

**The Venerable Sangharakshita**  
**Questions and Answers at the Buddhist Society of New South Wales, Australia, March 1979**

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**Sangharakshita:** Maybe, first of all, I'll just say a few words explaining what, you know, what I'm thinking about rather than giving a lecture, or even a talk. It's partly because, as Mr Dear... has just said that most of you have heard me speak before on tape, so you've heard the talks. So therefore I thought that while I was in Sydney on my way to Auckland it would be better instead of giving a talk, I took the opportunity of getting a little more feedback from you. And so I thought that it would be better to have some question and answers and maybe that can lead to some sort of dialogue. So that it isn't simply the one way process, with me giving a lecture and everybody else obediently listening, but I also get a feeling of what you feel about the Dharma, and what interests you in the Dharma. So therefore I thought that it might be a good idea if the people asked questions to begin with, maybe on points in the lectures themselves. Or asked about whatever they might want to know in connection with the movement in England. Or any just general Dharma points. So this would give me an some idea of where you are all at. Because I've plenty of experience of England. I know where English Buddhists are at the moment ... or maybe not at the moment, I knew 3 weeks ago where they were at then. Then I spent 2 weeks in India with my Indian Buddhist friends, and had quite a number of ... so I know pretty well where they are at. And just a few days ago I was in Malaysia in Penang, in Alor Star, and also in Ipoh ... and the last of these was a question and answer. So I've been getting feedback in all these places, otherwise it's more or less the same thing, where I give my lectures, but I don't really know what people are thinking. So I would like to know a little bit what people are thinking. So I'd like to know a little bit what people are thinking, and what is it in the Dharma that really attracts them, what are the aspects in the Dharma that they find personally most significant. So as I said if anyone's got any questions arising out of the lectures or anything that they'd like to know about the movement in England, or any general Dharma questions. Let's make a start someone, and perhaps get into some kind of discussion in that way, and see where that leads.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I'd like to ask, in your lectures on the Lotus Sutra, you saw much of it as being symbolic from one particularly great speaker ... ah ... should we view the Dharma particularly that of the Lotus Sutra in this symbolic way coming to find the Dharma in ...

**S:** I think in a way that we are forced to ask ourselves these sort of questions. For the benefit of those who haven't heard those tapes or who haven't read the Saddhamma Pundarika Sutra, the White Lotus Sutra, perhaps I should explain that this is one of the great Mahayana Sutras. In some ways it's the basis of Chinese Buddhism. Ah, it's widely studied in Chinese Buddhism and commented on by Chinese teachers. It's originally in Sanskrit, but it contains a lot of what I've called symbolic spiritual material. It contains lots of incidents that you cannot possibly take literally. So the question arises - if you cannot take them literally, what are you going to do about them? You can't remain in some sort of stage of spiritual indecision. You can't just read them and that's that, you've got to make up your mind: Are these to be taken literally or are they to be taken symbolically? And if they are to be taken symbolically, then what is their meaning? So that I think as we go through the Buddhist scriptures generally we have to ask ourselves these sort of questions. There are some things which the Buddha means to be taken very definitely literally. But there are others ... not so much Teachings, but things that happen, episodes in the scriptures, especially in the Mahayana scriptures which seem to be

teaching us in a different sort of way. So instead of taking those incidents literally, we have to ask: 'What is the scripture or what is the Buddha trying to tell us in this particular way?' And I think that it is very important for us to get this sorted out, otherwise we don't know really where we are, we don't know whether we are taking it literally or whether we are taking it symbolically and it can lead to a sort of intellectual dishonesty - or at least a sort of intellectual indecisiveness. So in the case of the White Lotus Sutra here there are many things that must be taken literally, like the Buddha's instructions as to how the preacher of the White Lotus Sutra should behave. This must be taken quite literally - straightforward, ethical and spiritual instruction. But when this magnificent stupa, many miles high comes springing up out of the earth, decorated in all sorts of wonderful ways, well, are you to take that literally? Can you, as an Australian Buddhist, let's say, really believe that? If you can believe it, then that's fine. But if you can't then what are you to do about it. If you're unable to believe that at a certain point in the Buddha's life, quite literally, this gigantic stupa literally appeared out of the earth. If you can't believe that it literally happened, then what are you going to do about that episode? Either you have to dismiss it completely as a later fabrication, and as worthless, or you have to take it as a symbolic ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : If I believe literally, and if I was to take it as this incredible thing, then still I ask: Am I still to look symbolically for its meaning, because even it literal ...

**S:** Yes, because even the literal is also symbolical, there is that point too, that some of the actions of the Buddha were literal and symbolical. But there are certain other 'actions' (inverted commas) described in scriptures, which are just symbolical. For instance, one that I quote in my lecture on symbols in the life of the Buddha, you know biographical symbols where the Buddha walks up and down in the air simultaneously emitting fire and water. So what does this mean? Even if he did it literally, what does it mean? I mean why should have the Buddha walked up and down in mid-air, emitting fire and water. Well, it wasn't for a sort of fireworks display. So even if it had a meaning it doesn't matter very much, in these sort of borderline cases, whether it did happen literally, with a symbolical meaning, or simply that it's symbolical. The general meaning here seems to be, the union, the bringing together of these two opposite qualities, the positive and the negative, the fiery and the watery, the yin and the yang, a complete unification and integration in the Enlightened personality. This seems to be the point here, whether it happened literally or not. But sometimes you, in the case of these yogic incidents, those incidents involving yogic powers, it is very difficult to know whether it has a literal meaning, or whether it is just symbolical. But we have to be quite honest with ourselves and thrash it out one way or the other, but not sort of bluff ourselves, and pretend to believe things that we don't believe, that we can't believe. Perhaps we should believe, but if we can't believe, with our Western education and background, then we must honestly say, 'I can't believe it, I'm sorry, many Buddhists do, but I can't'. In which case, I take it in such-and-such a way. But I think mental honesty, intellectual honesty is very, very important. And the White Lotus Sutra gives one a good opportunity. It's a very wonderful Sutra, very inspiring, sometimes I think that one should take it as poetry rather than as religious literature. If you take some of these Mahayana Sutras as poetry, and if you also believe that poetry, great poetry, can have a deep spiritual meaning, you're probably on safer ground than if you take it dogmatically, and try to get a dogmatic or intellectual philosophy.

But problems like these will arise when we study these Buddhist texts, especially the Mahayana Sutras. They have a very deep and really wonderful meaning but it isn't always the literal meaning. I mean literal in the sense of factual, historical, scientific, because the spiritual is also literal, the symbolical is also literal, on its own level, which is not the level of history and scientific fact.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Would you say that the deeper meaning is to be understood either by ... repeating the Sutra, or by a meditation, or by what?

**S:** Well, in all these things, in all these different ways. But also you need to study the scriptures with a teacher. This is one of the things that we emphasise in our own movement very much, that one doesn't indulge in a lot of miscellaneous Buddhist reading, but that you study the Dharma, you study Dharma texts with a teacher. And you go into the texts really thoroughly. And this is one of the things that I'm mainly concerned with at present. I don't have much to do with taking classes, and the public things. But I get together with Order Members and others and we go as deeply as we can into different things, like the Udana, the Sutta Nipata, the Majjhima Nikaya, the Bodhicaryavatara, Precepts of the Gurus (and all these different things). This is very important, to go into the texts ... and asking ourselves all the time, 'How does this relate to me and my spiritual life? How does it help me? Does it help me?' If it doesn't help it, all right, then respectfully leave it aside. If it does help it then you should try to apply it. And there's a mass of Buddhist scriptures, they're not equally relevant to us all of the time, but there are certain things that are relevant to us at certain moments, and if we are willing to (*unclear*) hold of them, and go as deeply as we can into them, and really apply them to our own lives. This is the way that we study the scriptures, and, as I say, we attach great importance to it. And the scriptures of all schools, we don't confine ourselves to the Theravada, or to Zen, or to Tibetan Buddhism. Because we believe that there are great spiritual inspirations to be found in all these Buddhist traditions as they come down to us. So our movement in England is non-sectarian, in the sense that it is just Buddhist, not any particular form or outlook, we take our inspiration from wherever we can find it. And not only that, some of our friends get inspiration from other sources too. One of the major sources of inspiration outside the Buddhist scriptures, in England at the moment is Blake. Lots of people get a lot of inspiration from William Blake, from his poems, and from his prophetic books, and from other writings and from his art. And we even have a Blake study group under the auspices of the movement. A lot of people get a lot ... so it's not even just the scriptures, it's other texts even outside the scriptures, that we do find really helpful ... At one time there was a group studying Yeats' dramas, as a lot get a lot from him too.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Could I ask if this raises the question, in the Western tradition of rebirth. In your tape, you said that perhaps this was time to have a look at this in Western terms, Western knowledge. It seems to me that some people in the Western tradition who are if you like enlightened, like Blake, they don't particularly see this in terms of rebirth (*unclear*).

**S:** This is a point that is often asked, interestingly enough, this is also a point which has also come up among the Indian friends. I was asked more or less the same question amongst my Indian Buddhist friends in Pune. And it really boils down to this, the extent to which belief in or acceptance of the doctrine or teaching of rebirth are necessary to one as a Buddhist. In other words can you be a Buddhist and not believe in rebirth. This is a question which sometimes people ask. And this was what I was asked in India, by a Western-educated Indian Buddhist. He said, 'I can't believe in rebirth, it seems incredible to me, to me there is just one life. So can I still be a Buddhist?' And this question was asked in almost the same words by many people in England, by many people in the West too. So I've usually one answer to that. I say, 'It's possible for you to be a Buddhist and not believe in rebirth, on one condition. And that is that you try to gain Enlightenment in this life itself. Because the aim of Buddhism is to gain Enlightenment, alright, a lot of Buddhists seriously believe that you make the effort to Enlightenment over a series of lives, and eventually you gain Enlightenment. Well, if you want to be a Buddhist, i.e. if you want to gain Enlightenment (and that's what being a Buddhist really means, that you want to gain Enlightenment), but you don't believe in any future existence, well that leaves you with this life. So therefore you undertake to gain Enlightenment in this life. And on that condition you can be a Buddhist and not believe in rebirth. But if you believe that there is no life after death, at the same time you're not prepared to even gain Enlightenment in this life, how can you be a Buddhist? So it's up to us, it just makes it all the more urgent. And I also point out that as far as we can make out from the reading of the Pali Canon, from those portions of the Pali Canon like the Sutta Nipata, especially, the Paranavaga and the Attakavaga, and other quite ancient Pali texts like

the Udana, and portions of the Samyutta Nikaya ... as far as we can make out, from what seems to be the older portions of the Pali Canon, the Buddha himself did not stress rebirth so much because the emphasis was on gaining Enlightenment in this life, just as the Zen people stress very much. Therefore in Zen you don't find much talk about karma and rebirth. Why is that? Because the Ch'an or Zen masters emphasised gaining Enlightenment in this life. The more emphasis you place on gaining Enlightenment in this life the less emphasis you place proportionately usually there is on the teaching of karma and rebirth. Or at least on the teaching of rebirth. So even supposing you emphasise gaining Enlightenment in this life and rather neglect the teaching of rebirth, that is not without precedent even within the Buddha's own Teaching. The Buddha's emphasis, although he did teach rebirth as far as we know, the Buddha's emphasis was on gaining Enlightenment in this life itself. In some Buddhist countries, people use the Teaching of rebirth to put off any serious effort to gain Enlightenment. I've met many a Buddhist from Ceylon or from Thailand who says, 'Why bother to try to gain Enlightenment. I've got thousands of lives ahead, I can do it anytime.' That is not really Buddhism, you see. So in a way the person who doesn't believe in rebirth, but is prepared to make an all-out effort to gain Enlightenment in this life is in a better position than them. Is much more likely to make spiritual progress.

But, as I say, this is a question which is quite often asked. I don't know why it is, but it's been observed - in fact I was talking about this with Christmas Humphreys some years ago - and I remember him saying that it's rather strange than when I started the Buddhist Society, he said, that was then about 35 years earlier, most of the people who came to Buddhism were attracted by, among other things, by the teaching of karma and rebirth. But he said that nowadays people who coming are not attracted by that, there's been a change. And I've also noticed that among our own younger friends, who come into our own movement in Britain, they don't bother much about rebirth. They're quite keen on spiritual development, even the ideal of gaining Enlightenment in this life is very meaningful for them. But they don't find karma and rebirth a very relevant concept. They don't reject it. It's not that they don't believe it. But it doesn't seem to mean very much. They think much more in terms of spiritual development in this life itself.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I wonder with so much of the recent development in the concepts of evolution (unclear)

**S:** I would say as far as my own experience goes in England in our own movement that there is very little interest in the concept of rebirth and in a sense people don't take the trouble to link it up or to explain it in this sort of way. If you asked them whether they believed in rebirth, they'd probably say 'Well, yes, I think I probably do.' But the emphasis is not there, there is not sufficient interest to work out what reincarnation or what rebirth might mean in modern terms. I'm a little interested in this myself, but most of my own friends and pupils in England seem not to be interested. But as an emphasis, the emphasis on gaining Enlightenment in this life (unclear)

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, some teachers have explained the Pratitya Samutpada particularly as something that is happening from moment to moment rather than over a series of lifetimes. What do you feel about that?

**S:** Well, they're right and they're wrong. Because the Buddhist tradition is definitely that the 12 Nidanas are spread over a period of 3 lives. This is perfectly clear. At the same time the texts also say that all 12 Nidanas are operating at every single moment of consciousness. So it isn't a question of 'either-or', in the texts themselves both positions are regarded as parts of the whole truth about the (unclear). So I think that one shouldn't misrepresent Buddhist tradition to make it more acceptable to the Western mind. One shouldn't say the 12 Nidanas do not refer to a series of lives, they only refer to the present life or the present moment of consciousness, just to make that teaching more

acceptable. This would be actually to misrepresent the tradition. One can disagree with the tradition, but one shouldn't misrepresent it. But the tradition does actually interpret the 12 Nidanas both (*unclear*) series of 3 lives, the first 2 Nidanas belonging to the past life, the middle 8 to this life, and the last 2 to the future life. But it also says that they occur at every moment of consciousness. And this is the standard Theravadin or Sarvastivadin teaching on the Pratitya Samutpada.

I can feel a few questions hovering but not quite coming, huh!

\_\_\_\_\_ : (*unclear*)

**S:** Well, in that case you'll be interested to learn that the Eightfold Path series was the first series that I gave in London under the auspices of the then newly-formed Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and I've given many series of lectures since, but that remains the most popular series. And the people who run Dharmacakra Tapes tell me that there are more orders for that series than for any other.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (*unclear*)

**S:** Here you would find it quite basic. You'll also be interested to hear that our Malaysian Buddhist friends are going to bring out the transcribed and edited version of those taped lectures in book form. It's really quite interesting that, just as you have been listening here to those tapes, Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia have been listening to them, because there is a rather interesting situation. Most Buddhists in Malaysia are Buddhists of Chinese origin. The younger people are quite interested in Buddhism but there seem to be two sections, there's usually the English-speaking section, and there's the Chinese-speaking section. The English-speaking section consists of those young Chinese who have been educated to be English-speaking who do not know Classical Chinese, and Chinese Buddhist scriptures are written in classical Chinese, and they can't read that. They also find that the expositions of the monks in Chinese very difficult to follow, so they're dependent for their knowledge of Buddhism on English literature. So amongst other things they've been regularly listening to tapes of mine. So they've been listening to them, especially to the Eightfold Path lectures, and they were so interested in them that they've been transcribing and printing them themselves in their magazine. So now they've undertaken to sponsor the publication of a full and properly edited transcription in book form from Penang and they're going to raise the funds for that purpose, because they find this most useful, so they're going to print some 5,000 copies and they're going to give half to us for distribution. So I hope some copies can find their way to Sydney also. There's certainly plenty ... But you know its true that sometimes people don't want to go through thick volumes of Buddhist philosophy, they want something simpler than that, something that they can put into practice. And especially people who are a little older, they've no time to waste on speculation, they want to get down to practical things.

\_\_\_\_\_ : It's hard enough already!

**S:** But it is quite interesting that that rather simple series of lectures has remained the most popular (*unclear*). Another popular series is of course the White Lotus Sutra series, and that might possibly be transcribed, but

\_\_\_\_\_ : Is there a possibility of the transcription coming here?

**S:** I don't know. I don't know if anyone has (*unclear*). But we have a mass of material that has been transcribed and edited, especially seminars. We've transcribed and edited the seminar on the Bodhicaryavatara by Santideva, there's a whole volume on that, and also these are shorter seminars.

These are mostly published in duplicated form (unclear) because these are less expensive, and I've taken study groups on various texts - in this way we've done The Mangala Sutta, the Ti-Ratana Vandana, the Karaniya Metta Sutta (unclear), these are basic.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear) (Question on Sukhavati)

**S:** Ah yes. Sukhavati is our Centre and Community and also a coop in London. Ah, the movement did originally start in London. We started up about 15 years ago, and we had a meditation class just once a week which I was taking. We had just seven or eight people once a week, but it's all grown from that. So the place we were using in the beginning became too small for us, we moved to North London. And that centre became too small, so we thought we'd better get somewhere really big by our standards, so we managed to get hold of the old Fire Station in East London. It's a magnificent building, it's a listed building, it's of architectural interest. It was built around 1890 I think, it was built by a well-known architect. I forget his name, but it's in the textbooks. So the property belonged to the GLC, and since it was listed as historical architecture, they couldn't pull it down and put up flats or offices. They couldn't change the exterior, so they didn't really know what to do with it. So there were two applicants, an arts group and ourselves, and we were able to put up a scheme for the development of this property which satisfied the authorities, so they let us have it ... (unclear). And we've spent quite a bit of money converting it into a Buddhist Centre. We've spent altogether just over 100,000 which we had to raise over a period of three years, but that's been done now. So it's a 6 storey building situated on a corner in Bethnal Green. I don't know how many people know anything about London, but Bethnal Green is part of what used to be called the East End. And some people were rather doubtful about us having a Centre in the East End, but it's turned out very well, and we get on very well with the local people, many of whom come along and meditate now! Well, we've got this property and we've spent 4 years converting it. It's got 6 storeys. We have the LBC, the ground floor, this comprises 2 large shrine rooms, one of them is quite large, and each shrine room contains a large, in fact larger than life Buddha-image, made by our own members, one is a seated Buddha in meditation. Amitabha, the Buddha of the West, and the other is a standing Buddha in the posture of Abhaya - 'Fear Not' - so these 2 shrine rooms on the ground floor, they're quite beautifully decorated with hangings and lights and all the rest of it. Though I do say so myself, they are quite beautiful shrines, and we've tried to decorate them in a tasteful sort of way, they're not cluttered. There's a lot of bare polished wood. So I think I can say of Sukhavati that the overall feeling is quite harmonious, and quite pleasing. Then we've also got a large lounge and reception room, there's a book store, there's a whole-food or a health-food shop also on that ground floor.

(Interruption for changing tapes)

I'm quite used to this (unclear) And then there are offices on the ground floor, there are study rooms, cloak rooms, that's all on the ground floor. Then there on the first floor is the community floor, there's the community dining room, there's the community library and study room. There's the community kitchen, there are offices, there's my flat in which I stay when I come down to London, and there's others which I forget at the moment. And then on the 2nd and 3rd floors are community study bedrooms. The 5th floor, the top floor, there's the community shrine, where the community members have their Puja and meditation morning and evening. Then there's the basement, the basement houses the press, we have our own press to print our publications; the store for the whole-food business, a photographic studio. So there at Sukhavati we have meditation classes, lectures, study groups, retreat, all the time. Evening time, of course we can have several activities going on in different shrines and different rooms.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (Inaudible)

**S:** Some of our individual members are professionally occupied, you know, in those sort of things. As yet, we don't do anything as an organisation in those (*unclear*) but a lot of a sort of informal counselling goes on all the time, because people come to us, especially through the Order Members, uh, with personal difficulties and problems and some of them have more faith in their contact with us, and communication with us, and meditation, than they have in the usual professional (*unclear*), uh, so quite a bit of that goes on of that sort of thing.

\_\_\_\_\_ : But do you see your priority as being (*unclear*)

**S:** I must say I see the priority as one in the spiritual sphere, because in England, you know, in the welfare state, why there are plenty of facilities for these other things, there are plenty of social workers and so on, but who is doing any spiritual work? Who is teaching meditation (*unclear*) so therefore, we don't underestimate the importance of social work, uh, but, ah, there are other agencies in England looking after that, uh, so therefore we concentrate more on the true Dharma, uh, we feel that we must give priority to that.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I wasn't thinking so much in terms of the people who (*unclear*) but in the terms of the people who need helping ... in society ... as a Bodhisattva practice.

**S:** Well, everything people do is to help, and if you do Dharma-work well, that helps more than anything else in the long run. So in a way that is the greatest of the (*unclear*) because it is said "The gift of the Dharma is the greatest of all gifts", uh, higher than the gift of (*unclear*) higher than the gift of medicine, even higher than the gift of life, it's the gift of the Dharma, which is spiritual life, uh, so we feel this is the best service we can give, especially under present conditions in England. In other places, in India, it might be rather different. In India, we're planning a medical mission, uh, because their conditions are quite different, uh, and we have a member of the Order who is nearly completed his medical training, and he is interested in doing medical work on behalf of the FWBO in India, in a place called Pune. He is at present in Pune. He arranged to come to India to complete his medical training, ... then he goes back to England to sit his final examinations, and then after a year of 'walking the wards' in England, he'll come back to Pune, and take up medical work there. So the situation in India is quite different, uh. In England we don't need to do this sort of work. But to come back to Sukhavati, you know, in addition to the main building, there's 'the Annexe', which is an old Salvation Army hostel, and we have meditation classes, yoga classes, sometimes, in there too. It's a four storey building. We've also got editorial offices there and we've a couple of shops and other businesses just next door to Sukhavati in ... So there's a whole sort of complex there. So there's a women's community about a quarter of a mile from Sukhavati, and there's another women's community about five or six miles to the east. It houses about thirteen women. They run their own community, their own co-op, their own businesses. We stress, by the way, very much, the businesses. The businesses are run on a co-operative basis, and they supply most of the funds of the movement. We don't have to ask the general public for a donation, and we believe in doing things more in this sort of way. Of course, work is good for them. Well, this is one of the discoveries, if I may say so, of the movement, huh. Some of the people who came along to us at the very beginning, - I'm talking of eight or ten years ago - for many of them work was a dirty word, uh. Work was the last thing, you know, they wanted to do. They were taking up the spiritual life, among other things, to get away from, you know, things like work. But (chuckle) uh, in the end, they found that work had its place in the spiritual life, uh. Work that you really want to do, work which was creative, work, even hard physical work such as was required for ... Sukhavati. uh, that if you did it with dedication and commitment, contributed to your spiritual development. It stirred up your energy. So work is one of the things that some people have really discovered in the course of building Sukhavati.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Why are they separative?

**S:** Why? Well, we find that this works better. This is the main reason. But at the beginning we didn't have any sort of separation. All our classes, all our activities were mixed, uh. But when people started getting more deeply into things we found it worked better if we had the retreats in the communities, for men and for women separately. The mixed communities especially, - most of the members, don't forget, were very young people - didn't work very well. We also found that the women needed to be separate, to be more independent, because they had a sort of tendency to rely psychologically and emotionally on the men. If a man came along, well his girl-friend or wife came too. So we wanted to discourage that, and encourage the women to have their individual commitment, uh, and to take on responsibilities themselves. So this is what is now happening. They have their own communities; they have their own businesses and so on. But it was at the centres that the men and the women worked together, with one or two Order Members running it, they took classes and so on. But this is something again. We have to find out for ourselves, you know, but at the beginning we assumed very often more in the West than in the East everything would be mixed, but we didn't find that that worked very well, not on certain levels. So now we have a combination of mixed activities and activities which are - I won't say 'segregated', that's rather an unpleasant word, - but which are separate, uh, and that seems to work fairly well ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : Do ... meditate together?

**S:** Well, both. Ah, well, at classes of course, for men and for women, both will meditate together. The Order Members, who are both men and women, yes, they meditate together. But there are also separate classes, for men Mitras and women Mitras, they meditate separately, or separate retreats, they meditate separately. So you could say it's a combination of 'mixed' activities for men and women, both, and activities which are separate for men and women.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, I am very interested in the mitra system. I've heard about this, but I couldn't find anything which explained it in detail. How does it function?

**S:** You see, a lot of things we don't explain in writing, uh, because we like people to experience them for themselves, but what happens is this - we have these centres ... in addition to Sukhavati, - I think there must be fifteen centres altogether, Sukhavati is the biggest, but there are others which are practically as active, uh. We have these centres, and people come along to these centres, all our classes are open to anybody who cares to come, except for the meetings of Order Members, which are, you know open only to Order Members. Mitras ... too which are meant specially for Mitras, uh, but otherwise all our meditation classes, lectures, courses, are open to anyone. You don't have to be a member. You don't have to join, uh. So anybody who comes along, uh, to any extent, uh, however frequently or infrequently, uh, they are called a Friend, with a capital 'F', uh, and as I said there is no membership. Of Friends, we've got quite a few thousand now, uh, then it happens that people, after a while, after coming along for a while, they start getting, or wanting to get, more regularly involved. They start coming along two or three times a week. They start meditating regularly, uh, and they start helping out with the running of the centre in many small ways. Maybe help financially, or so. So then they become what we call Mitras. They are regulars, who are dedicated to the activities at the centre, uh, and who help in whatever way they can, but they aren't given any actual responsibility. So there is a ceremony for them to become Mitras and special study groups are organised for them, and special retreats are organised for them, both for the men and for the women, to help them go further. So at present there are two hundred Mitras. And then of course, uh, if the mitra decides that he or she wants to commit himself or herself totally to Buddhism, and make that the most important thing in their lives, uh, and to make spiritual development the most important thing in their lives, then they, what we call, Go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and take the Ten precepts. This is called the Upasaka Ordination, or lay ordination, and they become members of the Order, and

of Order Members, we have one hundred and eight, most of whom work full time for the movement. They live mostly in communities, many of them work in the co-ops, they just get their bare living expenses, uh, and if they work in the co-ops, all the profit goes back into the centres, ... So the mitra is sort of half-way between the Friend who just comes along without any sort of sense of belonging or, you know, ... involvement, and the fully committed, and fully dedicated Order Member ... and most Mitras are thinking about ordination, or would like to ... When I left England, in England itself, I think there are twenty-five people who had asked for ordination by the time I left, some had been what we call 'pending' for several years in fact, and has asked several times, uh, but it isn't easy to get to Upasaka ordination in ... uh, In many Buddhist groups you can get it just by asking just once, but in our movement it is much harder than that because we take it as a very serious thing, uh, and we have made it ... So when we feel someone is ready really to commit themselves, and make the Dharma the central thing in their lives, only then do we allow them to take this ordination (under our auspices). So, as I said, a hundred-and-eight ordained people with thirty or thirty ? who are actually preparing themselves, at least half of whom I could call the ... and altogether, as I said, two hundred Mitras. So that is the sort of framework that we ... The centres by the way are all autonomous. There's no head office, uh, every centre is autonomous. Every centre runs its own affairs, uh, and every Buddhist centre is a registered charity, and of these centres there must be about ..., and they are all run by Order Members with the assistance of the Mitras. Membership, legal membership, is open only to Order Members, which means that the actual running of this organisation is in the hands of the spiritually committed, uh. So we are not a society, you can't just join, pay your subscription, and then maybe by some good get elected to the council, and then start running things, even though you may not be a Buddhist, uh. I saw this sort of thing happen in India. I saw it happen, for instance, with the Maha Bodhi Society. They had their headquarters in Calcutta, in Bengal, and they have a general levy, - everyone pays a subscription - so at the Annual General Meeting all the local members turn up, most of whom are not Buddhists, so therefore on their committee there is a majority of non Buddhists, some of whom in fact, so strange are the ways of India, are not sympathetic to Buddhism, (laughter), but the Maha Bodhi Society is a well-known international organisation. They like to belong to it, and belong ... so this does not conduce to the propagation of the Dharma in India, so I was determined to have nothing like that in England, uh, so legal membership of the local FWBOs, which, as I said, are all autonomous, uh, and all the ..., is open only to the Upasakas, only to the ordained, and the committed full-time workers. So we have no trouble at all. We have no internal dissension. We have no (*unclear*) nothing like that ever happens. It has not happened so far.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** Oh, yes, but they have to be upsakas to begin with, uh.

**End of side one, side two**

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** ... it's mainly personal preference. The Order Members keep very close contact with the Mitras, especially those who have asked for ordination. We talk with them, we communicate with them, we go into their motives, they have to attend retreats, uh, they go on solitary retreats, they sometimes see me, and sometimes actually put through it, to make sure that they really do know ... the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Only when they are convinced that they really do, are they (committed?). There is no actual regular set examination. It is easy to get around that, anyone can swot up and answer the questions and pass an examination but to pass the keen ? of Order Members is another matter, and with experience some of them are very ... you know.

\_\_\_\_\_ : So the assessment is ... has to be a tremendous amount of interest.

**S:** Yes, among the older and more experienced Order Members you know this. We've got a regular procedure. If someone wants to become a mitra it's raised at the weekly Order meeting. There is a weekly Order meeting in the evening ... If someone wants to become a mitra ... if someone asks for ordination, they usually ask me personally either ... and they might consult with other Order Members and they ask me to talk with that person, uh, or I may ask that person to wait, or they might come along and raise an objection then that person may have to wait. Some people wait for several years, because we want to be quite sure that at the heart of the Movement we've got a nucleus of really committed people. Everything depends on that. If you haven't got committed people, your constitution, however well-written cannot ... Everything depends on that - this is what ... If you want me to give you our main organisational principle, it is "Everything depends upon commitment". That's what we've got to make quite sure of, uh, that they're the right people. Not just trained in the sense of having been put through the mill, uh, or passing all their examinations, but people who are mature, ... people who can be trusted, people who are responsible, people who have not serving self-interest, people who are really committed.

**S:** I wouldn't say that everybody is equally committed ... but we've got a hundred and eight reasonably committed people, out of at least a third ... about two-thirds work full-time for the movement. They don't have any outside jobs, they don't have family commitments. So this is the way in which we started, in which we ... because when we started - or rather when I started, this, twelve, thirteen years ago, I was determined that all the mistakes I had seen people make in India, and in England, we were not going to repeat, and I made up my mind we would just not compromise, uh. We would not have anything wrong ... we would have a pure Buddhist movement, uh, and the movement is very pure. People are not ambitious, they are not out to (unclear) they are really out to develop themselves, and they really want to give themselves ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... in Australia and New Zealand?

**S:** We have one Australian Order Member, huh, I'd say probably not a typical Australian, not that ... know Australians very well. He's very quiet. (Laughter) He's very quiet. He's not particularly big, and ah, he's very cautious, so he is pondering deeply - having been an Order Member in England for two years - he's pondering the possibility of returning to Sydney, uh, and starting up something ... to help people. So there is that

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, what role is there in the organisation for the family ...?

**S:** Well, for the family as such, you could say - "No role" - uh. The family as such, with the emphasis on "as such" because commitment is by the individual, uh, but we have got, you know, families ... to which individuals are committed because Order Members who happen to be part of but the husband has committed himself individually, the wife has committed herself individually, uh. They haven't got into it, as it were, holding hands, because they can't bear to be separated. Each of them wishes to be an individual, and would have done anyway even if the other hadn't become involved, so in this sense families are involved. We've even got mothers and daughters, and mothers and sons, in the Order. We've got a brother and sister in the Order. But they don't come in as brother and sister, they come in as individuals, uh, so it is just the same with the family. One has to think over and come to your own decisions or they'd just trot along, you know, just like their father, but children do come to our festivals, and sometimes on retreats, but just to experience the general atmosphere, you know ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... of teaching Buddhism to children?

**S:** No. We don't try to teach Buddhism to children. We feel that what is important is that they are just

brought up in a positive atmosphere, answer their questions, you know, when they ask them. If the child asks, you know, "Mummy why do you put light on the shrine?" Well, you know, you answer that question. Children are usually interested in what their parents are doing, you shouldn't have to teach them, you just listen to their questions and answer them ... But we've no organised ... for teaching children at the moment, but as they grow up, I'm sure they will find quite a lot, and then they must make their own decisions, uh. They are not Buddhists just because their parents are Buddhists, we don't believe in that. Well, I mean, the Dharma is open to them, they can become Buddhists if they want, but they must accept it because they want to accept it, as individuals, not just because their parents are.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** Well, in England the situation is rather different than it was, because, in England in quite a few schools, there is just ... comparative religion. You learn about Christianity, certainly, because that's the major religion, but you also learn about other religions, and this is ... I mean, one does find on the part of many of the Christian teachers, there's a much broader attitude than there was ... So that isn't really a practical problem, and sometimes we know that children go to ordinary schools (whose parents are Buddhists) just come home and say "Well, Daddy what do you think the teacher said ... So, as I said, that isn't a practical problem, and also, I must say, that there are not many of our members who have children, uh, ... most are single people and very devoted ... being Order Members. Among the Friends, there are lots of children, ... bring their children to our festivals and some of our special outings for the children. Some of the men Order Members who are not married, and have not got any children of their own are quite happy (chuckles), taking all the children out for the day, for an outing in the park, while their parents get down to a retreat at the centre. You know, this sort of thing happens.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Is there meetings where the whole family ...?

**S:** Yes, there are several, yes, that does happen. The big ... festivals.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear).

**S:** Well, the festivals we do, we take ... well, you know there is the Puja, the chanting - the children love the chanting, they love anything to do with the shrine, you know, they are really interested. Sometimes we have the children making the offerings uh, of candles, incense and flowers. But it isn't really a problem, apart from ... But there are things ... we don't encourage children to meditate, I, personally, am not in favour of that, not before they reach the age of about thirteen or fourteen.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Why?

**S:** It seems that children, since their personalities are not sort of fully formed, can quite easily get into odd psychic states, uh, so - I've had some experience with this - so I decided that children - should certainly be encouraged to sit quietly and enjoy the atmosphere of the shrine, but not to take up serious meditation, not before the age of thirteen or fourteen.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** I'm sure they can go off into odd sort of states. They take it very seriously, you see. They believe everything that you say, unlike the sceptical ..., the child believes, and therefore does it wholeheartedly, therefore they get results, but sometimes the results are a bit odd (Laughter) The child's personality you know, is not very formed, they may get a bit alienated, or go into a trance, and

that sort of state, this sometimes happens. I've known children, very small children, meditating, and going into an unconscious state for seven or eight hours, uh, ... so, you know, one must be careful. So yes, encourage the children to enjoy the shrine, enjoy the festivals, sit quietly while their parents are meditating, and not disturb them and enjoy sitting quietly which children can do but not encourage them actually to practise meditation ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, could I come back to the mitra question? I believe that the system of the Mitras is that they are in groups of two or three ...

**S:** No. It is not really quite like that. I think you've maybe mixed it up with the kalyana mitra as another development.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Oh!

**S:** Yes, what happens is, ah, - it's not exactly a stage or grade - but those Mitras, ah, who have started thinking very seriously about ordination, or Upasaka ... and want to know more about the Order, and what and ask and approach two of the more senior Order Members, and ask them to be their kalyana Mitras or Good Friends, yes, then there is a ceremony for that. This we take quite seriously, it has to be raised at the Chapter of the Order by the ... and so on, as well as the ... Then after that it the duty of these three people to keep up contact with one another and to sort out any psychological and spiritual problems that the mitra may have, which are perhaps blocking the way to ordination, and we do find that even after ordinations, relationships - spiritual friendship will be retained ... spiritual friendship ... This is what we call the kalyana mitra system within the mitra system. It depends also whether suitable people are available, ... rather short of kalyana Mitras as only the more experienced Order Members can take on this responsibility, and also a mitra may be living in an area where there is a small centre, with only very few Order Members, and, you know, he may not feel attached to any of these particular Order Members. So it isn't always very easy. But serious Mitras usually like to have kalyana Mitras, and ... and there is also - every centre has a mitra convenor, there's a General Mitra Convenor for all the Mitras, to deal with questions especially concerning the women. So the mitra convenors meet every month to discuss matters concerning the training and study of the Mitras. Sometimes ... and the Chairmen of centres ... all council ... as I was telling you ... all meetings, meetings of mitra convenors, meetings of co-ops are minuted ... into the records ... so ... can see what work we've been doing, and a copy of the records from each centre are sent to me, for my scrutiny. In that way I keep an eye on the workings of the whole movement, uh ... So I've a pretty good - though I sit ... most of the time, I have a ... every day and it gives me a good idea what's happening [Pause for changing tape]

**S:** I think that - I think I can say that we've found a good, sound, practical way of working. We've found , it's all really ... It's all been tried and tested.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I was going to say, it doesn't appear to me as if there's any sort of fear about experimentation concerning

**S:** No.

\_\_\_\_\_ : To what extent ... recommended on that approach - the experimental approach?

**S:** Well, I'm not sure what exactly you have in mind? For instance - well, just to give perhaps an example - at the moment we're thinking about the Tai Chi Chuan - whether this could be integrated into our, you know ... some people, you know, are going into this, some Order Members ... whether it could be ... But, yes, we like to experiment. But we don't just want to hop from this to that. We want

to integrate a new practice or a new approach into the overall working of ... Though, that's quite natural. We have changed in several respects since we've started, as I mentioned earlier about the separate, and the communities separate, which wasn't something we'd thought about at all ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (inaudible) ... when they don't live together?

**S:** Pardon?

\_\_\_\_\_ : How can you solve them ...?

**S:** Well, in a way, it's happening all the time, uh, because the Order ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** Well, in a way, it isn't necessary because the people who are living in communities, they meet together as a community regularly, there's plenty of opportunity for problems to come up. There are so many opportunities, you don't really have to create special ones. Also, I must say, we don't favour a problem-oriented approach. We favour what we call an ideal-oriented approach. But at the beginning when we started the movement, a lot of people came ... problems, uh, but this is less and less the case. Now people think much more in terms of positive growth and development, and the problems being sorted out as something quite incidental. But within the Order there is great openness and frankness, and people can discuss any personal problem with other Order Members; either those they live with or those they meet at Order Meetings. The same thing with the Mitras. The Mitras can go to Order Members at any time and discuss personal problems. Or they can raise them in the context of a house meeting, or even a co-op meeting. Problems, you could say, crop up at any time, uh, and they are dealt with as they crop up. So you don't need specific circumstances to ... and people certainly do find that their problems do get solved ... Most people do have the odd problem. Maybe they do vary, very very much.

\_\_\_\_\_ : You spoke about a method of meditation. I have been doing regular meditation ... enables you to gain peace of mind, but I really found Buddhist meditation blanks the mind, or that's what ...

**S:** No, Buddhism doesn't teach blanking the mind. I don't think any form of Buddhist meditation advises that. But what we teach in our public classes is mainly two methods, uh. We teach the Mindfulness of Breathing, uh. Far from blanking the mind you concentrate on the process of respiration. There's a certain technique, with different kinds of counts. I won't go into that now. But the aim and object of the mindfulness of breathing is to - not just concentrate - is to unify one's energies, to bring one more together, because people are often rather scattered, uh, so the mindfulness of breathing brings them together, you get quiet, serene, and I'd rather say 'integrated' than 'concentrated', if you know what I mean, your whole being becomes more integrated. And then the other method that we teach is the metta bhavana, which is the development of an attitude of love and kindness towards all living beings, uh. So that a positive emotional state is created within us and we wish well to all living beings. Here again is a definite technique, we practise first towards ourselves, then towards a near and dear friend, then towards a neutral person, then towards an enemy, then towards all four simultaneously, then we go out in widening circles until we envelop all living beings. This is not just an exercise, this is something which people actually experience, ah. Some have some difficulty getting into it, uh, but others manage quite easily, huh. But the result is that you end up in a positive emotional state, and transcending your usual sort of interests, which are confined to oneself. So these are the two basic practices, at all our public meditation classes - the mindfulness of breathing and the metta bhavana, which is called the development of universal loving-kindness,

and these really do work ... and they're not too difficult to do. Most people can do them after a few sessions quite successfully.

\_\_\_\_\_ : The second one, development of ...

**S:** I must say, that after years of experience in England I tend to place more and more importance on the metta bhavana, huh. I regard this as quite crucial, huh. and if anyone is having serious difficulty with this even after say, two or three years, then I become very suspicious, uh, and I want really to go into that, with that person ... What we usually find is that, at the bottom of real difficulty with metta bhavana is self-depreciation, uh. It's very difficult to have a positive attitude towards others if you don't have a positive attitude towards yourself. This seems to be the basis. You can't love others while you're hating yourself, huh, or looking down on yourself. So usually we find that people who have a lot of difficulty doing the metta bhavana are not on good terms with themselves. So that means we have to go into it - why? And sometimes we have to probe quite deeply into childhood experiences, that whole sort of self-image, and self-valuation, and unfortunately, in England at least, there are so many people who don't think much of themselves, who don't like themselves, and this means they can't do the metta bhavana, so if I find after a year or two of practice, people can't get on with the metta bhavana, then it means that some quite serious work has to be done with that person, uh ... on the psychological level, uh. But people do get rid of it. So I don't allow people to escape from the metta bhavana. No! No! Some people try to tell me they are full of love and kindness all the time. They don't need to practise metta bhavana. No, I don't just accept that.

And then there are other practices which are taught to a limited extent in the public classes or sometimes only in mitra classes - the visualisation of the Buddha, or the Meditation on death. These are for some of the more experienced people and then within the Order itself there are various visualisation practices ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, I'm very interested in your communication exercises, very interesting ... In fact we tried a couple .... I'm interested to know the origin of them.

**S:** Well, I can only describe the origin, uh, as I know it myself - they're not as I learned them, or am aware ... heard them, specifically Buddhist. This is something we've integrated into our sort of our overall spiritual practices. I learned them in Bombay, uh, from a woman who had learned something like from somebody else, but adapted in her own way to her teaching in professional work, and a person from whom she had learned them said she had learned them in China from Buddhist monks. I'm not able to check up on that (Laughter) but, uh, actually what I've noticed, the Tibetans do have something like this, uh, in what they call their ... which is their very animated exchange, or question and answer, ... the monks ... a sort of debate ... maybe the origin of ... I wouldn't like to say, it's a possibility, but anyway, the communication exercises if you do them successfully, do work ... It's very good at breaking down barriers, overcoming people's shyness, things like that. If Vajradaka ever does pass through Sydney, get him to take a communication group. He's very good at this. Oh, another thing that's been integrated is therapeutic massage, he's also very good at that. There's some massage that we do without touching the person. I don't know if you know about this?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Yes.

**S:** Yeah, a sort of psychic massage, ah ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** Um, this massage ... It's more refined. He's also practised at this. So these things we've sort of

integrated into the movement as a whole but also coordinated to the overriding spiritual purpose.

\_\_\_\_\_ : You don't have the tail wag the dog.

**S:** No, no. We hope not anyway. There have been times, of course, within certain groups, or on certain occasions where the tail has tried very hard to wag the dog, and sometimes the tail has had to be trimmed a little, you know, down to size, uh, but on the whole ... All these things do help some people, huh. Often people are very blocked, they can't talk, they can't communicate. You know, communication's the essence of spiritual fellowship. Since we attach importance to spiritual fellowship we emphasise communication, we emphasise things like compassion, some ... has something on his mind, well, let him say so, tell everybody, well, not tell the whole world, but within the context of the Order Meeting, or the ... people feel free to stand up and say "Well, look, I've done something foolish, I'm in trouble, I've done ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... self-depreciation is very noticeably a Western characteristic ... do Eastern Buddhists regard this ...

**S:** I think I noticed that the Indians don't have this self-depreciation in this sort of way. I don't know. I mean, I'm just guessing - I suspect that Protestants have it more than Catholics, except that - because many Catholics, or ex-Catholics who have come to us, have strong feelings of guilt, uh, and they have to be (Laughter). Some people are really basically feeling quite guilty about being into Buddhism at all, eh? You know, they sort of half remember what the priests have said in the past about, different religions, and idol worshipping, devil worship and black magic and all the rest of it. It is really true. I remember someone came to see me some years ago in ... with him his Irish girlfriend, eh, and his Irish girlfriend had come straight from the bogs of Southern Ireland, eh, and she was terrified while they were with me, she was almost shaking, eh. And he told me afterwards that she had told him, uh, when they got back to their flat that that she felt she was talking with the devil himself (Laughter) ... because that is the sort of impression they got about, you know, people in religious ... So there is quite a bit of that still left.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Are they only in Ireland?

**S:** Probably not. You find a lot of people with very deep guilt feelings instilled by ... orthodox religion.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (Inaudible)

**S:** Pardon?

\_\_\_\_\_ : How do you ...

**S:** There's no sort of formal - you first of all try to get them in touch with their feelings, eh, to experience the feelings, and to say that this is what they're feeling, "I do feel guilty", eh, and then we get them to try and look at that feeling, and, you know, to see that they've nothing to feel guilty about; that they've been wrongly taught, uh, and they need not feel guilty about ... about Buddhism you know, ... that they've been taught when they were young, that it's a sin, and, you know, ... and they can ... get over it, but I'm afraid it takes a long time, in some cases. We have one Friend, who is now an Order Member, who spent eight years in a Catholic seminary, uh, and it seems to have taken him about twelve years to get over it, or most of those twelve years working on himself quite hard, uh, because what is said to you, what's done to you when you are very, very small, really stays with you, uh. So quite a few people are ... emotionally crippled by the wrong sort of religious upbringing,

uh. Not only, you know, people brought up as orthodox Catholics, but people brought up as Jews, uh, they suffer from it even more. We don't have much experience with ex ?, we got ..., but ... on that basis, uh; but ex-Catholics, and ex-well, maybe Protestants - and, you know, ex-Jews ... I really remember, you know, ... quite a long time ago, before I started the Friends, we were living in Birmingham, we had a day's seminar, and quite a lot of elderly women were there, women about your age. I would imagine, uh ... and we got talking about guilt, uh and, I just happened to ask, (I was relatively new in England in those days) so I said, "Well, is there anybody here, who feels that they have suffered in their lives from, you know, a sense of guilt?" So three elderly women at once jumped up, you know, with great emotion, and they all said that they felt their whole lives had been ruined by the sense of guilt which had been instilled into them by their orthodox religious upbringing. That seemed such a shame, it meant that their whole lives had been ruined by ... and there are still people who have that sort of ... even ... by other people, you know, who have been brought up in this sort of way, so they have to purge their ... and really get over them, and that sometimes means that they might have to do things they've been forbidden to do before - this - so that they experience for themselves that the heavens don't fall on them, uh, "Blind me God"! uh. (Laughter)

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** ... I don't know why. In England, people, you know, often ... In England, in England, people seem very reserved, inhibited and shy, and unforthcoming. It doesn't apply to everybody, and it's more in the South than in the North, and doesn't apply ... to the Scots. Luckily we've got quite a few Scottish Order Members uh, who ... that they're quite different. Most of them are in Glasgow, and they all so different (chuckles) that sometimes the English people sort of shrink. And the Scots are so outward-going and friendly and positive, ... but you know, it varies a bit ... from place to place ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** They are often connected - they're often connected.

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... the education system in the West tends to encourage this sense of worthlessness ...

**S:** Um - it's difficult to say. I think that the modern education, you know, the sort of education a lot of children now are getting ... perhaps tends to go a bit in the opposite direction, uh, ... I can't be too sure about that huh ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear) .

**S:** I think there's been less of a tendency now for young people who, 'fail' so to speak, at school, not to feel any sort of, you know, any sort of inferiority. It might be a lot to do with the home background and their parents' expectations, because parents don't have any particular expectations ... but if your parents, especially if you're very ... are really screwed up, to the idea of your succeeding and doing well, and getting to a better school and getting to a university, and you don't, you may feel, you know, you've let them down, you may feel bad about it. You may start resenting your parents for making you feel ... Resentment against parents is very common in England, among young people in England, I don't know how it is here, but you know, it's almost a joke, ... joke you could say, ... parents, of course, you know, everyone hates their parents, of course, it's taken for granted. Everybody gets on badly with their parents, it's taken for granted. And that's the ... that people have to work with this. You usually find, that when people get involved with the movement, you know, in England, for a couple of years, they start thinking not so harshly of their parents, uh. Not that they start seeing eye-to-eye with them, far from it, but they begin to feel, emotionally, more positive

towards them, and then willing to see them, otherwise for most people, at least for most young people ... they couldn't care less about them ... they want to get as far away from their parents as possible and stay away. That is the average attitude. That has ... changed now, uh, and some people have succeeded in establishing, with a bit of work, a quite positive relationship with their parents, to their great surprise. Even finding out that they could love their parents, even though their parents didn't want to change or didn't want to become involved with Buddhism. I personally emphasise this very much, uh. I personally believe that if people have got unresolved problems with their parents, and continue to have negative emotions towards their parents, it definitely holds them back in their own growth and development. I've sometimes said "You can't have a neutral attitude towards your parents; you either love them or you hate them." If people say they're neutral I just don't believe them, unless they've been in very special circumstances. If people don't have any particular feelings towards their parents, ten to one, they hate them, and they've got to work on that, uh, because so long as you know you feel hatred, in that sort of way, towards your parents, which are after all in a very close connection, ... so therefore if you hate them, you really do hate them, if you haven't got over that, it holds you back in your personal development, so it's something to be dealt with. And a lot of our young members have had to deal with this ... So I encourage people, after all, just to re-establish contact with ... on a new sort of basis uh. To really talk to them, try to get them to understand what they're doing. But even if they can't understand, alright, maybe they adopt a positive friendly attitude towards them - I think this is quite important on purely psychological grounds, uh, or even spiritual grounds. Not that the parents were necessarily right, they might be actually dead wrong, but that is no reason for hating them, you as a mature individual. If you hate your parents, it really means that you've not outgrown infantile irrational attitudes. You're still a child, uh, if you hate your parents, still a small child. But if you become an individual, and a mature person, even if your parents have done you great harm, you can forgive them, and you can still love them. And some parents do a lot of damage to their children. One of our members, one of our Order Members, is a woman with five grown-up sons, uh, five of them, very big, tall fellows, about thirty down to twenty. One day I asked her, I said, "Do you think in bringing up your five sons, that you've made any mistakes?" So she thought for a few minutes, then she sighed and she said, " ... They've all seemed to have turned out quite well ... So these are the sort of practical issues we have to deal with. It's not just a question, you know, of studying the Dharma in the abstract huh. It is a question of the living development of the individual, and, you know, it is easy to get side-tracked into these thirty-two kinds of sunyata, and all the rest of it, ... the problems, but you have to resolve these things if you are to develop as an individual and if you're not developing as an individual, well, you are not ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : I think this is one of the very basic ... Buddhism can make ...

**S:** Oh yes! It is very practical. It can sort out people's ... in a very positive sense. It can help people ... well, we've confirmed this hundreds of times, ... we see it. I personally, can see it. I see people changing over the years, sometimes see people changing quite radically in the course of a weekend; weekend retreat; you see the change taking place before your very eyes, they go away quite different, and very often they stay different. So when one sees this repeatedly ... believe that Buddhism can do this, the Dharma can do this. But it's not Buddhism just as a sort of religion which you sort of follow, huh. It is something very down-to-earth and practical that you really have to get to grips with, ah, otherwise it won't do you any good at all.

\_\_\_\_\_ :

**S:** No, I don't quite know. At the beginning a lot of our friends were quite psychologically oriented, read a lot of Freud and Jung and Fromm and, all the rest, but we didn't find it helpful. In fact we found often it side-tracked people. I'm not speaking so much of the scientific study of psychology, I was thinking of, you know, reading books about psychoanalysis and psychiatry, ... analysis, and

things like that which didn't help very much. And people sort of got all sorts of ideas and abstract notions, and talked about them a lot, but they didn't seem to get down to talking about their own problems. So I tend to discourage people getting involved with psychology in that sort of way. If you just get into Buddhist meditation, and you set up ... communication, and chanting and sharing ... try to re-establish good relations with your parents, I think you can dispense with psychology. I hope you're not a psychologist! (Laughter)

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... applied psychology rather than a ...

**S:** There's a lot of even theoretical psychology in Buddhism, in the Abhidharma, and the Yogacharya. But it's never just theoretical. There's some practical application.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear)

**S:** Um ... um ... practically everything is psychological whether one ... or not.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (Inaudible)

**S:** Do you mean in Sydney, or this room?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Aw, yeah, ...

**S:** Western Buddhism.

\_\_\_\_\_ : (Inaudible)

**S:** Yes, yes. Well, this is a strange thing, because, you know, when I returned to England ... in 1954, I found that among the English Buddhists at that time, the Going for Refuge, uh, to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, was never mentioned. No one ever spoke about this. Sometimes at the beginning of meetings they'd chant Buddhāṃ saraṇaṃ gacāmi, Dharmāṃ saraṇaṃ gacāmi - but that was all. So I personally felt that this was a great lack, uh, and so therefore when I started up the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, and the Western Buddhist Order, I made the 'Going for Refuge' the central thing, uh. So you could say the whole of our movement revolves around 'The Going for Refuge'. So people study, people try to understand what does it mean - to Go for Refuge to the Buddha. What do you really mean when you say that "To the Buddha for Refuge I go." What does it mean? In what sense is the Buddha your refuge? And in the same for the Dharma. What does it mean to go for refuge to the Dharma? What does it mean to go for refuge to the Sangha? Because all these practices that I've described, like sharing your problems with other people, communicating better. These are forms of going for refuge to the Sangha in a very simple practical way. So these things have been explained very thoroughly within our own movement in England and everybody understands them, and it's the central thing, especially for the members of the Order. But it is a very unfortunate thing that usually Western Buddhists just don't have any ... Unless - I've never heard it mentioned. But even in Eastern Buddhist countries in Ceylon, in Burma, in Thailand, they don't pay enough attention to the Going for Refuge. The Tibetans do ... The Tibetans pay a lot more attention to it. So do the Chinese Buddhists. But you know, many Indian and Sinhalese Buddhists that I've spoken to, have no idea that the Going for Refuge means anything more than just chanting the ... without thinking about the meaning. So, in a way, this is the centre of everything. If you don't 'Go for Refuge', if you don't understand what it means to 'Go for Refuge', well, you just can't be a Buddhist, it is just as simple as that. So we emphasise this, again and again, as the most important ... the Going for Refuge, uh. And we often speak of it in terms of commitment. Commitment to the Ideal of Enlightenment, commitment to the Path leading to Enlightenment, and commitment to the ... spiritual

fellowship with those are ... the path, and all ... People in England find the expression "refuge" a bit difficult to ... So often we speak in terms of commitment, you commit yourself to the Buddha, you give yourself to the Buddha, you give yourself to the Dharma, give yourself to the Sangha.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, have you ever been approached by somebody who comes into that sort of ... saying I like everything about Buddhism, I like the philosophy, I like meditation, but all the devotional stuff reminds me of Christianity.

S: ...

**[End of tape one tape two]**

*[There may be a piece missing here]*

You see when you are young, you know, you are free, you don't have any responsibilities, all you need is a pack on your back, you know, a few Traveller's cheques in your pocket, and there you are, off to ... a passport I suppose - this being a very conditioned world. (Pause) Well, how are we going for .. nine o'clock already?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Bhante, would you now like a cup of tea?

S: Well, that's not a bad idea ... Is this what you usually do? Is this a good Australian habit?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Well. I think you can see by the expressions on their faces how .... everybody is feeling tonight, so any words from me are superfluous.

S: Well, I'm very happy indeed to have had this opportunity of meeting everybody and setting up a little communication and that sort of thing. Because, I must say you know, one of the things I insist on in all the Dharma work, is making it interesting for me, (Laughter) Giving a lecture, you know, just not having a response from the audience ... is not always the most interesting experience .. but you know, having a gathering like this, having people asking me questions, and seeing what they think ... is much more interesting, for me at least, I don't know about you, but, ah, I appreciate this ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : ... New Zealand, ...

S: Yes, we have ... there, in Auckland ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : (unclear) .

S: Well, that's pure accident you could say. Pure accident. One of our Order Members, for personal reasons, emigrated to New Zealand, and he didn't feel quite at home among Buddhist groups, groups. So he started one. And then another one popped up in New Zealand, started by a Malaysian Chinese Buddhist who had been playing tapes, and then two years ago another one popped up in Wellington, by an Order Member, a New Zealand Order Member, who had spent some time in England. So, ah, in this way these three groups ... Four years ago, where there were only two, they prevailed upon me to pay a visit, I found that some people there had in fact prepared themselves for ordination with the help of this ... Order Member, so they received ordination. Since then ... and things have been carrying on. I think there are eight Order Members there at the moment ... and I think they have got about two dozen Mitras, several of whom have asked for ordination ...

\_\_\_\_\_ : You'd better tell them to ... over here.

**S:** Well, there is one Australian Order Member who is pondering at the moment ... If he does come ... and take it from there.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Would you like to take some tea ...

**S:** I would indeed

**End of Transcript**

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