

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

Questions and Answers at Broomhouse Farm - 1975

Please note: the quality of the recording is very poor therefore '(?)' in the text denotes that the words were indecipherable.

Sangharakshita: Anyway let's start our question and answer period. This is just to give those who have any particular topic on their mind an opportunity of asking about it. Well, if there's anything that they want perhaps to have talked about, anything that they have been reflecting on any way, and would welcome some reflections and observations on, either with regard to Dharma in general or meditation practice or the way the movement is going or particular details of doctrines and practice. (Pause) History of Buddhism. As wide as you like. Usually what happens on such occasions is that all the questions you've been thinking about for the last few weeks suddenly just disappear and you dry up and you can't remember them. (Pause)

Voice: Something which I'm not sure about. There are several forms of Prajnaparamita. Which is the one which the mantra in the puja refers to? There are several, I've seen several different ...

S: Ah, yes, the traditional, even the iconography of the Prajnaparamita doesn't seem to have been so, in a sense, well developed as some of the other figures. We mustn't think of any of the figures in a very rigid sort of way. They are all very fluid. Sometimes it's not very clear exactly how many forms there are. But of the Prajnaparamita forms the standard one which in a sense is the one is the golden yellow one. The mantra seems to refer to all the forms but inasmuch as that two armed golden yellow form is the main one, the principal one, well, one could say that the mantra refers particularly to that form. It's the form, in a way not unlike the form of the Earth Goddess. That seems to be a sort of source for the iconography. In other words, it's a female figure rather mature in years. Not a young figure. But not old. A mature figure of golden complexion and somewhat motherly expression in a positive way and with two arms, seated cross-legged and with the mudra of teaching the Dharma, which is the usual one - turning the wheel of the Dharma.

_____: Because I have seen different mantras.

S: Which one was that?

_____: I can't, I don't remember the mantra but it's in Conze's book on meditation, Buddhist Meditation.

S: That's probably (?)

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_____: (?)

_____: Is it with one lotus or two books or one book?

S: As far as I remember it's usually two lotuses and one book.

_____: On which side?

S: I think it's on this side, the left side. Is it like that in the Javanese figure?

_____: There are two lotuses and I think two books. Presumably they'd be (?)

_____: Is she holding them? (?)

S: As far as I remember they seem to grow down behind the shoulders as though they're sort of springing up from the earth almost, not held. They don't seem to be in the crooks of the (?). I don't remember seeing Prajnaparamita figures on thangkhas. They don't seem very popular in Tibet(?) Tara probably swallows up all the female forms. Tara and (?) (Pause) One can take it that as far as we are concerned it is this golden yellow coloured figure.

_____ : (?) correlation between her and the Earth Goddess.(?)

S: Well, it's a sort of iconographic connection in fact.

_____ : ... iconographic ...

S: No I mean in the sense that the Earth Goddess is represented as mature in years, golden coloured, sometimes with brown or green, but usually golden coloured and with a sort of motherly aspect and Prajnaparamita in much the same way. It's as though it's the same kind of thing transposed to a purely spiritual plane. But the iconography, the external form, remains pretty much the same. (Pause)

Atula: What would be the most healthiest attitude to have towards God and Christ to avoid too much conflict (?) festivities (?)

S: I don't think you need to have any particular attitude at all to avoid conflict with the festivities because most of the people who take part in those festivities have got no particular feeling towards God or Christ anyway. Christmas is just Christmas when they get together with their families and have roast beef or turkey or what not and Christmas trees. Most people it seems in this country don't attach any sort of special religious significance to Christmas any more. Very few people go to church over Christmas. They just feel rather vaguely it's a period of goodwill and they spend the period at home 'enjoying themselves', inverted commas. I don't think the question arises so much in connection with Christmas. You mean supposing someone invites you?

Atula: Yes.

S: I don't think there's any difficulty from a Buddhist point of view with the religious aspect where that is present. I think the social aspect which one could say is not even very much in keeping with the Christian significance of the occasion itself. Well, supposing you feel some uneasiness about joining in the so-called Christmas celebrations, it's not [3] a question of feeling uneasy about joining in something religious because that religious element is usually just missing. It's the whole sort of gamut of stuffing yourself with roast turkey and things of that sort which I'm not very happy about which don't seem to have much connection with Christmas anyway. Not Christmas as a purely religious celebration.

Atula: I was thinking in particular of (?) festival (?)

S: Well, what were they saying?

Atula: It was (?) attitudes to war (?) I can't remember (?)

S: Well, I think the only sort of way in which difficulty arises if one has got relations who are celebrating Christmas and they want you to be there as part of the general festivities as the family get together but you feel uneasy about that because you're not happy about the whole social side of things, yes? I don't think the question of Christianity really comes into it. It's a particular kind of social life and social set-up that one doesn't feel happy about. So one either has to sort of grin and bear it if you can, or just to explain frankly that you'd rather be included out.

_____ : I find that for most people it seems the religious aspect is so entirely lacking that I can partake in it quite easily to some extent because it's just a get together as a family, it's just a social occasion really.

S: But there are different levels of even social getting together. I mean which might differ very much from family to family. I mean your's might be comparatively relaxed and you might be permitted to stick to your own diet. But in some families that might not be possible. They will absolutely insist that if you were there you'd have to have some turkey or chicken, and a quite difficult situation therefore develops, unless you've brought your family up properly. (Laughter)

_____ : Do you think that Christianity was originally a positive way and that it's been misinterpreted or that it has a built-in fault in the religion?

S: I think there are, as it were, built in faults in the teaching especially as regards the thing about God, the supreme being. But on the other hand it does seem to me that it was much more positive than it is

now or has been for a long time. I feel that certainly for the first thousand years, on the whole, it was a positive influence in Europe. Up to about a Thousand AD when there was, during the period of the Dark Ages. The usual view, I know, among historians of culture, is that Christianity really bloomed in the early Middle Ages. I personally feel that was when the decline began. I feel that when the Church during the Dark Ages was still fighting to preserve something of civilization and establishing monasteries, little outposts of spiritual life and culture and was struggling with a very sort of crude and barbaric environment, there was a great deal in the Church that was very genuine but once the Church had triumphed and once the papacy started asserting its political power and political supremacy and claiming to control the whole of Europe, politically even, or control the whole world, in theory, and when the papacy and the Church started becoming very, very wealthy and when the Church became a vast bureaucratic body with a finger in every [4] pie, then, even though this financed wonderful art and culture and all that, then the decline really did begin and resistance developed against the Church and the Church attracted very unworthy elements that wanted just to be in on a good thing. So I feel this is how the rot really set in. So according to my reading of history the Church was a positive influence when Christianity was a relatively positive influence all during the Dark Ages. But when the Church eventually triumphed and virtually took over the state in many parts of Europe, as it had taken over the Roman Empire to some extent, and when the pope started claiming to control kings and princes, then things started to go downhill. That was the real origin of the decline I think.

_____: You don't think there were (?) ...

S: No I think from the very beginning Christianity very definitely (?) religion and if you can't accept the ordinary idea of god then you break with one of the most important elements in Christianity. I think, well a Buddhist, the only possible approach to Christianity other than total rejection is the, as it were, Gnostic one. That is to say, the Gnostics rejected God, they say he was just the God of the Old Testament, sort of carried over into Christianity. They rejected God but they didn't reject Christ, thought they didn't regard him as the incarnation of God, in the old sense, but as a being coming as it were from an even higher sphere and having a teaching which was diametrically opposed to the Jewish teaching and theism in the ordinary sense. I think this is probably the only possible positive attitude a Buddhist could adopt. Which doesn't mean to say that everything in the teaching of Jesus as preserved in the Gospel is acceptable. But that much of it is acceptable and some elements preserved in the Gnostic tradition, not preserved by the Church. These elements are acceptable.

_____: The question arose because of children being taught at school Christianity and trying to relate it to them in some way, to explain it to them in terms that they're being taught to use.

S: I think one has to be really careful ...

_____: ... the word God as ...

S: Not to be trying to even condition children even with good intentions. Supposing that the child just doesn't like that sort of teaching, well, the child should be able to have that sort of reaction. It may be quite spontaneous. (Pause) Just a few days ago when I went to see some of my relations I was quite surprised to find my niece who is only ten speaking very strongly against the Christian instruction she was being given at school and quite spontaneously without any prompting from anybody. And she said "I just don't want hear about God and Jesus. I don't believe all that. Why do they have to teach it in school. I don't like it" she said. And she's only ten. So it seems that children do have these quite spontaneous reactions so you shouldn't, as it were, try to talk them into say, "Well, teacher says God but you can take God in another way. There's no need to throw it away altogether". Well, if the child feels like rejecting it completely let him.

Ratnapani: I imagine you could do quite a lot of harm if you just try to bend the child's conditioning rather than let it grow up even if it does stay conditioned, until it's able to think a bit more and see if (?) ...

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S: I think it's important to let the child know that there are other points of view. And perhaps even let the child know, that had he or she been born in say a Muslim country, he'd have been taught something quite different. Or in a Buddhist country except that a Buddhist wouldn't have taught you in that sort of dogmatic way, we hope. (Pause)

Ratnapani: Taking the pressure off the conditioning rather than burying it or trying to change it.

S: Yes. You can even say to the child, "Well, this is a Christian country. Fair enough. If they like to tell you about Christianity, well, why not. It's all part of the history of the country but that doesn't mean that you've got to accept it. There's no harm in you knowing it because Christianity has played a very important part in the cultural and political history of Britain and of Europe and of the West generally. So it's a part of an educated person's general knowledge, which doesn't mean that you've got to believe everything that you're told but there's certainly no harm in knowing about it. You can just put it like that. Just reserve your belief until you're older and can understand better. Meanwhile just listen and just learn. But this, in a general way, is a question which has been made before. In a broader sense something that Subhuti raised a couple of months ago, that is to say what should the attitude of the Buddhists and especially the Friends be towards Christianity. I did say I thought I'd have to give a whole series of lectures to clarify that, whereupon of course he rubbed his hands in glee. [Laughter] I suppose I shall sooner or later. Maybe when Bethnal Green is ready. But I think that there is room for clarification and sorting out what is acceptable. What is not acceptable. What does (?) in with Buddhism. I think we can't adopt a sort of root and branch attitude I think we have to be discriminative.

There are certain aspects of Christianity, including Christian teaching we just can't accept. On the other hand there are certain other aspects which do harmonize quite well with our own overall attitude from a Buddhist point of view. Or at least, could be made to harmonize with just a little gentle reinterpretation. Like the idea of rebirth. Christ said 'accept you be born again'. But clearly this is not being born again literally but spiritual rebirth. The conception of spiritual rebirth, a change in the individual so radical that he becomes a new person, a new human being. That idea is clearly there in the New Testament. There is no reason why we shouldn't acknowledge that. And also there is the question of our attitude, not just towards orthodox Christianity which is that form of Christianity which politically won the battle, as it were and became the ruling and reigning Church. But what is our attitude towards all the other sects and schools which were subsequently regarded as heretical by the orthodox church, who at least according to some scholars were more faithful to the spirit of Christianity as it originally was, and especially what about the Gnostics - there were dozens and dozens of different schools. Some of them very interesting and quite a bit close to the Buddhist way of looking at things than that of orthodox Christianity. One hasn't necessarily to take the main orthodox position as entirely representative of what Christianity might originally have been.

Again of course you mustn't sort of make any sort of hasty generalizations because the whole history of early Christianity is so complex and so obscure in many ways, and there's so much different of opinion among scholars.

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Ratnapani: I think one very rarely comes across anybody who knows any of them, so when the word Christianity appears it means the time of the church in the ordinary (?) church the last couple of thousand years and the bishops and archbishops and popes which we've got around now. And I think that usually when someone is trying to wheedle a good word for Christianity out of a Buddhist, I mean that's what they're talking about.

S: Right, yes, yes.

Ratnapani: And then, well, I'd personally be pretty careful. I get overexcited and start perhaps using unskilful speech and condemning it roundly.

S: That probably is safer and in a way more positive with regard to the kind of Christianity that people have in mind when they use the word Christian. When your attitude towards (?) cannot but be negative whether that represents what Christianity could be said to be really like, that's a separate matter.

Ratnapani: I think that usually when that comes up though, 'well, not all this lot but the real Christianity' they don't know that either. And I think we have to know better than they do what is known about it - as you've mentioned about the Gnostics and so on. I think people usually don't know what the real Christianity if there is one is.

Subhuti: I think it's quite a lot of sentimental red herring which can be confusing.

Ratnapani: It's what Christ really said, he did say some nice things didn't he. So that's what Christianity really is (?) grounds for that.

Chintamani: (?) modern church especially (?) shake their heads, of course, Christianity isn't, we know it isn't what it should be but it's going to be wonderful (?)

Nagabodhi: I had quite an interesting experience the other day. I was giving a talk to some young art students on Monday last week and after talking for a while about the higher evolution theme, a couple of people there, (?) well, that's what Christianity is about. They, as far as I could make out, were in fact two self-confessed Christian (?). Immediately other people chipped in and said, "Oh, no, it's all about this, that and the other. In fact the people who considered themselves to be Christians sort of really picked up on this higher evolution theme. It was quite interesting.

S: Well, they might have read a bit about Teilhard de Chardin. On the other hand they might have just been picking up on anything that seems attractive or acceptable, and saying, well, this is Christianity (?) in a not really honest sort of way though maybe in a sense in theory but not with any real intellectual honesty.

_____: We have to be (?) down Buddhism.

S: Right, yes

_____: The difficulty with trying to sort of take some of the Christian concepts which are valuable and use those, you can't really [7] separate them from the rest of what we associate with Christianity. You're talking in Christian terms, and one immediately associates that with the old idea of Christianity.

S: Did some people see the Archbishop of Canterbury's appeal for moral renewal? How did you feel about that? (Pause) What did you feel he was really appealing for?

Ratnapani: Economic stability and stable government and industrial well-being ...

_____: Patriotism.

Ratnapani: I thought he was just a mouthpiece of the establishment that happened to have a particular garment on. There was certainly nothing spiritual behind it, no spiritual inspiration. You had to all be sort of good and boy-scoutish.

S: Don't rock the boat boys.

_____: Yes.

S: What did you think of Mervyn Stockwood's little piece in the 'Morning Star'. There was quite a controversy

Ratnapani: I just heard the outrage which followed.

_____: What did he do?

S: Well, the thing that was picked out, he commented upon the West End of London and Soho and all that and said that under a communist government they'd soon get rid of all that and apparently in an approving sort of way. It seems to me no less silly, if anything more silly.

_____: I think he's since backed down, didn't he and made another speech which was a lot more (?)

Subhuti: It looks as if he'd been quoted out of context.

S: But he did... I've read most of his article, it wasn't quoted in full, but I've read most of it and a little bit out of context. He did actually say that. Again it seems to me that the modern church is desperately trying to get on to the nearest bandwagon. I mean this is one of the things we have to avoid. This is one of the points of my criticism of Walpola Rahula - he tends to do this. You're not sort of riding in the chariot of the Dharma any longer when you try to clamber on to some other bandwagon passing by.

Ratnapani: On a more trivial level, there is the motorbike riding vicar and the pop music, apparently liking vicar. Not sticking by what you really believe to be the truth but (?)

_____: ... (?)

S: I remember that when I came back to England in '64, I think it was either '64 or '65 there was that famous experiment centre that ... Who was that? That other with-it priest. Not Mervyn Stockwood. Oh, Nick [8] Stacy Was it, yes, Nick Stacy and various others. They'd had a sort of, they were given ... There were five of them. There was Nick Stacy and four other Anglican priests, all fairly young men, all university trained and all that, and they had this centre somewhere in London, I think it was a church that was given to them and lots of money, a great deal of money was spent. And they wanted to bring young people to Christianity and it totally failed. It went on for a year or more. And he wrote an article in a colour supplement. It was quite a long rather pained article and in the course of it he said, "We tried everything. We tried bingo. We tried rock and roll. We tried dancing, we tried football, we tried debates," and he said, "We couldn't get young people interested". My comment on that was, "Well, pity they didn't try religion". (Laughter) And it really seems like that. What are they trying to bring you into in these various ways?

And this is one of the reasons probably why the Catholic church still has some strength. It offers you the straightforward Mass and the other sacraments etc., etc., with very few frills. So there at least is something of a general religious nature there. But even that's changing (?) Even they, even they are becoming a little gimmicky because they're also getting cold feet to some extent. They can't believe as fully as they used to.

_____: (?)

Subhuti: My brother's undergoing training as a Catholic priest. I should think that two-thirds of his training is social work.

S: In a way, I mean, a spiritual movement has to be gloriously irrelevant to the times, in a way. Don't quote me out of context. (Laughter)

Ratnapani: Bhante says we must be irrelevant. (Laughter)

Subhuti: And gloriously (Laughter) (Pause)

S: Someone once said the up-to-date is very quickly out-of-date. Nothing looks so old as last year's fashions. Intellectual and otherwise. Well, even since the Friends was started we've seen changes in intellectual and religious fashions, haven't we. Well, I have and maybe you have?

Subhuti: Well, we've seen Arica come and go.

S: It's gone has it?

Subhuti: Well we don't hear...

_____: Too expensive.

S: What about Primal Scream therapy?

_____: That's still used.

_____: I think they're all going in their way but they're not...

S: They're not on the crest of a wave now.

[9]

_____:

S: (?) fell by the wayside long ago. He's rolling in the ditch.

Subhuti: I suppose immediately you say something new and wonderful you can't stay new and

wonderful for ever. I mean they managed to do it with washing powder (?)

_____: New improved.

S: Newer than new.

_____: You've said once before and I've seen this happen more and more that the more we go on the more out of touch with fashions and the more out of touch with current modes of thought we'll probably get.

Ratnapani: Really Arica hasn't in fact died. We just stopped even thinking or worrying about it.

_____: We seem to be much less influenced by fashions and so on. Getting back to something (?)

_____: I think fashion consciousness is a sort of energy that's not being used creatively. You get preoccupied by things like that.

V: Can you see the possibility of, supposing at some point in the future the Friends were receiving more publicity and we got taken up with some "in-crowd" or whatever. Do you see a positive danger in that?

S: Well, when you say "taken up", what do you mean?

_____: Well, I'm thinking about these various movements that have received publicity which presumably they have to be paid for - I don't see us doing that ever - but, I don't know, I can't really see how it might happen. Perhaps some BBC person might take an interest etc.

S: How would we be "taken up"? How would it, how would it work? We couldn't be taken over. We're so 'organized', inverted commas that we can't be.

_____: I suppose what it would mean in practice would be ...

S: In practice it would only mean that you had your classes flooded with such people. But then what would you do? You might even want to be ordained. Well then what would be your attitude? If you felt that their attitude wasn't right. You could say no. Not ready. Go away. They couldn't get in. They might clamour. They might hammer on the door but they couldn't get in.

_____: The BBC can't make a film about us, say, if we don't want them to. We have to co-operate.

_____: I read in the New Zealand Newsletter a couple of TV appearances coming up by Order Members there. Have you been in contact with them about that because I know you're at least cagey, or cautious ...

S: There the situation is quite different. In this country the situation is [10] different as between say the national press and the local press. The local press is usually pretty decent. The national press you have to be very careful about. It's as though in New Zealand everything is, as it were, local, provincial. There are only four million people after all. Their newspapers are not very high powered, their national paper is a bit like the 'Ham and High' [Transcribers note: "The Hampstead and Highgate Express" - a North London Local Newspaper] I mean, I was interviewed on television in Christchurch and it was perfectly all right. They just asked very straight, quite sincere questions and I replied and it wasn't edited in the least and it went out just like that. The situation is quite different from what it is in London. I don't think you have to worry at all. I've alerted them to possible dangers anyway.

Buddhadasa has given a broadcast talk on Radio Brighton. Again there's no difficulty. That sort of rather local, small publicity I think is not at all harmful. It could be helpful in a small way, but it's the publicity in the really big media that you have to be careful of. I think probably unless you can be very, very sure that they're sincere.

Subhuti: We haven't perhaps spoken about 'Nationwide'. ITV is interested. Or BBC is it? BBC. Something about Bethnal Green.

And you said there that the thing was nothing about Buddhism, just about the work.

S: Just to let people be seen working. You say well Buddhists work. If that message gets across well that's all the better! (Laughter) Whether Buddhists believe in God or not or whether they believe in marriage or not, or whether they meditate or not. Well, never mind about all that. Just the message that comes across that Buddhists work. They look quite ordinary people.

_____: Buddhism works. (Laughter)

S: If Buddhists work Buddhism will work.

_____: You'd never get away with that, not with 'Nationwide'. If you didn't give interviews they'd find visual material to make their point and it might be safer to talk.

S: What is 'Nationwide'? I know nothing about it.

_____: It's, it's really the BBC's equivalent to 'the Sunday Mirror'. It's a nightly magazine programme.

S: The distorting mirror in other words?

_____: Yes. (Laughter) The people working on it are generally ex-Sunday journalists and that is their approach to their material really. To sensationalise (?) I think it would be in greater danger if they were to give us a good report. Everything is so full of misunderstanding.

Ratnapani: Extraordinarily low-brow... skim around something (?).

_____: A general preoccupation very much with audience figures (?)

_____: It's very good that we've got people in the Order who've had experience of the media now.

[11]

_____: They did something on 'Findhorn' and 'Findhorn' seemed very happy with it.

S: I heard something on the radio about 'Findhorn'. It wasn't bad.

_____: Last week?

S: The interviewer did express a mild scepticism, cynicism.

_____: It's the sort of thing where they actually think that you're mad.

S: It can come over to the average listener as rather sort of fay, not to say trendy. I think more and more that we have to insist on changing not only in our own way but within our own context, our own framework and say that communication depends upon the conditions of communication. But to some extent the conditions are part of the communication. At least partly. For instance I sometimes give the example of my own experience when I've been say having lunch with someone - maybe it's a sort of lunch party, and I'm in the midst of eating, with a mouthful of this that or the other and someone says, "Well, what does Buddhism really say about Nirvana?" (Laughter) How can you give an answer under those sort of conditions. You can't. But this is what we're being asked to do in all sorts of other areas.

So I think we have to insist that we are willing to communicate, we're only too ready to communicate. We exist to communicate in a way but because we want to communicate, and because we have experience of trying to communicate we know what are the conditions under which communication is possible and what are the conditions under which communication is not possible. So we are not going to try to communicate what we have to say under conditions which we know will render communication quite impossible. And we just have to stick to that. That if you like to come on a retreat and join in thoroughly and sincerely, all right we'll be quite happy to talk with you at the end about what we're trying to do. But for you dashing straight in from your studio having been to a wild party last night, your head full of micchaditthis of various kinds, how can you possibly begin to understand what we have to say?! We have to disabuse them of the idea that they are capable of understanding. They can't. What presumption really! If they're just an ordinary sort of person just sitting down quite open-mindedly saying, "Well, what is Buddhism?" Well, that's another matter. But some bumptious would-be interviewer comes along expecting you to open up and tell him all about Buddhism and he fully believes that he can understand it and get it in five minutes or ten minutes in that way, and then

put it out himself, well, that's just nonsense. He might just as well go on to an artist's studio and say, "Well, just tell me how you paint" and expect to be able to do it himself after five minutes and then show other people. It's just impossible. So that's sort of sheer presumption of a profane mind. (Pause)

I think as we ourselves as a movement and individualists become stronger we have to put more and more firmly though at the risk of displeasing. It's very difficult even for those who've been in the movement for years and years to say write an article about it but someone comes along and they expect they can do a bit of snap journalism and tell other people who know even less than he does, if that's possible, about it. How is that? It isn't possible. One shouldn't [12] encourage anybody to think that it is. (Pause)

Perhaps we even ought to adopt the extreme position that we've nothing to say to people who are not part of the movement. You have to join in a sense, if that is the term, before for you can begin to understand. This is a position in modern Protestant of theology. For instance Karl (Bath) says 'All theology is church theology'.

_____: (?)

S: He says that theology is committed Christians speaking to other committed Christians. It can't be understood outside that body. And he refuses to address a general audience.

_____: We have our own means of communication which we find entirely satisfactory. We don't need (?)

S: Well we are very happy if you would like to share in those, but we cannot communicate on your terms. Your terms preclude this sort of communication.

[End of side one side two]

S: It's much the same with this word 'monk'. You refer to a 'monk', to the average person and at once he gets all sorts of ideas. They've got very little to do with someone committed to spiritual development as an alternative.

_____: This is another thing which in a way really needs writing about. I think the whole process of bringing Buddhist ideas and so on over here without using, how to avoid using, or getting confused by Christian terms or terms of Christian connotation.

S: Very, very difficult.

_____: I think we need a lot of guidance on this.

Ratnapani: I think I have a bit myself. I suspect it's, I'm sure it's very widespread, the feeling that, OK, being an Order Member's very nice, being a mitra's pretty good and so on and so forth. But if you're really doing it then you're a monk. I mean if you're really ...

S: So you are, but not monk in their sense, monk in our sense.

Ratnapani: Exactly, yes. (Pause)

_____: I feel quite dubious about living in that spiritual (?)

S: I think perhaps it's more healthy to think in terms of the spiritual tribe. (Pause)

_____: (?)

S: Well, not so much, don't think of yourselves as (noise of jet plane taking off from nearby airbase!) maybe think of yourself as (?) this is what the Buddha said. The Buddha says that monks (?) he said that "We are Kshatriyas" that is to say warriors (?) fighting (?). Why is this? He says because "You're fighting for sila, you're fighting for samadhi, [13] you're fighting for prajna, fighting for vimukti. Therefore, O monks," he said, "are you Kshatriyas".

_____: A bit like the Knights Templar.

S: Yes, right. Perhaps it's good to think in terms of a brotherhood almost in the cultural sociological sense. Even that would be safer I think. (?) in our minds (?) what the actual spiritual content of it would be. But better to present that sort of image and convey that kind of impression rather than a monastic one or religious one.

Ratnapani: This brings up worry, a disquiet I've felt about the business of semi-monastic communities. I never did like the term because I thought it was sort of awkward but this sort of, it's almost like you've got half a robe if you're in one of these. You're almost really where it's at which, I mean ...

S: Well there were I know some discussions about which half of you was the monk? (Laughter) The top half or the bottom half? (Laughter)

_____: (?) (Laughter)

S: Well, I think perhaps instead of saying semi-monastic centre we should just say a men's house or men's centre.

_____: Yes.

S: I mean, that's much more direct ...

Ratnapani: Rather than live in a men's long-house or something, I mean half a monastery or (Laughter)

_____: I think it would be nice to have a robe for private use for when you have a situation like this. You can wear robes in that situation without an audience (?) quite (?). (Pause)

_____: For ritual use only.

_____: Right. It would certainly be more comfortable when you meditate.

Ratnapani: Grass skirt and a spear. (Laughter)

S: Rather prickly. (Laughter) You really want a whole set of terms which convey or is conveyed by spiritual but without any of the conventional religious associations. Otherwise religion has got such a sort of bad name, as it were, such an unfortunate connotation. It means that the Archbishop of Canterbury in his gaiters telling everyone to work hard and be good. Or else it means the local vicar roaring about on his motorbike desperately trying to be one of the boys, and perhaps they don't really believe in Christianity anyway. Hopes it will draw you into it all the more.

But it did strike me reading the Archbishop of Canterbury's appeal and thinking about it, one of the great weaknesses of the Church of England is that it has become an entirely married church. That is to say the priesthood is all married. Well, that is the norm. That means that the priest, the vicar is family man and he's faced by, as it were, the same sort of problems and difficulties as anybody else. He's trapped in the [14] same way that everybody else is trapped. He can't offer an ideal to anybody.

_____: I remember you talking about the Nepalese Buddhists in that way.

_____: (?)

S: Yes, exactly. This is what happened in Nepal. That Nepal became Buddhist quite early on, traditionally in the days of Ashoka, and it reflected the changes in Buddhism that took place in India, therefore it was following the Sarvastivada, then Mahayana teachings came in, then Vajrayana. But as Buddhism declined in India the Vajrayana Buddhists in Nepal were left more and more on their own. They started taking the Vajrayana teachings and symbolism rather literally with the result that the monks all got married and eventually took their wives to live with them in the viharas, so the viharas which were quite grand temples with beautiful images and artwork became the family residences of groups of monks with wives and families and their children took over the running of the temple, their sons that is, they became sort of brahmins. They just became hereditary priests and then they became more and more like their Hindu neighbours and then gradually Buddhism was sort of absorbed virtually by Hinduism in Nepal, and now it is a predominantly Hindu country and Buddhist teaching was entirely lost or very nearly entirely lost. (Pause)

Ratnapani: I've seen pictures, carvings on the outside of temples and things in Nepal and, would these just be a mish-mash of Hindu and Buddhist? They were very confusing and there were things there I wouldn't associate with Buddhists.

S: The Nepalese have confused is really the only word for it, Buddhism with Hinduism in that sort of way. Until twenty or thirty years ago, there was no Buddhist teaching as such in Nepal. Not distinctively Buddhist teaching (?) (Pause) Buddhism became just another temple, just another shrine. The women in fact go round in the morning throwing a few grains of rice into every shrine as an offering, whether it's Buddhist or Hindu they hardly bother to see. It's just an images, it's just a shrine. Any old shrine will do sort of thing. Propitiate the local gods. That is very much the attitude.

_____ : It's become another ...

S: Yes. (?) (Pause) I think there is the danger in this country that Buddhists become classified along with religions. You see the danger? I mean this is why I am not at all happy that we participate in anything to do with comparative religion or appear on the same platform with other people representing all the other religions. We're all there together in your business suits and different kinds of dog-collars. You're all basically the same.

It's quite interesting to see (?) because as when I was at St. James' Lane just as a matter of interest I did accept an invitation to join a committee which was connected with the study of the teaching of religion in schools and on this committee which was chaired by a friend of mine who taught comparative religion at teacher training college where he gave lectures some times, on this committee there were representatives of the Catholic church, representatives of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, [15] Hinduism and it was very interesting to see their approach and I noticed, I couldn't help seeing and feeling that though they represented different religions they were all the same kind of person and really they all represented the same thing. For instance, for one thing, they all dressed alike. They all had business suits. Now this may seem a small point but I thought it was quite significant, they all had business suits. They were all very definitely middle-class. They all had university backgrounds. They were all, as it were, priests in their own communities. They were professional men. This was the predominant impression. A group of professional men getting together about their professional problems. Not a group of spiritually committed people of different religions getting together about spiritual things, not that. It was a group of professional men. Like a group of solicitors or a group of architects, that was the sort of atmosphere and their sort of relationships among themselves were quite gentlemanly, as it were.

For instance, they were talking about the teaching of religions in schools and they all had the same point of view. That Christian children should be taught Christianity, Muslim children taught Islam, Hindu children taught Hinduism, Sikh children taught Sikhism and the general atmosphere seemed to be, "Well, you don't trespass on my preserves, I won't trespass on yours. They're your flock. They're your sheep. The fleece belongs to you. You don't touch my sheep, I won't touch yours". That was very definitely the feeling. And, for instance, the Muslim was really going on about Muslim girls should be made to cover their arms at their school. It was against the Muslim religion that girls should not have their arms covered and everyone was listening quite sympathetically to the poor Muslim imam having this problem with his Muslim girls and some of them not wanting to take Muslim instruction and the Hindus and the Catholics and the Protestants were all quite sympathetic and nodded, "Oh, yes. Muslim girls ought to take Muslim instruction" sort of thing. "She belongs to his community. She's one of his people. And very definitely the impression was of a group of professional people in positions of leadership with power over their communities and wanting to hang on to that power over their communities.

This was very definitely the impression I got. It was quite interesting. They had far more in common than there were differences among them. And I must say that the people who gave me, in a sense, the worst impression, the strongest impression of this sort of community property, vested interest in keeping up the numbers, was the Muslims and the Jews. These two. The Hindu representative wasn't too bad. He was an American converted to Hinduism anyway, Ramakrishna mission. The Catholic also wasn't too bad but I must say the two Muslim representatives and the Jewish rabbi, they gave such a strong ethnic impression, which was quite unpleasant. Everybody just wanted to keep his own people under his own control. So if you're invited as a Buddhist to attend or to, well, they're quite willing to welcome as a member of that kind of club, and you have to play that sort of game. But that's not our game.

So if you get together all different representatives on a platform you're expected to make common

cause, you all tut-tut about the decline of religion and the world needs religion. It doesn't matter what sort it is. Without religion there will be a drift to chaos as the Archbishop of Canterbury says. You all agree about this. You all want people coming to your different churches and temples and mosques and tabernacles and [16] you know that you're all equally pregnant, you're saying 'you're making common cause and you're not going to fight amongst yourselves any more. The times are too dangerous for that. That's a luxury'. You're making common cause. Don't rock the boat, boys. And anyone who does rock the boat slightly as I did (Laughter) is frowned upon.

Ratnapani: What did you say? "You can have mine"? (Laughter)

S: And bodies of that sort have got connections with government departments and they'll just try to exert influence so that in the end what happens is each little flock remains under the control - it really amounts to that - of his own particular shepherd. And the shepherds have an agreement not to steal from one another's flock. They divide the flocks up between them (?) the flock (?). This is what goes on. So I don't feel that we should have anything to do with or be party. We must be the lone wolves, as it were.

_____: We go out on sheep stealing raids. (Laughter)

S: We do not want to make common cause. We do not want to be ecumenically natural. If you meet say the individual follower of some other tradition, you feel that you can get on with him, by all means communicate with him. This is quite another matter. But not this organizational get-together on a common platform, and calling for more rearmament and things of that sort. (Pause)
It's just the religious establishment in general getting cold feet and wondering if they have any future. (Pause) (?)

_____: One thing that you notice about the FWBO is that there aren't people who come along to centres who are trying it out that they're Buddhists and understandably so. A block against what they call organized religion. Quite a few people (?)

S: One must go at least over half-way by not appearing to be an organized religion in (?).

_____: I mean, in their terms we are.

_____: So much of the problem does seem to come from the word "religion" and being taken as another religion and all the associations that go with that. (Pause)

S: Perhaps we'll have to talk in terms of anti-religion. (Long Pause)

While I think of it there was a suggestion about the name of the Bethnal Green Centre. It came from Devamitra. I don't know if you've heard it. He's got better than Temple of the Three Jewels or Temple of the Three Treasures or what not - "The Temple of Abundances". What do you think of that?

_____: I Quite like it.

Ratnapani: It's the nicest suggestion I've heard so far.

S: What about those who'll be living there, or who are living there?

_____: I don't feel like abundant treasure. (Laughter)

[17]

_____: You just wait. We'll make you one.

Ratnapani: You are one (?)

S: Wait until you've been cut and polished (?)

_____: (?)

Ratnapani: (?) things like the Three Jewels or whatever sounds a bit thin, a bit technical. Abundant Treasures sounds like you feel fat, and generous and jolly. It seems quite a nice image.

_____: It's definitely "Temple".

_____: (?) "Temple" as a flaming thunderbolt. (Laughter)

_____: You can even have the glorious temple of abundant treasures.

Nagabodhi: I wrote to the local press (?) whenever it was, (?) headline of my little letter was "Not a Temple". (Laughter) The whole point of it was that it wouldn't be a "Temple"!

S: Well, what does temple convey to you?

Nagabodhi: Well, what I said in my letter, I think it does convey perhaps to me but generally to people, it conveys something rather remote, a bit on a cloud out of touch with things. Certainly the East. I think it does reinforce the idea that it was a them and us situation.

S: Well then you couldn't call it a (?)

_____: Well, what about centre?

S: Centre seems to be very neutral and ordinary as though it might be a place where people play darts or something like that.

Ratnapani: Most of the places in America are centres of one sort or another, aren't they? The something centre or the centre of something and that sounds a bit diluted to fit in.

S: I felt that "Temple" has also a classical association. An association with Greece and Rome.

_____: The Temple of Bethnal Green.

S: Bethnal Green.

_____: I wonder whether we ought to forget to some extent about worrying about Bethnal Green because I think it's very positive. Again you've made the point before.

S: Or we could have a completely new term which we'd give our own meaning in the course of time.

_____: The shrine.

S: It might suggest something rather small.

[18]

_____: I just like "temple" (?) It seems to me one of the most appropriate.

S: We have the Inner Temple of course. The Temple of the Templars. There's a temple in London called the Templars.

_____: (?)

S: Well, we know what basilicas is, basilicas is 'palace', the place of the king, where the king gives judgement, the courthouse, the judgement house, the big meeting place used by the Christians, hence church.

_____: We could have a nicer word for house, the "House of Abundant Treasures" (?)

_____: That's nice actually.

_____: Treasure Hall. (Laughter)

_____: Sorry.

_____: H-A-U-L.

_____: Treasure House?

_____: (?)

_____: Something rather like fortress or (?)

_____: (?)

_____: What's the (?)

S: Pura in Sanskrit. Indrapura, Indra's fort. Pura is fort.

_____: What's the word in (?) The hall? It's the something hall.

_____: The moot hall.

_____: Moot hall.

S: It's where you moot! (Laughter)

_____: (?)

Subhuti: The hall is quite good - the Hall of Abundant Treasures.

S: How about cave? The cave of Abundant Treasures. I've often thought of a word like sanctuary, sanctuary is quite good.

_____: It's a bit religiously like church in a way.

S: They all are if we're not careful.

_____: (?)

_____: Castle.

[19]

S: Well, citadel has been (?) by the Salvation Army. A camp! [Laughter] Buddha's Camp. A pavilion.

_____: The flowing stream.

_____: Some of the eighteenth century poetry pavilion conjures up for me.

_____: Coleridge.

_____: There must be some word.

_____: I think it ought to not have any connotation.

S: Well, what about the word "vihara"?

_____: Isn't "Hall" the nearest translation to it?

S: No. Lodge would be the nearest. Lodge.

_____: (?) Trade unions have lodges.

_____: I think almost better that association than a religious one.

_____: Cell.

_____: Lodge.

S: What about "Brotherhood"?

_____: That's good. Yes. It might offend the women. (Laughter)

_____: Sisterhood.

_____: But then we're beginning to rename the Order (?).

S: What do they call (?)

_____: Phi, Beta, Kappa.

S: There is a term for the fraternity meeting house. On American campuses they have these weird sort of buildings like, with no windows where the initiation rites take place into these college fraternities. Some of them look like Egyptian temples built by alumni (?). At Yale there are about a dozen of them. Fraternity house.

It's a centre also we mustn't forget that.

_____: I personally like Hall

_____: Palace.

_____: It does sound (?) (Laughter)

S: Well, there's Alexandra Palace and Crystal Palace. (Laughter)

_____: Pally. [Laughter]

S: (?) P.A.L.L.Y. (?)

[20]

S: Stadia. Arena. (?) circus.

_____: Pantheon.

S: A Pan-theon except we don't have God.

_____: A Buddhist town?

_____: Athenon.

_____: Perhaps we should invent a new word (?) appropriate (?)

S: I really wish that Blake hadn't named his city of the arts Golgonooza. The (?) wouldn't be really (?) the name (?)

_____: (?)

S: I'm afraid we'll have to go on thinking for the moment. We've come to the end of our ...

_____: ... development from Bethnal (?)

S: Bethel means the House of God (Pause) I was walking along the other day. I saw a street sign, 'Paradise Row'. (?) Golden Street (?)

_____: (?) Pure Land of Vairocana (?)

S: I don't know whether there is one even. They don't all have Pure Lands. Sukhavati is the pure land of Amitabha. Abhirati is the Pure Land of Akshobhya. 'Vimanas' are quite nice. It means both a palace and a chariot and it floats. (Laughter)

_____: (?) Thames (?)

S: ... Pali Canon in the Kudaka Nikaya called Vimanavatthu. You get vimanas of various sizes, shapes, degrees of splendour, according to the good deeds (?)

_____: What's Vairocana's Tower?

S: The word that is translated as tower is (?)

_____: It You needn't have hall or anything like that. It could just be (?)

S: (?) (Laughter) While again I think of it are we listed in the telephone directory?

_____: Yes.

S: How are we listed?

_____: Under Buddhist Order, the Friends of the, because we've already got one mention under Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

S: I was feeling we should be listed under Buddhist. Because often people look Buddhist something or other for contact, information, classes and be listed under Buddhist vihara or Buddhist Society.

[21]

_____: Are we in the Yellow Pages?

_____: The Buddhist Vihara.

S: The London Buddhist vihara is at Chiswick.

_____: I wonder what it's going to get called anyway by the locals. Something awkward. They'll wonder what a Vihara is for.

S: In Auckland they called their centre, the one they had before 'The Bodhi Leaf Centre'.

_____: White Lotus is quite nice. Or something like just calm and clear, but that's unfortunately the name of a book. Along those lines.

_____: Nice and easy. (Laughter)

Nagabodhi: More about less. (Laughter)

_____: Private clinic!

S: (?) (Laughter)

_____: There might be something like (?).

_____: Like what?

_____: Something like Travellers Rest. People hear the name and they think, "Oh that's a nice name".

S: How do people feel about Aryatara which is (?) no one can know what that means unless they know those texts.

_____: We're trying to get rid of it aren't they?

S: Are they?

Nagabodhi: We answer the 'phone nowadays FWBO Surrey .

_____: I thought there was a definite policy.

_____: (?)

S: How about something incorporating Friends? Friends (?)

_____: Pity somebody's already done the Friends Meeting House.

S: Yes, yes. It's not just a meeting house but also a living house.

_____: Friends House in Brighton (Laughter)

_____: It would sound a bit like help for refugees.

_____: Buddha(?)

_____: (?)

[22]

S: Camelot?

_____: Camelot.

_____: I haven't heard it, but a word pertaining to military or... castle sounds too defending. It's outward going.

S: How about Dharmavijaya. Dharmavijaya means the conquest by Dharma as opposed to conquest by war. Asoka in his famous edict from (?) vijaya, Conquest by Battle to Dharma vijaya, conquest by the Dharma or victory of the Dharma.

_____: Energy House? (Laughter)

_____: It is Bethnal Green fire station. [Laughter] It's not a bad word actually - that sort of barrack type (?)

S: You could say you were stationed there. (Laughter) or seconded to Bethnal Green. Posted, posted to Bethnal Green.

_____: You're called up.

S: I mean anything rather than religious phraseology.

_____: What is that warriors and knights?

_____: Court, court!

S: Well, we've got Court Lodge already. (Laughter)

Subhuti: Not quite! [Laughter]

_____: Isn't there anything in the Arthurian legend, isn't there somewhere that the knights go? (Laughter)

S: Camelot but they go at King Arthur's greeting, attended by his three queens. And then there's the castle of women where they're entrapped for a while. It seems strange, it's so difficult to find a name for a place.

_____: Citadel is quite a good one. It's a pity the Salvation Army ...

S: Is someone putting the kettle on?

_____: (?) Perhaps the best idea is to drop the idea of trying to describe the place as in temple or (?) or whatever.

S: It could be something quite irrelevant apparently, but which would be felt to be quite appropriate.

_____: (?) something like White Lotus. (Laughter)

_____: What is the reason why we're dropping the name of Aryatara? Why are they doing that?

Nagabodhi: It's more a move towards calling it FWBO Surrey. The place as being a centre more and less of a home and more of a centre.

[23]

_____: What was that (?) chariot stroke (?)

_____: (?)

S: Buddha (?) Bodhi (?)

_____: If it's in Sanskrit or Pali I think it should be very short and very easy to pronounce, and without c's that are pronounced ch and that sort of thing.

S: Yes. Without too many (?)

_____: (?)

S: We need a bit more light really.

_____: Chariot of Fire.

S: Couldn't we have a studio, conservatoire, academy.

_____: (?) highest development. (Laughter)

_____: (?)

_____: We could have instead of "The Three Jewels" we could have just have "Temple of Jewels".

S: What about the Buddhist Institute?

_____: Good Lord!

_____: (?)

S: I know. The Wig-Wam. (Laughter)

_____: (?)

_____: Open House.

S: Open Door. (?) Open Door Buddhist Centre.

_____: (?) (Laughter)

[End of tape]

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