

The Venerable Sangharakshita
Question and Answer Evening in Auckland, New Zealand, May 1979

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Sangharakshita: I think most people know that I shall be leaving New Zealand early on Friday morning, after, I think it's two and a half, quite busy and quite pleasant months in New Zealand. So, apart from tomorrow night, when we have the third lecture; the third talk; in the series on "A New Buddhist Movement", this will be my last opportunity, I think, here tonight, to see most of you. So I thought it might be a good idea if we used an hour or so of our time, possibly, to clear up any outstanding questions; because quite a few of you, I imagine, won't have the opportunity of asking them, at least not asking me, for a little while to come. So, if in the course of the last few weeks, any question from the last meeting - any question that has occurred to anybody - anything that has been bothering you, about, maybe, your meditation, or about the Dharma generally, or even any doctrinal or historical problems connected with Buddhism; well, perhaps, this is the time to bring it up. Perhaps we can try to sort it out and maybe that will lead on to something dharmic, and this no doubt, will occupy our time till our-cup-of-tea time. So, who's going to lead Off? (Pause) Maybe as soon as you can get your minds working again.- (Laughter.)

Judith: Bhante, I'd like to ask a question about the function of ordination. Given that an individual is committed, or feels committed, and decides..... or who has asked for ordination, can he hope or expect to grow more effectively therefrom, rather than if he were not ordained? In other words - Is one of the functions of ordination to promote further growth?

S: Oh yes! Certainly.

Judith: More rapid growth.

S: Oh yes! certainly! No doubt!

Judith: So that in fact, it is to the advantage of an individual to be ordained as soon as they can?

S: Yes. In the sense that the more committed you are the more committed you can become. I shall be dealing with this at quite some length in the course of my talk tomorrow night; because tomorrow night will be concerned with commitment and the Spiritual Community, and will be concerned with commitment in the sense of ordination. So I will be going into it quite extensively tomorrow night. (Pause).

Bernie: Then the situation as a mitra to an Order Member..... the Order Member would be in a better situation to develop.

S: You mustn't think of the Order Member being in an external situation. This is why I said "the more committed you are, the more committed you can become". It isn't a sort of external "thing" with which you are provided and which makes things easier for you. Do you see what I mean?

Bernie: Yeah.

S: Eh?

Bernie: Yeah.

S: As a mitra you have certain facilities, and as a mitra you can make the best possible use of those facilities. You don't necessarily have more facilities as an Order member because the mitra, for instance, goes on retreat, so does the Order Member, the mitra goes to meditation classes. The biggest facility that the Order Member has is his own commitment. And in the same way, the association with others who are committed. The facility of associating with others less committed associating with the committed, just by virtue of the fact of his own lesser commitment, so to speak. But what we have to avoid doing, is to think of ordination as something external. There is an external aspect as you know, which consists in something concrete, something formal, so to speak, but essentially it's one's own inner attitude. (Pause) So as I said, your biggest facility as an Order Member is the fact that you're an Order Member: you are committed. Your biggest facility as a mitra is the fact that you're a mitra; because being a mitra represents a certain degree of involvement and that certain degree of involvement is your biggest facility, your best facility. In a way the other things like retreats and classes are secondary. But you might conceivably be in a place where there are no retreats, where there are no classes, where there are no Order members, where there are no other Mitras even, and you are still left with the fact that you are a mitra, and that is your biggest facility.

Sadhumati: Isn't it possible, though, Bhante, that a mitra, or even a friend, could be racing along the Spiritual path even faster than an Ordained Member?

S: It depends what you mean by 'racing along'? (Laughter.)

Sadhumati: On the way towards the goal.....

S: No, that isn't.....

Sadhumati: Progressing.....

S: No, that isn't.....

Sadhumati:- more spiritually

S: No, that isn't as clear - isn't as easy - isn't as obvious as it sounds. It is very difficult to estimate people's rates of progress; because, first of all you have to think in terms of where they start from. And then, again, what does one mean by 'a rate of progress'? Some, for instance, can go through all the four dhyanas in five minutes, but they also slip out of them in five minutes. In what sense have you progressed? Have you progressed more quickly, say, than someone who gets into a dhyana state very very slowly, stays in there, say, for a few days, and then goes on to the next one? So what is quick progress? What is it "to race along"? it's not nearly so clear as it might appear.

Sadhumati: What I'm trying to say is - I can't see how a person is a more spiritual person just because he wears a kesa.

S: There is no such thing as 'just wearing a kesa'. if you are 'just wearing a kesa', take it off! Because it's meaningless. That's what I'd say.

Sadhumati: Ah -. well I..... It's .. ah ...

S: If someone wears a kesa it means something.

Sadhumati: Yes ... I..... I

S: If it doesn't mean anything the person shouldn't be wearing it. There are plenty of people in the Buddhist world who wear yellow robes who shouldn't be wearing them. Plenty of people calling themselves 'Rimpoches' who shouldn't be calling themselves 'Rimpoches'! We don't want anything of that in the FWBO. If there is anything of that sort, then we'll just have to get rid of it.

Sadhumati: You see, it does seem to me in Judith's case, that she seems to think - though I can't be sure about this - that a brake could be put on to her.

S: It is impossible to put a brake on anybody from the outside. That's what, in fact, I was saying.

Sadhumati: (unclear)

S: it is not possible! But there is no reason to try to estimate relative speeds of progress. It's quite impossible to estimate this, because people go forward for a while, then they go back for a while. If you watch someone over a period four years, five years, eight years, ten years, you can see them having all sorts of ups-and-downs. Sometimes the tortoise overtakes the hare. So who is going faster? This is why I've said so many times in England, to people, "It's the plodders who get there". So it's very difficult to estimate speed - whether somebody is progressing faster or not. I might be able to say something along these lines, about somebody, after knowing them for ten years, but not before.

Tom: If one associates with (inaudible). I say associates' as between belonging or (inaudible)..... I wish you would explain because I can't..... Nevertheless.....

S: Associates with Bhikkhus did you say?

Tom: No, with the Movement.

S: Yeh?

Tom: Because I don't like saying "you can't associate therefore you can't communicate". It seems to me though, that the commitment is often commitment to a kind of behaviour. Can you distinguish between an inner commitment and a commitment to the behaviour of the group?

S: This is something I'm going into tomorrow, but I will say this, this evening - As a committed person, as an Upasaka or Upasika, one is certainly committed to a certain type of behaviour, among other things, and that is represented by one's ten precepts; because, at the time of Upasaka/Upasika ordination, you take upon yourself ten precepts, so you are certainly committed - to the observance of those ten precepts, but you are not committed to any particular style of life. That is to say, you are not committed to live as a monk, you are not committed to live as a layman, you are not committed to living with a family, you are not committed to living without a family. You are committed to your own spiritual development in harmonious, free association with other people primarily committed, with whom you have your ten precepts in common, as well as your actual commitment to the Three Jewels. So this is something which should be made quite clear; is something, I believe, which appears on the back cover of the Newsletter - that life style is secondary. There are many different people following different life-styles within the FWBO, but they are secondary, commitment comes first.

Tom: I was thinking more about joint action.

S: Yes?

Tom: The intention to act, to do something within the context of the Friends. There is a certain number of activities..... now in point of fact, say, one isn't really drawn to any of them, but one is still drawn to the Friends?

S: Well, one can still be an Order Member and not be drawn to any particular kind of activity. Well, there are some Order Members who are not involved with the activities of any centre.

Tom: And one is quite free to do that?

S: Well, of course! Well, of course! Who compels you to do anything else? I don't. If one is involved in a centre, whether as an Order member or as a mitra, one is there at one's own free will.

Tom: Well, I think that as long.....

S: Well, if one isn't involved it's at one's own free will.

Tom: As long as all the Order Members are capable of not comparing their action with others. As long as everybody involved is capable of not comparing their actions with others

S: I'm not sure what you mean by - 'not comparing one's actions with others'?

Tom: Take for example - how much is done for the movement.

S: Yes?

Tom: Comparatively speaking - does this person do much for the movement? does that person do much for the movement? Now does that..... ?

S: One may compare. There is no harm in comparing.

Tom: (Inaudible)

S: Pardon?

Tom: But does that leave a person free?

S: Oh yes! Well, a person might be sitting alone in his cave somewhere up in Scotland, as it occasionally happens, and he might be just thinking things over, or he might be thinking - "There's my old friend so-and-so running such-and-such a centre - there's my old friend so-and-so who's collecting funds for Dhardo Rimpoche's school", or he might be thinking and turning over in his mind what these different people are doing, he might even come to a conclusion as to which is doing most. He might even think he's doing most for the movement, just sitting there in that cave meditating.

Tom: Yes.

S: He's quite free to do that.

Tom: But that's only when he's got his structure of values already worked out.

S: Oh yes. Everybody does, whether implicit or explicit. There is no harm in making these comparisons if one wishes.

Voice: But Bhante.....

S: Just as we say, with regard to the higher stages of the path; The 'stream-entrant' is, so to speak, compared to the 'once-returner', the 'once-returner' is compared with the 'non-returner'. One has broken so many fetters, another has broken so many fetters. In that sense, we compare them. There is nothing wrong in comparing, but one shouldn't make comparisons the basis of likes and dislikes. Does that answer your question?

Tom: I'm thinking more of actions.

S: In what sort of way?

Tom: Well action that is conducive to the growth and developments of the Centre, and saying - 'There is only this kind of action that is conducive and not other'. Now, if people are at the level where they are capable of discerning this - that would be alright, but I question this. I question that people have that capability.

S: Well the aim and object of all centres is to provide, so far as it's humanly possible, the widest range of activities so as to get across to as many people as possible. This is why, for instance, we have, not only the meditation classes; not only lectures; not only study groups; we also have things like yoga classes; we also have things like poetry reading; we even have things like drama groups and we have film shows. This is so that we can get across to the largest possible range of people. But in any given centre, you may not have, so to speak, a ministry of all the talents. Your talents may be rather limited, so you may not be able to do very much. Just like here, there is no Yoga class simply because there is no yoga teacher available. If there was a Yoga teacher available I'm sure there would be yoga classes. So the idea is to have at every centre, a full complement of activities; as many as we possibly can. Here, I believe, you've got Tai-Chi Chuan. We don't have that in all our centres. With that, you're a bit lucky. But the idea should be as wide a range of activities as possible, depending on local conditions; on what talent is available. But everybody just has to do what they can. Some of you might feel like taking yoga classes. Somebody else who, though he perhaps knows yoga, might not feel like doing it.

Tom: Would you mind me asking if, in England, there is very much of the tendency for people to rather - um - ask the same..... a tendency to make prejudgments of their decisions about the spiritual progress of other individuals in the Movement?

S: But if one knows other people intimately one can't help wondering about this. In fact, it is one of the things that people talk about between themselves. It's one of the things that people are most interested in. But on the other hand, you should not be too concerned, either about the exact degrees of the spiritual development of other people or about your own. In fact it's even more important not to be concerned about your own spiritual development, than not to be concerned about others, because there are some people who sort of measure themselves up against the wall, so to speak, periodically. This is just hopeless! One must go ahead; carry on with the spiritual practice, carry on with the meditation, and not bother too much as to where you actually are. So if you are doing

meditation, don't bother too much as to whether you've got up to the second or third dhyana; don't bother too much whether you're a stream-entrant or not. Certainly try to understand deeply what it means to be a stream-entrant; try very hard to be a stream-entrant, but at the same time, paradoxically, don't bother too much trying to find out whether you are or not; or whether someone else is or not. Of course the thought will cross your mind. If you see a very committed Buddhist, if he's a close friend of yours, of course it may cross your mind "Maybe he's a stream-entrant". You are not sort of judging him or trying to value him, but sometimes you can't help thinking like that; or just wondering. Alright! just wonder! But don't let it become too serious a preoccupation. Just let that little thought pass through your mind.

Tom: I just wonder how often competitive conditioning runs over into this sort of activity.

S: Well, competitive conditioning is very strong, and there will always be the tendency for any worldly conditioning to spill over into spiritual life; so one has to be fully prepared for this, and one has to be fully prepared to resist. But it will always happen, one can be sure of that! (Pause)

Judith: Could I ask a question about attitudes to other people's behaviour? I mean other Buddhists?

S: Yes. Right.

Judith: You know, having been brought up a Christian, the concept of forgiveness is a central concept, in so far as one is taught that one can't forgive a person often enough, in a sense. And I just wonder where..... I'm not quite sure, in the Movement, where we stand on this, in terms of making judgments about other people's behaviour, and thereby, at some point, writing them off as a person for example, or putting them beyond the pale, or, you know..... Is the concept of forgiveness in this sense I am talking about, about acceptance and compassion towards another person, accepted by the Buddhist, as I imagine it is, or am I wrong?

S: Forgiveness in the Christian sense I would say is just not found in Buddhism at all. Because, in Christians, forgiveness is essentially a forgiveness of sins, while in Buddhism there are no sins in this sense you see, so how shall there be forgiveness of sins?, even though that concept is very important in Christianity. I think, looking into Buddhist literature; looking into Buddhist thought; this whole question, in a way, is quite foreign to that. Because, first of all, Buddhism traditionally does have the idea of karma and rebirth. It has the idea, of a whole series of lives, so you can think someone can be very wicked in one life, and might be very good in another life. So Buddhists don't tend to think that someone is wholly bad, or essentially bad, or even wholly and essentially good, just because that is how they appear to be in this life. So therefore, I'd say, as a general rule, or a general principle, Buddhists tend, or the Buddhist tradition tends, not to come to hard and fast rules about people, so quickly or so easily, as Christianity seems to do, or Christians seem to do, because in Buddhism, there is much more of a concept, that people can change. Even if they don't change very much in this life as far as one can see, they may change in another life. So you can't sort of - to use your own expression - 'write them off'. That's quite impossible! There is this overall hope in Buddhism anyway, especially in the Mahayana that everybody will gain Enlightenment, so even Devadatta is not written off. There is one Mahayana Sutra which tells us the name Devadatta will have when he becomes a Buddha and what the name of his Buddha field will be. So if you take even this extreme example - unlike the treatment which is meted out to Judas Iscariot in the Christian tradition, where he occupies the middle, I believe, of the lowermost circle of hell - Devadatta, the corresponding figure in Buddhism, is predicted, admittedly after quite a few thousand years, not to say aeons, into Enlightenment. So you could say there is, in Buddhism, a final judgement upon people, which is, that they can all gain enlightenment if they wish; and probably will. This is the Buddhist attitude one could say. So how is it possible to "write anyone off"? It's quite impossible! it's quite impossible to

write them off as a human being; it is quite impossible to write them off as a Buddhist; it quite impossible to write them off as a Bodhisattva; it's quite impossible to write them off as a Buddha; if you take a broad enough perspective. I think this is what gives Buddhism the attitude, not of forgiveness towards others, which seems out of place, but more like tolerance, or just understanding, or patience with them. Recognising that everybody has their own difficulties, everybody needs their own time in which to evolve. People are usually so impatient with others and so hard on them, but very often , unfortunately, so patient with themselves, and so easy on themselves. We just have to be more understanding and more patient and recognise that they all have that ultimate potential, and no doubt in course of time they will choose to grow. Meanwhile we put up with them as they have to put up with us, no doubt, as best we can.(pause)

I think quite a few people - this is what I found in England may be bothered by the idea of acceptance. For quite a few people it is very important to be accepted. But, sometimes, I think they need to ask themselves what they actually mean by that, what they feel by that - this "being accepted" by other people. Perhaps it isn't so important as it seems. if one can accept oneself, then being 'accepted' or 'not accepted' by other people becomes less important. But if one can't accept oneself no amount of acceptance by other people is going to do you any good, so to speak, or is going to help you or to make you feel good, basically, you have to accept yourself. Just as in the Metta-Bhavana, you have to start off feeling goodwill and love towards yourself. So if one wants to think or speak in terms of forgiveness, forgive oneself. 'Forgive' oneself all the 'wicked things' one has done, and then maybe it will be easier for others to 'forgive' you; if it is a question of forgiveness. Forgiveness essentially I would say, is non-retaliation. You just don't want to retaliate, regardless of what 'they' have done, because you understand, or because you are patient, or because you can see why they react in that way, so you don't feel any rancour. Anyway, you think it's natural, so you have no desire to retaliate. That is, so to speak, forgiveness.

Judith: Doesn't that become easier, the closer one comes to being a true individual, because you wouldn't be so ego-involved in the whole situation anyway - (Judith's voice blurs).

S: Because the more and more one becomes an individual, the more and more you do, and can, accept yourself; in a way, the more and more worthy of self-acceptance you become, so it's not a problem. You don't go looking to others for that acceptance as, perhaps, one did before, to some extent. Everybody likes to be accepted by others to some extent at least, but some seem to be more dependent on that, than others, and therefore they suffer more when they don't get it. But perhaps one should think not so much in terms of whether one is accepted by others so much, as in terms of whether one accepts others. I think one will find if one can accept others, then it's easier for them to accept oneself. But very often we are very much concerned that others should accept us, or don't accept us, but never give a thought to whether we really accept others. Maybe this is what we should be doing more.

Tom: The freedom of speech of the person must be.... I mean..... it will probably be that it's mindful..... it must be a very important aspect of Buddhism surely, isn't it?

S: Buddhism doesn't, actually, ever speak in terms of freedom of speech that I, remember, but it certainly speaks in terms of 'right speech', of 'perfect speech'; speech that is truthful, speech that is affectionate, speech which is harmonious, and speech which is useful. This is the four-fold criterion. But "freedom of speech"? No, I don't think that expression ever occurs in Buddhist literature. It might be interesting to inquire why it doesn't. Perhaps in the Buddha's day everybody had it, and therefore, what you have you just take for granted. Perhaps you don't even have a name for it. But it seems, judging by the Pali scriptures, that in the Buddha's day everybody said, certainly on religious and philosophical matters, whatever they pleased. There was no restriction on expression of thought

at all. So perhaps, one can say, 'yes', in ancient India, they did enjoy complete freedom of thought almost unconsciously. They weren't aware of it because they had not known anything different, so it seems. You could criticise anything; no one would be up in arms about it. They might not agree with you. They might not be very pleased, but, it seems that there was never any attempt to restrict you, or to prevent you from saying what you thought. This is how the Buddha could criticise the Brahmins for their class pretensions; could criticise their animal sacrifices. Different teachers could criticise one another's teachings. No one ever thought they should not be free to do so. I think this is a very striking feature of life in ancient India, especially in the Buddha's day, that there was what we would call complete freedom of thought and freedom of expression, such as we don't possess nowadays in many parts of the world, including the Western democratic world. We don't possess it. I know from my own experience there are certain things I cannot say in public; a few things one cannot write and publish; things which one says in private. It is not permitted. One would not be allowed.

Tom: If within the context of Buddhism and the Friends you say that doesn't occur.....

S: What doesn't occur?

Tom: Well, the actual phrase "freedom of speech"

S: Yes. Right.

Tom: But somehow I thought you said it would be a good idea from the point of view of developing the skilful state of mind of not reacting to a contradictory idea. But I wonder if, almost, it would be a good practice, because somehow I think we are very sensitive to.....

S: What would be a good practice?

Tom: To listen to somebody else's idea without reacting, even though it contradicts your own.

S: Well, this is what one should do in any case. One should always listen to what people say, and very often this isn't done. One might profoundly disagree, but at least listen to what he says.

Tom: But I mean with respect to what I asked in the first place. In a Buddhist context that really would be 'freedom of speech'. I mean.....

S: 'Freedom of speech' is really the possibility of being heard by others.....

Tom: Yes. That's right.

S: Which is sometimes limited. And this again is one of the great things, as I've experienced it, about the FWBO, about the Movement, as a whole, especially about the Order. I certainly know that this happens, extensively and regularly, in England, within the Order. People feel they can say exactly what they think, and it's a very great relief to be able to do that. For instance, I know if I find myself in the midst of a group of Order Members I can say what I think, which I cannot always say outside; which I'm not always permitted to say outside. And this is one of the great advantages, this is one of the great features of a spiritual community, in this sense, that you do have that complete freedom; that no one is going to react to what you say; that you are going to be heard; that you are going to be listened to. People may not agree with you, that is not expected; but they'll listen to you. They may sympathise even though they don't agree. So one has this sort of confidence in one's fellow Order Members; that they will give you that sort of freedom, that sort of space. And when this happens, it's a very, very enjoyable experience because it's not an experience which is available

anywhere else in the world. Even in India nowadays, there are things you can't say in public; you get in trouble with the government. I don't mean matters of politics!

Tom: Because of the associations within groups there seem to be associations of people who decide that each one agrees with the other one. Do you see what I mean?

S: Well, there is 'agreement' and 'agreement'. After all, there is nothing wrong in agreeing with people. There is agreement in spirit and there is agreement in the letter. Sometimes there is agreement in spirit where there is not agreement in the letter. One must be wise enough to make that distinction. Sometimes there is disagreement in both the letter and the spirit. Sometimes one has to recognise that. Sometimes, also, there is the possibility of agreement in the spirit and in the letter, perhaps that's the best state of affairs of all. Because people agree about something, they do not necessarily form a group. I think it is very important to understand this. They may agree deeply in the spirit, they may agree deeply on the level of true individuality, so even though it may seem that they are agreeing in the ordinary group sort of way, that is actually not what is happening. The Buddha's are all in agreement; the Bodhisattvas are all in agreement; the Arahants are all in agreement, but there's no one toeing a party line. There is what I call (there is an expression I coined recently to cover this sort of experience) a 'coincidence of wills'.

Tom: To be toeing a party line would seem self-evident, but I'm not too sure that it is, because I'm not too sure, often, if people know that they are toeing a party line or not. " but am I or aren't I?" -"Am I just following other people..... ?"

S: Well people oughtn't to think of any line at all. They must think - "What do I believe"? Just as when someone commits themselves to the spiritual life, they don't look to right or to left to see who else is committing themselves or not committing themselves. They commit themselves. So, in the same way, on certain issues, they think for themselves; they come to certain conclusions quite independently, and then having thought things out for themselves they may happen to find that others, thinking in the same way about those matters, have come to similar conclusions, or even the same conclusions. So they find that they are in agreement. There is not anything preconcerted. They are not having a common mind, but, independently, they've arrived at common conclusions, and this is the best kind of agreement.

Tom: So if people begin with an agreement in spirit, a spiritual agreement - it's possible that their disagreements can be really quite phenomenal sometimes, you think, or even, do you see what I mean?

S: I'm not quite sure what you mean by 'agreement in spirit'. If there is agreement in spirit, I think, sooner or later, there will be agreement in the letter too; but it might take a little working on, because people may be agreed in the spirit, but they many not be agreed, even though in the spirit, quite in the same way; because they are still individuals with their own slightly different points of view. But I'm quite sure that if people are fundamentally in agreement in the spirit - taking that in quite a deep sense - then I'm sure that, sooner or later despite all differences of outlook, background, personality, they will come to realise, or to actualise their fundamental agreement. I have that confidence.
(Pause)

Bernie: I was thinking about meditation. How important is a regular practice? Being out of a regular practice in the morning, say, in my case, living in the community, and then getting out of a regular practice. Should I be more concerned about getting back into it?

S: Well, there is a definite criterion. Regularity of practice is very important, but one doesn't have to

make it a shibboleth, so to speak, that is, an end in itself. There is a criterion. The criterion is this - if you happen to miss, say, one or two sessions, and, if having missed, the next time you sit, you can carry on with your meditation as though there hadn't been a break, then regularity is not important for you. But if you find that missing two or three days, say, puts you back a month in your meditation, then regularity, is, important for you. That is the criterion. There can't be a hard and fast rule for every individual; but most people find, that at the very beginning, before they've really got into meditation, if they miss a day, it puts them back a month. They can't afford to miss a day. But as they get more experienced and more advanced they may be able to miss a week even. Say, when they've meditated ten or fifteen years, they may miss a week, and when they sit again on the eighth day, they can go straight back into it as though there hadn't been a break. So that is the criterion. If you find you can get back into it quite easily, even though you've been a bit irregular, then you need not bother about regularity so much; but if you find that missing one or two sittings really just sends your meditation haywire for a few days or a week, then you really do need to be regular.

Bernie: I was just wondering if there are certain periods in your life which is..... where it's more suitable to do meditation. Say, like in a working community, your mind is so caught up in the working situation that you find it very difficult to meditate.

S: Well, this does raise the whole question of the rhythm of the spiritual life. I was talking about this quite recently. I think it was in England actually. Because there are various things, all of which are important for spiritual life, and for the development of the individual. There is meditation, there's study, there's work, there's all these things. Now, some people are so constituted that the best sort of plan, the best sort of programme, for them, is, something of each of these every day at certain stated hours. You see what I mean? Morning before breakfast one hour meditation; then after breakfast, the rest of the morning, work; after lunch, some study; after tea, some more work, and then in the evening, another period of meditation - so to bed! They have something of everything that is needed for the Spiritual life every day. Others can't do it like that, for one reason or another, subjective or objective. What do they do? They spend, perhaps, the whole day working, every day for a week or two, then they take two weeks off, and they spend all their time in meditation, then after that, they go off on a study retreat for a week, and do nothing but study. Or it may be that the rhythm, the wave is longer. You have a few months when you're completely into study, and then you have a few months when you're completely into meditation. So the important thing is, that, whether on a short term basis, or whether on a long term basis, provision is made for all these important aspects of spiritual life. But whether you make four provisions on your individual needs and requirements and on a short term basis or a long term basis depends on you;

(END OF SIDE ONE - TAPE ONE)

So everybody has to draw up his own list of priorities. No one knows this better than me, because people are pressing me all the time to do this, that, and the other, and I can't fulfill all these requirements at the same time. Lokamitra is quite annoyed that I am not already in India. Other people are not happy I'm not yet back in England; and had I left Auckland two weeks ago, you would all be (words lost in general laughter). So this is where I have to decide my priorities. So I put Auckland at the top of the list (laughter and applause). But India's turn will come tomorrow. so it's, sometimes, very difficult to tell. Because - I personally find this - quite apart from people's pressure, I'd like to spend all my time writing books. I really would. But at the same time I'd like to spend all my time giving lectures, but I can't do both; so I have to work out a scheme of priorities - that for a few months I'll give lectures; that for a few months I'll write - etc., etc. And sometimes it is quite difficult, one knows this, so, in my case, I'm thinking more in terms of the needs of the Movement. Most people, no doubt, have to think more in terms of their own individual needs. But you have to work out your own system of priorities. You may take the advice of your spiritual friends, but only

you really know where the shoe pinches; only you really know what your needs are, or, at least, what your feelings are. So after taking the advice of your spiritual friends, you have to make the decision - whether to put work first, or meditation first. You have made the decision, because it is your life, it's your development; nobody else can develop you for you. You have to do it yourself. So therefore, you have the responsibility of making your own decisions about priorities. And, sometimes, it may be quite difficult, because you may be torn in different directions. But you have to try to work out your system of priorities; your scale of priorities. Maybe it's best to try to work out what you can cut out - what isn't really necessary, and just reduce yourself to the few really necessary things - necessary for the individual in terms of his spiritual development and then of course try to adjudicate, so to speak, between them, and try to adjust their relative importance, and spend more time on what are, for you, the more important. And of course, it may change from time to time, from year to year, according to the way in which you are developing; according to the kind of person you are. You might feel like spending week after week meditating; that might be your priority for the time being, or work might be. But nobody can quarrel with anybody else's list of priorities, provided everybody quite honestly makes his own individual assessments; taking into account his own needs, the needs of others for whom he may be responsible, and the needs of the overall situation. Everybody must make his own decision.

One of the important things that everybody should realise in the general sense; in the broad sense, is, that, actually, you are quite free to do whatever you want to do. Very often we don't realise this. Very often we say we can't do something when it's really an unacknowledged 'won't'. But we disguise the 'won't' as a 'can't' to give ourselves a way out, so to speak, to let ourselves off the hook! But there's quite a lot that we actually can do if we only recognise the fact, and really want to do it. (Pause)

Surely there must be some more questions? There's quite a bit of time left.

Patrick: Bhante, would you say a little about whatever you see, for a person, who is not really a fully developed individual - their priority would, perhaps, to become an individual?

S: Yes.

Patrick: And I wonder whether you would like to say if there is any particular ingredient, in fact, which stands out as being particularly indispensable.

S: Everything is indispensable! All the things I've mentioned; like meditation, study, association with spiritual friends, maybe, even in the case of some people, getting into the arts, maybe travelling, as a deconditioning agency; maybe yoga, all sorts of things. They are all, or most of them, not necessary for the development of the human being in the long run. But it is up to the individual, himself, to decide just what is necessary, when, and in what proportions, so to speak. You see what I mean? Again, one can always consult with one's spiritual friends, but you yourself must make the final choice, the final decision.

Judith: This would be the recipe within the individual's ?

S: You could put it that way.

Judith:..... the ingredients..... ?

S: The ingredients are all the same, but the quantities differ, and the way you mix them, and the sort of 'cake' you produce in the end. I think this is one of the things that people, generally, need really to realise, and to recognise that people really are different; they really do see things in different ways,

and even though they are all evolving individuals, even though, basically, they practise and need the same things, they need them in different ways, at different times, in different forms, in different quantities. So, if you see someone is going all out for work, and you are going all out for meditation, don't think that you are on different paths. Because, the man who is meditating today may want to work tomorrow; the man who is working today may want to meditate tomorrow, or next week, or next month, or next year. So don't expect everybody to be doing at the same moment, exactly what you are doing at that particular moment. It's enough if they get around to it sooner or later, in their own way, their own time. So there needs to be, among people generally, a much broader recognition of the fact that people do develop in so many different ways. It's very difficult to, sort of, say, that one person should be doing this, or shouldn't be doing that; somebody's going faster, somebody's slower. It's very difficult to say. But all that one can expect, all that one can say, is, that everybody who aspires to be an individual should, in all honesty and sincerity, do, with all his heart, with all his mind, whatever appears to him (again, having consulted his spiritual friends) - (seems) to be most necessary at the moment.

I think that in the background of most people's minds is a whole lot of Christian conditioning. This is what I sense quite often - that the questions don't really come from Buddhism, so to speak, not even from within their own experience as Buddhists, but come from out of this dark cloud of Christian conditioning, which is hanging behind them. Questions connected with guilt. Questions connected with all sorts of other things. Questions connected with obligation, questions connected with pressure, questions connected with the group, and so on. These are all, it seems to me, largely issuing from the way in which we have all been brought up - our Western Cultural background, but not really very much to do with Buddhism. As we get more and more into Buddhism, more and more into the Dharma, more and more into being individuals, these things will be shed.

Patrick: (unclear) I was wondering - Is the content of the Three Jewels..... the (unclear) on the Sangha more important for the individual than it is for..... ? What I was wondering was..... before one is a true individual, one can, sort of, get by. One can imagine that one can get by quite well on one's own, and making further effort more systematic. But for me, I sort of get the feeling, when I blossomed out and could be more individual, it is then, at that point, even more so than before, one needs a spiritual community..... ?

S: Yes.

Patrick: And um

S: Yes. There is something in this. Because as you become truly individual, among other things, you become very aware. Again, among other things, you become very sensitive; and you may go through, as a developing individual, a stage of extreme sensitivity where you are very vulnerable, so if you are moving with people who are not themselves thinking in terms of developing, in terms of being individuals, and who, therefore, at least from your point of view, are quite harsh, or even quite crude, you may get very badly jolted, very badly wounded almost, at these times. So, in this sort of way, certainly, in that sort of state, you need to be with other developing individuals who will respect your sensitivity, who will be aware of your sensitivity. And, of course, another thing, the more you become an individual, the more you develop, the more you want to develop, and, of course, the more you will see that, the closer association you have with other developing individuals, the more truly, the more quickly, perhaps, you can fulfill your own individuality. It is just the same with meditation - the more deeply you get into meditation, the more you realise the value of it. In the same way, the more you see of spiritual friends, the more you realise the value of them. And yet, as you say, at the very beginning of the spiritual life, you may think, or you may feel, that you can go it alone, but it's very, very, difficult to be an individual, and the greatest help you can have is association with other

individuals, so that, what is actually there will stimulate what is potential in you. So we know very well that saying of the Buddha's about spiritual fellowship being, not half, but the whole of the spiritual life.

Anyway we've still some more time left; a little bit anyway, so don't let any sort of unspoken question remain, or any sort of hidden doubt linger.

Akshobya: Bhante, in chanting, particularly chanting that one does alone, can one take as a yardstick, the chanting that has most official backing, or should one stick to - um - what one might do here?

S: Well private practice is private practice. I would say that you are on your own, there's no harm in sort of collating whatever chants, mantras, and passages from the scriptures you find suit you personally. I see no reason why one should not do that. In fact, you know, in the Tibetan Tradition, this is what usually happens. Not that you do anything completely different; you embroider, you see what I mean? For instance, supposing you have the seven-fold-puja as your basic structure, well, when you are chanting that with others, it may be just a simple, straight forward so-called puja, with Refuges, precepts, Heart Sutra, reading from the scripture and so on; but if you are doing it by yourself, you can embroider in your own way. You can have readings from all three Yanas, you can insert certain mantras that you are particularly fond of, or you can lengthen certain sections. For instance, you might feel like lengthening the 'Confession of Sins' section, or 'Confession of Faults' section - So there, you can interpolate those confessions from the Sutra of Golden Light. So one is, in fact, encouraged to do this; but what you do, as it were, in common, is sort of, almost like the have bones. Even though there is very good 'bone' done together, recited together, - on your own, when you want to consider more, your own very specific needs, you can embroider in this sort of way, or transpose, or even add completely new things. On the other hand, if one departs too much from the general, or standard practice, perhaps it is advisable that one should ask oneself why. But embroidery is encouraged, just as in the case of the meditation, the visualisation. For instance, you are told to visualise Sakyamuni, the Buddha, and you are told to visualise him sitting under a beautiful Bodhi tree, sitting on a heap of grass, which is spread on a stretch of green grass. Well, you can embroider that. You can imagine every little leaf individually, you can visualise all sorts of little flowers in the grass; if you like, you can visualise a butterfly on one of those flowers, you can visualise a lizard. In this way, you embroider. In other words, a more creative personal element comes into it, and this, in fact, is encouraged. The practice gives you, as I said, the bare bones, though that isn't quite the right expression. It gives you the warp and the woof of the practice, and you embroider it; enlarge upon it and develop and experience it more intensely in your own way.

Akshobya: I was thinking particularly, where one doesn't participate in the sense that 'I will embroider', rather, that the mantra, or whatever is, as it were, takes over; creates for itself, and so there is a surrendering to it. You would therefore say that is an acceptable practice to pursue?

S: I'm not sure what you mean by 'an acceptable practice to pursue'. But sometimes it does happen that, to use your expression, you are 'taken over' when you recite a mantra. You get into quite a sort of exalted or exhilarated state. It becomes more spontaneous. Well, one can certainly let that have it's own course. This is one aspect of spiritual Life, certainly. Don't let it be too rigid, or too much confined within a particular framework. Let it develop in it's own way. Watch it. See that you are not getting, sort of, carried away; you are not becoming unmindful, but with that proviso, certainly, let things develop in their own way in the course of one's individual practice. One should never change for the sake of changing. Sometimes people want to change almost on principle; Sometimes to show their independence, that they're not doing it in the same way everybody else does it. This is to show how much of an individual they are. Well clearly, this is reactive. But if, spontaneously, different

experiences arise, or one feels very strongly about doing things in a particular way, or is carried away by a particular practice, by all means, let that happen. Keeping, as I said, a mindful eye on it,

Trevor: I was just wondering, Bhante. I was reading, in a magazine, of some Tibetan lamas giving something called a "lung"! How does that differ from 'abiseka' or 'adistana'?

S: 'Lung' 'lung' 'Lung' is 'permission'. 'Lung' is permission to read a text, or to study a text, especially within the context of Tantric initiation. There are three things. There is, 'wong', 'lung', and 'ti'. 'Wong' means the 'abiseka', the 'wong-kur'. You get that from the guru the 'transmission of power', as it's called. But you must be careful, not to misunderstand. And then, having 'empowered' you, so to speak, the guru then goes through, with you, the text pertaining to the practice. This is called 'Lung'. He is supposed, according to tradition, to speak it in your ear. That is the tradition. This is called 'Lung'. You are then permitted to read and study that text. Then there is 'ti'. He gives you explanation of the text. So it is said, therefore, that every complete Tantric initiation includes the 'wong', the 'lung' and the 'ti'. of course, there are many texts, non Tantric Texts, for which 'ti' and no 'wong' there are only 'Lung' and . For instance, this is why we sometimes say that you should only study texts with a teacher. Not that you can't read them by yourself, but the real reading of the texts, the real getting into the meaning, is best done with, or in the company of a teacher, who can give you a much deeper insight into what the text actually means. So this is what is meant by 'lung' and 'ti'. And this is the traditional Buddhist method, not only in Tibet. I need hardly say, that throughout the Buddhist world, in the past, tradition has not been that you just indulge in miscellaneous study of Buddhist literature by yourself, picking out now this, now that, a bit of Zen, then a little bit of Theravada, read about meditation, read about Milarepa, read about Tantric Buddhism. No! You should go through, systematically, and steadily, in very small doses, with your teacher, in accordance with your actual spiritual needs. Not this sort of grasshopper-like jumping from text to text, which is of course, what we've all done in our time, and none probably more than me. (laughter) But this is not the traditional Buddhist method. And the traditional Buddhist method is certainly better. Nowadays one can't prohibit people from miscellaneous reading, because, after all, you can find these things in every bookshop, in even, almost, every drugstore; some of these popular paperbacks' of Buddhist texts, and all that kind of thing. But I think, people who get seriously into spiritual life, and seriously into their own development, and seriously into study, after a while, they tend to let that miscellaneous sort of sampling of Buddhist literature just drop away; and they (half way, tape one, side two.) more importance to studying really serious Buddhist literature by themselves, or, if they have the opportunity, with somebody who is able to explain it more deeply to them. I think this is a natural development.

Dave Rice: Bhante, with reference to this, I was reading just recently a comment by Lama Rimpoche. And he was commenting that a lot of people came to him asking for initiation, and he was very reluctant to give them, in many cases, because he thought it was more important 'to cut the root of mind'. Can you explain what he might have meant by that expression?

S: I can't explain what he meant, but I can explain, perhaps, what he might have meant, as you said. 'Cut the root of mind'! Well, clearly, the mind that was asking for the initiation. You see what I mean? People came to him asking for initiation, not even ordination! When you go to a Tibetan Lama, you do not ask for some trifle as ordination, you ask for initiation; the full-blown Tantric thing. [Laughter] So, you know, in the West, there are all these Lamas going around, and some of them are handing out pretty powerful initiations, so one gathers. So, you can get very interested, and get very fascinated, so they flock along to Lama so-and-so, begging for this initiation, begging for that initiation, the higher, the better! Now, what is the mind that is asking? What is the mind behind all this? What I have observed is this - people usually think, perhaps rightly in some cases, that only the best is good enough for them. People usually have - (and I'm talking more about the West; people in

these sort of Tibetan circles in the West, - there are a few in Tibetan circles, I must say, too, in India and Tibet) - they think that they are, spiritually, very advanced; and they therefore think that only the more advanced initiations are appropriate to them, so if they hear that a great lama has arrived and is handing out some very advanced, esoteric, initiations, they at once think - "That's the very thing for me!" Right? - "Because I'm just at that level". - That is their assumption. So, I think Rimpoche must have been asking people to cut that mind; the mind that thought, the mind that assumed, the mind that presumed that they were ready for that high level initiation. But sometimes, of course, lamas do hand out, because there are lamas and lamas. They do hand out high-level initiations (what are labelled) high-level initiations, and people receive them, and they get a high-level satisfaction for their high-level egos [*Laughter*] for their minds. So Rimpoche knows all about this. He's been around long enough. I know him personally, Oh, yes. I've known him for quite a few years. He's a very simple, ordinary, straight-forward and quite genuine sort of lama. We know quite a bit about him. So I can well imagine that the mind he wants people to cut, is the mind that asks for initiation because the motivation was so wrong. So, if they can cut that mind, then they come nearer to initiation. But it is easy to go around almost flattering people; and I have seen, I'm afraid, even Tibetan lamas doing this, maybe, at least a bit unconsciously, sort of flattering people, by assuring them that they are ready for these high-level initiations; and conferring them. It sort of - 'if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. If you say I'm a high-level lama, O.K., I'll say you're a high-level disciple - [*Laughter*] and have a high-level initiation'.

I remember that some years ago in India, when I was in Kalimpong, someone came to see me, who was a disciple, believe it or not- of Lobsang Rampa. [*Laughter*] And he was, I believe, the only personal disciple of Lobsang Rampa. Otherwise, Lobsang Rampa has, or makes, his disciples entirely through his books. But this was in the quite early days, and this particular person, being a very determined person, tracked Dr. Lobsang Rampa, alias Dr. Crewe, down to his lair in Ireland, of all places, where he was living on the coast, and actually became his disciple, and was initiated. And was initiated by Lobsang Rampa personally into the secret order of The Potala, which was the most esoteric the most advanced, of all the Tibetan spiritual fraternities. And not only was he initiated into the secret order of The Potala, but he was given a certificate to prove it, [*Laughter*] and he was given a robe to prove it! So he told me: that he was a member of the secret order of The Potala. And he said that it had been started by the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and there were only sixteen members, and that these sixteen members were the most highly advanced people in the whole of Tibet, and probably in the whole world, and he was a member of this secret order of The Potala. He was about forty years of age - there's another long history attached to that, but I won't go into it - so he was quite convinced that he'd been accepted into the highest of all Tibetan orders, the highest in the world, and he was one of the chosen sixteen!

So without questioning it, I said, "Well, can I see your certificate?" [*Laughter*] So he said, "But of course". So he went to his suitcase and he produced it. It was written, I suppose, on a sheet of parchment, (it might have come out of a drawing-book) and in a somewhat shaky but ornate hand - that this is to certify that Dr. so-and-so, and so-and-so, initiated by me into the secret order of The Potala, such-and-such date, and duly conferred with a robe, and signed by a lot of squiggles which even I could tell were squiggles, but they were reported to be Chinese characters made in Tibet. So I said "This is your certificate?" He said, "Yes, this is the certificate." Then I said, "Well, could I have a look at the robe? Can I see the robe?" So he said "oh, yes, certainly." So he went to his suitcase and brought me the robe. So I looked at it, and it was a robe just like this one, except it was the Burmese colour, a sort of brownish yellow. So I said "This is the robe of the secret order of The Potala?" He said, "Yes". "How do you wear this robe?" So he said, "I'll show you how, I will put it on." So he took this one robe and skimped one end, round his waist and tried to throw the other up over his shoulder, almost like a sari. Certainly, no Buddhist monk ever wore his robe in that way. So I said, "Jivaka", [*Laughter*] - (that was his name) This is a Burmese monk's robe. This is a Burmese robe".

"No, it isn't. It's the robe of the secret order of The Potala. Who are you to doubt it." I said, "No! It's a Burmese robe, and I can prove it. I've got two or three in my cupboard, and I'll show you. It's exactly the same, the stitching's the same, the colour's the same, even the label and the tag." "That's odd. That's odd." There was also a length of dressing-gown cord which he tied round him. It looked fantastic. I said, "No, I'm sorry, this is not the robe of the secret order of The Potala, and I can't take your certificate. Anyway, it took me three weeks of talking with him almost day and night to convince him that he had not in fact been initiated into the secret order of The Potala. So he was quite crestfallen. "I just can't understand it" he said. "This is what I was told." So he thought about it and then he said, "Well, I must admit, I did have one little doubt about it. Before I came here to Kalimpong, I went to see Dhardo Rimpoche, in Buddhagaya - (Dhardo Rimpoche being one of my own teachers who runs the Tibetan refugees school in Kalimpong.) - So I went to see Dhardo Rimpoche, and I wore my robe when I went to have tea with him", and he said, "Lobsang Rampa told me that as soon as any Tibetan sees you wearing this robe, even the highest Rimpoches will at once prostrate themselves before you, because they will recognise you as one of the highest initiates." So he said, "I thought it rather odd at the time that Dhardo Rimpoche did not prostrate himself before me!" So you see the kind of mentality. He wasn't a bad man, he wasn't a wicked man, but he had this sort of subtle, or not so subtle, spiritual arrogance. You know, he really thought he was one of the chosen ones, and so it was only you, so to speak, when he was accepted into, or initiated into the secret order of The Potala by Lobsang Rampa. Rather sadly and thoughtfully he wrote to Lobsang Rampa who was still in Ireland, living in a house Jivaka had bought for him. And he wrote this letter, telling him what I said, without mentioning my name, I think. And he showed me the reply he got. And all Lobsang Rampa said was, "It seems to me that some evil person has been tampering with your faith." But Jivaka did, in the end, become quite disillusioned.

So this is what we really have to be careful about, and I'm sure it is this sort of thing Rimpoche was well aware of. And this is why in the FWBO there is a general sort of principle of - "More and more of less and less". I mentioned it, I think last week, didn't I? Don't think in terms of high initiations, don't think of them in those sort of terms at all. Go right back to the fundamentals - back to fundamental things like: 'The going for refuge', and the precepts. There are people in the Buddhist world, unfortunately, who think such things like the precepts and 'going for refuge', are just child's play; are beneath their notice, beneath contempt. If there was such a thing as blasphemy in Buddhism, it sounds almost blasphemous to say it, that something like the three Refuges is beneath contempt! But this is what a lot of people seem to think. So I think one generally has to be very, very, careful about thinking one is worthy, or that one is ready for any sort of initiation on any level! One must have a very, very, humble, a very, very, receptive sort of attitude, otherwise one will not get anywhere at all! Because spiritual egotism is so subtle and is so difficult to get rid of. It's so difficult to see. It's so difficult to detect. So - an attitude of complete receptivity and openness, and a willingness to concentrate on basic things, in the confidence that if you concentrate on the basic things, if you concentrate on the elementary things, the more advanced things will look after themselves. So this is the sort of thing Rimpoche was getting at. I'm really astonished, especially when I see some of the literature emanating from Tibet, as well as from America. It seems that people in America, now that all sorts of esoteric and advanced teachings are being published, translated, and circulated, all sorts of people without any sort of spiritual qualifications that one can see, consider that these texts are appropriate to them and are addressed to them, and even, in a way, try to practise them, without fulfilling any of the conditions or requirements. And this, is really quite shameful, really destructive of the Buddhist tradition! So this is why in the FWBO we don't think in terms of high initiations. We don't think in any of those sort of terms. We think in terms of 'going for refuge', of committing oneself in that sort of way, and observing the precepts, and practising the 'mindfulness of breathing' and the metta bhavana. I've heard people coming from other Buddhist groups say that they are really surprised that the FWBO stick to such elementary things, that they don't get on to something more advanced. Well, if they don't think like that, that's fine, let's take it as a compliment.

So we stick to the ABC of Buddhism until we've really mastered it. So I really think that one can take this as a general principle; of going back to the beginning and practising the absolutely basic, bedrock things, in the confidence that if one practises those things, then all the other things will look after themselves. I think the whole difficulty rises, not only out of our overdeveloped egos, but out of our overdeveloped intellects, because there is so much that we can sort of understand intellectually, in a way, without our being as total individuals, as total human beings, even beginning to be ready to put into practice. Why, we can read about Nirvana, we can read the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, the Prajna Paramita scriptures, we can read about the thirty-two kinds of Sunyata. In a way, we can understand, but it is totally irrelevant to what is usual in terms of actual practice. We need to go back to the first precept. What about, 'abstention from violence'? Have we even begun to practise that seriously? The situation is as bad as that, so to speak! So, back to the beginning - "more and more of less and less". That's the way to Nirvana you could say.

Tom: I've noticed in yoga, they have three conditions. I think one of them is 'cheerfulness', which is interesting I thought.

S: It was one of the things I couldn't help noticing when we were looking at the slides, a little earlier on, of Sukhavati, especially at the opening - just how cheerful everyone looked. This is a sort of I wouldn't say spiritual characteristic; but I find it difficult to imagine people who are spiritually minded, developing spiritually in the absence of cheerfulness. I mean, gloom and sorrow and guilt and repentance, they are certainly not Buddhist virtues. But cheerfulness is not exactly a virtue, but it is certainly quite an admirable quality. Some people have more of it than others, but all, we hope, can develop it in due course.

Tom: I mean, take something like yoga series which are published in a wide variety - writings of different translations - but I have always noticed these tremendously complicated statements, in a way, which I suppose would take me years to study it - but in the beginning there are these preconditions which are often mentioned rather slightly. Eventually I thought, well, one comes back that they're the most important, because one can't understand the following principles until they.....

S: Right! This is one of the things that my friend, Mr Chen, the Chinese hermit - yogi in Kalimpong, used to emphasise. He used to criticise the Tibetans for this. He would say that the Tibetans profess to go through all three Yanas first practising Hinayana, then the Mahayana, then the Vajrayana, but, he said, that they are in such a hurry to get into the Vajrayana - he said, "So what is their practice of the Hinayana?" He said they just gabble the 'refuges'. They don't think about it, or think about practising it. They just recite the refuges. And he said, "what is their practice of the Mahayana?" They recite a little verse representing the arising of the Bodhicitta, but they don't think about it, or practise it. They are in such a hurry to get on to the Vajrayana and do Tantric practices. And unless you have really 'gone for refuge', with all that, that implies; unless the Bodhicitta has really arisen, and you are really a Bodhisattva, it is impossible for you to practice the Vajrayana, even though you go through all the motions. But he said the Tibetans have fallen away in recent times. They hasten on to the Vajrayana because this is more advanced, and this is people's natural tendency, it seems to think that it's only the most advanced teachings is the teaching which is suited to them.

Judith: Bhante, aren't a number of the people in the Order very attracted to the Vajrayana? I was under that impression.

S: Attracted! Well they'd better come and see me about it! *[Laughter]* Well, no, to be fair. I myself am very attracted to the Vajrayana. I enjoy the Vajrayana. But I would say, nonetheless, it is better to concentrate on the foundations, on 'the going for refuge', in the ordinary Theravada sense. There is plenty enough there for most people. Concentrate on observing the precepts; concentrate on the

basic, elementary meditation practices, which, in a way, properly practised, can take you all the way; and concentrate on developing spiritual fellowship; concentrate on developing any artistic gifts that you may have in harmony with the spiritual life. We can really do with amazingly little in the way of teaching, so far as spiritual development is concerned. The Buddha's disciples did not have a Tipitaka to read. You must never forget that! It just didn't exist in their day. What happened, they met the Buddha and he gave them a teaching. He might have taught a whole discourse, so to speak. He might have spent half-an-hour or an hour speaking to them, and that was their teaching. They went away and practised it and gained enlightenment. Or the Buddha just spoke a single verse, and they went away and meditated on it; they practised it, and they gained enlightenment in some cases. But we browse through whole libraries, and do we get anywhere near enlightenment? of course not!

[Laughter]

So you know, you don't really need too many things. I think it was Sri Ramakrishna, one of the Hindu teachers, who said, (I've quoted this before somewhere) that if you want to kill a whole army of people you need a whole armoury of weapons, but if you want to commit suicide, a pin is sufficient. In the same way, he said, "if you want to convert others and lead them on the spiritual path, you need to know the contents of so many scriptures, but if you want to gain enlightenment yourself, one mantra is sufficient". And there are some people, I believe, who have gained enlightenment just by repeating "Om Mani Padme Hum," and meditating upon it, becoming immersed in the meaning of 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. So you know, it's a mistake to think you need lots and lots of teachings, more and more advanced. I've sometimes said, that even one verse of the Dhammapada would be quite enough for most people; if they really practised it, it would take them all the way. But then our minds are so active, our minds are so restless and monkey-like we just need to titillate it, and amuse it, and entertain it, with all these different scriptures and texts and versions and teachings. But we're not actually practising, usually we are just entertaining the mind. And, very often, we find that the few that make the best progress, or, (to go back a little on what I said before), the quickest progress, are those who concentrate on the very few fundamental practices, and fundamental teaching, and fundamental verses. So this is why I have become more and more convinced of the validity of the principle of 'more and more of less and less'. And I say this entirely against my own natural inclinations; entirely in the face of my own practice for many years, in fact, I can quite honestly hold myself up, as a bad example in this respect, and warn you accordingly. *[Laughter]* So you're not to follow that bad example, but just concentrate on a few things, so far as your own personal development, so far as the needs of your own personal development.

Tom: That state of mind that likes variety and novelty can you relate that more closely to some specific - (I am thinking of the Abidharma, I suppose) - some specific area of the Abidharma.

S: No. I would not regard the Abidharma as an example of a novelty.

Tom: That's the categorisation?

S: That's the categorisation. What does that categorisation amount to? For instance, you want to reflect on "All is impermanent", but you want to give it concrete content. It is not a question of novelty. So you say, "Form is impermanent"; you say, "Feeling is impermanent"; "perceptions are impermanent",

(End of Tape One Tape Two)

by seeing it in all the more concrete detail; but you are not there searching for novelty. Yes, the mind is given a certain variety, but it is only the variety of the repetition of a constant pattern. So the idea of impermanence is hammered home into your mind, otherwise the abstract statement, "all is im-

permanent", might not mean very much. So this is the sort of technique of the Abidharma, insofar as the categories of the Abidharma are regarded as supports for meditation and the development of insight, which is what they essentially are, at least in principle, even though there might have been independent scholastic developments later on.

Tom: I wasn't suggesting that.....

S: But if you say, "let's have a little bit of Abidharma", and then you get bored with that., it's too tedious or it's too tedious, so then you skip off to Zen. You try a few Zen stories, then you think they are all right, but, you know, you get a bit tired of Zen stories after a while, so you sort of go into a bit of Theravada - Pali Canon life-stories about the life of the Buddha, and you get bored with that - after all, they are talking about renunciation and giving things up, so you think something more colourful, maybe the Tantra, you know, Padmasambhava with all these little dakinis prancing around - that's more entertaining, so you get into that for a bit. And this is the way it goes on - you don't.....

Tom: The unskilfulness is using the mind as a sensational object - trying to get a kick out of a new teaching - or something.....

S: Yes.

Tom: I don't.....

S: It's no more than high-class entertainment really. A lot of this goes on. I mean, if you are following a certain definite trend or line of thought, well, yes, sometimes, it may happen you might be thinking - "Well, what does the Theravada say about 'mind'?" and you might look up the Abidharma, and then you might think - "Well, what does the Yogachara say about 'mind'? What does Zen say about 'mind'?" That is rather different. You are pursuing something. There is more continuity. Hopefully we are getting more and more deeply into this question of 'mind', with the help of these different Buddhist traditions. This is, of course, quite acceptable.

Tom: I have noticed with reading, over the years, that one was all over the place, but originally one couldn't sort out what relationship there was.

S: You may also need, modern conditions being what they are; you may also need to do a bit of miscellaneous reading at first, just to get your bearings. Well, there are so many different forms of Buddhism, one can see that, supposing one is not actually in contact with any tradition, or any actual Movement, well, what are you to do? Maybe leaf through books about Zen, about Theravada. You just try to feel what might interest you most. Well, this is understandable as a preliminary step. One has nothing to say against that, but sooner or later of course, one needs to get into a definite tradition, a definite path, and curb the overactive nature of the mind, and not allow the mind to use even Buddhist Scriptures as a means of entertainment.

Tom: But reading can be..... one can gain an awful lot of concentration by reading.

S: One can. One can. If you are reading, first of all, receptively and at the same time, though it may sound paradoxical, with a very active mind, really grasping what's being said, what you are reading. But too many people just dip into different books on Buddhism too easily. Well, again, that is understandable at the beginning, but one shouldn't let that continue indefinitely. That shouldn't be a substitute for actual spiritual life and practice.

Well we've covered quite a lot of ground, so maybe we can start thinking about that cup of tea - Unless there are any last minute questions.

Dave R: Just something I would like answered, Bhante. I really enjoyed your first volume of memoirs. Are you planning a second volume?

S: Well. It comes back to what I was talking about earlier on. Priorities. If you could give me the time, I could write one. *[Laughter]* I'd like to write another volume. In some ways, I'd like that more, but then there are all sorts of other things that I want to do. In a sense, feel, I ought to do, but I hope to get into writing a second volume very soon. one of the things I've done while I've been in New Zealand is to write three letters from New Zealand to 'Shabda', which is the monthly magazine, so to speak, which circulates within the Order. So I was able to write these three letters, though they are quite lengthy. Each is certainly the length, well - uh - the length of a chapter of a book like "The Thousand Petalled Lotus". I was able to write them quite easily, but it occurred to me, maybe, instead of being too particular, or too finicky, from a literary point of view, I should just sort of slap off the reminiscences, and really get them all down without bothering whether I'd done them in the best possible way because in a sense they aren't all that important. Perhaps they don't need too much attention attached to them, but on the other hand quite a few people do seem interested and maybe it would be marginally useful. I've also got various seminars to edit. There are about fourteen volumes of full length seminars unedited, and a small amount of short seminars unedited. So all this has to be done sometime, so there is really a lot to do. I must say, I would rather like to be able to finish these reminiscences. Perhaps within the next year or so I'll get into it. In a way you have a professional interest, haven't you? *[Laughter]* In a way I've got a sort of professional interest in you *[Laughter]*.

Dave R: Thank you.

S: It's no use writing books if they don't sell. But it's very difficult to know, sometimes, what to give priority to, especially when there are so many things to be done, and all of them very excellent and worthwhile things, that one would really like to do. So if I myself, sometimes, feel like this, then I'm sure so would many of you. You really wish you were Avalokiteshvara, with a thousand arms, a thousand hands, and were able to do so many things - transcribing tapes with one pair, maybe making a kesa with another pair, cooking a meal with another pair, writing a letter with another pair, all sorts of things - looking after the baby with another pair. But we have our limitations and we have to choose, and sometimes people don't understand that everybody has these objective limitations. Sometimes, I think that people really do seriously believe that I actually have a thousand arms, a thousand hands, not to speak of eleven heads, because sometimes people wonder why I haven't done this and why I haven't done that, and why I didn't have time for this, and why I didn't have time for that; completely forgetting that, just like you, I only have twenty-four hours in the day, only one pair of hands and one pair of eyes and one voice and so on. So this is also something that people need to remember. I am very pleased, not to say, touched in a way, that people have this naïve faith in me. *[Laughter]* - all these extra arms and hands and maybe legs and heads and eyes. And there are some people who seriously believe I can see out of the back of my head - *[Laughter]*. Well maybe I can, but it doesn't help very much! So if you do not expect too much, and realise that even I have my little limitations, and if they don't get a reply to their letters every time they post, it isn't that their letter has been neglected or tossed aside, it's simply that there hasn't been time. There have been other things which have been given priority. So I mention this especially, because, to come back to the starting-point, I shall be leaving in a couple of days going first to India for two weeks, and then going back to England. So for a year or two, the only means of communication, apart from the telepathic, except in the case of those who are able to come to England, and they are of course a minority, the only means of communication will be through letters, apart from the Newsletter - but I'm speaking of personal communication. So, I'm always quite happy to hear from people, in fact I look forward to hearing

from people and learn what they are doing and how they are getting on, but it doesn't mean that I'm always able to write, certainly not at the length that I would like. And I think, sometimes, people don't realise what questions they ask in their letters. Again, their faith in me is really sort of touching in its naïveté. For instance I very often get letters which are quite short, but to answer them satisfactorily I should have to write, well, without exaggeration, at least a decent little booklet. But people don't seem to realise the implications of their question. And sometimes I think about it, and the more I think about it the more I realise - "Well, maybe a booklet - I really ought to do a booklet." And then I feel very disinclined to answer the letter because I feel very disinclined to give what cannot but be an inadequate answer to that particular question, which is usually such a good one I feel that the letter deserves more than that. So the only thing I can do, is, to allow that question that that letter has asked to contribute to my own general thinking, in the expectation that sooner or later the results of that thinking will come out in something I write, or in a lecture that I give, and everybody will experience the benefit of that, if in fact there is any. So if people write something short and factual I can usually manage to reply, but if they ask questions about the Buddha-Dharma, well I'm very happy to have those questions and consider them, but the better your question, the less likely you will be to receive a reply. So in a way that is unfortunate, but then again you can take comfort from the fact that the question enters my general stream of thinking, and sooner or later, some evidence that that question has been asked may come out in what I write or what I say. So also, I mention this, just to emphasise the point, that every person so to speak, has his or her limitations, and every situation also has its limitations. So sometimes people, sometimes out of naïveté, sometimes out of lack of experience, are a little unrealistic in their expectations. So, even though one's expectations may be quite justified, in a way, or quite justified in principle, one has to take into account the limitations of the situation, the objective limitations of the persons concerned and not expect too much in an unreasonable sort of way, and have the confidence that one is borne in mind, that one's needs are borne in mind, that one's requirements are borne in mind, and that one is not forgotten. That, because one doesn't receive, perhaps, a letter in reply to one's letter, one isn't forgotten! The letter is 'registered', has its effects, and sooner or later something will be done about it. So one has, in this way, to try to see the broader picture, and try to see everything taking place within that broader picture and everything that needs to happen, happening in its own good time, sooner or later, and not get impatient, and not get disappointed, and not make what are in fact, unreasonable demands, So if one can adopt this sort of attitude it makes it easier for everybody concerned. It makes it easier for me because I don't feel a lot of pressure is being put on me, which means I can function more easily and more efficiently; and it makes it obviously easier for you because instead of bothering about a lack of response, or something like that, you can just quietly get on with your own individual development in the best way that you can, sorting out your own priorities and just waiting for other things, what you might, so to speak, expect from other people, just to take their own course, just to arrive in their own good time. So maybe that isn't a bad sort of note to close on. Maybe we've gone on a bit later than we originally intended, but maybe not too late for a cup of tea, and not too late even, for the concluding Puja, for those who are able and don't have to rush away to other important duties. So I'll see most of you, no doubt, tomorrow

Thank you Bhante.

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