

The Venerable Sangharakshita
An Interview with Five Clergymen
At the London Buddhist Centre

Transcribers Note: The recording quality of these tapes is very poor and at times it has been impossible (after many hearings) to get any idea of what is being said. Also the microphone seems to have had an intermittent fault and was also too far away from the speakers! I wish the reader success in their journey through this session!

_____ : a course for clergy and we hope (unclear)

Sangharakshita: (unclear)

_____ : That's right. Christopher Lawrence wrote to you, (*unclear*) sent you the course pamphlet.

S: So how has your course been going? You must be having an interesting time. Is it a sort of renewal or refresher course or...

_____ : It's called 'mid-service' and it's somewhere, not precisely mid-way through a clergyman's.....

S: You can assume you have roughly forty years as clergy?

_____ : Well [*Laughter*] It quite a bit of a review of where a clergyman's got to and each writes a study of something that interests them before the course begins and then we spent last week sharing that with one another and this week is really looking at our experience in the light of others things that are going on, principally in the Greater London area, and next week we go away for a residential week and look at the way in which the ministry might be mapped out for the future. So that's why it's fascinating to come and meet you and....

S: Well I am about thirty five years through my course! [*Laughter*] But I don't see retirement ahead of me in five years' time by any means. In fact I wouldn't want it to be.

_____ : So that's when you first became involved.

S: I was ordained.

_____ : You were ordained.

S: In 1941. Buddhist monks have two ordinations. You've got a lower ordination and a higher. Sometimes one follows immediately after the other in some Buddhist countries. Strictly speaking there should be (unclear). I suppose it corresponds a bit, though only a very little, to what you would call (unclear).

_____ : At what sort of age is that?

S: According to rule you cannot take the lower ordination before the age of seven, nor the higher ordination before the age of twenty. In countries where Buddhism is established monks (unclear) are ordained usually (unclear) in the monastery where the child lives nearby.

_____ : (unclear)

S: No.

_____ : You can resign.

S: Oh yes. No there's nothing like the (unclear), no nothing like that, and also no life long vows are taken, in any case. One can be released from all his vows. Well one doesn't even have to ask. You appear in front of a monk of higher standing and you simply renounce your vows as a monk and you take from him the vows of a lay Buddhist. There's no elaborate procedure at all.

_____ : Could you say what the vows of a monk are?

S: Well that isn't as simple as it might appear at first because of various historical developments, but the backbone of what we call the *Vinaya*, the monastic code, is the list of 150 rules called the *Pratimoksa*, which are observed wherever the original tradition of these monastic vows had (unclear), that is to say especially South East Asia, Tibet, China to some extent, Japan not at all and some other parts (unclear). For practical purposes in Japan the *Pratimoksa's* been replaced by what they call the Bodhisattva *Samvarasila*, that is to say another list of, as it were, rules, developed under the auspices of the Mahayana and taken by monks and lay people alike, in principle, but in practice they are usually taken by those who function as what are generally called 'priests'. So it isn't quite (unclear). In some Buddhist countries they sort of superimpose the Bodhisattva *Samvarasila* onto the original monastic *Pratimoksa*.

_____ : Are there different forms of Buddhism in different parts of the world?

S: Yes. There's roughly speaking South East Asian Buddhism, which is Theravada. There's Mahayana which is mainly China, Japan, Vietnam, and there's also Tibetan Buddhism which is an amalgam of the Mahayana and Hinayana. Broadly speaking that is the case.

_____ : And you are from the Western Order?

S: Well our position in a way is a little peculiar because we're a sort of, in a way, modern development but I hope we have developed along thoroughly traditional lines. We try to be simply Buddhists, so to that extent we're ecumenical actually! We don't identify exclusively with any one Buddhist tradition. That's not to say that we're eclectic because we don't believe in sort of intellectual achievement, but we do recognise that there is a lot that has come down to us in the Buddhist tradition which is very venerable but which doesn't really, well, speak to our conditioning. So we feel free to put that politely to one side without pretending and to take on from the Buddhist traditions and scriptures what we actually do find useful and helpful, and we feel that inasmuch as everything that we take has some relation to our actual needs as spiritually developing human beings, that need itself will impose a certain unity on the material that we select.

So the Order itself is not a monastic Order. In a sense it's a lay Order, but only in a sense. I won't go into all the details but it is lay in the sense that it isn't technically monastic. At least celibacy isn't required, although some members are celibate, and we also have both men and women members. In some ways we try to go back to the roots of Buddhist tradition, where the distinction between the monastic follower and the lay follower, so to speak, was not as sharp as it afterwards became.

_____ : But poverty and living a common lifestyle.

S: Yes. We don't use the word poverty. It's not a very popular word [*Laughter*] but yes we try to reduce our material needs. We do that as much as we can, and we do believe very much in the community life. And we do have men's communities and women's communities and these are one of the biggest features of our movement. For instance this is a men's community and there is the public centre also underneath the men's community. At present it contains twenty men. There's another one in Bow which contains four men (unclear). There's another one in Norfolk (unclear) and it's also a retreat centre. So we have these communities both for women and for men. The women's communities tend to be smaller. They tend to prefer a small, what they call more intimate, type of community.

_____ : Can you say something about how you came to be a Buddhist, and can you say something about what happens in the life of the community? On a practical level.

S: I'm afraid I became a Buddhist in a rather pedestrian sort of way, just as a result of reading, because in those days, and this takes us back to the late thirties and early forties, there was hardly any Buddhist activity, especially there was a very tiny Buddhist Society led by Christmas Humphreys with which I afterwards became in contact but otherwise there was nothing. But I did (unclear) Buddhist literature that was available in those days and this attracted me very very strongly. I was interested in comparative religion anyway and yes I was interested in religion as such but among all the books that I read, scriptures that I read, it was definitely Buddhism that appealed to me most strongly. So I thought of myself as a Buddhist long before I met any other Buddhist, and it was only after a couple of years, as it were, on my own as a Buddhist that I made contact with the Buddhist Society. This must have been in 1942 or 43, and I was a few years in contact with them then I went to India and I remained in India for twenty years, where I chose a wandering life, I was a wandering monk for (unclear). (unclear) I eventually settled in Kalimpong in the Himalayas near Tibet and I had a lot of contact there with Tibetans (*unclear - tape quality or background noise becomes worse*)

You also asked about community life. Community life is connected with something else that we call Right Livelihood. We are quite concerned about the application of ethical principles to one's livelihood, so quite a few of our Friends in the communities, whether men and women, also work in our co-ops. We have a number of co-op businesses. We have a number of vegetarian restaurants, we have building services, we have a press, we have a number of businesses of this sort, set up on a co-operative basis, which provides financial support for some of our members including some living in the communities and also provide a harmless lifestyle and community life (unclear). It's possibly also a means of access to the public. So some of the people living in the communities go and work in the co-ops, others are supported by the Centres, the Buddhist Centres (unclear) They eat together each day. Meals are in common, there is a morning meditation, usually at seven o'clock, and there are weekly meetings, they are study groups for community members, and they do spend a lot of their time together. (unclear) and of course from time to time they go on retreat to retreat centres, either individually or sometimes they all go together.

_____ : And it was the attraction of this kind of spiritual life that drew you in and draws people in now.

S: Well of course in my day in England there was no community. In fact....

_____ : You made your own one (unclear) [*Laughter*]

S: I did of course have experience of community life (unclear) in India (unclear) . I think that the trend or the tendency in our movement as a whole is in that direction. We do have a lot of members, including Order members, who don't live in communities, who live at home in their families, but they don't find it easy. There is quite a strong pull between what one might call more direct kind of spiritual life and more indirect kind of spiritual life.

_____ : That's because it requires a strong personal discipline.

S: Because you have another set of responsibilities. You must all know that very well because

_____ : (speaking at once)

S: ... like everybody else you've got to look after your wives and children. You've got to think in terms of their home, clothing, education, general welfare, in addition to a quite demanding professional life.

_____ : (unclear) where different religions place emphasis the family. The Jewish emphasis is very strong, isn't it in worship and in praying, meeting, together.

S: I can't say that we place any emphasis on the family, especially the nuclear family. You see in India we've also got quite a large movement and among the Order members they are all married with families, but there it seems to work better because they mostly belong to large extended families with twelve, fourteen people living under the same roof, so that you don't get the same stresses and strains usually as you get in a nuclear family. So it's more the nuclear family that we're talking about. Whereas the relationships if there is a small number of people the tensions must be (unclear) whereas in a larger (unclear) family or extended family the tensions are spread. Well they're not tensions at that stage. The emotional demands are spread over a number of people.

_____ : I was going to ask when you said you had drawn from the traditions things that spoke to people in Western culture, and one of the things is how to retain an identity when you live in a community in large cities, isn't it.

S: Of course it isn't easy to have a spiritual community in the city, especially in London where there are all sorts of distractions. But nonetheless we do manage, we do feel we have to have a presence in the cities. We can't just retire into the country (unclear).

_____ : In a way that's perhaps a challenge that ordinary religions face. Their background is very much (unclear) a spirituality appropriate to the city which is going to be so much more a feature of what you do.

S: It has of course been pointed out by historians that Buddhism from the beginning in the Buddha's own lifetime, had very close associations with the cities. The Buddha's principal centres, his monasteries for want of a better term, were all quite literally on the doorstep of the cities, that is to say Rajagrha (unclear) Magadha, (unclear). So Buddhism did have that connection with the cities from the beginning. (unclear) the typical pattern was a village subsisting mainly by agriculture with a little monastery, a vihara, at the end of the village with one or two monks who taught the children their ABC and chanted Pali verses on the occasional birth, death and marriage and gave the occasional sermon, and that was (unclear) the general pattern.

_____ : Do you relate to.... I'm thinking of the tremendous number of Buddhist immigrants who must be in this country now and are you in a sense co-ordinating them?

S: No, we don't. I don't think anybody does. The Buddhist immigrants are quite a different category. We have some connection with the Indians but I must say it is very difficult to have much to do with them, because mostly their primary concern is not Buddhism. Their primary concern is survival, you know money, jobs and all that sort of thing. Yes, they are Buddhists, they accept that they are Buddhists but all that they really require of you usually is your attendance when someone dies or something of that sort. Though if we are invited to perform a death ceremony or after death ceremony, yes we will do that formally. Sometimes they come here and they burn some incense sticks and sometimes they even ask also if we would be good enough (unclear) Buddhism which we would perform. For instance Chinese Buddhists when they come into the shrine, the first thing they ask is 'where are the sticks?', this meaning the fortune telling sticks, because that's why they usually go to the Buddhist temple in

Voices: (speaking and laughing at once drowning out Bhante's words)

S: they feel disappointed that it's supposed to be a Buddhist temple but no sticks.

_____ : I'm sure we've had sticks! *[Laughter]*

S: There usually is a sort of flower vase with these sticks in and there's the priest or the monk, he listens to their question and then he sort of throws the sticks, I don't know even how to do it, and he divines, under the auspices of Buddhism, but we don't go in for those things. It's those sort of services that the 'ethnic Buddhists', as we call them, mainly require. So we keep up what friendly contact we can. Sometimes they come to festivals and join in, but as regards the study of Buddhism, practise of meditation, which is what we're interested in, they just don't really want to know. They think oh yes, it's a good thing, they're happy it goes on, but they don't want personally anything to do with it.

_____ : It sounds like the Church of England. *[Laughter]* Part of a culture isn't it *[Microphone gets knocked and goes quieter!]*

S: It's a general problem when a religion becomes a.... well yes in a sense it must, a universal religion must become a culture, but on the other hand it needs to maintain its vitality at the other end of the spectrum.

_____ : And that's the attraction, is it, of the community that you're associated with? A pure or more specific.

S: There's not a single one who's, so to speak a born Buddhist.

[loud 'feedback' from microphone - ouch!]

_____ : Have you any idea what I might do to make it right again?

[Discussion about problems with the microphone - thank you!]

_____ : What would you say would be the causes of growth in Buddhism, a general attraction

(unclear)

S: We started the FWBO about (unclear) years ago. I think that we at that time sort of rode on the wave of interest in meditation. Quite a few of the people who came along to us were not especially interested in Buddhism to begin with. They were interested in meditation. We taught meditation. It happened to be Buddhist meditation, so they happened to get involved with Buddhism. I think that was the case then to a great extent. Others were vaguely looking for something alternative. (unclear) Now I think it's more specifically an interest in Buddhism as a, for want of a better term, a philosophy. (unclear) explanation for the meaning of life. I think there has been a change in that respect, certainly as regards people coming along to the us.

_____ : Could I ask (unclear) theology. You say that you, in our terminology, are ecumenical. I gather that the different forms of Buddhism are very very different in their thoughts about whether there is a personal god or not. Some will say no but others will say Buddha is a god and all those different things... Do you have a theology here or...

S: Oh yes, no in this case our position is quite clear cut. I myself, and I think in common with other Buddhists in the East, don't accept, actually, despite what some western orientals say, that there's any such thing as a theistic Buddhism, and that we don't accept that at all. Because there are forms of Buddhism which speaks, so to speak, of reality in, as it were, personal terms, but there is no form of Buddhism that regards the Buddha in any of his hypostases, as it were, as the creator of the world, the creator of the universe. So therefore we don't recognise that there is in fact, historically, such a thing as a theistic Buddhism, even though some books on Buddhism are written by non-Buddhists who see, say, the Mahayana as a theistic form of Buddhism, but we wouldn't accept that as a correct interpretation and we don't want it either.

_____ : But then... and again we know that's true about a creator isn't there the thought of a Buddha as being a god in some areas, not the creator god but a god in some areas as being a god amongst other gods, where there's no kind of Buddhism that says all that is wrong.

S: Buddhism does accept the existence of gods, in the plural. It's accepted the existence of gods from the very beginning, and one finds repeated references to them in Pali canonical literature. This is something that some Buddhists in the West, not in the FWBO, who approach Buddhism a bit rationalistically, so to speak, are not very happy about, but you can't really get round it historically. Well you can demythologise Buddhism if you like but it's no more easy to demythologise Buddhism as to demythologise Christianity, because the mythology, to use that term, is embedded in the very structure of the religion from the very beginning and you can't go back to a pre-mythological Buddhism historically speaking. So therefore we've got all these gods, but it's also equally clear in Buddhism, even in these early texts, that these gods or these guardians are essentially mundane beings who, spiritually speaking, are dependant for instruction on the Buddha who is Enlightened. The gods have not understood reality. The gods are subject to rebirth, they're subject to birth, old age, disease and death on an even grander scale than human beings. It's only that their lifetime is longer and their glory is greater, but they are essentially mundane, they fall short of the Transcendental. It's only the Buddha who has realised the Transcendental and who is not, for that reason, reborn.

So gods in this sense have been in Buddhism from the beginning, so they don't affect the position of Buddhism as a non-theistic faith. But then there is the question of the Buddha himself, because there are texts like the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*, which is one of the most important Mahayana Sutras, where there is what is called 'The Revelation of the Buddha's Infinite Life', that the Buddha's life is not limited to his earthly career, so to speak. So that Sutra and other Mahayana Sutras of that sort,

explore, as it were, the significance of the fact that the human being, Gautama the Buddha, has realised the Ultimate Truth. He is at one, so to speak, with Reality. Well where does that leave him? Well if he is at one with Ultimate Reality well in a sense he has always been at one with Ultimate Reality. There is a dimension of Buddhahood which is not limited by time. You can understand from obvious Christian parallels, there's a sort of field that those Buddhists were exploring, but never is it said that the Buddha, even in that more philosophical, more metaphysical, sense is to be equated with the creator of the universe. Because Buddhism holds that the universe, the *Samsara*, has no perceivable beginning. It just, as it were, goes back and back and back. There's no creator apart from it because there is no beginning to mundane existence.

So therefore for these and various reasons it doesn't seem reasonable to hold that there is in fact any form of Buddhism which is theistic. One point that Christian (unclear) often bring up is that Buddhists worship the Buddha, and because Buddhists worship the Buddha they must be regarding him as god in some sense, but Buddhists don't accept that, because we believe that worship is something that you render to anything that you regard as spiritually superior. In the Buddhist canonical language, that's Pali and Sanskrit, you have the same word, 'puja', for showing, as we would say in English, respect for your parents and worshipping the Buddha. So sometimes you get translations like, 'before going to school, he went and worshipped his parents', well he paid his respects to his parents, but the word is the same. It is the attitude of a veneration towards something higher.

_____ : Is it the case that in Buddhism as practised in the countries of South East Asia which are predominantly Buddhist, there's a sort of division between the interior reality and having your horoscope done by the sticks. Do people pick up something else than, and live on another level than, the interior reality of Buddhism? In a way certainly most Christians do.

S: I think it varies very much. Much of Eastern Buddhism until very recently, until (unclear) was very much like medieval Christianity. At the one end of the scale you had peasants where Buddhism is just almost a superstition. They're very vague and pay more reverence to the clergy, the image of the Buddha, and at the other end of the scale highly sophisticated people who are well into Buddhist metaphysics and perhaps yogis and masters of meditation. The difference is still in many areas enormous, and the vast mass are perhaps not exactly in the middle, perhaps a bit lower down than that.

I think that this raises a broader question that I think all the major religions are facing, this whole question of, in a sense, without any loss of spiritual authenticity, sort of updating ourselves, and this is connected with the very question that you're especially concerned with, that is to say inspiration for peace and mutual kindness, because the whole situation is now completely different from what it was in the past. I was thinking over only yesterday, well what am I going to say to you, and the first thing that occurs to me is that Buddhism as a whole - probably this applies to other major religions too - has not yet really fully come to terms with the situation in which it finds itself in the modern world. Among others it's not yet really come to terms with this whole question of peace and war, because the whole aspect of for instance during the Falklands (unclear) recognition (unclear) this phenomenon of the possibility of nuclear war, nuclear disaster. It isn't any longer a question of containing a little conflict here, a little conflict there, it is something much much greater than that, and I must say that Buddhists haven't begun really to develop a systematic, well thought out, Buddhist approach to this sort of situation in the light of Buddhist principles.

I remember when I was in India I often used to attend meetings and conferences of various sorts, and I'd hear people, I'd hear sometimes Buddhists say that well if everybody in the world followed

Buddhism well the problems would be solved, in the same way a Christian says the same thing, almost the same thing, but where does that get us? Well we all agree it's true, but so what, that doesn't help us very much, it's much too vague and it's much too general.

And again, in the same way, in the case of Buddhism, I mentioned that there is such a thing as Right Livelihood. Right Livelihood is one of the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path, so one of the conditions of Right Livelihood is that you should not manufacture weapons of war. A Buddhist is not permitted to engage in that particular trade. A Buddhist cannot produce and buy and sell....

_____ : Is that an ordinary Buddhist?

S: Well a Buddhist, a Buddhist. The fact that in Buddhist countries there are Buddhists who do these things in defiance of the plain and straightforward teachings of Buddhism. I don't think that they actually try to justify themselves. They will just laugh and say, 'well I'm a bad Buddhist!' They don't really bother any more than that. But, yes, there is this teaching that a Buddhist cannot engage in the arms trade. Now in the Buddha's day that would have applied to perhaps bows and arrows and spears and swords, but yes this is very relevant to the present day, yes, but at the same time well how are you going to implement it? It's still just a good general principle that no one will disagree with but the question is well how do you (unclear), it's like that.

So I can certainly refer to these sort of things, but then that may be inspiration in a very very general sense but it isn't really enough by any means. We need to channel the inspiration much much more specifically. So it seems to me that maybe there are a couple of areas here where Buddhists could be of some help, or where Buddhist insight could be useful. I did mention about retreats and about meditation, yes that is helpful no doubt. If more people in the world were meditating that would help create a better atmosphere but again it isn't enough, the situation is much more urgent. We don't have much time, etc., etc. But it seems to me that there are certain things getting in the way, and there are two areas as I see it, where Buddhists perhaps can be of special help: One is this whole question of language. I think language is really quite important, language in the sense of a medium of communication. Traditionally Buddhists have been very concerned with this (unclear) philosophically, (unclear) but what they find is very often that when people are talking about peace, even when governments are talking about peace, they're not talking about the same thing, so it's quite useless even though, yes, it's good to get people together and talking but if they're talking even about peace but they mean by peace different things, well they'll only be talking at cross purposes.

So I think this is an area where Buddhism can give some, perhaps general guidance because it has always been a very semantically aware religion. I don't know if you've had any thoughts of this kind.

_____ : Isn't one of the things that all the religions suffer from when they think about peace, is what you have already said, it's the bows and arrows mentality, on which we have all given various sorts of moral guidance, but that was too what a man could do with his hands, and later with some simple kinds of machine which were really extensions of his hands, so that the moral teaching of the religion was about disengaging from or controlling the impulse to kill with your hands, but we're now going to get killed by a microchip. I was reading a thing that Lord Carrington said yesterday that he's really frightened of, talking about NATO, which is deep strike by microchip, and the new thing that the religion doesn't seem to have got hold of yet is the way that an enormous amount of modern warfare is not personal at all. It's all conducted by some other people on our behalf or without our consent, and that seems an area of great difficulty for the moral conversations that one has.

S: Actually this was going to be my second point. This is a great difficulty, because there's a well known incident in the Buddhist scriptures where some of the Buddha's relations (unclear) were fighting over the use of the water of a river, so the Buddha stands up and of course he knew the people on each side, he was related to most of them, and he said what's happening, and they explained and he said well, this is ridiculous, to sacrifice your blood for the sake of water. So their grievance, the dispute was settled. But even the Buddha couldn't operate in that sort of way any longer because it isn't people coming together face to face, fighting with their own hands, or even behind guns from a reasonable distance, there's no question of someone getting in between and actually talking to the people on both sides because we've got infinitely beyond that sort of situation, so we have to sort of try and find a way of functioning in this situation, and one of the things that we can try is to re-establish the human contact.

So this is why I feel that one of the things that we could be doing from a Buddhist point of view, and no doubt from other points of view, is to encourage as much personal contact as we can across national barriers, especially where tension is greatest. If you're invited say to Russia or to Poland or America or anywhere well just go! So that there's another person getting together with other people in that particular country, even if you're not talking about politics.

_____ : That was one of the impressive things that some of the churches were doing through the Second World War. Keep contacts in Germany. It's to do with a very great heightening of public awareness about certain things that are no longer accepted.

_____ : Extend that then across to politicians (unclear) the Green Party in Europe and (unclear) just beginning to be significant in this country. The peace movement now is something of a political force. Our church and the bomb debate produced a Conservative party television broadcast the week after. It has slightly more strength than.....

_____ : As you say it feels very vulnerable and weak.

S: I think one of the things that people have to be quite careful about is not to divide their forces by disagreements about ways and means. I think the only people really who can do anything about the reduction of nuclear weapons (unclear) the governments of the countries, the governments have got to talk to one another. I think it isn't very helpful for people to argue a lot among themselves as to what line their particular government or any government should take, then all their energies are dissipated or a lot of their energies. Even this question of unilateral or multilateral, I think it's a bit of a red herring. I think the thing that is to be insisted upon is that you insist that your government takes the necessary initiative in talking to other governments about these issues with a view to resolving them. Otherwise you are so busy arguing what is the right approach that your government is let off the hook.

_____ : There's a deep gulf, isn't there, between people in power, the way people in power have become seems to be increasingly isolated from the people who are supposed to put them there or remove them from there, so that people speak a different language there. For example in the church and the bomb debate we managed just in the end to say that, not by a very substantial majority, but just to say that we shouldn't use nuclear weapons first. *[noise of knocking the microphone and then silence!]*

[End of side one side two]

[Humming noises from the microphone until.....]

... generally accept that possibility, and no politician should accept that possibility because, he said, it throws away the use of the deterrent. In other words the deterrent is to frighten people, and if you take them off the hook and say actually we won't throw it first then they won't be frightened. Now something very seriously wrong is happening there which is already out of control, and it's in this area that the sophisticated people know that he doesn't mean it, he's not going to throw it first, but not everybody is sophisticated, and the machinery, on the other hand, is extremely sophisticated and it may not know if when the button has been pressed that it isn't actually supposed to fire. So it's a fascinating area, isn't it, of deep division between ordinary people's feelings and the way those feelings are not managed or responded to by the people of power. That seems to be very difficult to get over.

_____ : Well (unclear) someone from the Department of War Studies at King's on Sunday Afternoon, saying something about what substantially made Europe stable over the last thirty five years was in fact the capacity to strike back.

_____ : And peace through mutual power or fear or...

S: It may be. I think it may be, but we don't really know, we don't know with sufficient certainty to be able to say well yes that is absolutely

_____ : (*talking at once*)... terrible situation to be in.

_____ : But if we knew with absolute certainty then the argument would have some more validity (unclear) only just might be worth living with but your point is that we don't know that, and that's true, and the other thing that the same man said, the argument, all right, it was Russian American but when they were going to have lots of countries with them any minute now, and they have politically unstable situations, then it all becomes very very difficult, so it's all a bit of a (unclear) about nothing because we're actually sitting on the middle of a volcano.

S: That's why I was saying we shouldn't lose ourselves in these sort of discussions because we can't know, but concentrate all our energy on bringing home to our respective governments the fact that we are very very concerned about this whole issue, it's a life and death issue for the whole world, they should be deeply concerned, it should be their top priority, and they should get immediately on with the task of getting together with other governments and really thinking about it and making some sort of steps towards it. And I think we have to make it clear that this is what we want.

_____ : Can I ask you what has been the traditional thinking in that pre-nuclear age with regard to the occasions when Buddhist societies found themselves in situations of conflict, perhaps with other Buddhists.

S: Yes. I mentioned some time ago the fact that in the course of Buddhist history the division between the monk and the layman had become accentuated in some Buddhist societies. The general position is that everybody in a sense is observing the same moral code, but they're not all observing it with the same degree of strictness. So in for instance the South East Asian Buddhist countries, the general view is that a very high standard of ethical conduct is expected of the monk but not nearly so much, not nearly so high a standard, is expected of the layman. This rather lets the layman off the hook. I'm not very happy about this development and this is why in the Western Buddhist Order we don't have this division, because among South East Asian Buddhist you often hear people say if you for instance point out well that's not in accordance with the Buddha's teaching, they say 'well I'm

only a layman, what do you expect of me?' So they're let completely off the hook. The serious practice of the Dharma is left to the monks, who are the specialists in that sort of thing.

So this applies also in the sphere of violence and non-violence. The monk is completely non-violent but the lay person is not so. He will not, if he's a reasonably good Buddhist, attack, but he will certainly defend himself when he's attacked. So in a way, historically speaking, I would say that in principle that Buddhism hasn't actually grappled with this problem. It's side stepped this by syphoning it off to the monks. They're the people who are completely non-violent, which leaves the lay people free to practise at least a measure of violence. It is of course a solution that works up to a point, but to what extent it's really in accordance with the Buddha's teaching, that is quite another matter. But this is the solution (unclear) in most Buddhist countries.

Though in Tibet it's rather interesting. In the old days they had fighting monks. The big monasteries had fighting monks, and I'm told by some of my Tibetan Buddhist friends that they were among the best monks because they led very simple lives etc., etc., and they were prepared to fight for the monastery if it was attacked, if it was attacked, and some of them did fight when the Chinese came. But they (unclear)

_____ : (unclear) martial arts had developed (unclear)

S: Yes, yes, but an interesting thing I was told was that if it so happened that one of the fighting monks, and they only ever received the lower ordination, not the higher ordination, if one of them of them accidentally killed anybody he would have to leave the monastery. *[Laughter]* You see what I mean? So again there's this element of, well not exactly compromise but division of responsibility.

_____ : A question that interests me and probably many people in the church is how Buddhists (unclear) sufficient integrity to give (unclear) live the life of a believer in the world. It's full of complex (unclear).

S: You see the Mahayana did face up to this more than the Hinayana. (unclear) They did develop the idea of the Bodhisattva who had, so to speak (unclear) and some Mahayana sutras go so far as to say that the Bodhisattva can even take life as a skilful means, but this, you could say, is a very dangerous (unclear). But the Mahayana sutras do say this. Again it's another possible... well it is an attempt to grapple with this. For instance there's this well know episode of the Buddha's own kinsfolk, the Sakyas, they were attacked and they asked the Buddha (unclear) and they resolved that inasmuch as they were related to the Buddha they would not be given to violent resistance, and they were all wiped out. So all right, within a context of belief in karma and rebirth, yes, one can perhaps accept this. They didn't (unclear) and the good karma, so to speak, goes with them, but this is not a point of view that one could generally recommend and (unclear) even believe in it, that the good should, as it were, give in, let's say, to the bad in this sort of way. These are very very basic difficulties.

_____ : Well they are (unclear)

_____ : (unclear) tries to resolve, doesn't it.

S: (unclear)

_____ : Not at all. That's in a sense the purpose of a religion or a belief, to try....

S: The religion which has the least difficulty, the major religion which has the least difficulty with

these sort of problems is Islam [*Laughter*] [*Voices speaking all at once obscuring Bhante*] They're in a very happy position as regards at least their consciences, they can fight and kill with a very clear conscience. It's highly meritorious for them to do so. Our religions aren't really in that position. Even the Sikhs, they too approximate to some extent with the Islamic position, though they are definitely a milder... (unclear). in this discussion about the Golden Temple. I've never been to the Golden Temple but I know many many Sikhs. Though they are warlike people in a way they are not an aggressive people.

_____ : No, they're very reconciling.

S: They are friendly people. (unclear) Traditionally they do believe that they're entitled to set upon (unclear) in defence of their religion. (unclear). Among Buddhists the important thing is the lay people are broadly (unclear) but not the monks. Among Christians (unclear) you've got the Quakers at one end of the scale and various other people at the other end.

_____ : (unclear) pacifist (unclear) developed (unclear) the just war and all those (unclear) present situation.

S: Even assuming that there could be a just war, there can hardly be a just nuclear war. But then again (unclear) the Buddhist says all right, supposing the nations of the world do succeed in abolishing nuclear weapons, well that doesn't solve everything by any means because you've got all the other weapons still and if the threat, the possibility of nuclear war has kept people relatively quiet, well (unclear)

_____ : It's not a problem taking it away. (unclear)

S: Actually it's not just the question of nuclear war, it is a question of violence itself and being decisive.

_____ : I think so. That's why I was asking about living in cities. (unclear)

_____ : How are you regarded by the neighbours? What contact do you have and are you conscious of their attitude to what happens?

S: Actually we have quite a bit of contact with them. Before we moved here which was about seven or eight years ago we were in Archway, and when we first were offered this place some of our friends felt that Bethnal Green just wasn't the place. They felt that there would be a lot of local hostility, being a working class area. I personally didn't feel that that was the case and actually that's how it turned out to be, though perhaps it's interesting to see why that should be so. When we took over this place, this old fire station as it was (unclear). So we had anything from between thirty and fifty people working here quite hard for a period of up to three years. So this really impressed the neighbours, you see. They saw all these young men leading a very simple life, camping on the premises and no comforts of home at all, and to begin with there were no baths even, and just eating simple food and working really hard, this impressed people, and so this created an initial good impression which it was possible to build on. Some of the local shopkeepers used to send in free food, they felt so sympathetic. The woman across the road always used to send in biscuits in the morning for their morning tea, and so on and so forth.

So on that simple level there was a very positive response and I can't say that people in the area have shown any particular interest in Buddhism as such. Very few of them actually come to the centre,

very few indeed, they come from all over London. But round about (unclear).

_____ : (unclear)

_____ : People live here for quite a long time, do they get involved in the community life or mostly life within the centre.

S: You mean the (unclear)

_____ : Yes.

S: We don't actually render any sort of social service in the ordinary sense. It's not that we're against that but we feel that, say in modern Britain, this is not what is needed. We feel that people need much more things like meditation, things like (unclear). I think the material problems are more or less solved. I know people do talk about poverty and even if there is still poverty I don't see things like that, because I remember my twenty years in India. I know what poverty is, I've seen poverty there. People in England or even in areas like Bethnal Green, they have a pretty good life, but I don't feel that much in the way of ordinary social work is called for. We do have social work type projects in India, yes we are building a medical centre there and we are building hostels and so on, so any sort of funds that we can raise for work of that sort we prefer to send there.

_____ : This building is a teaching centre, the community. People come here to stay for a while?

S: We do sometimes have guests. Sometimes they are from other centres and other communities (unclear) or with responsibilities (unclear)

_____ : And they are in the twenty to thirty year old age band.

S: They mostly are, but there are exceptions. We have a few who are quite a bit younger and a few who are quite a bit older. In the Order itself we've got people from I think 22 would be the youngest up to about 73 would be the oldest, with the majority I think in their thirties now, and the majority are male. It's interesting, this question of women clamouring for ordination, *[Laughter]* well we have the doors wide open but very few of them actually come through. It's interesting. We've got at least five times as many men in the Order as women, even though we try very hard to (unclear) get them ready. We've as many women members, broadly speaking, as men. Many women come along to classes, if not more, but a very much smaller proportion of women are prepared to commit themselves wholeheartedly as the men.

_____ : Have you any theories why that is?

S: Well the only theories we have are the more traditional ones. We don't find many exceptions with the women themselves, so it's very difficult to say. Buddhist tradition maintains that woman inherently is, so to speak, more worldly than man. That is the traditional view, (unclear), but it's certainly drawn out by (unclear). *[Laughter]*

_____ : Do you find cultural difficulties in a way. Being a Buddhist centre in Bethnal Green sounds, in a sense, exotic. Downstairs looks exotic and it looks Eastern. Are you, in a sense the Orient in Bethnal Green or do you try to adapt to the country you're in, as it were, in any ways?

S: Well that's inevitable. It might seem a bit oriental, say, to you but if you were in a really [*Laughter*] thoroughly ethnic sort of Buddhist centre you'd find it completely different. You might have noticed....

_____ : ... Western clothes.

S: Yes, and also you might have noticed that the image has been adapted a little bit. It hasn't got - neither of them have got far eastern features.

_____ : I thought they looked like Bethnal Green boys!

S: Because the artist, the sculptor is one of our own Order members, and he made a study, prior to making those images of Gandharan Buddhist art. Now I don't know if you're aware of this but the Buddhist icon, the image of the Buddha himself, is generally considered to have originated in an area corresponding roughly now to Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan and Southern Russia where Buddhism was present and where Greek culture was extant, so it's believed that this earliest Gandharan art was strongly influenced by Hellenic art, and that the Buddha image developed under those auspices, and you can see that even in later Indian Buddhist art. So he's made a special study of those Buddha images and so tried to continue that sort of tradition, except that instead of becoming more oriental, as happened there, it became more Western. You see what I mean? So in a way it's oriental but it's not sort of full bloodedly oriental. So yes, we're very very conscious of this area.

_____ : What festivals do you have?

S: Well there's the festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment, that's in May, and we've got the Buddha's birth and the Buddha's death (Parinibbana), and we have the anniversary of the Western Buddhist Order itself. We also celebrate what we call 'Dharma Day', the anniversary of the Buddha's first teaching, and what we call 'Sangha Day', which originally marked the end of the rainy season retreat when the Buddha's disciples would go in retreat, we observe that as a 'Sangha Day', a day when we celebrate the spiritual community. Because in Buddhism we've got these 'Three Jewels', which are the Buddha, his Enlightenment, The Dharma, his teaching, and the Sangha, his spiritual community, corresponding in a way to the church. So the Sangha Day celebration is a celebration of the church. We attach great importance to the whole principle of spiritual community, spiritual brotherhood and so on.

In this connection I personally am quite interested in the teaching of the Eastern Orthodox church, because, as we know, in that church they've got in Russia a very interesting word ('Suvorana'?) which means - well they really don't know how to translate it because in English we don't have it, it's - something like conciliarity or a sort of spirit of community or even togetherness in the spiritual sense and they attach tremendous importance to this, and they say that the other western churches, whether they're the Catholic or the Protestant churches are much too individualistic. They believe in a sort of spiritual togetherness, which is not a togetherness of the group in the ordinary sense, a spiritual togetherness. So this seems in a way familiar to us, because this is in a way our context of the whole Sangha, and the Eastern orthodox people stress that their church is not a sort of ecclesiastical organisation. They don't have ecclesiastical authority in the way that, according to them, the Catholic church does. So it's much the same in Buddhism with spiritual community, but it's not the same kind of almost authoritarian organisation and structure that one has in Protestant (unclear) .

_____ : You don't have abbots to your monasteries?

S: Yes. Well not our own community, but in the East, yes, there are people that are called abbots.

_____ : And have they got the authority of a Christian type abbot?

_____ : A vow of obedience.....

S: No, there's no vow of obedience to begin with. There's a vow of, well in Christian terms, poverty, and a vow of chastity, but not a vow of obedience. And also the monk can denounce his vows at any time, which withdraws him from whatever authority the abbot may have anyway. [Pause]

_____ : Each one is more or less independent, on its own, the organisation?

S: This varies from one Buddhist country to another. I think I can say broadly speaking, though there are exceptions, even important exceptions, that the pattern, the classic pattern in Buddhism, is more like the congregational structure, the structures of the Christian church.

_____ : I'm interested in who comes. Classes, are they evenings on meditation?

S: We've got, as far as I know, two kinds of classes. It's years since I was personally involved with classes but I know what's going on.

_____ : How do enquirers make contact with you?

S: Usually we have two kinds of classes, the ongoing classes, that is to say there's a Tuesday Evening regulars' meditation class, followed by study and by puja. That's for people who have been in contact with us for some years. So that's an ongoing class every Tuesday.

_____ : They may be more interested in meditation or..

S: They may be, yes.

_____ : They'll be learning about Buddhism.

S: That's right, yes. But then we may have courses, say a six week course or eight week course which you join as a course for that limited period. Some people may come just for that course and we may not see them again. They may be for instance people especially interested in religious education, so they come and they take their course. Or they may be regulars again, coming on another day to take their course. And then of course in connection with some of the courses we've got retreats, that is to say weekend retreats, sometimes day retreats here. Weekend retreats in the country, ten day retreats, two week retreats, beginners' retreats, retreats for what we call 'Mitrans', retreats for Order members, retreats for men, retreats for women, and so on. There's a big (unclear) of retreats (unclear). So that's the way that people get involved.

Or again someone may join a co-op. They may choose to live in that, or they may begin by joining a community, but usually they get involved first of all through the centres, the public centres, through classes and courses. They make their way in that sort of way.

_____ : Is there an initiation into Buddhism, like baptism?

S: Yes. Strictly speaking. You could say strictly speaking for us baptism and ordination coincide.

[Laughter] Because a Buddhist is a Buddhist, in a way just as a Christian is a Christian. Some forms of Protestantism speak of a sort of a priest sort of (unclear) It's not that you can be a lay Buddhist, one who's just been, as it were initiated or baptised, and you don't have to take it very seriously. Only those who are ordained and who have to teach take it seriously, well that isn't the position really, though it's become a bit like that in some Buddhist countries. So to be initiated is to be ordained. In that way we're like the Mormons. They don't have (unclear) in this way. Though we have degrees of commitment, but we don't regard you as really a Buddhist unless you've committed yourself, as we say, to the Three Jewels, to the *(Microphone displaced/half unplugged and hum almost totally obscures proceedings for the rest of the tape!)*

[End of tape one tape two]

_____ : and of course it's not the (unclear) at stake, it is the clergy who are at stake, and they've all been caught with their pants down really. That's what so difficult. They are almost always in church the most defensive part of the church. Part of the defensiveness is you suddenly realise that you haven't been doing what you could have been doing for years and years, and trying to protect some people from thinking.

S: When I get these big congregations in India, I think of them always as an educated people, these people have little education, many of them are illiterate (unclear) illiteracy if not highly illiterate, but they're very (unclear) So I try to make my lectures and my talks (unclear) vehicles of education.

_____ : Things which start (unclear) as their experience.

S: Yes, and a lot of (unclear) have, just because they are ex-Untouchables, and they're still treated as such by Indian society.

_____ : (unclear) that happened in Africa as well.

S: Even whether to retaliate when attacked, yes, because they are attacked, sometimes they're murdered, even now. In this very week probably there've been two (unclear).

_____ : Have they come to Buddhism because of a genuine desire for Buddhism or to stop the naming of Untouchable?

S: Their main motivation would be separation from the caste system, and they saw Buddhism as a means of doing that.

_____ : So then in a sense you have to convert them after that.

S: In a sense, but I wouldn't put it quite like that. I'd say their point of departure was different. I sometimes compare it with the two sorts of, as it were, congregation I get, over here and over there, because my life has been pretty evenly divided between India and England. Here I've got a smaller congregation (unclear) and there I've got a very large following, probably a couple of thousand times bigger than the one here. Yes (unclear) a few (unclear) they're very old friends. (unclear) But the difference I've noticed or the comparison I make is this - that here the people who come to Buddhism are suffering, broadly speaking, psychologically. It is the psychological problems, psychological stress etc., etc. There they come as the result of social forms of stress. I would say that either approach is valid, as an approach, as a starting approach, because nobody comes, very very rarely does anybody come with a pure and undiluted desire for spiritual enlightenment - that is almost

unknown. [Laughter] They come as (unclear) [Laughter].

_____ : That's right. You start with people and their tangles.

_____ : (unclear) [Laughter]

_____ : Well slightly less perhaps a tangle, but a tangle doesn't go away does it.

S: Well we find it very often does.

_____ : Do you. How long does it take?

S: Oh it varies. We don't actually keep (unclear) but there are some people who do come who are deeply disturbed and they're quite emotionally (unclear), mainly in connection with their human relationships, especially parents, towards fathers. I would say those who only are moderately disturbed and moderately unhappy, after being involved with say meditation and study and Buddhism, say for two or three years, they can be sorted out. But I do know of other people coming along regularly but they've such a backlog of emotional disturbance that they can really not yet sort out.

_____ : Well you probably don't have personal counsellors.

S: That is all quite informal, but a lot of it goes on. We do, for instance, make a lot of people explore that. On retreat the Order members who lead the retreats are always available to talk with people. (unclear) Not that they hand out solutions, or even necessarily give advice, but (unclear).

_____ : (unclear)

_____ : (unclear) [Laughter] simple life, choice of teas and which cake!...

S: It is a bit unusual.

_____ : Perhaps see a few dried beans! [Laughter] (unclear) A choice of cream cake! This course is full of surprises! [Laughter]

_____ : Is Buddhism vegetarian?

S: Buddhists differ here somewhat. In the East, Buddhists of South East Asia are not vegetarian. Even the monks are not vegetarian. (unclear) The monk is not supposed, according to the Vinaya, to accept meat which has been specially killed for him or which he has (unclear). In the Mahayana Buddhist countries the monks (unclear due to clattering noises of teacups). Buddhism logically (unclear) so even if they (unclear) so most of our members (unclear).

But I think this has bearing (unclear - the microphone seems to have moved again during the tea pouring and someone's breathing is louder than Bhante's speech! - I wish the reader luck trying to follow the rest of the transcript!)

I would say this is not unconnected with the whole question of violence, because Pythagoras said that if people can kill a little animal they can kill a human being, and I think they are not unconnected.(unclear)

_____ : (unclear)

If you ask a monk in South East Asia why he takes meat he will say because the lay people give it and the monk cannot pick and choose. (unclear) *[Laughter]*

_____ : Anything goes!

S: (unclear) you are the teachers of Buddhism and you have been established in Ceylon or wherever it is for two thousand years, could you not have taught them by this time what they can offer, but I don't think that happens at all.

_____ : The great advantage of your position is that your small group in this society (unclear) can keep the purest side of Buddhism.

S: We have our own backsliding.

_____ : But with everyone it's nominal (unclear) what the culture wants and the different eastern and western situations.

S: Something which we begin to have a sort of effect on at least some Buddhists in the East, some who are purported to be Buddhists in the East, and who do know about the FWBO and they're quite interested.

_____ : Yes I was thinking it is a strange turn around that you are in fact going to India and teaching. *[Laughter]*

_____ : It's certainly parallel to what's happening in the churches (unclear) now beginning to get the situation (unclear)

S: I believe some African Christian missions, (unclear) the mission feels (unclear)

_____ : (unclear)

S: (unclear)

_____ : Is it because of the Indian division of the holy men, that that is so deep in society that it's quite secondary what makes that element to be.

S: Partly that, but it's also that the Buddhists amongst the ex-Untouchables have known me personally for a long time and they've come to trust me, and also I was personally associated with their famous leader Dr. Ambedkar, who was actually responsible for the (unclear), and before his death (unclear) monks and one of them was me, and that has helped (unclear) . In some ways I feel more at home in India than I do here. Basically because it's such a very traditional society and really because there's much more of a spiritual tradition, I feel more at home in a traditional kind of society. I don't like the modern world really. I was saying to a group of my students the other day I came to the conclusion I had a thoroughly medieval mind. I don't have a modern mind.

_____ : That's the centre of the problem of spirituality in the Western world.

S: I'm afraid I have been most reluctant to be dragged into the 20th Century, I don't like the 20th Century, but what can you do, you can't put the clock back, here you are. I would have loved to have just been occupied with monastic life and with giving my lectures and dedicating shrines, not having to be involved with issues of economic importance, with which I'm really not interested but am forced to be interested. In fact these things have been forced upon us (unclear).

_____ : It may be also be that some of answers that you had then actually (unclear) actually take us further back into tradition (unclear)

S: (unclear) as regards broad general principles. We have to dig very deep.

_____ : In a sense (unclear) someone who does lots of retreats (unclear)

_____ : (unclear)

S: Hardly any contact at all. (unclear) the position has been that over the last fifteen, twenty years, I've been concerned with establishing the FWBO, I've just had no time and energy for this kind of contact, but over this last year or so I've come to the conclusion that now the movement is going along reasonably well and there are other people to whom I've been able to hand over certain responsibilities, I want to have a bit more personal contact with people outside the Buddhist tradition.

_____ : It's an area that's expanding. (unclear)

S: (unclear)

_____ : (unclear)

S: (unclear)

_____ : (unclear) are you overtly evangelistic and trying to get as many converts to Buddhism as possible, or are you (unclear) Have you got a policy for Buddhism (unclear)

S: Well obviously we would like to see as many Buddhists as possible. (unclear) I must say quite frankly that quite a few of our members have got a somewhat critical attitude towards traditional Christianity, (unclear) and quite a few of them have personally had, let's say, unfortunate experiences of Christianity. I myself do not have this. My own experience of Christianity (unclear) was quite positive and I went to church, I enjoyed going to church and (unclear) and so on, but subsequently I started taking an interest in the different religions of the world, and Buddhism appealed to me most, but I never went through a stage of, as it were, the reaction against Christianity. I would say I've sort of passed through it as I knew it, (unclear) so yes I accept that too, but some of our friends have actually had unfortunate experiences, more especially those who are Catholic. They in some cases remained I would even say psychologically disturbed even for years after they've come into contact with us, as a result of a very strict Catholic upbringing, and the difficulty is in two areas - the whole question of authority and the area of sex.

Some of them feel that their whole attitude towards their own sexuality has been, well, almost permanently distorted by their Catholic upbringing. Both men and women feel this very strongly, and so they feel very bitter as regards to the Catholic church. Most of them remember (unclear) and have rather unpleasant memories of being warned off sex, you see, and there has been a deep conflict.

So we have quite a few people of this sort, and it takes them years for this (unclear). Some of the women (unclear) the Virgin Mary, when they didn't feel in the least (unclear) pure as the Virgin Mary was pure. (unclear)

_____ : (unclear)

S: So to go back to the question that you asked, we're not against sort of going out to people even in an evangelical sort of way, using that word in a non pejorative way, but it's not that we want to turn people or take people away from a faith that they do in fact have, but we feel there are so many people who don't have a faith at all, who don't believe in anything, (unclear), and it's those people, at least for the next few hundred years, that we're going to be concerned with. (unclear) so there's no point in our sort of (unclear) against Christians, we're wasting our time, because there are so many people who don't any sort of faith.

_____ : (unclear) now no longer speaks to a different kind of society.

S: We are very conscious of that. No man's land. [*Laughter*] (unclear)

So if we do go out at all, it's more with the object of reaching these people, not those who already have a faith. But I wouldn't go so far as to say that Buddhists believe that all religions are the same, (unclear) , I wouldn't say that, but Buddhists would certainly tend to believe that (unclear).

_____ : (unclear)

S: (unclear) I personally resolve it in more sort of evolutionary terms, that's to say that most people are looking for something, (unclear), and some (unclear) are clearer than others. I can't really say more than that. (unclear) I won't say that they are the same necessarily, but certainly they meet some kind of need and (unclear).

_____ : Can you say something about the Buddhist teaching about sex?

S: Buddhists don't seem to have any problem about this. To begin with, in the Theravada countries, again there's the monks and lay people. For the monks no sex, they're totally celibate. Lay people, I won't say anything goes, but their attitude is pretty relaxed, and there are no feelings of guilt, especially guilt tied up with sex. In the case of a monk, if he feels that he no longer is able to observe the precept of celibacy, well he is free to leave and many do, and some of them for that reason, and in some Buddhist countries ex-monks are highly prized, because they feel they've been in a monastery for some years, they've been well trained, and some people even go so far as to say that an ex-monk makes a particularly good husband! [*Laughter*] Yes, this is a popular saying, and he finds it easier to get a job in the government service, because he was ordained, he's reliable, he's mindful, he has all these sort of qualities.

So it doesn't seem to be much of a problem. I've talked with quite a few monks and sometimes this subject has obviously arisen, and I'm not quite sure why it is, but monks in the East don't seem to find celibacy so much of a problem as sometimes priests do in the west. I'm not quite sure why that is. It might be because the emphasis on sex and therefore on the (unclear) are not there to the extent that it is here. Also that it is a different kind of society, where they are not being constantly titillated by (unclear). I think here in the West there's a constant play on the male sexual ego especially, (unclear) provoked in a quite unhealthy way that does nobody any good. Some of our young friends

who live in the men's community who are not married, they say they find it very difficult to be celibate, especially living in a city, but when they go off on retreat in the country where they don't have to see this they say they don't [*Laughter*] actually think about it. It's as simple as that. They say no, that doesn't bother them, especially when we go off to a particular place we have in Italy where we are isolated and we don't see anybody for three months or longer.

_____ : Things take on different proportions.

S: Yes they don't even think about it, they don't feel it (unclear) even living in a men's community.

_____ : Yes, they are surrounded by

_____ : You don't have homosexual things....

_____ : That seems to be when there's a lack of female stimulation they get more (unclear)

S: In the East I would say this seems to vary from one Buddhist country to another. In some Buddhist countries there seems to be almost a tradition of homosexuality and it seems to be accepted. In China for instance. So sometimes among Chinese Buddhists you do find homosexuality. You find it also in Ceylon, (unclear), you don't find it in Burma, you don't find it in Thailand. There seems to be no Buddhist (unclear), there seems to be no homosexuality either within a monastic order. But of course from the Vinaya point of view, homosexuality is definitely not accepted because the monk is supposed to show restraint in all relations. Though it is interesting that in the Vinaya all kinds of sexual behaviour are just put on the same level, as it were. There's no special emphasis on any particular form of sexual behaviour being especially offensive or especially taboo. It's all on the same level. There's no distinction made and the monk just abstains from all. That is the point of view. It's not that one particular kind of sexual involvement is especially reprehensible. No.

_____ : When you were saying that amongst the laypeople, sexuality is fairly relaxed, how does this tie in with fidelity (unclear)

S: Well as regards the Buddha's actual teaching fidelity between husband and wife is emphasised in connection with the public, but on the other hand as regards particular social (unclear) Buddhism does not take one particular pattern, Buddhism does not prohibit polygamy. You can be a Buddhist and have more than one (unclear). This is not always practised but yes this is not impossible, it is not specifically prohibited. But certainly what is condemned is adultery with somebody else's spouse. This is regarded as highly (unclear).

_____ : Would you say that this is specifically Buddhist or cultural?

S: In the question of India that sort of thing is rather interesting. It's very ambivalent. It's very difficult to see what is actually Indian and what is the product of Western culture. Mahatma Gandhi for instance was fairly untypical, very untypical. Before that attitudes towards sexuality was much more western there . If you think that Indian culture produced texts such as the Kama Sutra and so on, well Mahatma Gandhi doesn't represent that side. Think of all the erotic sculpture (unclear). So India is a very rich culture. On this question of their ambivalence, on the one hand sexuality is almost glorified in a guilt free sort of way, that you must develop experience in (unclear). On the other hand asceticism and celibacy are also very highly valued, very highly appreciated. And different spiritual traditions apply these in different proportions. Buddhism on the whole tends to be more ascetic. Some of the Hindu traditions, especially (unclear) and (unclear) they tend to (unclear). There are all

sorts of possible combinations and contradictions. Also Indian sexuality is much, I won't say (unclear) is channelised much more through the arranged marriage. Marriages are still arranged by parents (unclear). So that the sexual instinct is channelled very systematically through the socially acceptable channels in a way that (unclear). The only difficulties they have are usually with young men whose marriage has been delayed due to their pursuing (unclear).

I remember when I was in India there were all sorts of newspaper articles saying that some of these young men were especially in Delhi, (unclear) they were nicknamed 'roadside romeos' because they whistled after girls in the street, which was very very unacceptable. Indian public behaviour is very decent on the whole.

_____ : Public?

S: Yes. I mean there's no flirtation between the sexes.

_____ : Our time is running out.

S: Oh dear!

_____ : Are there other things you would like to say to us?

S: It's very difficult to say, because, as I indicated, my sort of more ecumenical encounters have only begun quite recently so in some ways there's quite a lot of things I'd like to ask but (unclear) especially as you are sort of half way through your [*Laughter*]. Have you all been clergymen for twenty years or...

_____ : Not all.

_____ : More or less.

_____ : Fifteen.

_____ : Twenty two. How long have you been?

S: (unclear) business career. We hear about businessmen becoming clergymen. Did anyone have a career before becoming a clergyman?

_____ : I was an architect.

_____ : Now there are more and more people that are ordained having had a career and then coming in.

S: In a way that would seem to me a sensible arrangement, especially if one is going to be (unclear).

_____ : It's not possible to go straight through college, university, (unclear) training, without some other experience.

S: I did just wonder whether you'd had any previous contact with Buddhism.

_____ : I was in Sumatra for a number of years and I saw Chinese Buddhism.

S: Where each held a stick.

_____ : That's right. *[Laughter]* temple Buddhism, temples round every corner and difficult (unclear). In a way I'd like to have a longer chat with you about how to differentiate ancient Chinese superstition and(unclear)

S: A lot was Taoism and even Confucianism. We have some of our (unclear) in Malaysia. They are all young Chinese, most of them educated. Some of them they don't even speak Chinese, and are quite alienated from the traditional Buddhism, but they find our version of Buddhism, so to speak, very interesting. We've had some of them (unclear).

_____ : I know in the Roman Catholic church out there, they had a number of Chinese priests (unclear) but not (unclear) priests, they didn't have (unclear) priests. The simple reason was celibacy, as far as the (unclear) whereas the Chinese knew of the Buddhist tradition of celibacy and could understand it and therefore could enter the Roman priesthood.

S: (unclear) in Malaysia, because some of these young Chinese Buddhists were of course of the Buddhist traditional faith but they'd no wish to be celibate monks or priests and so on, and since we don't insist on that, we regard it as optional they were attracted to us for that reason. Because I personally feel that (unclear).

_____ : (unclear) *[Laughter]*

S: (unclear) *[Laughter]*

_____ : (unclear) *[Laughter]*

_____ : Well thank you for your time and let's hope (unclear) *[Laughter]*

S: Maybe some of us could even meet again.

[End of recording]

*Transcribing attempted by Silabhadra
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