses I gave. The series of eight lectures. Some of them - especially the later ones - stand out very much in my mind. And Tuscany of course stands out. There are other sort of, in a sense, lesser things or individual things. For instance, this might surprise you a bit but when Subhuti's book was published I saw this as a landmark not only for the movement but for me also. I felt as though something had been passed on, something would continue. So I think in some ways I was happier with the publication of Subhuti's book even than Subhuti himself was, which is saying quite a lot.

Nagabodhi: I hear you referred to it as being like a grand-daughter.

S: Yes, that's right, yes, yes, yes.

Nagabodhi: And what was the grandson, was something else. You would have a grandson when something else happened?

S: Well, that was when Order Members were able to give ordination themselves, yes.

Nagabodhi: Have you any idea how long that might be?

S: I can't say. I would like it to be this year, but I know it's not going to be this year. It is in a sense a responsibility I want to hand on to leave myself free for other things. I was hoping, I did some years ago tell myself that I hoped I would be able to hand over that responsibility when there were one hundred Order Members. Well, in recent years I've said when they're two hundred and fifty Order Members. I don't actually see that as coming about, not in the natural course of things, so to

speak.

Nagabodhi: Are you beginning to feel quite eager to be freed of this sort of responsibility?

S: Well, I am quite eager to devote myself to those things which I want to give priority to. I mean I've thoroughly enjoyed giving ordinations. I love going to Tuscany. I enjoy ordination retreats. It's not that I don't enjoy these things and don't wish to do them but that I see other things as being now even more important. I'm quite sure that eventually this responsibility too will be taken on. I mean if I look back to those early Keffolds retreats which I mentioned, at that time I couldn't entrust the evening puja to anybody, not even to an Order Member. There were evenings when I had to rush up to London to take the class there immediately after a class in (?) and then be back hoping that nothing had gone wrong between my absence in time to take the evening puja because nobody else could take it. Well, there's a tremendous difference between then and now. I just don't have anything at all to do with retreats except to go along and give ordinations and everything functions perfectly. Not only that, it's not that the retreats now are just as good as when I was taking them, no - they're far better because they've got a whole weight of the movement behind them now.

So, well, I was hearing just this last few days about the success of the women's retreat which they had in Chester and 86 of them. It seems to me to be an amazing success. This is without the slightest .....

(End of tape one tape two)

S: ... taken over by more experienced Order Members sooner or later, though actually so far as I personally am concerned it would have been very, very convenient to say the least, had it been handed over already or if it could be handed over within a year or two but I don't really honestly see that happening.

Nagabodhi: The next twenty years. We have talked a bit about the movement over the twenty years, yourself. What do you think is the shape of the next twenty years staying here or concentrating increasingly on writing or you mentioned a while ago about perhaps spending a few years in India?

S: As I see things at present and this is only quite provisional except for what I'm going to say just now. I want to give priority to my writing for two or three years. I want to keep in touch with India. I see myself as making regular visits there as long as I can, if I was to give ordinations and give a few lectures. I want to co-operate personally along a broader front if I possibly can and make more contacts in the outside world. I'm not quite clear as to how that (?).

Nagabodhi: Personally because you talked about hoping that the Order would broaden out?

S: Oh yes. I want the Order to do that too. But I see myself as doing it personally as well.

Nagabodhi: You feel you're going to be able to combine that with your literary ...?

S: I hope so, I hope so. For instance I have had contacts with groups of clergymen and last year I went and gave a lecture for the Wrekin Trust, mystics and scientists conference. So I shall be perhaps trying to do more of that sort of thing if the opportunity offers. But my main priority of course is my literary work. And I may be combining that and lecturing by producing papers which I can read as lectures and which can be published. I'm beginning to prefer that way of doing things. It

enables me to be more thorough and more precise. I certainly prefer that way of doing things in England. In India I still operate as regards doing this in more or less the old way. I'm quite happy to go on doing that. It's quite appropriate.

Nagabodhi: As the movement does develop and grow, let's speculate. Supposing there was some kind of quantum leap into a much, much higher public profile, suddenly we became much better known for one reason or another, and let's say you got called on much more to give interviews on the radio, television, newspapers and so on. Is that something you'd welcome or would that seem a bit of an imposition to your present plans?

S: No, I think I'd quite welcome that. I don't find it difficult to talk to people. I mean I can usually establish quite speedy rapport with people. The only reason for which I would withdraw from that sort of activity was if I was misreported or misrepresented. I would just not risk that. I'd rather not be heard at all than heard in a distorted and garbled form.

Nagabodhi: Though there is the almost inevitable risk that supposing the movement became more widely known, you therefore would become more widely known and you would become something which in a way you seem always to have resisted being which is the sort of the popular guru figure, the cult figure?

S: I see this as entirely within my own choice. I mean if I don't want to give interviews no one can make me give interviews. If I don't wish to see people, it's a free country, I don't have to. I don't believe the gurus who say, well, they don't really want to be well-known, they don't really want to see people, they're made to do this and made to do that. I think that is just a lot of nonsense. I think if I didn't want to give interviews, well, I wouldn't give them and that's that. People would soon get the message.

Nagabodhi: I'm really glad you've given me this one. The last question. Do you ever stand back from your work over the last twenty years, just restricting it to the last twenty years and recognise how much you've achieved, how much you achieved, how much you've given despite whatever frustrations you might feel? You've given so much, and made so many people...

S: I think by the very nature of the part I've played it's very difficult for me to do this. I don't try to do this. I don't think I actually do step back and try to see what I've done because from another point, I'm just living my life. I'm doing what is natural for me to do. But I must say that in recent years, and especially this last year, I've received so many letters from people within the movement expressing their appreciation of the FWBO and their appreciation of me for having started the FWBO that I can no longer really ignore the fact even if I wanted to do, that I really have started and really done something, and sometimes I find that not exactly surprising but one sees things in a different way when one sees them, as it were, reflected from another person, or through another person's eyes. But it's quite difficult for me to see what was being done as a result or see what I have done.

Nagabodhi: You never allow yourself the glow of contentment?

S: I can't say that I experience things in that way. To me I'm just leading, I'm just living my life and doing what I want to do, what I think is right to do and that's that. I mean, just as for instance on another level one might say, I mean the ordinary person doesn't think, "Oh, here am I. I've had this job all these years and I've brought up these two children". He doesn't sort of look back on that with

a tremendous glow of pride because it's just his life.

Nagabodhi: Yes, but that is a life lived reactively whereas your life has been lived creatively and there's a little more personal initiative involved in what you've chosen to do and made of your life?

S: Yes, but in the same way that say reactivity is natural for him, creativity perhaps is natural for me, so I, it doesn't seem such a big deal as it were. Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: Yes. Well, thanks for living your life, Bhante and thank you for talking to me.

S: Well, I hope you can make something of it. It'll need knocking into some kind of order, some kind of shape.

(end of interview)

Transcribed by Paul Doré,

Checked and contented by Silabhadra

Copied and distributed by Margje Perla-Zeef