

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

ORDINATION RETREAT 1977

Held: Somewhere in Cumbria

Date: 1977

Those Present: Not noted at the time of the session, but including:
The Venerable Sangharakshita, Ajita, Dharmapala, Dhammarati, Asvajit,
Subhuti, Dipankara

Transcriber's note: At times a number of the participants who are on this seminar speak very quietly and were not able to be deciphered. These gaps are indicated by open and closed brackets in this transcript [()].]

Sangharakshita: We are going to have in the course of this weekend, in fact in the course of today, two question and answer cum discussion periods. So what I thought was we would divide them in this way; in the first of these periods, that is to say this period, we will deal with topics arising more or less directly out of the whole question of Ordination. This will be especially appropriate in as much as this is in fact a specially called ordination retreat and it may be a good opportunity, in fact it will be a good opportunity, to throw a little light on these matters, not only for the benefit of those who are being Ordained but for the benefit of everybody because sooner or later we hope everybody will start thinking, or thinking of thinking quite seriously in these sort of terms. And even if you aren't as yet, it will be interesting to know at least in what terms others are thinking, others who are taking this step of Ordination. Also I want to say one or two things myself in connection with something which obviously is involved with ordination; that is the precepts. We can come to that a little bit later.

Then this afternoon the second such period we can throw the discussion open to much more general topics to include things like meditation, aspects of Buddhist doctrine, aspects of the functioning of the Movement itself and so on. But this morning let us try to keep it more or less to issues revolving around the central topic of ordination which suggests commitment and so on. So who would like to set the ball rolling? Anybody can set it rolling, it doesn't have to be one of those who are going to be Ordained.

: Well I've got a question. It seems to me probably the biggest sort of difficulty is getting round the idea or getting some sort of idea of or faith in the ideal of Enlightenment. And it seems like, well I feel that I'm committing myself in the hope that this faith in Enlightenment will sort of arise as a consequence. I don't feel as if I can see that such a thing as Enlightenment is possible, even though there is the historical precedent of the Buddha and that in a way I feel like I'm doing it after a lot of consideration but still in a way I'm sort of blind, I'm trying to grasp the concept, if it is a concept, that I suppose I could grasp.

S: Though again one could say that if one could grasp the concept, well you probably wouldn't be grasping the right thing. If you can't grasp the concept of Enlightenment in a way that's good. I think

it would be almost suspicious if you felt that you could grasp it and that you in fact knew exactly what it was that you were aiming at and exactly how you were going to get there.

There's a saying of Cromwell's which I've quoted once or twice but I will quote it again to the effect that A man never flies so high as when he doesn't know where he is going. It's as though one has got to trust the sort of innate tendency, the deepest and truest tendency of one's own being. It is as though one sees, as it were, at work within oneself a process, the end of which or the culmination of which one can imagine as it were in a dim and distant sort of way and which one calls Enlightenment. But the position seems to be rather that you feel within yourself something happening, something growing, something developing, and then you extrapolate this - well supposing this was to grow more and more, supposing this process was to continue, supposing it was to arrive at a successful conclusion, well that would be Enlightenment. It is more like that rather than that one has an abstract idea of Enlightenment and is convinced about it and is working towards that. It may be like that for some people but I think that if it is in those cases one has to be a little careful that they're not just too confident or too slick, as it were, about it.

Do you see what I'm getting at? It can't be very clear, by the very nature of the process and what we can only think of as the goal of the process. You are giving form, you are giving definition, you are giving a more accurate sense of direction to some sort of general sense within yourself.

Maybe one should think of oneself as being more like a sort of plant, or not even a plant, a seed. You are deeply buried underneath the earth. Maybe there's several feet of earth on top of you, but as you are sort of nestling down there, not exactly rotting away but you are just sort of down there buried and you feel somehow coming from above and penetrating through the earth a sort of warmth and you just start stirring, you germinate. And you can't see the sun, maybe you've no idea what is the sun - I mean how could you form an idea of the sun - but you just respond to that warmth and you germinate and you start sprouting upwards in that direction. This is the sort of thing that happens. You follow the direction of the warmth as it were but you don't know anything about the sun. When your little shoot emerges above the soil, well even then you won't know anything about the sun but you will feel a little bit and you will start expanding and opening and in that way the whole process continues until you stand in the open sunlight as a fully opened flower. Maybe that corresponds to what we call Enlightenment. I could continue the metaphor indefinitely but you see the sort of thing I am getting at. It's not that you have a clear picture of what Enlightenment is and then you sort of quite confidently go towards that and you reach and realise it. It isn't so clear cut as that.

If one has this sensation, as it were, of the warmth coming from above or the light coming from above and if one is simply following that, even though one doesn't know anything about the source of that light or is not able to define it or describe it, that's quite enough. One is faithful as it were, true, as it were, to that warmth and to that light. And one is following it and trying to reach the source from which it comes, even though you can't see that source or even though thinking of it as a source even is just a way of thinking, but we can't think of it in any other way if we are to think at all.

But going toward Enlightenment and reaching and arriving there and travelling in that direction is certainly not having a clear picture say of a place like Glasgow which you might never have seen before and you know the road and you know that you are going to go along the road in a certain way and get to Glasgow. That is the sort of analogy we often use but it isn't really very much like that at all.

_____ : There's a difficulty when people say, if say I've got some doubt about what I'm doing

and they might say "well as long as it conduces towards Enlightenment" and in a sense it's unreal, there's just nothing to go on.

S: Well you won't know whether it conduces towards Enlightenment in the absolute sense until you're there, and then you will look back and you will see your whole meandering path. 'Oh yes, when I did that I went away, and when I did that I came back.' You will know that then, but at present one can only try to assess one's development over a much shorter period and that is quite difficult.

Sometimes you may not know at the end of a year whether you have made progress or not. You only know that you have been working quite hard and doing your best, but whether it results in any overall absolute progress in terms of approximation to the goal you may not be able to say at all, not with any certainty.

Bernie Tisch(?): Something I have been wondering Bhante is, you at the moment doing the ordinations, the Initiations, you are not going to last forever then what?

S: Then what? Well obviously somebody else will have to do it whether collectively or singularly. But this is not unthought of and not unprovided for. If Buddhism could survive the Buddha's death it can survive anybody's death. (Laughter)

Ajita: The feeling I get when I was going for Ordination was that it hadn't got anything to do with my intellect at all. As though my heart was set on opening up to waves and flows and it seemed like the only thing to do. There didn't seem too much of a choice involved really although I did ask for ordination.

S: Well you could even say that if you really do ask then you must receive, or in that sense your asking is your receiving - if you really and truly do ask.

It's obviously not a step that you take out of feeling in the narrow sense. Because if it isn't a question of intellect it doesn't mean that it therefore must be a question of feeling. When you say that it's a decision as it were from the heart it doesn't mean that it's something that you have done stupidly, unintelligently and blindly. It means in a way that though what people often think of as the intellect - as a split off autonomous rational part of you - just isn't like that in your case. It hasn't been split off and made autonomous in that sort of way. When one says that one does something from the heart it means really totally, it means that your head is involved as well as your heart actually. Your thought as well as your feeling but they aren't split off and divided from each other so you are making the decision or responding as a total person. Which is the way it should be.

So it's not a question of intellectual conviction, it's not a question of intellectual conviction just by itself as it were. It's not a question of what you feel, it's just a question of your total response, your total response to something absolute and something unconditioned. It's that total response that we call faith, it's that total response which constitutes commitment or going for refuge when its objects are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

So it's, to go back to my analogy, it's just like when the little seed or the shoot feels the warmth of the rays of the sun it cannot but go in that direction. It would be a very foolish and suicidal little seed [Laughter] that when it started feeling the warmth coming from above it deliberately turned its back and went burrowing down into the cold depths below. But some human little seeds do just that, but

sooner or later they just learn better.

Ajita: When someone asks you why you got ordained then it can be very hard to answer that question.

S: It's very difficult because you have to establish first of all a whole sort of framework of reference.

_____ : One sort of framework that occurs to me is the whole Buddhist tradition and from what I can see it did have some 500 years of (unclear).

S: Well you could then put it in historical terms and say that if we look back in the case of Buddhism at least its history as a religion, for want of a better term, as a teaching, as a tradition, has been completely positive. It's been pacific, it has no record of persecution or intolerance or anything corresponding even remotely to the Inquisition or anything like that. It has always been a peaceful positive and cultural influence, if one doesn't wish to look any further than that. A very wholesome influence in the history of a very large part of humanity and one just wants to align oneself with that wholesome influence, an influence that makes work for peace and happiness for all. One can put it just in those very simple terms. [Pause]

People may nowadays put the objection that Buddhism doesn't seem able to stand up very effectively to some of the forces of the modern world and that even in the course of the last few years Buddhism, as an institution at least, has been effectively wiped out in many places. What would one say to that? They point to Tibet, they point to Cambodia now or to China - maybe point even to Japan - Buddhism isn't doing very well in Japan, is it. So what would you say to that? They might agree that Buddhism has been a very positive influence in the past but think it was in a way too mild and too easy going to be able to survive in the modern world.

_____ : Since you have started ().

S: Yes that's true too. Dr. Conze makes this point. Dr. Conze makes the point that religious orders are much tougher and longer lived as a general rule, both Buddhist and Christian religious orders, than States. How long did the Roman Empire last? How long has the Catholic church lasted? How long has the Benedictine order lasted? Fourteen hundred years? The Buddhist order in its different branches, well its still really quite vigorous after 2,500 years. What state, what empire has lasted 2,500 years? So Conze makes this point. Actually he says, despite their Passivism and their weakness, he's thinking especially, I think, in terms of monastic orders not just churches in a broader almost ethnic sense but monastic orders as such are very long lived. That is quite an interesting point. They have survival value.

Subhuti: Perhaps also a lot of what has died out of Buddhism in the East, it's perhaps almost better that it did.

S: Well it didn't die out it was killed off. But I did say 'institutional' and I used that word quite deliberately. I do think there were some quite positive institutions that were incidentally destroyed. But that isn't to say that they were all having a positive effect or functioning positively by any means.

Dharmapala: Well I think that any individuals from within that in the positive sense get away from it and it carries on in another place.

S: Yes, right, well some have got away to the West we know and to India.

I've mentioned before it was very interesting to me to see what happened when Tibetan refugees started pouring into Kalimpong. Especially interesting to see what happens to the monks. Some monks just couldn't survive as monks. Within six months they were no longer monks, some of them had married, got jobs and settled down and that was that, because you see in a sense they never had been monks. They had been totally dependent in that respect on their environment and the support of the institution to which they belonged. But there were others who survived as monks despite great difficulties, who didn't think of giving up the monastic life or giving up Buddhism. They were a smaller number but they carried on.

So it's as though the destruction of the institutions does have the effect also of serving as a sort of weeding out process. Though incidentally also some very good people may be killed and we know that also happened in Tibet.

So there is this question of true survival value and if one thinks in terms even of just survival, institutional survival, all the great religious orders of history, that is the different branches of the Buddhist Sangha, the different Christian monastic orders, even I think also, although I am not so familiar here, some of the Sufi orders are very long lived - much longer lived than states and empires. So that should give us cause for thought. The Jain monastic order is still alive and that is a little older than the Buddhist monastic order or orders.

So your buildings may be destroyed, you may be chased out of your own country even but if you survive and you are committed to the Dharma then the whole thing survives. So in a way in becoming a Buddhist and becoming an Upasika and becoming ordained one is aligning oneself with, at the very least a very durable element in human history and a very Positive element.

_____ : I often get the feeling when there's an Ordination retreat approaching, like this one, that what's happening is (indistinguishable mumbling!).

S: Well you could say there's a sort of intersection of time and eternity and when you follow the path this is what happens, when you go for refuge this is what happens, because following the path or going for refuge represents a going from the conditioned to the unconditioned. The conditioned is in time, the unconditioned is out of time. You're going from the timely to the timeless. So there should be at least a feeling of the timeless and the timelessness around when you're committing yourself to the timeless. The Dharma is called timeless (akalika) isn't it? So it should seem for a little while as though time stands still as though you've transcended time. You're going for refuge is, well I won't say completely out of time, but you start going for refuge within time but then you find yourself out of time in some strange and puzzling manner. [Pause]

_____ : That thing about time came up with me with the doctrine of reincarnation in the Buddhist doctrine, because I'd never thought much about it. But then I thought in a sense it's me accepting me for myself. Me accepting previous lives and perhaps lives that come afterwards, it seemed to widen me right out in a sense. [Pause]

S: Has anybody thought very much about the precepts recently, have they been the subject of discussion anywhere recently or has everybody tended to take them as read?

Ajita: I have been finding out in the Glasgow Centre about that.

S: In what way, can you

Ajita: I think everybody became sort of precept conscious, I know I had a personal check up to see if I was in fact spot on with the precepts as much as I could be.

S: The results of the check-up were satisfactory? (Laughter)

Ajita: Actually one point that rose in my mind was the difference between the conditioned morality that I've inherited from my family and my society and probably my protestant upbringing and actually, my own natural sort of unrestricted morality.

S: What do you mean by unrestricted morality?

Ajita: A guiltless morality which wasn't based on any sort of pleasing any hierarchy or higher figure.

S: Well you know in the Buddha's teaching there is the traditional distinction of the two kinds of sila. I think I have mentioned this in lectures. There's what is called in Pali, Pannatti sila and what is called Pakati sila. Pannatti is conventional morality and Pakati is connected with the Sanskrit word 'prokrit' - 'nature', natural morality.

Conventional morality is simply that which conforms to the requirements of society, which don't have any true ethical basis. Whereas natural morality, Pakati sila, is sila which has such a basis. That is to say moral conduct which is a direct expression of skilful states of mind and which therefore has under the law of Karma certain consequences, a certain effect on one's character also. So this distinction is made very, clearly, especially in connection, say, with the rules of the Bhikkhus. For instance there is a rule for the Bhikkhus that you shouldn't let your hair grow longer than a certain length. This is said to be a matter of conventional morality. In other words it is just a sort of social convention. If you break this there is no karmic consequence. Whereas a matter of natural morality is say when you tell a lie with intention to deceive. On account of your unskilful mental attitude there is an effect upon your character, a modification of your own mental state and a consequence under the law of karma.

In the same way say matters of conventional morality are say whether you have one wife or two wives. This is according to social tradition. In some parts of the world a man who has more than one wife is looked down upon, in other parts of the world a man who has only one wife is looked down upon. This is a matter of conventional morality. But that you should be greedy or that you should be full of hate or free from hate, these are matters of natural morality. You see what I mean, so this distinction is there but you weren't thinking quite in those terms I think. I think that what you were getting at was that you mentioned 'guilt free' as though one's morality is self-regulating. You'll have a sort of instinct for what is good for you without having to listen to the voice of conscience in that narrow sort of socially conditioned sense.

Ajita: Yes, I feel that I'm more in touch with that sort of natural morality and in touch with metta and I guess that I'm more aware.

S: Your organism, as it were your moral organism if one can use that term, knows what is good for it. This is of course quite different from just doing what you like or doing your own thing in a

subjective sense.

Ajita: I think also that it might be good to break the so-called conventional morality just to see what the effects are.

S: On you or on others?

Ajita: Me.

S: I think - I hope I'm not going to be misunderstood here - I think, sometimes one has to do this. In other words to challenge one's own acceptance of what society requires for no other reason than one's feelings of guilt. Because one is in a way treading on slightly dangerous ground here but when you are leading a spiritual life you are in a very dangerous situation anyway.

Ajita: It seems much better than an air of guilt which in a sense is worse I think.

S: I must say though that I also distinguish two kinds of guilt. I think there is a sort of healthy guilt which is connected with a true sense of responsibility. If you are an individual one of the characteristics of individuality is responsibility. That is to say that you can be aware of the consequences of your own actions. Before you perform a certain action you can see what the consequences are going to be and you take those consequences into consideration when deciding whether to perform that action or not. Having performed the action and having experienced the consequences or seen the consequences, you can look back to your vision and motivation and you can perhaps sometimes see that you weren't sufficiently responsible, you didn't think sufficiently what the consequences would be and you can experience guilt in a sense that you can recognise that what you did was not correct and that you are responsible for that and responsible for any untoward consequences and that you have incurred some guilt, and you can recognise this quite healthily and objectively. But this is non-neurotic guilt.

But neurotic guilt is simply the awareness of having done something of which other people would disapprove if they knew and on account of that disapproval would withdraw their love, affection, protection esteem from you. That is neurotic guilt.

So I don't want to give the impression that guilt is always negative or always wrong and you should never feel any guilt. I think some people have taken some of the things I have said in that way in the past. For instance sometimes people have said to me "We mustn't say such-and-such to such-and-such a person, that will make them feel guilty". As though you must never say anything to anybody that would ever make them feel guilty. You should certainly not try to manipulate them because this is what it amounts to, through their neurotic sense of guilt, but you should certainly not hesitate to induce any genuine objective feelings of guilt or irresponsible behaviour on their part which is actually irresponsible etc.

But sometimes people seem to object to anything unskillful being pointed out because if you point it out that person will feel guilty. And they take it for granted that on no account must anybody ever feel guilty about anything. Well that's reacting to the opposite extreme. Have you come across this in any way?

Ajita: I actually said that to somebody once when they pointed something out to me and I said "You've made me feel guilty" and they said "I'm very sorry, I never meant to do that to you".

S: Well if you made them feel guilty, before saying that you are very sorry you have to ascertain whether that was justified or not. Supposing somebody says "Yes, I will do that job", They promise, maybe at a Council meeting "I will do it." And then at the next Council meeting you ask "Have you done that?" and they say, "No I haven't done it." And then you say, "Well that isn't very good. We were relying upon you doing it." So if they say "You shouldn't have said that it made me feel guilty." they're wrong. You had every right to say that. They should feel guilty in that sort of situation. That is if they have no valid reason for failing to do what they promised to do, They should feel bad about it. That's quite healthy.

Not that you should rub it in. Because then irrational, neurotic feelings of guilt may also become linked with those objective rational feelings of guilt. There's no need to make a big issue of it but certainly if a person say fails to keep their promise they should feel not very happy about it, even a bit guilty about it.

_____ : Isn't a healthy guilt when you feel a sense of shame?

S: Yes it is more like that. I wouldn't say it was synonymous with that but yes it is more like that.

_____ : Remorse?

S: Remorse again I think can be either neurotic or non-neurotic.

Subhuti: Usually the problem seems to be that the two are confused. It may be appropriate to feel what you call objective guilt but there are feelings of neurotic guilt involved at the same time,

S: Yes, it's very difficult to separate the two sometimes.

Subhuti: People often rebel against their feelings of neurotic guilt and therefore find it difficult to acknowledge even the objective kind.

S: Well they have to be encouraged to do that and the fact that they start feeling guilty in a neurotic way when you point out something on account of which they ought to be feeling guilty in a purely healthy way mustn't be taken as a prohibition against your ever pointing out that anybody has failed to do something and has thereby incurred objective guilt. Obviously if you know that they are very prone to neurotic feelings of guilt well you will just touch upon these things rather lightly. But you won't accept that sort of plea for avoiding that issue altogether.

_____ : Sometimes I feel on my part that it's somehow against the precepts to sort of invoke in another person or bring up any sort of reaction at all that brings out the reactive mind.

S: Well the reactive mind is very operative in most people. I think if you are not careful you will end up by not saying or doing anything. (Laughter)

Dharmapala: I went through quite a long experience of misunderstanding the precepts and taking them very literally that time. With the result that I became more and more silent and yet more and more unable to truly communicate in an open sort of way. [Pause]

_____ : I've had a lot of really creative communications with people in the Friends which have

been quite painful. We've had to be unafraid to inflict pain on each other and its very difficult. Not inflict pain on each other but you often have to say things to each other which hurt.

Dharmapala: In the past that's where with regard to the precept on harsh speech I would have thought the more you could say in the contact the less hard to do that thing. I see that now as more of a misunderstanding where that's concerned.

_____: Are the precepts designed, if I can use that word, for people who didn't suffer from the depression we tend to suffer from in the West? I feel almost as if I'm not healthy enough to practise the precepts.

S: I think if one was truly healthy one wouldn't even have to think of the precepts. I think people must have been a little unhealthy even in the Buddha's day otherwise there wouldn't have been any precepts at all. The Buddha himself does say that things like precepts are antidotes to poisons which suggests that poisons were there, and healthy as people were in the Buddha's day he still said that all worldly people were mad. Even then.

_____: Is it in keeping with the precepts to not be angry? I feel as if by being angry I'm breaking the precepts.

S: Again I make a distinction between anger and hatred. Put it this way, hatred is an expression of the desire actually to injure people and harm people. Rather it is the mental state of wanting to injure people and wanting to harm people. But anger isn't like that. You can be very angry but not actually want to harm people or injure people. It's as though anger is more like a frustrated energy which is trying to break through or burst through, but though it wants to break through or burst through it doesn't actually want to do any damage. Even when you are angry you are sufficiently mindful, even when expressing the anger, to avoid doing any actual damage. But I think there are occasions in which anger in that sort of way, in that sort of sense is not unskilful. But hatred of course is always unskilful and cannot by its very nature be anything else.

So if you speak to somebody with hatred, which means intending to hurt them, intending to do them injury, intending to harm them, that is very unskilful. But you can speak with anger without it necessarily being unskilful. You just feel so strongly it bursts out or breaks out but doesn't do any real damage. There's no desire or no intent to hurt, no intent to destroy. It is simply that you want to be free, that you want to break through the constraint or restraint that you are subject to.

_____: (unclear)

S: Well you only feel anger when you felt frustrated by the child's refusal to obey you. But you wouldn't actually want to do the child any harm, in fact you would be very careful not to do the child any harm even if you did get angry with it that would certainly not be your intention. Your intention would be to keep it away from the fire.

Subhuti: It's more like putting a charge of dynamite in to get rid of a blockage of rocks or something like that. Extra energy being drawn up.

S: But it's because of the resistance that energy accumulates and eventually it forces its way through and that is anger. So getting angry is not at all unskilful in the way that being full of hate is unskilful.

So I think a lot of people are confused about this and repress their anger unnecessarily.

[End of side one side two]

Dharmapala: That's sort of an open area with regard to angry speech in a positive sense even being regarded as harsh. Perhaps it doesn't need to be, it can be very powerful but not harsh in the negative sense that we define it.

S: Obviously you have to watch yourself and be sure that hatred doesn't enter into it. Sometimes it may in the midst of the anger there is a bit of hatred. You're not just angry, you've been hurt yourself perhaps and therefore you want to inflict hurt on the other person. Sometimes there is a mixture of anger and hate or there is just a flash of hatred in the midst of the anger.

But if you habitually repress your own anger I think it will eventually turn rather sour and it may then even develop into something like resentment or even hatred, certainly resentment if you regularly suppress your, as it were, healthy anger.

I was having some thoughts recently about the second precept. What is the second precept?

_____ : Adinnadana.

S: Adinnadana. So not to take the not given. Why not say don't steal, what's the difference? Why is it not to take the not given?

Dhammarati: It's much wider isn't it, you need to practice it, It's simple not to steal. Something that's actually given to you ()

S: So how literally is one to take that?

Asvajit: As far as one can.

S: All right, put it in another way, or at least look and explore another direction. Not given by whom?

_____ : Whoever's got it! [Laughter]

S: Ah, yes, whoever's got it. So suppose he's got it wrongfully as you think, have you got the right to take it from him? Suppose you had the right to have it, do you have the right to have it according to Buddhism?

_____ : No.

S: No, not according to this precept it would seem. So this raises a further question - in Buddhism do you have any rights? What is meant by rights anyway? Do you see what I mean?

For instance, just think for the moment in rather familiar terms. Supposing certain people have been exploited and certain other people have got what seems to be a quite unfair proportion of what one would have thought should have been shared amongst them all. But have those people got the right to take what they consider to be their lawful share? Or should they just wait to be given. Supposing they're not given then what do they do? Well the precept says that you shouldn't take what is not

given.

Asvajit: There may be a middle way surely.

S: Which is?

Asvajit: Which is acquiring what is rightfully one's own.

_____ : But that would be taking the not given.

Asvajit: Not necessarily, that's an extreme.

S: No, the precept seems to be an extreme precept. You should not take what is not given. That's why I say given by whom?

Asvajit: Well given by he, who possesses it, the body or individual or organisation who possesses it. So one has to enter into some kind of communication in order to re-establish what is rightfully one's own or what one may believe, whether it really is one's own is another matter.

_____ : The criterion for what is rightfully one's own is that which is given.

Asvajit: But then what is one's own is not material really. One can't really possess anything.

_____ : It sounds a bit legalistic to me. Is it not more a question of one's attitude? Are you being generous?

S: The precept as such is quite clear. You shouldn't take what you are not given. Supposing certain others of you are hanging on to all the food, if you take the precept literally if they are refusing to give you, you should just starve. So supposing you don't want to starve, on what would you base yourself in terms of Buddhist ethics?

_____ : Panatipata. (Laughter)

S: Yes, you could say that. Well even if you allowed yourself to starve to death for the sake of the precepts you wouldn't be committing violence against yourself, because that would be a very noble action just like the bodhisattva sacrificing himself to the tigress, you would generate meritorious karma.

Asvajit: Then again he did that for the greatest good. One acts according to what is best everything considered.

S: Though the precept appear's to be quite absolute doesn't it?

_____ : Presumably the precept doesn't preclude you trying to manipulate the situation through persuasive argument etc., so that something comes to you.

S: No, it doesn't seem to exclude that at all but on what would you base your argument? All right let's take this particular instance. Somebody else has got all the food and it would be better if he was

to share with you obviously and you can't take from him, you are not allowed to take as a Buddhist so if he doesn't give you you are going to starve to death.

Asvajit: Well one would try to stimulate generosity.

S: Exactly, yes. You would ask. So it would seem that the observance of the precept would preclude your taking from him by force.

_____ : But you can ask.

S: You can ask. And supposing he doesn't listen.

Asvajit: Well one would continue ever more vigorously to persuade to.....

_____ : Point out the consequences to him of the actions that he's dealing with.

S: But do you see what I'm getting at? That there's more in this precept than might meet the eye.

_____ : It's interesting that it seems to me that you have no rights.

S: This is the conclusion actually that I arrived at, that according to Buddhism we have no rights. That is to say rights have got no real ethical basis. There is no such thing as natural rights, that all rights are by agreement and convention between parties as it were.

Dharmapala: But there are natural needs and you have to let your needs be known, in order to receive what is given.

S: Certainly, yes.

_____ : You can give expression to needs but it's a question of trying to take what you regard as your needs.

_____ : Well not to take them but you express your needs then you are giving the other people the opportunity to be generous. You are not taking it in that sense but you are opening yourself to receiving it.

S: Yes. Then also I thought about, what about natural resources? Is it appropriate or correct to speak in terms of not taking from nature what is not given. And what does nature give, or what does nature not give? So for instance, you could say that nature, using this term quite widely and loosely, does give you sunshine, yes? Without being anthropomorphic you could say that the sun does give light and heat and you are quite correct, I was going to say within your rights but that isn't correct, but it would not be against the second precept if you enjoyed - even utilised - the light and the heat of the sun. But supposing you dig into the earth, what's the position then?

_____ : Presumably if you, within the limits of your awareness of that complete system you did no damage to the system as a whole.

S: Yes you don't disrupt the system.

_____ : Or as little as possible, I think it would be impossible to live and not do damage.

Dharmapala: But you can limit it to what you can see as quite limited damage and not ...

S: Which nature can repair. Well if it can be repaired, in a sense it isn't damage.

You see the implications? I'm only thinking aloud here. Would there be any case say for saying that you could rightly consider that anything say whether within nature or within society was given in principle to you even though somebody else at any given moment happens to be hanging on to it?

_____ : I'm not really clear what you are saying.

S: Well its a little bit like the idea of natural rights. Could you not for instance say that by virtue of the fact that you are a member of society, society as a whole in effect or in intention gives you all that you need to live. So that if you don't actually have it it's not that you aren't being given it, you're being given it but somebody is obstructing what has been given from actually reaching you and that you are therefore justified in seeing to it that what society as a whole, in principle, has given you did actually reach you. Could you argue in that way or would that be a bit Jesuitical?

Asvajit: One can argue in that way. There will be some people inevitably who will say no to that.

S: Yes, so do you think that this would be in accordance with the second precept or not?

Ajita: I think it would actually. A sort of Robin Hood approach. Somebody with a lot of money and the peasants are starving and you decide to take some sort of action without causing anybody really too much harm.

S: A very ambiguous expression!

Ajita: At least any physical harm anyway to stop the peasants from starving it would be quite compassionate actually.

Asvajit: You could also argue that because the earth is given you birth then she has a right to support you with food.

S: Duty to support you. The world owes me a living eh?

Asvajit: No, not a living that's different.

S: Well the world owes me life eh?

Subhuti: The important thing seems to be that you have an attitude all the time that nothing comes to you by right, that you never get resentful of not having anything.

S: The thing is there is no such thing as a natural right. This is actually the conclusion I have come to. That 'right' is a purely ethical conception, you can't claim it as coming to you by virtue of the fact that you are alive on this earth. There are no unilateral sights, rights are a matter of agreement whether implicit or explicit, between people. So if someone doesn't recognize your right you cannot rightly enforce your right, yes?

Asvajit: So it is a purely legalistic argument really.

S: No, I would say it was an ethical argument. In other words, if you want to enforce a right you could only do it by force. You cannot say that you've got the right to use force. You use force because that's what you want to do, yes? But you cannot dignify that with an ethical status. Which is of course what people usually do, 'well I've got the right to it', as though that confers a sort of ethical sanction and my conscience is clear. But no actually, if you use force you go beyond the sphere of ethics altogether, you are back in the jungle as it were. You are out of strictly human society really, even though it may be within a given society everybody is resorting to force, but to that extent it isn't a really human society, because it isn't an ethical society.

So when you fall back on force you cannot evoke any ethical sanctions. This is really what in a way the second precept is getting at.

_____ : So then a law suit would be considered force.

S: Yes, this is why in the East according to the Vinaya a Bhikkhu cannot be any party to a law suit. He cannot be a party to a prosecution, so that if someone strikes a Bhikkhu he cannot, according to the Vinaya, he cannot bring a case against the person who has attacked him. But only the Bhikkhus, according to tradition are expected to practice to this extreme extent. A lay person is not considered able, by virtue of the fact that he is a lay person and living in the world, to practice to this extent. If he does then so much the better but it is not required of him but it is required of the Bhikkhu.

_____ : Something I've often thought as a right but I don't think is enforceable in any way is an individual's right to dignity. Would you say that was a right?

S: Yes and no. I mean what you have not got a right, you have no right to enforce rights. To enforce a right is a contradiction in terms. A right is something essentially ethical. The minute you try to enforce a right you destroy the right. Do you see what I mean?

Asvajit: So all one can do then is to encourage, or what one can do is encourage a right by example.

S: Yes. To put, in the case of the second precept, your needs before others and encourage them to meet them, if that is the situation, but you have no right, no ethical right, to enforce an ethical right. So a right in a legal sense is something which is enforceable. If you have got the right say to protection it means that you can enforce that through the courts so there is no such thing as a right apart from the capacity to enforce that, the machinery to enforce that, which involves the whole of society. So you can't unilaterally claim a right and try to enforce that. That is not ethical.

_____ : Do you think that society is unethical?

S: To the extent that society is based upon power and the enforcement of rights, society is not ethical. It's a group, it's a balance of powers. But to the extent that you are an ethical individual you abandon the appeal to the courts, and you do not stand upon your rights. You have no rights in that sense.

Dhammarati: And you don't stand on anybody else's rights, for instance.....

S: Yes, you don't impede anybody else's needs. You don't recognize their rights, you don't say give them food because they have got a right to have food, you give them food because they are hungry. Otherwise if you do anything else. if you try to enforce what you say are your ethical rights it's like trying to make somebody love you by hitting them over the head until he does love you.

So the second precept raises all these sorts of questions really doesn't it?

Campbell: I suppose the situation is a bit different when you are dealing with children.

S: Well what are you trying to do in the case of children?

Campbell: Teach them.

S: Yes right, well that is the criterion isn't it?

So one could say that with regard to the observance of the second precept in this matter of giving and taking you are trying to rely less and less upon force and more and more upon persuasion.

Ideally you totally abandon any legal claim, any enforceable claim that is.

Is it possible to draw the line quite sharply between persuasion and force?

S: I think here we might encounter the heresy of the thin dividing line.

Uttara: What springs to mind is the Glasgow Centre, the (unclear)

Dhammarati: I must say the whole situation after that escalated and became so unpleasant that we moved.

Asvajit: The sort of line I had in mind, or the sort of distinction rather, was simply between bodily action and verbal action but even then that's not really adequate.

S: Also one sees the second precept really logically follows from the first doesn't it? Because the second precept involves an abandoning of force. You are not going to enforce your rights. Supposing for the sake of argument there are such things as moral rights, well they are unenforceable.

_____: (unclear)

S: Well that is given to you by the government isn't it if you have the right to it. That is to say, if you need it.

Ajita: That sometimes comes in that a certain person who (unclear) but you think you you are so you've got to argue your case a little bit and clarify the situation.

S: But there is only a question of clarifying the definition of needs, that's all.

_____: (totally unclear)

S: That particular benefit is for people in a certain position of need so it's really a question of ascertaining whether any particular person is in that particular situation of need or not, as defined by the law. That's where the difference of opinion comes in, whether your case falls within that particular definition or not. You might think it does, they might think it doesn't therefore it goes to the tribunal and the tribunal decides. But you have a legal right here and you also have the right to enforce that right through the appeal.

Sangharatna: From a more sort of moral point of view is the government getting it freely from the people who are giving it to the government and would they be willing to give it to people who had intentionally given up their work.

S: And also the question is what is the government? Who is the government?

Sangharatna: Well they are supposed to be the elected representatives of the people.

S: Well they are the elected representatives, there's no doubt about that, that they have been elected. But the precept says not to take that which is not given. It doesn't say anything about anybody having the right to anything whether they have actually got it or not. But you as an individual are not to take what is not given, it doesn't go into the question of whether anybody has got the right to possess that which they are giving you or not giving you. So I mean the level of the individual is not the level of the group. On the level of the group there is such a thing as power in the ordinary sense, there is such a thing as force, there is such a thing as enforceability. When I say enforceability I mean enforceability through force not through legal process. I think you are not breaking the second precept if you have recourse to legal process, because that right to having recourse to legal process has been given you by agreement of the community, you see what I mean? So if you go to law to secure rights which are guaranteed to you, let's say, by the constitution of the country in which you live, you are not breaking the second precept, unless you consider those laws to be actually unjust and that in having recourse to them you would be doing injustice to somebody, then of course you shouldn't.

But to the extent that, as far as you can see the laws are just then you can freely have recourse to them but what you cannot do is by actual force, physical force that is, enforce ethical rights. This is what the second precept would seem to imply.

Ajita: I came across a problem of a friend giving a gift of a pair of jeans and I know this chap was a van driver who delivers boxes of jeans so I didn't know whether to refuse or take them because I felt like well he may have bought them and to insinuate that he stole them could have been disastrous, and had a disastrous effect on him.

S: Well here you have just to weigh the balance.

Subhuti: We've have had this one out quite recently in Sukhavati because we get quite a lot of materials brought to us and it became obvious that certain sorts of materials were not legal and we took it up with the person involved and said that we really did not want any materials which were dishonestly come by and he said well what can you get that is honestly come by nowadays? (Laughter) Which was quite an interesting point.

S: I think that tends to be a rationalisation.

Subhuti: I know it was but nevertheless it was ...

S: You can get things which, at least in legal terms, are honestly come by. So sort out that first then after that the finer points of whether even the legal is really honest.

Subhuti: It's quite interesting that his view of society was an enormous process of conning each other.

Asvajit: Although the conventional is merely conventional it is useful.

S: It is useful and it could be just like the spider's web with various threads along which you can run to the () easily. The Buddhist view would be that if by having recourse to legal process your action resulted in somebody being seriously injured in any way, even though you legally have that right you should not have recourse to that legal process. In certain instances for ethical reasons you would relinquish what were in fact your legal rights. But supposing for instance someone owed you some money and you know he is quite able to pay and just through sheer cussedness he isn't, it is not against the second precept to recover that money, which is in fact yours in the sense that he has made a contract and in principle has given you that. It is not against the second precept to recover that money through the courts, because society has given you that money, because society has agreed that contracts should be honoured. Even looking at it from a purely ethical point of view you are not doing him any harm in getting that money from him in that way because he doesn't need it. If it was a man who had had a lot of disasters through no fault of his own and was in real difficulties well then you might consider not enforcing your rights in that sort of case. Well in that case the likelihood is that the chap would come to you and explain his difficulties and you would settle it amicably, and say well give me when you can.

_____ : Presumably the interpretation of the second precept hinges a lot on how you took the first precept, particularly the distinction between persuasion and enforcement of rights.

S: I think that a right is something that arises essentially in a social context. So there's no such thing as a unilateral right. If nobody else agrees that you have a certain right, you don't have it.

Asvajit: One can't imagine two people, two individuals, arguing about rights.

S: No, indeed not. No. It would be absurd. It's like going to your friend's house and saying 'have you got anything to eat?' 'Oh yes help yourself there's some in the cupboard.' You don't have to announce that you have a right to something to eat so please do your duty and satisfy my right! No, the fact of friendship precludes all that.

_____ : It seems to me that the positive aspect of the precept is a really very very necessary thing.

S: To encourage generosity in oneself and others. This is really what the precept amounts to, as I said, to encourage generosity, or to cultivate generosity in oneself and others. Or perhaps we should say it's to cultivate generosity in oneself and encourage generosity in others. The general promotion of a spirit of generosity between individuals.

_____ : That again follows on from the first kind of problem of encouragement.

Dharmapala: I experienced a couple of years of this up North Bhante, where this whole question of generosity and if you have a need, state your need and it really catches on and has a tremendous influence in a community situation, everybody really is receptive to this and if they can help do so immediately. It just has a really loosening up effect.

S: I think if one doesn't make known one's needs to other people, it implies a certain lack of trust or lack of faith which sometimes may be justified but very often isn't. It also encourages the direct person-to-person approach. In other words its linked up with communication. Make known your needs. Don't suffer in silence and feel resentful because people are not giving you something when they've not got the faintest idea that you need it. You can't blame them can you?

This is a rather sort of degenerate example, but in India the beggars always approach you saying, not I've a right to anything, but oh you are a very kind man please give me - you have got a very kind face etc., etc. This is how they will beg. Unfortunately there are so many of them that people almost have to turn a deaf ear very often. But this is the mode of begging to stimulate your compassion, not to insist upon any right. It's a pity that they have to do that but perhaps that is the better way really.

Dharmapala: I find though that with begging it tends to ask for help with a cup of tea or something being quite specific with their needs.

S: It sounds a bit more convincing when they ask for the money for the price of a cup of tea when you don't smell the beer on their breath. [Laughter]

Anyway talking of beer is it time for tea?

_____ : I was wondering about, talking of beer why the fifth precept is not included in the ten upasaka precepts?

S: Well the ten upasaka precepts don't include it. [Laughter] I'm not being facetious! [Laughter] What I mean is the list of ten upasaka precepts has not been arrived at by excluding the fifth precept of the five. That list of ten is a traditional list usually known as the ten kusala dharmas. So the ten kusala dharmas do not include the fifth precept of the five so perhaps in those very early days, either drinking was not considered a very serious matter or there wasn't very much of it about or it wasn't considered on a par with the other things. My own personal feeling is that, well leave aside the extra precept but out of the five the fifth one is a bit anomalous because it is sort of specific whereas the other four relate to very general matters of principle. Do you see what I mean?

The first one is not to harm living beings, The second one is not to take the not given. It doesn't specify any particular items, and then to abstain from sexual misconduct, again it doesn't say how many wives you should have or not have - it is very general, but the fifth one seems to be more applied. So in a way it is a bit anomalous. It does seem to have been added on actually. The four were considered basic ethical precepts and the fourth one can be expanded so that you have four kinds of wrong speech and then you have got three precepts covering the mind - the first two sets having covered body and speech. So it isn't that in the Friends we have dropped that particular one, no, it isn't in the original list of ten kusala dharmas. So clearly, traditionally it isn't considered to be on the same level as the others. But again this raises some questions.

Suramerya majja pamadatthana - we usually translate the fifth precept as abstention from or the

observance of the training precept or factor in training which consists in abstention from sura which is usually understood as fermented liquors, merya, distilled liquors, majja, intoxicating liquors, pamadatthana, anything which destroys mindfulness. So you could say the full translation is fermented, distilled, intoxicating, mindfulness destroying substances, not even liquors actually, substances, you should refrain from. Again if one looks into this it is clearly a question of the effect on the mind. The really operative word is pamadatthana - conducive to heedlessness.

Lets look at it from the opposite point of view just for a moment very briefly. Does drinking ever have a positive effect? Thinking of alcohol, lets confine ourselves to alcohol. I mean there are other drugs but lets confine ourselves to one of the more popular varieties. Does it ever have a positive effect?

Asvajit: On the face of it, it does seem to sometimes.

S: Well could you say the same thing about say violence or about falsehood. You couldn't really so again it's in rather a different category. Peoples' levels of heedlessness or unheedfulness do vary don't they, but the general tendency of Buddhist culture is to discourage anybody from intoxicants.

Well what about things like stimulants and sedatives? What do you feel about those? Do you think they are covered by the precept? It does say which conduce to unheedfulness or heedlessness.

Asvajit: I would say they are covered from my experience.

S: What you mean both sedatives and stimulants?

Asvajit: Yes and stimulants.

S: What about tea and coffee?

Dharmapala: I think the question of occasionally the timing.

I tend to think that on some occasions this might be very useful, coffee in the morning perhaps but last thing at night if you want to go to sleep and it has the effect of waking you up then it would be unskillful.

_____: Surely it would depend on how much you feel yourself. (unclear)

Asvajit: That suggests that clarity of mind is a purely subjective thing. That it's simply a matter of one's own judgement.

S: Well it's a matter of one's own judgement what quantity of the drug is required to have a certain effect, it's your own judgement in that sense presumably.

For instance some people find that a stimulant will make them mentally very active. It would be foolish therefore to take 2 or 3 cups of strong tea or coffee immediately before sitting to meditate because this would just make you distracted. And in the same way you wouldn't surely take a dose of sedatives before sitting and meditating, nor would you take alcohol before sitting and meditating. I mean on the other hand, if you feel very dull and drowsy, difficult to wake up in the morning well you might find a cup of tea or coffee helps this. Or if you have to enter into a certain social situation and felt that your inhibitions were such that you couldn't function properly and positively in that

situation then you might feel justified in taking some alcohol. But clearly one has to do these things very mindfully. But the use of alcohol is not altogether excluded in principle and this is where again this differs from the other precepts, and we can see this from the fact that in the case of bhikkhus, that is in the case of the monks, the use of alcohol in medicine is permitted in case of illness. So it means that there is no 100% exclusion on principle. Perhaps I shouldn't be saying this with us being so near to Glasgow (laughter).

Asvajit: Its excluded in the case, in the sphere of influence of... rather it doesn't persist, for instance the fifth precept doesn't operate in the sphere of the ten precepts.

S: Well yes you could say that they are operating at a higher level, but when one becomes an upasaka one does not take the fifth precept that doesn't mean one is free to disregard it but as you say it is not a precept on the same level. You could say that the ten precepts represent principles to be applied and as principles they are absolute in as far as moral principles can be absolute though perhaps that is a contradiction in terms, but the fifth precept is not a principle in that sense. The principle involved is one could say mindfulness, mental balance even.

You could say very roughly that for the man in the street

(break in recording)

..... at least temporarily you can make your self quite sluggish and sleepy through overeating.

Drugs are a special case to some extent inasmuch as one, the results are rather stingy and extreme, and also drugs are addictive. So the question was raised recently, quite an interesting question, as to whether someone can truly go for refuge while under the influence of drugs of any kind. Maybe we should talk a bit about that.

[End of tape one tape two]

So if one says this, that someone cannot go for refuge truly while under the influence of drugs, what is one meaning or what is the effect, or alleged effect of drugs so that the going for refuge becomes impossible while the effect of the drug continues to be felt?

Asvajit: Well it impedes the experience which the going for refuge supports, encourages.

S: The two are sort of as if they were contradictory. Work that out in detail, say with regard to alcohol. Supposing for the sake of argument, someone before his Ordination ceremony felt so nervous that he just nipped across the road and had a few drinks to support himself through the ceremony. What sort of effect would that have, how would that work out?

Asvajit: Well it would tend to link the experience of going for refuge with that particular mental state.

S: That's an interesting idea, yes. So what would that mean? [Laughter]

Asvajit: Well it would be a source of confusion.

S: You're saying in effect that he would be tending to take refuge in drink. Yes. That very

undesirable association of the two.

_____ : Possibly the same could be said of psychedelics, where people have been in a certain condition where quite spiritual experiences have happened to them and they have tended to link the two inseparably and had a lot of trouble later on in separating them.

S: Yes. But aren't there other drugs also. We just said alcohol, but what about pain killers? Supposing you had a violent toothache just before your Ordination ceremony. Would you be justified in taking a pain killer and what effect would that have? Does anybody know?

Dhammarati: There's quite a difference, a pain killer if it's used properly shouldn't have any sort of effect on your consciousness or your state of mind. All it does is block a certain sensitivity to a certain kind of sensation. It still would be the same person with the same amount of energy without pain. But there's a difference in quality almost after other drugs. It's almost like changing the person really.

S: It can be a change for the better sometimes in the case of alcohol. You could even say that you are more truly yourself sometimes, could you?

Asvajit: Well then it wouldn't really be the alcohol, It would be the state the alcohol gives rise to that isn't truly yourself.

Dharmapala: But then you are taking refuge in the alcohol in order to be yourself. Rather than taking refuge and being yourself.

_____ : What do you mean by being truly yourself?

S: In an ordinary psychological sense. In a non inhibited sense. Let's say you want to do something but where inhibitions prevent you doing it you use alcohol to remove the inhibitions. But you could also say the inhibition is part of you and you have got to overcome it truly in a natural way - not just break it down with alcohol. That really doesn't help. So you could say that anything you do having broken down your inhibitions with alcohol isn't really you doing it. You could say that I suppose.

Supposing you're in a negative state of mind, say a state of great depression, and you use drugs to clear away that state of depression so that you can then go for refuge. What would you say to that?

Dhammarati: I think it's like ()

S: In what way?

Dhammarati: In a way it's () you are using something that's chemically changing your kind of Image or something and making the change for you.

Dharmapala: I think there is the question too that if it does actually clear it away and then you are clear and you no longer take the drug. But if you continue afterwards then that's another matter.

Asvajit: It also shows a distinct lack of faith.

S: Well supposing, I don't know very much about drugs and that, but I have been given to understand that there are some mental states of say depression which are the result of purely chemical causes and that you need drugs to control those chemical causes. What about that? Is that actually a similar situation? Or is this still a very sort of twilight region of investigation?

Dhammarati: It's an idea that I've heard but as far as the British (unclear) are concerned () specifically the drugs that they use and anti-depressants are just a symptomatic treatment. They are not trying to restore any chemical imbalance. They are treating the symptoms of depression and psychological things.

S: So it wouldn't be agreed then that there are forms of psychological depression which are essentially and exclusively due to chemical imbalance and which therefore have to be corrected by chemical means, i.e. through drugs.

Dhammarati: Well I wouldn't exactly () I've heard the idea but I don't know if the principle has come into clinical treatment yet. As far as I'm aware it hasn't.

S: So therefore, you would say in the present state of our knowledge, at least our official knowledge, one would have then to say about such a case exactly what Asvajit said about the case of going for refuge under the influence of alcohol. That it would mean that the person had either to go for refuge in that state of depression, with that state of depression or to work on it by other means until they had got rid of it and then go for refuge. But not to take drugs to alleviate the feeling of depression so that they could go for refuge, even though they might feel themselves that their state of depression is due purely to a chemical imbalance.

Dhammarati: Well I think that that's the principle involved and the same situation is true for alcohol. It would depend on the specific drug being used and there are specific reasons for it being prescribed you would have to go into that.

S: And do you know anything about that?

Dhammarati: I think I do know.

S: It might be useful for us to know these things. Sometimes these questions do arise.

_____ : What about other situations like say epileptics, diabetics, people that need constant medications of some sort and in some cases they could be taking them heavily enough to be altering their state of consciousness?

S: Well this is something we have gone into a little bit recently because now we have, to my knowledge, two people within the Order who are susceptible to epilepsy. Neither of whom are very happy about taking drugs and one to the best of my knowledge has never taken drugs for this anyway. But there is a certain practical difficulty. I don't know whether anyone can throw any light upon it. There's also this question of what is epilepsy. There's a lot of doubt about this.

_____ : I know that if Akshobya finds that if he takes the prescribed dose that there's just not a

chance of doing meditation so he halves it or something. What were some of those ideas that (unclear) He was saying that people with epilepsy more easily got into states of () I think it was, consciousness or something. Into higher states of consciousness they are more likely to get into....

_____ : It's interesting that I know an epileptic that developed, a woman that developed her epilepsy late in life and she's what I would describe as extremely repressive and angry and it's rather interesting that she used to suffer heavily from migraines but once her epilepsy started she never had another migraine.

S: I do have a private theory, and it's no more than that, that epilepsy represents a sort of spontaneous, spasmodic discharge of energy that's been accumulated. In a way a sort of safety valve. For instance, epilepsy in Asian terms was called a sacred disease wasn't it. And epilepsy is associated with well known historical figures like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar who were men of very great energy and according to some homilies.() was supposed to be an epileptic. People with tremendous drive. This agrees in the case of our own Friends - Akshobya's got tremendous drive and the other Order member who suffers with this has also got great energy and drive. So there is that sort of possibility.

Asvajit: To revert a little bit to the question of depression it occurs to me that the depression is understood, I myself have previously understood it, as a sort of extreme condition of one end of a spectrum of possible mental states. Whereas now I would say it seems to be much more an imbalance. Depression I used to understand as a sort of energy low in which one was in a low energy state which you couldn't get out of because there wasn't energy there.

S: I see what you mean but actually that energy is there. Yes I agree. It struck me some years ago in my 'greener' days that these very depressed, energyless, weak people who came to see one and talk about their problems seemed to have tremendous energy really. They could talk you under the table [Laughter], talking about their lack of energy all day (laughter) and apparently we could still eventually go on talking about it all night. At the end of that I came to the conclusion they sometimes had more energy than me. But what had happened to it, that was the question, where was it? So I'm quite convinced that many people who came to be depressives are not depressed in the sense of being low in energy. I used to get often that there was a tremendous resentment there and they couldn't get it out openly and honestly as it were so they'd come and tell you how depressed they were and how low and all that and in a way try to bring you down, And that was how they expressed their resentment in this very sort of dirty way if you like. You see what I mean?

They expressed their resentment not by giving a punch on the nose but by just unloading their lack of energy, as it were, onto their depression, but actually bringing you down if they can. So these so called weak energyless people, some of them have got tremendous strength.

_____ : (Unclear). punch somebody on the nose. What is the solution to these people?

S: I think that the short term solution may be that they have to be in contact with their own resentment and acknowledge it and experience it. I don't want to emphasise this because I think this is really grossly overworked - this idea of experiencing your negative emotions or letting them out. Perhaps in a very provisional sort of () At least they

must acknowledge them and know that that is the situation. But sometimes if you say "I think there's a lot of resentment" they say, "Me resentful, no, never feel any resentment." Well that's the whole trouble! Of course you don't, [Laughter] but it's there! I always - if someone comes and whines, a person with repressed resentment who claims to be depressed but is really very resentful has this weird sort of whine in the voice. You can always detect it. They whine at you and they go on whining. They want to drive you to exasperation (laughter) and you will start feeling a bit needled or a bit angry and of course well that is what they want though they disclaim any such intention. They want to drive you up the wall if they possibly can (laughter). And they will try to present you with problems that they have no intention of allowing you to solve (laughter). Yes this is a favourite trick of theirs and I'm telling you this in case you are ever in the position of being the recipient of the confidences of people of this kind.

_____ : You often get into sort of tennis match games where they present you with a problem and whatever solution you come up with there's always something to counter it.

S: Yes, right.

_____ : The game's won when, of course, any solution you can possibly come up with won't work.

S: They've beaten you. Well they've expressed their resentment in that way.

So a person who is in a state of depression is not necessarily in a low energy state. Far from it. But where's the imbalance coming from do you think?

Asvajit: I see it sometimes just looking at it where it's as if there's insufficient inspiration, they're not taking in enough, they're not looking up or looking out, looking beyond themselves.

S: Well you mean they're very self-centred. Indeed they are very often.

Asvajit: So it's an imbalance with regard to the inward looking and outward looking aspects of personality.

S: Well depressed people do feel very sorry for themselves very often don't they? When they talk to you about their problems they're trying to get sympathy for their extremely unfortunate state and so on. That's where the whining comes in. They almost get a kick out of describing how badly they have been treated or are being treated, but they don't want to change it really. Often I'm quite sure there's terrific anger underneath. Very often really directed towards someone quite near and supposedly clear to them that they just don't dare to let out because of their commitment.

But often if you were to say to the person in that state, Well just take a bit more interest in people. They would say, "I couldn't, I'm so overcome by my suffering and problems that I just can't - it's too difficult." or they will convince you that if they did that it would only give rise to further and greater problems.

Very often, unless one is very skilled indeed, the only thing that one can do is to leave such a person to the enjoyment of their own problems. This may sound rather unkind but I'm afraid sometimes that is the position. You must not allow them to drag you down and into their own sort of murky sphere.

At least you stay clear, but help them if you can, if they want to be helped. But a person who really wants to be helped will also be willing to help themselves. Another sign of the apparently depressed but really resentful person is they want you, or somebody, to do it all for them, as though they are asking you to take them bodily and lift them out of the problem. You cannot do that nor should you ever try, it's quite impossible. And then when you tried, or if you tried to take hold of them bodily and lift them out of their problem you will find the dead weight of resistance. If a person is making some effort to help themselves then they've a right, as it were, to ask you to help them. But if you see that someone is making no effort to help themselves don't you try to help them, you can't because it really means that they don't want to be helped. I don't think I can envisage anybody being in such a situation that they are able to ask for help at least verbally but actually are not able to do anything themselves at all. You can't help another person, as it were bodily. You can't do it for them. The help means that they do it for themselves with perhaps some co-operation from you. Maybe in the way of clarification of issues and so on. Maybe general positivity.

Asvajit: You did say verbally there. Does the same apply by gesture or by sign?

S: Oh yes I would say yes.

Dhammarati: Earlier on you were saying about somebody under drugs going for refuge, well on the last convention we were talking about vows and the nature of vows, so I suppose () I wonder if there couldn't be a sort of situation in which somebody () was a bit fragmented but actually going through the ceremony of going for refuge could be the sort of galvanization that they would need.

S: Oh yes. We do find this. Everybody's energies are scattered to some extent. No one is completely integrated or very very few people are. Yes there are a few around who are completely integrated on the level of which they are but there are not many of them. So those people even go for refuge in a not fully integrated state. That means that they don't go for refuge fully, and that's why as you grow, as you progress, after your going for refuge your going for refuge itself becomes more effective and more and more true and genuine. But we could say, or at least I've observed from my own experience that with regard to going for refuge and ordination people seem to fall very definitely into two categories. There are those people who are galvanised before being ordained, to use that expression, and the ordination is the confirmation of that. But there are very definitely other people who almost at the instant of ordination are actually galvanised. This certainly does happen in sometimes a quite extraordinary way, and there would seem to be these two kinds of people.

Dhammarati: In which case somebody under the influence of drugs, although they're falling short of an ideal condition of going for refuge, the actual act of going for refuge, even going through the ceremony might be something that would sort of bring them together and give them.....

S: Enough strength to rise above. That is a theoretical possibility. I can't say that I've actually encountered this so far in my experience but that would seem to be a logical possibility.

Dharmapala: There is the question of an addiction () to get away from the addiction.

S: But clearly the general tendency of a Buddhist is to get away ever more and more from the use of drugs of any kind even for the relatively, at least short term, positive reasons.

I think one can say that if one does take the fifth precept of the five seriously it means that one is all the time lessening one's dependence on drugs. At least one is moving all the time in that direction. Supposing one happens to be taking alcohol well you are moving in the direction of giving it up, or if you are dependant on sleeping pills then you are moving in the direction of giving them up. In other words you are making an active effort to reduce your intake of the drug and to cope in a more positive and direct way with whatever it is on account of which you are taking the drug.

Even in the case of stimulants when we ought not to have to rely on stimulants really. How do stimulants work can anyone tell? Take coffee - how does coffee work?

Asvajit: Stimulants are sometimes referred to as speed, as things which produce speed. They seem to set the mind in action, ideas seem to arise more spontaneously rather more quickly. One becomes a little bit bubbly - that sort of thing.

S: So if you've got that tendency anyway you shouldn't increase it. If you are prone to distraction in Buddhist terms. But if you are prone to sloth and torpor are you justified in having recourse to stimulants to overcome that or should you not be doing something else about it? Supposing you are dull and sleepy in the morning what should you do about that?

_____ : Perhaps if you take the stimulus or stimulant and (then the ideal is to try and live without it??)

Ajita: Actually, if you are dull or feeling like that just to move, just to move your body.

S: Also of course sometimes you use stimulants to enable yourself to do things which you shouldn't be doing anyway, or at least not at that particular time or in that particular manner or maybe like the student who takes lots of strong coffee so he can go on studying all night, but he you shouldn't have to study all night. It may be that your natural sleep cycle might extend up to 9 o'clock in the morning, well if that is actually your natural sleep cycle you shouldn't be tampering with it with strong coffee at 7 o'clock in the morning.

_____ : () mindfulness ().

Asvajit: Even when we say people are unique I think it would be true to say that people tend to be awake in the daytime and asleep at night and any radical departure from that would be an abnormality.

S: In human beings.

Asvajit: In human beings.

_____ : One of the things I have found with () certain drinks and so on is that it did stimulate and did open up areas and I got the association of those kind of states with that kind of thing. But also it became a real craving which was arising at the same time when this stuff was around. Craving for it, beginning to get used to the idea and get through-to that without it.

(Tape distortion - speech inaudible)

S: not as many as we used to have.

Subhuti: There are definitely a few in Sukhavati.

S: Usually people who smoke say that it soothes the nerves. Is there anything in this at all?

_____ : I think so.

S: But what about those who have given it up, what do they find now. I mean are they just accepting the fact that they aren't as relaxed now as they used to be when they were smoking. Or do they find that they can be relaxed or become relaxed in a different way or by different means?

_____ : When I gave up smoking I got this tremendous release of energy and initially it was intense nervousness and irritability but I think I was using smoking as a means of damping myself down, not calming myself down.

S: Oh.

Ajita: I think smoking is an expression of nervousness. (Indistinct)

_____ : (Indistinct)

S: Well in a way habits as such are reassuring because there's something regular that you can rely upon that's there.

_____ : One of the things I noticed most strongly about giving up smoking was....

S: Oh you've given up too? (Laughter)

_____ : It was a long time ago. It was the whole social thing. Someone of my friends might have a cigarette and ask "Do you want one". And you don't even think well do you want a cigarette or do you not you just reach out and take it anyway, and then later on you might have one with a cup of tea. And also occupying your hands. I noticed once when I gave up and it wasn't successful I was in a new area and I didn't know many people and I was quite nervous and I just went and bought the cigarettes to keep my hands occupied. (Maybe Mara was just sort of handing out cigarettes). [Laughter]

S: I know people who have phased themselves out on herbal tobacco. (Laughter) One phased himself out with apples. Whenever he felt like smoking he would eat an apple.

Asvajit: It is quite interesting that the actual physical business of smoking because when you have a cigarette and you are drawing on it when you are taking the in breath your attention is directed upon something immediately in front of you instead of outwards. Whereas when you are breathing naturally you are also aware of what's around you. Maybe people try to cut off from what's around by smoking.

S: How are we going for time? Have we gone over? All right then perhaps we should wind up here

and carry on in the afternoon anyway.

Next Session

Alright then lets carry on from where we left off in the morning, Either perhaps pursuing that same topic, I think one or two people would be interested in doing that, or/and checking up other more general questions.

Dharmapala: I would like to go back to that fifth precept again and the wording as you translated it and the way it is distilled etc. seeing it even in terms of nutrition when you take in refined foods quite concentrated sometimes without its natural balance and this has an adverse effect on us, and this may lead to something (unclear) being brought in with it and it causes an imbalance because your biological being is not really able to naturally cope with that sort of concentration.

S: You mean like when we take in an excess of starch, we eat so much white bread and biscuits.

Dharmapala: Without the extra fibres we can't really assimilate that properly and we can see this on a much larger scale rather than just this personal ecology if you like when you start applying chemicals to nature and so on.

S: I was quite surprised to hear on the radio the other day, in the course of an interview with a Professor of something or other from some university or other, I forget the details, but the interview was in connection with saccharine. It has been discovered in America that saccharine is not as harmless as it has been thought. So they have banned saccharine. I'm not sure if it was in America or Canada - it was one of the two. But anyway that apparently is rather an extreme step. The person who was being interviewed said this was rather an extreme step and that sugar, white sugar, was much more dangerous than saccharine, and he mentioned this as an established fact that everybody knew and was aware of and he suggested that if anything it was sugar that ought to be banned, white sugar.

But there is so much on the market in the way of adulterated foodstuffs and is over refined or rather ultra refined. One really wonders why a standard isn't taken and responsibility.

Dharmapala: How I see it too, coming back to some of the things that were said earlier is that when you have this sort of imbalance through these high concentrates of imbalanced substances, shall we say, this causes a discordination in the harmony of say the human being or nature environmentally. I think drugs can be very much like this and if it's an addictive one to follow through experiments to try and discover personally as it were, I think you might discover more and more how certain states work but at the same time you are weakening the ability to come back and if it's an addictive one.

On a larger scale you see whole areas of the environment just become permanently damaged.

And if again another thought is that we rationally discover certain things as we have with chemicals in controlling a symptom of nature and this is where they are enforcing a thing that works, is seen to work and then you forget about that ethical fact because this works and becomes conventional and the ethical gets more and more weakened by that until such a time that it is then seen that this is destructive in the long run and then the ethical perhaps gets the chance to have an influence again.

I would like to actually clarify a point I made there when I said that the ethical gets weakened when a

solution is found to work and then the solution becomes a conventional way of doing things. The ethical being an understanding of the natural harmony of things and I think often we just disregard or we don't look into how the natural thing works. We just bore in on one angle of it and see well this works in that case and don't really look at how nature deals with it and therefore we take a concentration from nature instead of really looking at what nature is already giving us to deal with these sort of things.

S: Well in a way that's characteristic of our whole attitude very often that we want what Tagore called, and I quoted these words I think in 'The Three Jewels' as a 'hurried path of success'. We would rather cut our way through almost by force rather than just let things grow and develop. This is what Tagore called the greed for results.

_____ : about intoxicants. The particular thing is that a lot of them intoxicate you in such a way that you don't know you are intoxicated.

S: Is this why people are said to get very indignant when you tell them they are drunk and they strongly deny it?

_____ : Yes that's a more obvious example but if I'm taking a food that I'm intoxicated with then I would not know it so I suppose it's best to play safe.

S: Well you know it presumably in the long run but then it may be rather too late to do anything about it.

What's the policy, if any, at Sukhavati about these things?

Subhuti: About what?

S: The use of refined foods and so on. Has this been discussed **in** any way?

Subhuti: Yes, at one point we tried to do away with sugar and there was quite a strong reaction against it.

S: Why do you think that?

Subhuti: I think there are a number of factors but partly people didn't like the idea that they felt it was something that was coming from outside their own volition that they were being forced into a course of action that they didn't agree with. Why they didn't actually want to give up sugar is a different matter, maybe they didn't feel that it was harmful.

Subhuti: It was quite heated at the time.

_____ : There weren't very many people who wanted it but those who did want it really wanted it. They resented the idea of being forced.

S: Then it must be addictive, physically addictive if you do experience sort of withdrawal symptoms when you don't get it. Because if you have been taking it all your life presumably it does make some difference when you stop taking it and you feel bad for a while.

Anyway, in a more general way it would suggest that people need to be educated rather than simply stopped from having certain things.

Asvajit: I think I remember someone once saying that if you chewed a piece of bread for long enough it began to taste sweet.

S: I believe I'm correct in saying that provided that it is wholemeal bread but not this white stuff that you get that is called bread.

_____ : I think with sugar (unclear).

S: I understand, I'm not very sure about this, but I have been told that apart from the psychological factor there is definitely a physiological addiction.

Asvajit: In what sense would that be? That when you stopped taking that discomfort arises?

S: Yes. Withdrawal symptoms in other words.

_____ : I was reading the other day that people in stress situations like soldiers at war drink a lot more milk than people who aren't in stress situations. Drink up loads of milk. (Laughter)

S: Well in stress situations the general tendency perhaps is for people to regress. You regress to safety and comfort and warmth and you all know what that means don't you and hence the association with milk presumably.

I think you can offer this as one of the criteria of a healthy normal person. That in situations of stress he does not tend to regress in any way. Whether in the form of sucking a candy bar or fleeing to the nearest female solace or going to bed as people do in stress situations and so on. A healthy person will stand up to stress ...

[End of side one side two]

.. and cope with it but a person who is not so healthy will tend to regress into a slightly infantile sort of situation.

Asvajit: Supposing that one feels under stress but one can't identify exactly what it is?

S: Well one just has to go on looking and trying to find out what it is. But for heavens sake not regress into some sort of situation which will give you comfort and enable you to avoid the stress or whatever is producing it and not face it. Some people respond to stress by drinking, some will respond to stress by biting their fingernails, others as I said will go to bed and go to sleep and forget all about it.

Asvajit: I mean sometimes in the middle of the afternoon perhaps my energy is a bit low and I maybe feel a bit bored and I go and sit down perhaps for half an hour and just relax, just let go. Is that a regression?

S: No I wouldn't say that that was. You're just recuperating your forces as it were. But if you are not in a stress situation to begin with anyway - you are just a bit dull and a bit bored. I think that can be

a very positive situation when you feel bored, if one feels bored one should never try to escape from boredom. You see what I mean. Let yourself experience the boredom, be bored and just wait until you really do want to do something. Not that you want to do something in order to escape from the boredom but the phase of boredom is succeeded by a phase of wanting to do something or other so you do it. If you wait long enough that will happen the boredom will resolve itself and you will think of something that you want to do but not think in terms of "what can I do now so as to avoid the feeling of boredom". It's very important not to avoid boredom. The avoidance of boredom, one could almost say, is neurotic or the attempt to avoid boredom. There is nothing wrong with being bored. If you stay with it long enough it will resolve itself quite positively. Even if you only just get a feeling to go and make a cup of tea. If that is actually your feeling and you're not doing that because you think it will alleviate your feeling of boredom. Just stay with the feeling of boredom, be bored, accept that sometimes one is bored. So what, never mind it's not the end of the world. [Laughter]

_____ : Would the same apply to the stress situation? You have to do quite a lot in order to cope with the situation.

S: Well a stress situation is a situation in which you have to mobilize your resources in order to cope. You have to make a definite effort to mobilize those resources, but sometimes people don't want to do that so they refuse to face the situation of stress. Because stress can be of different kinds. There can be the stressful work situation, there can be emotional stress and so on.
[Pause] Stress is a rather ambiguous word really isn't it?

Asvajit: Stress - it means a force. It usually means a static force like a load resting on a table.

S: Because you may be in a situation of stress quite wrongly. You may have got yourself in a situation in which you are exposed to more stresses than you are really able to cope with. So coping then positively will consist in ridding yourself of certain stresses. Realising that you have made a mistake and positively getting out of certain situations in order to relieve the stress. Recognising that you had let yourself in for more than you really could cope with. If you did that, that would not be regressing, that would be coping in a way. But not coping and regressing is almost refusing to recognise the situation, refusing to see that you've taken on too much or have exposed yourself to too much stress and just sort of hoping that things will come alright and you are going to muddle through somehow. That would be refusing to see the situation.

But stress very often is created when there's pressure from different directions at once so you are torn, as it were, between a number of things. So then you have got to have the strength of mind to put certain things aside and out of your mind while quite definitely you deal with others first. Not be dithering between a number of things. Just flapping around helplessly.

Asvajit: It's often all right if one has just two or three or even quite a number of relatively easy definable directions, they can be resolved. If there are too many well then they can't.

S: So sometimes coping with stress, situations of stress may consist in getting rid of some of the factors that are producing the stress not just grinning and bearing it.

Ajita: Sometimes you've really got to get the into situation and that can cause stress. How do you know when if you're not exactly used to doing as much work as that before?

S: How would you know?

Ajita: Who's going to tell you?

S: Well I think you have to be able to work, even though under pressure quite happily. I think this is quite important. You have to be enjoying doing it. I think if it has become a chore and you're feeling strain and you're not able to do it very joyfully and spontaneously then you have taken on a bit too much. It may be very hard going sometimes but if you are enjoying it, at least deep down or when you have finished at the end of the day then that is quite positive. You're not in a really stressful situation, you haven't taken on too much.

Ajita: You might not necessarily feel joy but you still get a kind of

S: Yes.

Ajita: I sometimes find when there's quite a lot happening you can get a little bit edgy, just occasionally.

S: That's also a sign that there's something slightly wrong. You shouldn't be getting edgy. Maybe it's not always objectively what you have taken on but sometimes it's due to lack of confidence in one's own ability to cope. You think maybe you can't cope so that makes you a bit edgy but actually you can so you've no need to be edgy really but you learn that with experience. You know quite well what you are capable of doing. For instance, before your first public lecture you may feel very edgy indeed but when you have given five or six lectures or ten or twenty, not to speak of a hundred, you don't feel edgy. Even if you haven't prepared very well or even if you've had a very busy day you know quite well you are going to be able to cope so you don't get edgy. And the same with other similar experiences.

_____ : Can I change the subject? A question which I really haven't found a satisfactory answer to which becomes a sort of issue in New Zealand at Christmas time was the question of children on retreat. I feel that I weakened my standpoint on it and after having talked to some people I feel that not only was my standpoint right in the first place but I shouldn't have really weakened and I was wondering as there's people here from about four centres and I was wondering about people's ideas and if children did have a place on retreats what sort of retreats or if they had a place at all?

S: I'm rather out of touch with retreats these days so I won't say anything at this stage. Maybe others have got something to say.

_____ : I think the concept of children on retreats is outside all of our experience. [Laughter]

Subhuti: It's a very good thing it is!

_____ : Well the situation basically was that a mother, a solo parent I think she is, had two daughters and she was not able to make it to the retreat unless she took her two daughters, they're about 5 years old and 7 years old. They were nice kids, they were very noisy kids but they were really nice kids and there was some feeling among some people, not very many - which I thought was unfortunate - that they shouldn't really be there, that wasn't really the place for them.

_____ : Well if they're noisy that wouldn't be the place for them.

_____ : (Unclear)

_____ : I think there are noises and noises. In a survey which was done recently on disturbance of noise of all the most disturbing noises in the city apparently children noise is the most disturbing.

S: Well sometimes children's shrieks are very penetrating. If a cow moos it isn't really very disturbing because it isn't shrill and penetrating. It's a low sort of sound isn't it. But if you have a sort of shriek from a child it can be much more disturbing and children when playing usually do shriek don't they, especially if they get excited. So it's a very shrill almost sort of nerve jangling sound isn't it? Whereas if you heard say distant thunder that wouldn't disturb you, or as I said a cow lowing it wouldn't disturb you. If you heard a deep throated dog's bark that probably wouldn't disturb you but the shrill yapping of a little lap dog would disturb you. I think it is these more high pitched, penetrating, piercing sounds which disturb especially meditation.

_____ : They've found in some kind of experiment that the human ear is more sensitive to the sound of children's high pitched frequency than any other.

S: Well this might have a biological survival value, who knows?

But it doesn't have a meditation survival value! [Laughter] There is of course obviously another problem, I mean clearly a problem is what do you do in the case of a woman, or let's say in the case of parents, who very much want to attend a retreat but who cannot do so unless they bring their children with them. I mean the counter argument is, just to act as it were devil's advocate for a minute, that it would not be fair to exclude those two people. Some people even say discriminate against people and exclude and bar them from retreats just because they happen to have children. This is the counter argument I know, isn't it. So what are you going to do about those people. Are you going to leave them out in the cold and say "No retreats for you, you've got children and children can't come on retreat and you say you can't come without them so that means you can't come on retreat". So are parents of young children more or less permanently excluded from retreats?

_____ : Not if they think they've got to find babysitters.

S: You think that might be possible?

_____ : () parents do but I don't think it would be good for the retreat ...

S: Even if there was a crèche or something like that. Do you think their thoughts would still be very much with the children if they were actually around?

Also of course it raises the question, well what do you mean by a retreat? What do you mean by a retreat, what is the purpose of a retreat, for whom is it intended? Are there different kinds of retreats or different kinds of people with different needs? There's that aspect too. So what has one got to say about all that?

_____ : There probably will be a children's and families retreat this summer in Norfolk organised by Abhaya who's felt the need for it for quite a long time.

_____ : I very much do feel that there is a need, but I feel main consideration or policy, if you like, should be directed towards individuals whose commitment is total, as much as they can manage towards the Dharma, not torn between that and something else. And situations can be then provided for people who have other commitments if you like. I think it's a sort of a sense of priority. You see there's some decisions or resolutions where it ended up something like children can come on retreats if they are supervised and things like that and there will be retreats that will provide a more intense level of practice for some people. Well I think it should have really been the other way around. I felt the whole thing was getting a bit family orientated instead of individually orientated and there's a question of if children are going to go on retreats should they be allowed to participate in anything. These children were participating in some of the activities which some people found disturbing in some ways.

S: I think there's also another thing of a more general psychological nature that you have to bear in mind in connection with children - their energies are very scattered. Have you noticed this? There is as it were in the case of small children no unification of energies. Their energies are quite literally all over the place which in a way is the opposite to the effect that one is trying to bring about on an occasion like a retreat.

_____ : I think there's only been one retreat that I've gone on where there was a lot of young children. That was the last retreat we had at Tittleshall where there were quite a few very young children and they all participated in everything. They could come into anything and they liked the pujas very much and they used to make offerings and sing songs and read in the puja. It was a very nice kind of feeling but it was scattered.

S: No doubt there's room for retreats of several different kinds.
But Supposing one had say a family type retreat, what would be the purpose of that retreat?

Asvajit: It tends to encourage the idea that that is the best possible situation. This is perhaps digressing a bit from the central point of the argument, but as I see it if one's commitment is towards the growth of individuals then one wants to provide those situations which point to that ideal.

S: Yes.

Dhammarati: If you can set up a situation that lets individuals in the family involve themselves in a more intensive practice then you are going to benefit the individuals, even given the family situation. If you are giving individuals who have had a nice time access to a level of practice that they wouldn't have otherwise then it's the individual who benefits. I mean they are still going to be second best because they have distractions but if you have got enough people and enough demand then it's good to do something for them.

Asvajit: I wouldn't have thought there was any harm in asking occasionally or inviting occasional families to bring their children along just to see what effect they have. I think that's rather different from making a deliberate policy of having family retreats but I don't know if that will make it possible. There may be some growth potential in it.

S: I think there is a bit of ideology, as it were, that it's nice to do things as a family, it's nice if the whole family can go along as a family. I have heard this sort of point of view expressed and no doubt it is nice from the family point of view but the question is in whether that is really, or that attitude is really compatible with the development of the individual as such. I mean that is the real

question.

You do go along to a retreat as an individual or at least to the best of your ability you go along as an individual.

Dhammarati: I have heard about a lot of cases of couples becoming involved in Buddhism and splitting up as they get into their practice their priorities become reviewed and it seems that if somebody's going to be on a retreat and they would get into their practice then they are going to know what is the thing to do. So if you set up a situation where an individual and a family involves themselves in their practice then it's going to disperse it out a bit.

Asvajit: Then one knows that if you have a number of people who are in that situation on a retreat then there is going to be some tension, some conflict.

S: But supposing you have a retreat which is intended definitely for family people, in fact people with young children we're more thinking about now. And supposing everybody accepts that there is a limitation on that kind of retreat, so if they do go along on that kind of retreat well they go along knowingly so they wouldn't be annoyed if there was a bit of disturbance or distraction because they know very well what the situation is. I think even so there is the point that even a retreat of this sort, or even at or in a retreat of this sort the point must be very clear that really one is involved in the retreat at all, even in that sort of way, for the sake of individual development. But the idea mustn't get around that the family type of retreat is the normal type of retreat, just like you go away on holiday together as a family. 'It's good to do things as a family. That's the right, the normal, the natural way of doing everything!' So therefore you go away on retreat as a family.

So I think we have to be very careful that a tendency doesn't develop just for the little group, i.e. the family, to stage a sort of comeback on the spiritual scene, if you know what I mean, and saying well we want family retreats. Not as a stepping stone to individual retreats as it were, but because you believe in the family and you think everything should centre around the family and that families as such should be catered for. I detect a little of this ideology around. Not that certain people who are really trying hard to become individuals do have children, so that fact should be considered. That's one point of view, but the other is families ought to stick together. Families are really at the centre of everything, so everything should be organised around families, including retreats. Anything that excludes families can't be right. It must be in the wrong direction. That's quite another point of view. And I think one can very easily slip over into the other, and I think in New Zealand there is a bit of a tendency to, as it were, make the family a little central and to tend to think that retreats ought to be family oriented, that if something isn't family oriented or doesn't permit the presence of the family it's somehow wrong in some way.

Asvajit: It must be very difficult if the leader of a retreat is himself a family man. It's difficult in the sense that as the leader of a retreat or the individual on whom attention is focused, to separate what he stands for, what he represents, from his own lifestyle. I don't know whether that has any difference in Akshobya's case that he's married with a child.

S: As far as I know he's never been on a retreat with his family, so in that case the question just wouldn't arise.

Asvajit: Probably not though people would know that of course.

S: But here the relevant point is bringing families on retreat or not.

_____ : I think my main element of dissatisfaction was that it was becoming more the rule than the exception.

S: We don't want a Buddhist 'Butlins'. [Laughter] If you know what I mean. Have you heard of 'Butlins' in New Zealand?

Subhuti: What slightly surprises me is that it's been in the air for about five years to have a family type retreat and it's never happened. I often wondered why that is.

S: Well I think the reason is obvious. The only people who are going to try to get together a family type retreat are family people themselves..... [break in recording]

..... entire sort of self-abnegation and self sacrifice organise a retreat of that kind which would take quite a bit of organising. So the only people who are interested are those with children and families themselves. But for one of them, first of all, to find the time himself to organise it, and then to synchronise their various holidays and free times and numbers and age groups of children would take such a lot of time and trouble and this is why it has never got off the ground. [Break in recording]

.... you meditate every day and children are inquisitive and they want to know and they might even want to sit with you sometimes. You might sometimes allow them to do that. And you may even talk to them about Buddhism, not with any idea of indoctrinating them but just to answer their questions because they're naturally inquisitive. Take them along to festivals and anything that is colourful and get them to join in to the extent that they want. I think probably for children the best thing to take them along to, from a Buddhist point of view is festivals and celebrations and colourful things, where a little bit of noise just doesn't matter. But not retreats. Take them along to a Wesak celebration and have that sort of Wesak celebration by all means or let part of the Wesak celebration be of that nature. That people can feel quite free to bring their children along. Where it's colourful and you've got some decorations and toy balloons and things like that, and something to eat and some tea for them to drink or lemonade. That is quite appropriate then for children to be present. That's the best sort of situation for them from a Buddhist point of view.

I think it's almost cruel to take children on retreat. Just thinking of it. If I was a small child I don't think I'd like to be taken on a retreat.

_____ : I think the thing is you generally find there's plenty of people who are willing to play with them, which is good but the person really ideally starts out just wanting to practice a more intense level of meditation etc., especially teenage girls with a couple of young kids around, it's very tempting to play with them. They may be doing it quite volitionally but nevertheless if they weren't there possibly they'd be doing a meditation or something instead.

S: And also I think if young children were present the parents are always a little on edge unless the children should make a nuisance of themselves and make a noise or shout or cry. I think it's very difficult for the parents to get completely into the retreat as such. They might have a good rest and a good holiday, but that's a different thing. So does any consensus or overall feeling emerge from this for you then? Do you feel you've got a clear cut answer or is it still rather vague and problematical?

_____ : Well I think I had my ideas pretty well sorted out from the beginning. I think there's a

different need. The fact that it's become an issue demonstrates that and something possibly has to be catered for but I think it's a question of priorities.

S: For instance, supposing the situation were such that there could be only one retreat in a year. You couldn't have more than one for whatever reason, then should it be open to children or not? I think if there's only the possibility of one retreat I think it's clear it should(n't?) be. But if there's a possibility of a whole series of retreats and if there are definitely people who really cannot come without bringing their children then surely yes there can be some provision made for them. But there is this point as Roy said - can't they find babysitters, are they really unable to leave their children?

_____ : Well this is one of the arguments that one of the people had on a lama's retreat and there were 2 or 3 couples there. They managed to somehow farm their children out for the 10 days away that was necessary. I think that if they have plenty of forewarning something can usually be done even if they took turns at operating a crèche away from the retreat in a town or city.

S: Because in New Zealand the sort of family structure is still reasonably intact and there are usually parents and other relations who are quite happy to have the children, I mean some grandparents are just waiting for the opportunity.

Or you could even have someone say in a place like Auckland, if a number of people were going on retreat from Auckland, well just arrange to have all the children minded in Auckland by one friend. There wouldn't be all that many, there's not dozens and dozens of them. There might not be more than 6 or 7 perhaps, well they could all be gathered together in one house with just 1 or 2 people who weren't going on the retreat or had decided not to, just staying and looking after them for that period of time.

I think this question of priorities is very important, that is your big occasion of the year.

_____ : Yes, well it's the only occasion really that the 3 centres can get together. And this is some of the argument that it should be open to children,, so that the parents can meet. I don't particularly agree with that.

S: Well the more important it is, the more important it is to keep it not disrupted. And to the extent that it's disrupted, to that extent it isn't a retreat in the full sense.

Also one must bear in mind a few more general considerations. Essentially the Friends is a spiritual movement. That means you are up against the world. You are in diametrical opposition to everything that the world stands for so you have to be very careful about any compromise. Do you see what I mean? Because already you are so weak, the world is so strong so you cannot afford to compromise. You are trying, as it were, to create a little area within which the influence of the world does not obtain, where different laws prevail. Otherwise you end up with something called a religious movement, or spiritual movement or Buddhist movement but which is just a section of the world slightly coloured with Buddhism. One must always be aware of that possibility, that danger. I don't like to talk in terms of danger but here one must. Because one has seen monasteries degenerate, one has seen Orders degenerate, so how careful one must be.

Asvajit: You once spoke in terms of a mandala, Bhante, surrounded by, I think it was a ring of flames, a ring of vajras and a ring of lotuses, what was the symbolism there?

S: Well this is traditional Tibetan Vajrayana symbolism. The vajra is the wall of vajras. You know when it looks like a circle when it is in two dimensions, actually it is a wall of vajras which means a complete exclusion of all external influences; the flames are to repel the external influences and burn them up before they can even touch your wall of vajras and the lotuses are the possibilities of creativity which arise when this is done, when those external influences are not only excluded but transformed. It's not that you literally cut off, no, you do not allow anything within your charmed circle that has not been totally transformed.

I think with regard to children, we shouldn't allow ourselves to be led by pseudo-sentimentalism or people using this language of exclusion to make you feel guilty, 'Well how if we are Buddhist we can't really exclude anybody'. This is to put it in entirely the wrong sort of way.

Asvajit: People who are a bit problem orientated are only too happy to find something that they think you are against.

S: Yes. You wish that everybody should grow and you wish that everybody should develop and you just want, to the best of your ability, to set up situations which make that possible. You could well argue that you ought to allow sick people on retreats, even if they need a lot of other people to look after them well why should you exclude them from retreats? They also need retreats. If people on retreat have to spend so much of their time looking after six sick people it ceases to be a retreat for them. if they want to look after sick people by all means do that and make arrangements but a retreat is for a different purpose. Otherwise you will end up with people coming on retreats with their wives and families, husbands and children, dogs, cats, canaries, TV, office files everything. What better place to have all these things than on a retreat where it's nice and quiet! So beware the thin end of the wedge.

_____: With regard to noise, do you think it would be harmful to meditate, for instance, in the centre of the city with earplugs in?

S: I don't know. I think one or two people at Sukhavati have tried this I have heard.

How's the time going by the way.,

_____: It's quarter past four.

S: And what are you supposed to be doing?

_____: Meditation at five.

S: And we are going to have a cup of tea before that, well perhaps the kettle could be put on and then we will gradually draw to a close.

I think one has to be very careful not to allow people to put you on the defensive and to morally blackmail you, and in this particular instance, to try to make out - well you're excluding children and you're being unfair to their parents and you're not allowing them to participate etc. etc.

_____: How far can you can push this though, particularly when you can see there might be a danger of creating a division of some sort?

S: Perhaps there is a division, in the sense that some people are in one kind of situation and some are in another, some people are less committed, some people are more committed. Perhaps that should be recognized.

_____ : How can you recognize emotional blackmail?

S: How do you recognize it? Well it's the equivalent of any other form of blackmail.

_____ : Whenever I've experienced it it's just in retrospect and I feel that I've been, that it's been emotional blackmail it's difficult to see it at the time.

S: I think one tends not to see it at the time if one tends normally to be not very sure in one's own judgement and to tend to believe that other people must be right and that what other people are saying must be right. I think then it becomes quite difficult for one to see that one is in fact being emotionally blackmailed. It's a very terrible thing and a very dreadful thing and one should really resist it, no-one has the right to emotionally blackmail anyone. And in this particular way one is sometimes put, or people try to put you in a completely false position - that you're excluding people etc. etc. And you are not doing that at all. In fact you are trying to include people i.e. those who really do want to have the experience of a retreat in the full sense and you are concerned to safeguard that possibility for them.

We used to have a lot of difficulties of this sort in the very early days of the Friends in England in connection with retreats. For instance sometimes the husbands and wives would come on retreats and the wife would absolutely insist that she must have a room together with her husband and there must be just the two of them in that room, and sometimes that wasn't physically possible. Usually in the sort of places that we had there were only big rooms so we had a number of men sharing and a number of women and we had to split up the men and the women, though we hadn't at that time thought very much in those terms, but on retreat this used to happen as regards different rooms. And some wives, on one or two occasions, would not stay overnight if they could not stay with their husbands - just the two of them - in the same room overnight. They would insist that they just are. So this is the sort of difficulty we had in those days.

Asvajit: That indicates quite an infantile level of dependence.

S: I think it's quite common in the world.

And I think also if one isn't careful what creeps in is the ideology of that in order to develop you don't really have to give anything up. You can take it all with you along the way and still continue to develop. That renunciation is a dirty word.

So I say to summarize it - let there be full provision for children and family retreats by all means, but not at the cost of the real retreats. I'm afraid we have to call them that, not at the cost of the real retreats. And if it is a question of choosing between the two it is the real retreats that have to be given the preference.

Also as I said there is this question of the influence of the world and the worldly influences and worldly values creeping in, even into a spiritual movement however careful one may be. One just has to resist this. [Pause]

I think also from a purely psychological point of view one has to be very careful that resentment doesn't develop. if you feel bound to anyone you will always feel resentful sooner or later, even if you think you love that person, if you feel bound then you will feel resentful. And this can apply to most children too.

Asvajit: That's what tends to raise the level of parenthood to a very high ideal.

S: Well I've sometimes said that I'm really shocked at the way in which some people slip into parenthood. I've sometimes said I think you should follow the example of the ancient Brahmins in India and not even think about parenthood - I'm thinking now more of men than of women, fatherhood say rather than parenthood, before you are about 35 and you just know what you are doing, and you are a responsible, mature person who can take on that sort of responsibility and discharge it properly. This is a point of view that could well be put forward. I once I'm afraid, on a men's retreat rather shocked, not to say scared, some of the people present by saying that some of them at the age of 35-40 might well consider getting married and producing children and doing it really properly, not in the haphazard messy way in which people usually do it. As I said they were rather shocked and scared of the idea. But do you see what I am getting at otherwise you are catapulted into parenthood before you are really grown up, when you are barely out of your adolescence. Even if you are 23-24 or 25 you are not really mature very often, you are very unsure of yourself and maybe just got infatuated with somebody, it isn't the result of any human, individual choice or decision.

So I would say, yes I would rate ideal parenthood very highly indeed and say very few people are capable of it. It would be a very good thing if people entered into parenthood as a responsible act and decided that yes, this is what we are going to do and we are going to do it in a mature and responsible way. In a way make that their, not exactly their mission in life, but recognize that they are going to have to devote a lot of their time and energy and thought to that and it isn't just a sort of by-product of something else. It is something that they have decided to commit themselves to.

I think there may be that sort of development within the Friends at a later date but at present it is hardly possible. Well lots of people haven't reached the age of 35 yet much less 40 for one thing.

[End of tape two tape three]

Asvajit: I used to hear it said that older parents weren't really capable of bringing up children.

S: Ah, I've spoken of the father. The wife I think should be much younger, I don't think she should be 35. No. I mean in the Brahminical traditions, they go into these things more than the Buddhists do. If the husband is about 35 and the wife should be about 18 or 20. I think this is quite a good arrangement. You're not old at 35. I think this would be much better, much more likely to be successful in a true sense. A really mature man getting married in that sort of way because he decided quite objectively that it was a good thing for him to do.

_____ : Do you think the woman would be mature at that age, emotionally mature, to bring up a child?

S: I think emotionally women do mature more quickly than men. Men mature generally later than women. I think an 18-20 year old woman could be mature, yes. You'd have to select a mature

woman, you wouldn't just fall for the first pretty face that crossed your path. You would look at the whole thing quite objectively and weigh up everything and take all these things into consideration. If you were yourself a mature person you wouldn't marry an immature person. You might marry someone younger and less experienced, that is a different matter.

I think probably the only positive reason for getting married is that you want to have children and bring up children in a way that human beings should be brought up. You want to give a really good chance to some human being emerging into this world. It isn't just the result of the satisfaction of your own ego or anything like that. You just want to provide a really good positive environment for somebody to be born into and you've entered upon it quite deliberately as a result of a mature choice.

_____ : I was reading somewhere, I think it was Baba Ram Dass' "Be Here Now", and he was saying that things like death and birth should be as conscious as possible.....

S: Well birth can't be conscious!

_____ : Well done with awareness, if you like.

S: How can a baby be born with awareness?!

_____ : Well not so much the baby but the conditions in which it arrives.

S: I think you are referring to conception rather than birth.

_____ : I was thinking about the French guy - (?) have you heard of him?

S: No.

_____ : He has a natural childbirth technique where the baby is born in soft lighting and it's completely natural.

S: Sweet music.

_____ : Yes, sometimes apparently.

S: Bach preferably! [Laughter]

_____ : And the baby is eased from one state from another. It's been found in follow up experiments that a lot of the children that have been delivered that way have been a lot better coordinated.

S: But I think one's common sense would have told you that! Emerging from the womb and the first thing is to grab you and slap you well anyone could tell you that this was a traumatic experience for the newly born child, surely. We're discovering these things as though it's a tremendous discovery and a great scientific revolution and all that but I think this is normal common sense. I know nothing about babies but I would have thought that if someone was being born he would want to be born gently and softly.

_____ : Yes but how common is it?

S: It seems a sort of common sense to handle a newly born child gently and kindly and not just immerse it in cold water and slap it and all that kind of thing.

Asvajit: Stuff tubes down its throat. I thought it was a tradition that many highly advanced spiritual beings could be reborn in full consciousness.

S: Ah yes, but I think we are talking about the ordinary baby. Oh yes surely, that is a Buddhist tradition. I do believe that there are people who do remember being born.

_____ : Do you think many hangups could stem from that?
There are _____ who think that a lot of them do.

S: It's possible. _____ I wouldn't like to speculate too much about
that because you can _____ recover from quite a lot of bad treatment
but it certainly wouldn't have a very positive effect.

S: So I would say I would tend to discourage marriage for two quite different, though perhaps related, reasons. That first of all, it certainly gets in the way of spiritual development, marriage as we know it. But to put it quite bluntly, most of the people I know just aren't fit for marriage, if you think of it in more, not ideal terms, but more positive and genuinely human terms. They're just not qualified for it, I mean essentially for parenthood. It's not just a question of giving birth to children in an animal sort of way and bringing them up somehow so that at least they survive, it's much more than that. I mean the reason why most people get married is that they have fallen in love, but that would seem to be the least valid reason of all. The one that is most likely to lead to disaster. [Pause]

There is also of course this question of the extended community. My remarks so far have referred more just to the nuclear family but one could also say that one need not restrict oneself in that way. It might be more positive to think in terms of an extended family situation in which the father as such is less important. In other words, it isn't necessary from the child's point of view for the biological father to be always around. The biological mother, apparently, has to be around, at least for a few years but the biological father doesn't provided there is some sort of father surrogate in the immediate environment.

Dharmapala: Possibly too in some of the extended families
that term with the mother needing to be present would be much shorter, then there would be a greater tendency for the children to mix among the other adults, so therefore the question of retreats for these sorts of people would be much easier.

S: Yes. Because in a way the problem of taking children on retreats is a direct result of the rather unhealthy nuclear family situation. Which is Certainly not normative as regards human history in general. But you have got this very tightly knit little group, let's say for the sake of argument four people, mother and father and two children, and they are accustomed to always being together and the children are emotionally very dependant upon the parents because they have very little contact with anyone other than the parents. The parents are also very emotionally involved with the children, so even if the parents, say, do become interested in the Dharma they find it very difficult to separate themselves from the children and think also the children wouldn't want to be separated from them even for a very short period. So in that way the problem arises, that well I want to come on

retreat but I have to bring my children. But supposing it had been a much more relaxed and positive extended family situation, well they could have gone off, both of them even, for ten days leaving the children, apart from very young babies, with the other people in the community without any difficulty at all.

_____ : Actually on the last Christmas retreat Rosemary and Jim, whom you know took a young baby and I found that no strain whatsoever because it was away from the general scene of what was happening and couldn't run around because it wasn't all that mobile, so I didn't find the baby any sort of distracting influence at all.

S: Well you can ignore a baby if it's not in your immediate vicinity and isn't crying. But it's very difficult to ignore young children and sometimes it isn't right to ignore them if they are asking for attention, but on the other hand you don't really want to be disturbed or distracted.

Asvajit: With a child of that kind they very quickly becomes the whole centre of attention. Quite quickly and it's no longer a retreat is it?

S: And children who are in the nuclear family situation are accustomed to being the centre of attention very often and want that and demand that.

Dharmapala: We even found the question of having a cat on retreats to be for some people a distraction. It wasn't a child particularly when this cat was very.....

S: We certainly noticed it with dogs.

Ajita: : It's like a TV set that everyone sits around. (Laughter)

S: I noticed on some of our early retreats that when we had the silent period some people would talk to the cats somewhat lengthily. (Laughter) 'Hello pussy we're silent now and we're not talking to each other.' [Laughter] Actually hold quite long conversations with the cat. This was at Quartermaine.

I mean there is also the point that if you allow people to bring their children on retreats they may well get into the habit, as it were, of thinking, well it was possible once why shouldn't it be possible again. Then it becomes a sort of accepted thing that you can Always take children on retreats and maybe then even when they could have found babysitters they won't bother, thinking well it doesn't matter it's quite acceptable to take children on retreat anyway. So they won't even think in terms of getting babysitters. Whereas it might well have been quite

(tape slows down and recording stops!!)

Transcriber's note: As the discussion was concluding I assume that only a little of the discussion was lost!