

[Tape 19, Side 1]

Prasannasiddhi: Presumably, on a basic level, being with other people does constrain you to some extent.

S: It depends, one might say, at the most refined level, on their mental state. For instance, if you are feeling quite cheerful and buoyant and they are heavy and depressed and you are aware of that, that does act as a sort of constraint upon you. You can't be as positive and ebullient as you would like to be. So for you to be generally free from constraint in another person's presence, they would have to be pretty much in the same mental state as you were, especially assuming that you were in a positive state. If they were in a negative state, so to speak, that would in effect be a constraint upon you. Because on the one hand you could not ignore them, and on the other you would unavoidably be aware of their negative mental state, and that would be some check on your positivity.

Ratnavira: We generally tend to be more constrained in the company of other people than by ourselves, but if you are with a very good friend it can even work the other way round - you feel very bound up in yourself, very limited, but if you are with them, especially if they are in a good state, you can feel less constrained -

S: Well, because you express yourself freely with your friend, by expressing yourself you can experience yourself, what you feel, what you think, more strongly, and therefore experience yourself more strongly. You can be yourself more fully.

Anyway, perhaps this whole area is sufficiently familiar to us. There is a saying from one of the Sufis now, which strikes a slightly different note or goes in a slightly different direction.

"One of the Sufis said:

- Do not be intimate with anyone unless piety will not increase his respect for you and sin will not diminish it. The merit or demerit should be yours, while his regard for you is the same.

He said this because in such a case there is freedom from discomfort and formality. Otherwise, nature would cause one to observe formality, knowing the risk of losing his esteem."

S: Here we have a saying from one of the Sufis: 'Do not be intimate with anyone unless piety will not increase his respect for you and sin will not diminish it.' I suspect there is a certain degree of ambiguity about the word 'respect', because normally one would speak of respecting someone less if they were sinful and more if they were pious. So what exactly do you think 'respect' means here? We mustn't, obviously, take the English word too literally, but try to understand what the author is getting at.

Subhuti: His feeling for you,

S: His feeling for you; though the word is 'respect', it isn't 'feeling' or 'love', which it might well have been. Perhaps it's more a question of overall respect, one might say or one might paraphrase. Or his respect for you as a man, one might even say.

Prasannasiddhi: Although even that could vary, because you have this idea of expecting someone to be 'a man' -

S: But here what is spoken of is piety and sin, and being a man might be rather irrelevant to those considerations at first sight (?). So you could respect someone as a man, as a strong, healthy human being, even though he might on one occasion be pious and on another sinful. It could be perhaps in this way.

But even that doesn't seem to go far enough when one speaks, as this saying apparently does, in terms of respecting someone regardless of whether he happens to behave on any given occasion in a manner which is pious or a manner which is sinful, but your respect remains the same.

Nagabodhi: It wouldn't be some allusion to have the love for your soul or something behind all the accretions of - ? Or something like that.

S: But we've really dealt with that or disposed of that, haven't we, in earlier sessions? Is it respect for your potential?

Abhaya: I thought we'd disposed of that.

S: Well, perhaps we can't really fully make sense of it.

Prasannasiddhi: Although there is this thing about metta - that you can have mettā which in a sense is objectless.

S: Yes, but can you have respect which is objectless? That would normally seem to vary with someone's behaviour.

Anyway, al-Ghazali's comment says: 'He said this because in such a case there is freedom from discomfort and formality.' Here the antithesis is between comfort and formality, not between piety and sin. I wonder how literally we should take these expressions 'piety' and 'sin'?

Kuladeva: Hasn't it really got something to do with your duty towards your brother? Even if you see him falling down in some respects, you don't really cease in your duties towards him.

S: I was wondering whether the terms 'piety' and 'sin' were to be taken as referring more to the externals, so to speak, from our point of view, of Muslim religious observance.

Subhuti: The formalities.

S: Well, they would not regard them as formalities in the completely meaningless sense. Nonetheless, perhaps, especially as it's a Sufi speaking, of relatively little value. Someone might be lacking in piety in the sense that he doesn't unroll his prayer carpet five times a day, etc. etc. So it could be that 'piety' and 'sin' refer to things of this sort, and that someone's respect and regard for you does not increase or diminish in

accordance with these things. That would be a possible explanation, I suppose. Perhaps we shouldn't think of 'piety' and 'sin' in terms of the Buddhist skilful and unskilful behaviour; perhaps it isn't really quite as serious a matter as that, at least not from our point of view or from the Sufi point of view.

Tejamitra: So are you saying, then, that if someone does behave skilfully or unskilfully that is going to change the amount of regard -?

S: Well, yes, from a Buddhist point of view that must be so, because respect is essentially your feeling or your attitude towards that which you conceive of as higher than yourself, superior to yourself, more developed than yourself. So, to the extent that someone behaves in an unskilful fashion, to that extent you have less respect for him, and vice versa. So if a Buddhist is to make sense of this saying, 'piety' and 'sin' cannot refer to genuinely skilful and unskilful behaviour.

Anyway, let's go on.

"One of them said:

- Behave politely with sons of this world; with sons of the Other, wisely; with Those Who Know, as you wish."

S: This too seems to be a saying of the Sufis. So 'Behave politely with sons of this world' - what do you think is meant by 'sons of this world'?

_____ : Just ordinary people.

S: Just ordinary worldly people. Behave politely, observe the manners and customs of society. 'With sons of the Other, wisely'. Who are these 'sons of the Other'?

_____ : Brothers?

S: No, I'd say it was religious people in general; the pious. With them behave wisely; what does one mean by 'wisely' - especially wisely as distinct from politely?

Devaraja: Might be double-edged. Might be the orthodox referring to.

S: Well, 'politely' suggests or seems to refer more to external manners, customs - regardless of how you actually think. But in the case of religious people you have to be more serious. You have to be more genuine in your behaviour towards them; formality is not enough. You have to be more mindful, perhaps. And 'with Those Who Know' - this seems to be a Sufistic term: those who are, as one might say in Buddhism, more Enlightened. With them you behave as you wish. I think the suggestion is you can't hide anything from them anyway, so you might as well just be yourself. They will know you for what you are, regardless of how you behave, so you need take no thought for how you should behave with them. Just behave as you please, it doesn't really make any difference to them; they will see through you. They will know you, they will

understand you. I take it to mean that.

Abhaya: Do you think that's true, then? Would we agree that that's the way you should behave with the more Enlightened? You suggest that's - politeness and acting wisely doesn't matter.

S: I don't think it suggests that you shouldn't be polite, but if you are polite and not genuinely polite they will see through that. If you disregard politeness, but at the same time you are not being genuinely impolite they will understand that too. They will understand your heart; they will judge you by that, not by any external behaviour. You might behave with them wisely, very circumspectly, but if even that is inadequate in some way or other, they will see through it. In a way you are quite helpless in your dealings with them; you just can't do anything, it's pointless to try to be polite or even to try to be good with them, they will just know you for what you are.

I think the Arabic word here is the equivalent of the term 'gnostic' in Western: the Knowers. Sufis do use this term.

Kulananda: So you would behave as you wished not for their sake so much as for your own, because it would reflect how you are.

S: It wouldn't really matter, because if they knew you they would know you.

Kulananda: I was thinking, since that is so, it doesn't matter to them whether you are polite or whether you are not polite. It's irrelevant.

S: No, it doesn't.

Kulananda: So it's only really for your own sake that you should behave as you wish.

S: It says please yourself. It really doesn't make any difference. By the time you meet them, it's too late; after all, you've got a whole history behind you, all the things that you've ever done in your life. So how you just behave at that particular moment with them is not going to influence their judgement at all. When it is said that they are 'Those Who Know', and who by implication know you too, it doesn't mean just you at the present moment in a very superficial sense, but they can see right down, so to speak, into the depths, see what you really are as determined by or conditioned by the experiences of your whole lifetime. So it's too late to behave in a particular way at that particular moment for their benefit.

One can take it in various other ways; that's not the only possible interpretation. One could say 'Those Who Know' - those who know Reality - it doesn't matter how you behave because they will be able to take you from that point to a higher degree of understanding and so on. You don't need to behave in any particular way. Their skilful means will be adequate to the situation. You can behave well, you can behave badly, you can behave politely or rudely; they will find some way of teaching you and bringing you to a deeper level of understanding.

With 'the sons of the Other' you need to behave wisely - all right, you need to be receptive in a proper manner, you need to listen to them,

otherwise you won't be able to benefit from them, but in the case of Those Who Know all that doesn't apply. Not only do they not bother how you behave, but they will be able to turn the way in which you behave to your eventual benefit or teach you some lesson by that means. One could look at it in that way too.

Abhaya: So what level of spiritual development do you think is being indicated here by 'Those Who Know'?

S: It's very difficult to say in a general way, if you just take the English words; they are so vague and general. But they are capitalised, so that would seem to suggest some deeper spiritual understanding or knowledge. But in what that consists precisely or technically for the Sufi, we are not told.

Abhaya: What I was thinking about was, say, Stream Entry

S: I don't know that one can make that sort of technical comparison.

Abhaya: But even in that case, say in the case of the Stream Entrant, the Stream Entrant wouldn't necessarily be able to - or would he/she? - divine the stage of your being to that extent.

S: A Zen Master might. For instance, to give you an amusing example, I heard a story from my friend Mr. Chen, and it concerned the late Karmapa when he was quite young. This is a little in my mind because I just happen to be reading the life stories of the sixteen Karmapas. Mr. Chen told me once that when he met the Karmapa in Eastern Tibet, the Karmapa was only quite young, and according to Mr. Chen quite playful; so by accident Mr. Chen, while conversing with the Karmapa, happened to make a loud fart, which is not very polite. So the Karmapa gaily, and even more loudly, farted back. [Laughter] This made quite an impression on Mr. Chen - the freedom and informality and spontaneity of the young Karmapa. He was able to deal with that situation, because if you'd done that in the presence, let's say, of someone who was merely a good religious person, at the most they would just pretend that it didn't happen, and you would have been left feeling a little embarrassed, but in the case of the Karmapa - assuming that he was say one of Those Who Know - he was able to turn it to some advantage, and even communicate [Very LOUD Laughter]

_____: How do you perfect this - ?

S: You see the point. So, in other words, in the case of Those Who Know, it doesn't really matter how you behave. they are going to be able to handle the situation anyway, and not only handle it but turn it to your benefit, and impart and communicate something. Read that next saying and al-Ghazali's comment on it, because he doesn't agree with him.

"Another said:

- Seek fellowship only with one who will repent for you if you sin, apologise for you if you do wrong, bear your burden for you and take care of his own.

The man who said this would make the way of brotherhood narrow for people. This is not how it should be. Rather you should seek the brotherhood of any intelligent, religious person, resolving to observe these conditions yourself, but not imposing such stipulations on the other. Then you will have many brothers, for you will be a brother for the sake of God. Otherwise, your brotherhood will be for your own convenience only."

S: The Sufi in that saying, if it is a Sufi saying, 'Seek fellowship only with one who will repent for you if you sin,' etc., seems to put too much of an onus on the other person. It seems to be an insistence on your rights - or his duties towards you, and therefore your rights - rather than on your duties towards him, and hence al-Ghazali does not agree with that saying. But he says explicitly: 'Rather should you seek the brotherhood of any intelligent, religious person, resolving to observe these conditions yourself, but not imposing such stipulations on the other.' It does seem really a very important point, that though rights and duties are reciprocal the emphasis should be, so far as you are concerned, on your part, on your duties rather than on your rights and the other person's duties towards you. If you faithfully discharge your duties, the chances are, or there will be a greater likelihood, that the other person will observe his duties towards you, and you will in fact get your rights. In fact, if there is a mutual recognition of duties there is no need to speak of rights at all. In fact, one might say, other factors being equal, people start thinking of their rights, or claiming their rights, only when there has been very great remissness in the performance of their duties on the part of other people.

For instance, one might say that in the days preceding the French Revolution the monarchy - the aristocracy - had almost entirely forgotten their duties with regard to the common people; so probably if the monarchy, and if the aristocracy, had been more mindful of their duties towards the common people, the common people wouldn't have felt the need to insist on their rights to such an extent. Even though their situation might not have been a very happy one, had they felt that the monarchy and the aristocracy were trying at least to perform their duties or perform them to some extent, they might have been more content with their position. But it would seem that in the end the monarchy and the aristocracy had no sense of any duty towards the rest of the population at all, and merely plundered them. So the people didn't remind the monarchy and the aristocracy of their duty - well, perhaps that had been done fruitlessly, for years if not centuries - therefore they started claiming their rights. That was a quite decisive development, perhaps, in the modern world, marking - to generalise - the final shift, so to speak, from medieval to modern civilisation; the final shift from emphasis on duties to emphasis on rights.

Nowadays we tend to think much more in terms of our rights than in terms of our duties. We don't like to hear about duties; we like only to hear about rights. So I think we have to try to reassert the balance.

Devaraja: I've noticed over the last three, four, five years, personally I've moved round to the position that I think that probably the most successful form of state is hierarchical, with a kind of benevolent king at the top to direct and guide things. I think there's been a fairly good example of this in recent times in that in Spain's transition from the Franco dictatorship to the present parliamentary democracy, the king, Juan Carlos, has supervised the whole transition. But he has quite a remarkable character. He seems to have a genuinely altruistic concern for the state of the country, and in fact the state of Spain politically during the time when the most power was in his hands was probably best, there was less chaos.

S: Well, under Franco there was this rigid insistence on duty, and of course the modern emphasis is on right; and maybe the king just marked the point of transition where the two were held more or less in equilibrium.

Kuladeva: It's very difficult, though, to maintain that level of equilibrium, isn't it? The whole idea of the philosopher king goes back to Plato, and it just seems very difficult to practise. I think even the Roman emperors did to some extent try - they changed their method of succession from the hereditary principle to one of choosing someone who would be a suitable emperor; but even that fell down. Occasionally you do get somebody like that who can rule wisely.

S: Charlemagne is probably a good example, and Queen Elizabeth I is probably a good example. She disliked war intensely, and tried to keep out of it as much as possible, despite the fact that her young nobles were always [almost?] clamouring to be allowed to go to war. Through war you won glory.

Some of the Muslim rulers have been very good in this respect - Saladin; Akbar was a notable example. One could even mention Ashoka, though we don't know so much about him in detail. But Akbar certainly had a very great influence on Kublai Khan. So there have been such people.

Anyway, that will lead us rather astray, but no doubt there is an over-emphasis nowadays on rights: people think far too much in terms of their rights and not nearly enough in terms of their duties. Because their duties need not be regarded as being defined along conventional lines. The fact that one speaks in terms of duties doesn't mean that one is necessarily thinking that it is one's duty, for instance, to be respectful to the local vicar or the local squire. That is not necessarily what one is thinking in terms of. The content of the duty may be quite different from what people actually think.

Subhuti: Or to have a family.

S: Or to have a family, yes.

"A man said to al-Junayd:

- Brothers are scarce in these times. Where am I to find a brother in God?

Al-Junayd made him repeat this thrice before replying:

*- If you want a brother to provide for **you** and to bear **your** burden, such - by my life - are few and far between. But if you want a brother in God whose burden you will carry and whose pain you will bear, then I have a troop I can introduce you to."*

S: This is exactly what we were talking about the other day. People say: 'I don't have any friends; friends are very scarce nowadays.' Well, they don't want to be a friend, they just want to have a friend. A friend is a sort of possession for their convenience. But you can well complain of the scarcity of friends if you are thinking of having a friend; but if you want to be a friend, well - there are any number of people that you can be friends with. Yes, write it down! [Laughter]

It's very true, isn't it? But it's interesting that 800 years ago, in some part of the Muslim Empire, I don't know exactly where, people could be saying exactly the same things as we are saying, coming to exactly the same conclusions in response to exactly the same complaints. This is all connected with the emphasis on rights rather than duties. Instead of thinking in terms of 'It's my duty to be a friend', you think in terms of 'It's my right to have a friend. Why don't I have a friend? Why don't people want to be friends with me? I've got the right to have a friend.' If you think in that way, yes, you'll find friends few and far between, but if you think, 'It's my duty to be friends with people', you'll find many friends then.

Years ago we used sometimes to hear about Order members, even, who would not come along to anything for months on end, and when you did finally meet them they'd complain that they never saw anybody; nobody came to see them. So they would go on to make all sorts of generalisations about the Order - i.e. the rest of the Order. It was 'unfriendly'. You hear people saying - both in and out of the Order - 'No one ever speaks to me.' 'Well, do you ever speak to anybody?' 'Why should I? It's their responsibility to speak to me.' It's so strange, this attitude.

Anyway, this is all pretty obvious to us, isn't it, so let's carry on.

"The man was silent."

Yes, what could he say to that?

"Know that there are three kinds of people: a man from whose fellowship you can benefit; a man you can be of benefit to, and by whom you will not be hurt, though you cannot benefit from him; and a man whom you cannot benefit and by whom you will be hurt, namely the fool or man of evil character. The third type you should avoid. As for the second, do not shun him, for you will benefit in the Other World by his intercession and prayers, and by your reward for attending to him."

S: That's pretty clear, too, isn't it? '- three kinds of people: a man from whose fellowship you can benefit; a man you can be of benefit to, and by whom you will not be hurt, through you cannot benefit from him; and a man whom you cannot benefit and by whom you will be hurt, namely the fool or man of evil character. The third type you should avoid. As for the second, do not shun him,' - that is to say, do not actually shun him - 'for you will benefit in the Other World by his intercession and prayers, and by your reward for attending to him.'

So presumably you should actually make friends with the man of the first type, 'a man from whose fellowship you can benefit' spiritually.

Tejamitra: Is there any Buddhist equivalent to benefiting in the Other World?

S: The 'Other World' here stands for spiritual values in general. Islam often speaks in terms of regard for the Other World, and having your actions determined by considerations of the Other World. In a way, it corresponds to the Buddhist conception of karma, one might say very roughly: that actions do have consequences, so you should act accordingly. The Other World represents the consequences, because the Other

World includes heaven and hell.

Prasannasiddhi: It's interesting: 'you will benefit in the Other World by his intercession and prayers'. This is 'the man you can be of benefit to'. It seems to imply he is going to supplicate your -

S: It could be a poor man whom you help and who therefore out of gratitude may pray for you.

Nagabodhi: It seems to be moving things back on to a selfish tack to me, because here is someone whom you can benefit, although you won't get any benefit back, and the only reason al-Ghazali tells you to not avoid him is because you will get some kick-back eventually through his intercession and prayers; which seems, in terms of the things we have been reading about - you can benefit him; that's your reason for befriending him. But al-Ghazali seems to bring it back on to this rather tit-for-tat basis.

S: I think it's impossible to avoid that, because if you choose a friend, you do think in terms not only of your benefiting him but of you benefiting from him. On the other hand, you can't think too much in those terms, otherwise it becomes too much of a *quid pro quo*, too much of a bargain. So it's almost a Catch-22 situation: that you shouldn't associate with someone for the sake of what you can get out of them, but nonetheless you do associate with your brother for the sake of spiritual improvement. That isn't an egoistic or selfish gain in the ordinary sense.

Devaraja: I sometimes think that our approach to teaching the *mettā* in Centres is maybe a bit psychological and sophisticated. We constantly put the emphasis on the benefits that you personally can - Makes it a bit too subjective.

S: Well, I have spoken about this, because unless you genuinely wish well towards the other person, in a sense you don't develop *mettā*, so you are not benefited.

Devaraja: I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't tap - maybe it's just a personal approach, but I sometimes feel that maybe to eradicate completely that psychological terminology, that aspect of it, and approach it much more idealistically and present it more in terms of actually transforming the world by emanating something from oneself and bringing happiness and so on, would be a much better tack, as it might touch something more innocent and -

S: I think over the years perhaps the psychological emphasis within the Friends has increased in certain respects. As far as I remember, I didn't emphasise the *mettā bhāvanā*, when I was teaching it, in the sense that you did it because it benefited you; or even if I spoke in terms of it contributing to your spiritual development, what did one mean by 'your spiritual development'? One didn't see that in a subtle, selfish way. Your spiritual development included greater capacity to help other people, and help transform the world.

But, yes, I think we have to try to generally, even, get away from this attitude of you do certain things - you meditate or study - just for your sake, for the sake of your individual development. I think that can become almost self-indulgent. I have referred several times in recent years to various rationalisations in this connection: that you allege that you are doing something - something which seems a bit questionable - because it

helps you in your spiritual development, as though this justifies anything. But this seems to be - one might describe it as ethically solipsistic. One needs to get out of oneself; one needs to think in more objective terms as well, not be always asking 'What effect does this have on me? What does this contribute to my spiritual development?' And if it doesn't contribute anything you don't want to have anything to do with it. There is sometimes a tendency of that sort, I feel.

So if you ask someone to help or to co-operate in some particular venture, some particular work, their first thought, very often, is 'How is this going to affect my spiritual development?' and they spend a long time perhaps working it out. Meanwhile the job has been done by somebody else. One can be a little too precious in this way.

Abhaya: Do you say you feel that that sort of psychological emphasis in some way has increased over the years?

S: In certain respects, yes. I think partly, if not mainly, because we've introduced more what I call peripheral activities - things like massage, which make 'me' feel better, and so on; even yoga can function in this way. And even drama groups, so that 'I' can express 'myself'. Most people aren't thinking in terms of 'If we have a drama group, eventually we'll be able to put on very positive productions which will have an inspiring effect upon people'. Most people seem to think in terms of 'This is an opportunity for me to express my creativity, which will be good for me.' The thinking seems to be almost entirely of that sort - with just a few people perhaps like, in this particular connection, Jayamati - seeing a bit further than that.

Devaraja: It's almost as if people think in terms of being more creative themselves rather than in terms of creating something beautiful and thinking of it in more objective terms.

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S: But it seems strange, in the case of the *mettā bhāvanā* - *mettā* being essentially good will experienced towards another person - but you develop that good will not for his sake but for your sake. That means that in a sense there is no good will there, unless there is good will towards yourself. But there is certainly no good will towards the other person if you develop good will towards the other person simply for your own sake, in a very narrow and exclusive way. You must develop good will towards the other person for his sake. You must believe in doing something for his sake, even though, yes, admittedly that will redound to your benefit. You have to try to keep that knowledge a bit in the background; whereas if you do the *mettā bhāvanā* for the sake of its effect on your mind, not for the sake of the other person - even though, yes, it does have an effect on your mind if you do it for the sake of the other person - then you will not be able to do it for the sake of the other person and therefore not benefit yourself either.

This is a problem created by our reflexive consciousness.

Devaraja: Can you just amplify this slightly - a problem created by our reflexive consciousness? in the sense that we have an awareness of ourselves actually benefiting from doing it in that sense?

S: Yes. But it's true that we do benefit from helping others, but if our awareness of the fact that we benefit from helping others is so intense that we benefit as it were others for the sake of helping ourselves, then we are no longer really benefiting others - especially, for instance, in the case of a subjective practice like the *mettā bhāvanā* - and therefore not really benefiting ourselves. So if it's a question of giving a certain amount of money, so we give because we think it benefits us, well, even if we have that wrong belief at least we part with the money, which means that the other person is objectively benefited. But in the case of the *mettā bhāvanā* allegedly for the other person's benefit, we don't literally hand anything over. So if we are doing it too deliberately for the sake of its effect on our minds and not for the sake of the other person, not as an expression of genuine good will for the other person, there will not in fact be any effect on our own minds, or at least not to the same extent; so then the practice will become self-defeating. But it's very difficult to keep out of our minds the thought that 'this will benefit me too'. It's therefore difficult not to dwell upon that thought; and perhaps it's difficult to prevent that thought becoming in the end even dominant.

I get sometimes a quite unpleasant impression when I hear so much talk of people doing this and doing that 'for the sake of my development' - because sometimes they don't even say 'spiritual development', just 'my development' - doing everything for the sake of their own development - in the end it becomes self-defeating; you don't develop, because you strengthen your selfishness, so to speak, to such an extent that development just comes to a halt.

Devaraja: Arising a bit out of what you were saying yesterday, and also arising out of my own thoughts about the value of having things like massage and so on around a Centre, - well, what you were saying yesterday about seeing [one]self as existing more mentally - it seems to me that - I'm only saying this from outside, not actually having done anything like massage and so on -

S: No? Oh.

Devaraja: No - it's just that it would have the effect of pulling you into your bodily experience and reinforcing a kind of quite solid, quite mundane view of yourself, physicality and so on.

S: The argument is, and no doubt it is justified at least in the abstract, that a lot of people are one-sidedly intellectual, or let's say one-sidedly mental, and out of touch with their emotions, even out of touch with their own bodies; and one of the best ways of putting them in touch with their emotions is through massage, through putting them in contact with their bodies, and then a sort of balance is restored. They do become more whole. I think this is true. But on the other hand it is really no part of the spiritual path; it's all part of the remedial psychological work that is to be done, unfortunately, in the West before one can even think of following the spiritual path. So we have to be very careful how we evaluate these things. It's a pity that we have to have massage workshops for this sort of purpose, but I think the danger is that people who don't really need them are drawn into these things, or when they no longer need them they remain on that level, and in fact concentrate on it and work on it more and more. And instead of developing, so to speak, their mental consciousness, consciousness becomes centred more and more on the body, and it becomes grosser, more self-indulgent and so on. And I think this definitely does happen, in quite a few cases.

Devaraja: I think I have seen that in one particular case - someone who concentrates a lot on massage. But I wonder if the person wouldn't get

a better experience of the physicality and non-mental non-intellectual experience of themselves just by doing a bit of work - cleaning up round the Centre, arranging flowers, and doing a regular stint. Because at least it would orientate them towards a much higher -

S: Ah, yes. And also being more practically useful.

Devaraja: Making tea, and all those kind of things.

S: Yes. And be aware of themselves doing those things. Because according to the standard *satipatthana* teaching you should be aware of the body and its movements all the time.

There is another angle to it, because massage produces pleasurable bodily sensations and it may be that some people have become out of touch with pleasure in general, and need to perhaps re-establish contact with it on the lowest, or at least the most primary, level. But nonetheless I feel that there is too much of a centric attention on the body and on the level that the body represents on the part of at least some people around the LBC. I say no more than that. I've been down there recently and talked with quite a few people; I think I can generalise a little bit about this.

I think perhaps the difficulty starts when you have classes of that sort, groups or workshops. It isn't something that is just kept between individuals or just recommended to a particular individual for a particular purpose. It becomes a sort of public activity; perhaps that isn't really quite desirable. If there are two friends, and one is feeling a bit out of sorts or a bit out of touch with himself and the other says, 'All right, let me give you a bit of massage' - well, that's all right. But when you get, say, several dozen people trooping along for a whole weekend of massage, then you begin to wonder.

Nagabodhi: But they're actually learning to do it - just to point out the other side. I get the impression that the people who are in any way seriously involved - seriously in terms of time - in massage around the LBC - the workshops are places they go to learn it, not only - they have it but that's incidental to the fact that they are learning to give it. And I know that people, say, in Sukhavati who have been on those workshops do exactly what you say. If they hadn't learned it all they'd do is give your neck a quick rub, but it does seem that they learn to be sensitive to people and to develop a kind of refined sensitivity to others through doing massage, which seems really good in some cases; much more than just having a nice physical experience of a massage. Not all the people are into it for honourable reasons; some seem to be just looking for a kind of sex substitute in the giving and receiving of massage, I'm suspicious - but I do feel that quite a few people seem to approach it quite responsibly.

S: Well, one hopes so, but I do feel still quite uneasy about it, broadly speaking.

Kuladeva: I think partly, around a centre like the LBC that's quite big, it's got quite a lot of peripheral activity, so therefore it's quite easy for somebody involved in the Centre to get distracted by that. You could spend all of your time just going along to karate, tai ch'i, yoga, massage, drama, without going on to the Dharma.

S: Well, this is why it is so important that there are Order members present in the midst of all these activities, and ideally conducting them, so that a link is provided with the spiritual tradition.

_____ :

S: Well, there is that, but obviously that can't be the sole, even the main, consideration.

I also discovered that some of the women around the LBC - and this is a topic one has to approach with some caution, so I'm going to choose my words quite carefully - seem to have become quite interested, at least theoretically, in sex therapy.

Kulananda: What!!

S: Yes, and I say this not from anything I have heard at second hand, but from what I've heard from some of the women themselves, who seem in a few cases at least to be quite enthusiastic about sex therapy, in the sense that they feel that there are some men, not excluding men Order members around the Centre, who are sexually blocked and who would benefit from their, the ladies', sexual ministrations, and would be helped on the spiritual path in this way. And they see themselves as functioning in this way, and would in fact like to function in this way.

As I say, this is not anything heard at second hand; they have confided this to me themselves.

Kulananda: This is in the form of Right Livelihood? [Laughter]

S: It didn't go as far as that, perhaps for obvious reasons. But this is the sort of thing, the sort of tendency, which makes me a bit concerned, to say the least, about activities like massage, when they seem to get a bit out of hand or a bit out of proportion.

Abhaya: I hope we don't feel like that. We have a lot of massage in Norwich; Saddhaloka does -

S: Well, I didn't even really know that. I was confining my remarks, as I said, to what I have come to know recently about the situation at the LBC, which I must say nevertheless - in case one should misunderstand - is on the whole very positive and I am on the whole very pleased with it and feel it is progressing. But nonetheless there are certain areas of concern and perhaps we should

I hasten perhaps to add that the women who confided to me in this way were Mitras, they were not Order members; just in case that might have been misunderstood.

Anyway, perhaps we'd better pass on. (drowned by laughter)

[TEA BREAK]

S: investigations into hypnosis, and it does seem that one can hypnotise people, or some people can hypnotise some other people; and it would seem that some what we now just call psychosomatic ailments are susceptible to this type of treatment.

Abhaya: I was thinking of laying on of hands.

S: But that is just part of the mechanics of the treatment. I think it's generally agreed that laying on of hands is no longer needed as regards healing, and waving of hands is no longer needed as regards hypnosis.

Kulananda: So you would say that anyone who purported to be having an effect on someone else through their own energy was in fact only having a hypnotic effect on the other person, and that bringing about a change in something psychosomatic by affecting the other person's mind?

S: Yes - when one speaks of healing, one isn't thinking (but some people may differ here) of being able to cure diseases which are essentially physical in origin, assuming that there are such diseases, by hypnotic means. But clearly some diseases of psychosomatic origin can be cured by hypnotic means; can be cured by - what do they call this kind of healing? Faith healing - or spiritual healing nowadays is more I see no reason to doubt that, and so I see no reason why that shouldn't theoretically be incorporated into Buddhism in the same way that, say, yoga is or massage is - as having a subordinate place, part of our repertoire of techniques to help people.

Kulananda: There is another theory of run it wasn't just a mental attitude and that there is a stream of - that some people can act as capacitors of energy which they can pass on to you.

S: Yes, this would seem to be the case. I believe that this is the case. I have some experience myself of this kind of thing which I have talked about on several occasions. I wouldn't deny this. But I question whether energy - just anybody's old energy - is necessarily helpful. I have very serious reservations nowadays about acupuncture: not because it doesn't work but because it does work. I have very serious reservations about whether people who practise acupuncture really know what they are doing. They are producing certain effects, but whether those are effects which will benefit the patient, whether in the short or the long run, I think that's a quite different matter.

Kulananda: If they lead to the alleviation of symptoms there still might be quite profound changes going on elsewhere as a result of the treatment.

S: Well, in some cases they don't seem to result in the alleviation of symptoms. One is almost having to have pure faith in the fact that it is doing you good at all, because it doesn't seem to be doing you good; you don't feel better, and the symptoms haven't disappeared. None the less, you are assured that something positive is happening, and you believe that; you go on with the treatment, in some cases for years on end.

Devaraja: I have come across people who have had a course of treatment by acupuncture, and said that it does take quite some considerable time. They have noticed quite profound changes in their moods, maybe feeling quite tired and then after a course of treatment there comes a

point where there is a transition, and things seem to re-order themselves.

S: Well, that assumes that you have a course of treatment with the same acupuncturist over a period of years, so that would assume a very definite commitment of the acupuncturist to his practice, which isn't always the case.

Devaraja: These have been much shorter periods, maybe, say, six months.

Tejamitra: Yes, I would say I had a successful [treatment] over a period of six months,

S: But on the other hand, these are not experimental conditions. One doesn't know, because it is a known fact that out of say 100 people - well, supposing 100 people have a certain complaint, of those treated by any medical means 50% will become better, and out of those who are not treated again 50% will become better. So one has to bear in mind considerations of that sort.

Devaraja: It's - just to recount one or two things that I've found quite interesting - I've never had any treatment with acupuncture, but I've just noticed one or two things, like for instance in meeting an acupuncturist in Cambridge in passing, in a café, and he was training and he just took my pulse, and I noticed that it was a much deeper taking of the pulse. And also two girls who were acupuncturists were both training, were both comparing notes, both took my pulse and then found that their findings were both the same, that they were taking a deeper pulse, not just the blood pulse. So there does seem to be some sort of objective element that they were both relating to or coming across, which wasn't one that would be recognised by -

Subhuti: Nobody's denying that.

S: Yes, but there is a question of knowing how you treat that objective element - that is again quite different. As I said, I don't deny that acupuncture produces the results, but what I doubt very much is whether always the acupuncturist is fully in control of those results, or in other words really knows what he is doing. Some of them seem very confident - I rather distrust that. Well, I've had one lot of acupuncture treatment, and it's notorious that the acupuncturist in that case, a very well-known one, didn't in the least know what he was doing. But perhaps that has been more in the past.

Subhuti: I used to think that people who meditate ought to be a bit careful with acupuncturists, because I think even experienced acupuncturists are used to dealing with people whose energy is flowing in a certain way. I had acupuncture once, and I passed out; and apparently that happened to you -

S: Well, I more than passed out: I was - well, I have told the story more than once.

Subhuti: Well, apparently this is quite well known. My experience was that he was like a sort of village farm mechanic tinkering with a space ship. [Laughter]

S: horse doctors - in the old days horse doctors used to sometimes treat human beings. It was well known in the army, for instance, that a dose of a particular kind of medicine that they gave you for a certain purpose was equal to the dose that they normally gave horses under similar circumstances.

But it is really unfortunate - but, again, it's interesting that people have this terrible scepticism about which is perhaps justified to a great extent, but they have this blind faith in alternative medicine. It is similar to the fact that you become sceptical about Christianity etc. so you leave the church, then you fall at the feet of some guru who makes even greater claims than the pope himself.

_____ : But he has a beard.

S: Recently a writer I was reading commented on the fact that even some encounter-group gurus nowadays wear long gowns and beards and so on, and try to create an aura of themselves as being gurus. He was clearly referring to Fritz Perls, the founder of gestalt therapy.

But one cannot help suspecting, for purely subjective reasons, that some of these practitioners like to surround themselves with an aura of authority, in much the same way that the traditional doctor does. I think this is highly suspect. They say all sorts of mysterious things: in the case of the acupuncturist: 'Ah well, we've got to get your energies in balance', and that all sounds so profound and wonderful and mysterious and yin-and-yangy [Laughter] - you don't question anything, 'We're getting your energies in balance'. So of course you'll go through all sorts of painful experiences - 'My dear, that's to be expected' [Laughter] -caters to your masochistic instincts. So you just stick with it, you never question anything, whether it really is helping you. Maybe you stop only when the money runs out.

I'm not at all happy with - I get less and less happy with alternative medicine, as practised even by some of our own Friends. There is this aura of the wise old man or the wise old woman who creeps in and - this sort of authority and all that sort of thing, and them knowing far more than you do so you just submit yourself to them. Yes, in certain limited respects, they do know more than you do and perhaps they can help you, but I think that very easily gets out of hand.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe there should be a distinction between actual diseases and things that need proper curing, and people just leading a healthier style of life which would probably clear up a lot of psychological problems.

Devaraja: They do seem to attract a lunatic fringe of people. A girl in Brighton who is an acupuncturist - who's given it up now, actually - says she always much preferred treating people from the Friends because they did actually seem to want to get better. But a lot of people would come to her just to leech off her and get a kind of an energy buzz of some kind, and she just found it so draining and exhausting that she's just given up practising. But virtually everybody she came across from the Friends, there was quite a difference.

S: Anyway, let's carry on.

"God (Exalted is He!) inspired unto Moses (Peace upon him!):

- If you obey Me, how many are your brothers!

Meaning, if you console them, suffer them, and do not envy them."

S: That is to say, if you carry out your duties - again confirming the previous point - you will have many brothers, but not if you just look for people who will perform the duties of brotherhood towards you. Do your duty by people and you will find many brothers.

"Someone said:

- I have kept the fellowship of people for fifty years without discord falling between us, for I have been with them as I would be on my own.

One who bears this mark has many brothers."

S: Because in a way confidence invites confidence. If you are genuinely yourself with other people, that invites them, that encourages them to be genuinely themselves with you, doesn't it? And in that way brotherhood increases and flourishes.

Nagabodhi: It also suggests consistency, like if you befriend someone but don't let him see the whole of you, you might, as you become more friendly, become less inhibited, so you let things out which maybe would break the friendship, conceivably, or at least affect it.

S: I can't quite see the connection.

Nagabodhi: If you've gone into a friendship on a dishonest basis, and by being very polite and not just being yourself right from the start, you might get into a friendship on a dishonest basis which would get undermined with time.

S: I think that always happens. I think one always goes from greater dishonesty to less dishonesty; it's probably only a matter of difference of degree. You let out more and more of yourself. You shouldn't deliberately mislead the person you take as a friend or brother to begin with, because if he one day finds out you deliberately misled him, well, that will affect your friendship; but one should, I think, be prepared for quite a few surprises in the course of your developing friendship with somebody, because it's very difficult to be very, very frank right from the beginning. But the length of time is important; this is one of the things I have been struck by more and more over the last few years - that continuity is very very important. Even if there are big gaps, you don't see anyone for months at a time, but you go on meeting them steadily and regularly over a period of quite a few years, something definitely does build up, however slowly: you do get to know them better and better, however gradually. How much more would that be the case if you were actually in unbroken contact over a period of years?

So here fifty years is mentioned. 'I have kept the fellowship of people for fifty years without discord falling between us' - you have to be at least 60 to be able to say that! Very few of our Friends can say that as yet. To keep up fellowship for 50 years with or without discord is difficult enough, not to speak of without discord. It's quite an achievement.

But I think this has been especially noticeable among the Chairmen - that as they have met from year to year they have been able to disclose

more and more of themselves to one another. I think those chairmen who are present would bear that out. In fact, they don't even always tell me what they do [Laughter]. I have to be satisfied with little bits and pieces of information and read them through and through. I can see the effects in their slightly different behaviour towards one another. They do seem to get more and more friendly, if You could argue that in order to become a chairman at all you have to be a pretty competitive creature, so for 10 or 12 of these competitive creatures to get on well with one another is quite an achievement. Anyway, don't take the competitiveness too seriously.

Subhuti: To be competitive and lost.

S: They have a quality, perhaps, which under other less favourable circumstances might have developed into something like competitiveness.

Anyway, a new topic is introduced in the next paragraph, so let's go into that.

"Relief and freedom from discomfort includes not objecting to supererogatory devotions. A group of Sufis used to engage in fellowship on condition of equality in four respects: If one of them ate all day his fellow would never say, 'Fast!'; if he fasted constantly he would never say, 'Break!'; if he slept all night through he would never say, 'Get up!'; and if he prayed all night through he would never say, 'Sleep!' Instead, he would follow suit, neither adding nor subtracting, because disparity moves the temperament to affectation and formality, without fail."

S: That is quite interesting, isn't it? You know what 'supererogatory devotions' are?

Abhaya: Yes! [Laughter]

_____ : 'Please, sir!' [Laughter]

S: Within the Islamic context?

Abhaya: Beyond what is absolutely required by duty.

S: Yes.

Abhaya: From Latin *super* meaning beyond, and *rogo*, to ask: [*footnote: erogo, to pay out*] beyond what is asked.

S: 'A group of Sufis used to engage in fellowship on condition of equality in four respects: If one of them ate all day his fellow would never say, "Fast!"; if he fasted constantly he would never say, "Break!"' etc. So what is the point of the anecdote?

_____ : You support.

S: You support, yes. It's as though the fact that you support is more important than the fact that you either fast or break fast or meditate all night or sleep all night; but you support, and in that way maintain unity, is more important in respect of the maintenance of brotherhood, or in respect of the relief and freedom from discomfort.

_____ : You're also trusting him.

S: You're also trusting him, yes.

Abhaya: It implies quite a high degree of development

S: I think it does. It's significant, perhaps, that this a group of Sufis, not ordinary Muslims.

Nagabodhi: Why is that? Why is it significant that they are Sufis?

S: Well, Sufis are usually considered as people who are more concerned with the essentials, as we would regard them, of religion rather than with external conformity as are most Muslims - making that sort of distinction which many Muslims perhaps would not accept.

Again, it's as though one so often comes up against individualism. If, for instance, someone wants to break fast, you say 'No, let's not break fast, let's fast for a bit longer' - and it seems very good; it seems as though you are taking the religious side, so to speak, you are more pious, more sincere; but it may not necessarily be so. And in any case, at least within the context of brotherhood, it is more important that you and your brother keep in accord, and no element of discomfort is introduced on account of your going different ways. It's as though accord is a sort of spiritual practice in itself, because it militates so much against individualism.

Some chapters ago we had that little anecdote about if someone asks you to go for a walk with him, don't say 'Why?' Or if he asks you to go in a particular direction, don't say 'Why?' Just agree with him, go along with him. You might argue 'Why should we go that way? Why shouldn't we go another way?' Well, it's quite true, but the fact that you argue in that way at all only too often is an expression of your unco-operative and individualistic attitude. So going along with your brother, and experiencing relief and freedom from discomfort in this way, even in respect of devotions of that sort, means that you are working on your unco-operativeness and individualism. In other words, that sort of co-operativeness is itself a spiritual practice.

If you get into a heated argument as to whether you should do an extra half-hour's meditation or not, that half-hour's meditation that you eventually do doesn't perhaps have all that much value. You are better amicably agreeing perhaps not to meditate.

Objectively speaking, yes, it's difficult, in our terms, to have a community where different people are doing different things; so if one wants to maintain the unity and harmony of the community, it's better that people should, so to speak, just go along with one another. Unless, of course, they've reached such a high spiritual level that they can in fact all do different things and that doesn't disturb the underlying sense or experience

of unity and harmony. That is quite difficult.

In other words, in order to maintain unity and harmony, give up doing your own thing. Your own thing doesn't really matter very much: give up your pseudo-individualism, your pseudo-independence. It's more important that you go along with your brother. I've noticed this is in fact often how things have worked out. I noticed, sitting in on house meetings of the Sukhavati community, several times things were worked out in this way. People did express a preference for how long they should meditate or whether there should be silence at breakfast and if so for how long; there was a certain amount of - I won't say disagreement, but non-agreement; different people have different ideas. But in the end, those who were relatively in the minority were in a way quite happy to go along with those who seemed to be in the majority. They didn't maintain their point or their demand with any obstinacy, and that was quite good.

Nagabodhi: A sort of essential agreement to agree.

S: Yes.

Kulananda: It needn't even necessarily work in terms of the majority taking the lead. Sometimes some of the minority have such strong opinions that the majority will go along with them.

S: Right, yes indeed. Or stronger needs, or more urgent needs. It's a question of the stronger party, the essentially stronger party, so to speak giving in. You give in through strength, not out of weakness, because you can appreciate the need for unity.

Kulananda: The strength of your feeling for the harmony in the situation.

S: On what other grounds could a majority give in to the minority? It's completely undemocratic!

Anyway, a whole series of quotations and various sayings illustrating the points that we've been covering.

*"It has been said that if you drop your **kulfa** (formality), your **ulfa** (friendship) will last, and that if your burden is light you will have lasting affection."*

S: You see, even Muslims appreciate a pun. They are human too. 'If you drop your kulfa, your ulfa will last.' No need to comment on that.

"One of the Companions of the Prophet said:

- God has cursed those who cause discomfort. And he (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:

- I and the godly in my Community are free of formality."

S: We treat one another as brothers, as friends. All right, carry on: something a bit different here.

"Someone said:

- If a man practises four things in his brother's house, then his society will be complete: if he eats with him, uses his toilet, prays and sleeps."

S: This is quite interesting, isn't it? 'If a man practises four things in his brother's house,' - so to speak in his brother's company - 'then his society will be complete: if he eats with him, uses his toilet, prays and sleeps.' These are almost the four things that one does together in a spiritual community. What is the significance of doing these things in your brother's house rather than in your own - there is a significance; what do you think that is?

_____ : That they are living together.

S: No, not just that, it's more than that. There is an extra element.

Kulananda: You feel at ease in his house.

S: You feel just as much at ease in his house as in your own house, so you can do in his house the basic things of human life that you normally do in your own house: that is to say, you are equally at ease eating in your brother's house, you feel no embarrassment, no constraint, whatever time you arrive; you don't bother not to arrive at lunchtime or have any feeling of embarrassment, because you know you are very welcome at lunchtime just as at your own house. Even using his toilet -

[End of tape 19, tape 20]

You have to be a little careful about these matters, because it isn't a question of just asking 'Where is the toilet?' or just making a note of where it is. It is a little more complicated than that. And I do believe from what I've read that the Arabs were and still are a bit particular about these sort of things. Arabs, at least the old type of Arab, never urinated or defecated in the presence of another person or within the sight of another person. They would go and hide out of sight behind a sand dune. So they were perhaps a bit more sensitive about these things than we have to be under modern conditions where there is a flush toilet in every house. So for them it was a much bigger thing, as it were, to be able to just use the toilet even when you were in your brother's house, and not in your own house, than it is with us.

Even among us some people do feel some hesitation, don't they? When they are just a guest in someone's house in the ordinary sense, I know that there are some people, both men and women, who have to screw up their courage to ask where the toilet is; which wouldn't be the case in their own home. [Laughter] So it is a sign of friendship and brotherhood even now that in someone's house you have no more bother about going to the toilet, you are just as much at ease going to his toilet as you are going to our own toilet at home. So this is still highly relevant, isn't it?

'Prays' - you feel no embarrassment about performing your prayers in front of your brother. Well, normally Muslims don't, because they are so

accustomed to these five daily prayers that they can do these things quite unselfconsciously. The same with Tibetans: they can chant mantras or tell their beads or prostrate themselves before pictures and images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas without any selfconsciousness at all; it just doesn't bother them that there are other people around or that other people see them. So it's the same sort of thing that is meant here.

And 'sleeps' - he feels just as much at home sleeping in his friend's house as in his own. He feels just as safe, just as secure, etc. etc. So this in a way does very much describe the spiritual community, because these are the things that you all do together: in the spiritual community you all eat together, you share your meals, you use the same toilet or toilets, you have your meditation and Puja together, and you all sleep under the same roof. Nobody goes home, so to speak, to sleep. You do all these things under one and the same roof. So that's the mark of a spiritual community.

So it's interesting that the idea of brotherhood and the idea of spiritual community seem to come quite close; except, in the Islamic context, there is the question of woman, which doesn't quite arise in the same way in the case of a men's spiritual community. So that comes in in the next saying.

"This was mentioned to one of the elders, who added:

- A fifth remains, namely that he may bring his wife to his brother's house, and have conjugal relations with her there. For the home is chosen for privacy in these five things, otherwise the mosques are more comfortable for the hearts of worshippers."

S: That is quite interesting, isn't it? 'The home is chosen for privacy in these five things' - well, why do you have a house at all in the ordinary sense? - so that you can eat at ease and privately, so that you can go to the toilet comfortably, say your prayers without disturbance and sleep without being disturbed; and also, this elder reminds people, have conjugal relations. So if you feel towards your brother in such a way, you are so much at home with him, that you can eat in his house just as in your own, use his toilet, pray in his house, sleep in his house, you ought also to be able to bring your wife there for conjugal relations; because you should be so much at home in his house. In other words, to put it more generally, you don't even feel the need to conceal your legitimate sexual activities from your brother. You can be quite open with him about those, and can use his home for that purpose, just as you would use your own. It is just as private a place to you as your own home.

There is a general point here as regards spiritual communities, because clearly there is no question of bringing a woman onto the premises, but in a general sense that in the case of those who are friends and brothers you are able to be quite open about your legitimate sexual activities. I say 'legitimate' because it is a question of, here in the saying, your wife and conjugal relations. You wouldn't, for instance, feel able to, say, rape a woman in your brother's house, because that would be illegitimate, that would be morally wrong. So that is a quite different sort of thing. But with your brothers you should be quite open about your legitimate sexual activities. And, of course, if you have ever been guilty or are ever guilty of illegitimate sexual activities, you should be open in the sense of being able to confess to your brothers; but that carries us, perhaps, beyond the Islamic context.

But these are signs of confidence, that you eat with someone, you even eat in his house just as in your own; that you use the same toilet facilities - I've even known people use the same toothbrush - that you pray together, you meditate together, and you sleep under the same roof, maybe in

the same room. And also you are open about your legitimate sexual activities; you see no reason to conceal that information from your friend and your brother. But often, of course, people do, even - they may be quite open about all sorts of other things, but a bit guarded, a bit reticent, about that area of their life. Or even if they are not, they are open in a rather unpleasant way, if you know what I mean; in a bragging, exhibitionist way which can be quite distasteful - a pseudo- masculine way.

Nagabodhi: When Dharmarakshita was talking to me about the old days when you'd been working in Poona with him as translator, he was trying to explain how close you'd been at that time, and he said, 'When we went to the toilet, he'd be there, I'd be here - ' ! [Laughter]

S: The toilet is often an open space at the back of a village. Yes, that's true. I remember him, he'd stand a couple of dozen yards behind me, holding the little brass *lota* with the water in it, ready to pour over my hands when I'd finished. Yes, that's true. But he could have added another example: that he was courting Mrs. Dharmarakshita as she became, the present Dharmalocana, while he was going around with me. He didn't mention that. Or some people might say she was courting him. But that was going on at the same time, too. No doubt they didn't feel unduly inhibited by the fact that I was around, though I never actually saw anything going on, but I just knew. Eventually, of course, I blessed their wedding ceremony.

What do you think is meant by 'otherwise the mosques are more comfortable for the hearts of worshippers'? A mosque is not like a church. Have you ever been in a mosque? It's a quite different atmosphere; it's different from a church, it's different from a vihara or a temple. It's definitely a meeting place. In some respects it's almost like a café, except that there's no coffee and no hookahs and all that sort of thing.

Nagabodhi: There might be round the back.

S: There might be round the back, quietly.

Nagabodhi: There's one in Paris which has got a very nice tearoom that is clearly part of it.

S: It's quite a peaceful place, it's a peaceful place; and it's an unfurnished place. It's very bare, there are no pictures or statues, of course, as in a church or a temple. It's just got this bare room, as it were, maybe large or small; usually there are quite a few pillars or columns around; mats or carpets on the floor. People just sit there, they can chat during the day. And of course inasmuch as in Islam there is no separation of religion and politics, to discuss politics in the mosque would not be regarded as irreligious. They just don't have that sort of antithesis.

Subhuti: It used to be a bit like that with the old medieval churches, didn't it? People just

S: That's true. Even markets used to be held in the naves of churches. It was like the village hall as well as the church. So I don't know quite why he says 'otherwise mosques are more comfortable' - it's as though, apart from the question of privacy which you need for these activities, the mosque is the more comfortable place, in a way the more companionable place - well, there are other people there, other men there, other Muslims.

"If he does these five things the brotherhood is complete, awkwardness is removed, and comfort is assured. The speech of the Arabs points to this, since their form of greeting is:

- Marhaban ahlan wa-sahlan.

That is, 'You have a welcome with us, namely room in the heart and in the place; you have family with us, to enjoy their company without embarrassment from us; you have ease in all of this, that is, without anything you want being hard on us.'"

S: Hindus - Indians - often say, 'Make yourself at home, treat this as your house', and, yes, they really do mean it and they are quite happy if you behave in that way.

So 'If he does these five things the brotherhood is complete, awkwardness is removed, and comfort is assured.' So if you have any hesitation about eating in your brother's house or using his toilet etc., your brotherhood is not complete; there is some element of uneasiness and discomfort and even perhaps of disharmony in it.

"Relief and lack of fuss is only complete when you consider yourself beneath your brothers and think highly of them, but poorly of yourself. When you consider them better than yourself you are actually better than they!"

S: Here again the problems of the reflexive consciousness. It must be unselfconscious, it must be natural, spontaneous, genuine, sincere. You can't really consider others better than yourself in order to be actually better than them: it just doesn't work. These things shouldn't even be spoken about, because one has thereby become conscious of them.

"Abu Mu'awiya al-Aswad said:

- All my brothers are better than I!

- How is that?

- Every one of them considers me more worthy than himself, and whoever rates me higher than himself is in fact better than I."

S: Perhaps that's more an attitude that one should have in this way: to think very highly of those who think more highly of you than they think of themselves. Not that you necessarily try to think less highly of others so in fact actually you will be higher than they are.

Abhaya: Is it the Muslim custom - salaaming?

S: Yes.

Abhaya: And do you do that to your brother, or is it only to one whom you consider the boss?

Devaraja: to brothers, you give them the greeting of peace, then you make them welcome, then you sit them down and

S: I have read somewhere that Muslims give this greeting of peace only to other Muslims. They have another kind of greeting for those who are non-Muslims. I am not quite sure of the details of this, but I do remember reading something to that effect. I read somewhere that a Muslim did happen to greet a non-Muslim with the Muslim greeting as a special favour and privilege, as it were.

"The Prophet (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:

- A man is on a par with the religion of his friend, and there is no good in the fellowship of one who does not regard you as highly as himself."

S: It suggests that in a way friendship can only be between equals, brotherhood can only be between equals. This is what Aristotle says in his *Ethics*, you remember. At least, there must be many respects in which they are equal. If there is too much of inequality between them, friendship is not really possible - not friendship as defined.

Kulananda: So *kalyana mitrata* is not identical with brotherhood in that respect?

S: Well, if it is a question of one person standing in a quasi-guru-like relation to the other, consistently and without the positions ever really being reversed, then it wouldn't be brotherhood in this sense, or friendship perhaps in the Aristotelian sense. It would be another relationship - highly positive, no doubt - possibly even more positive - but not to be described in these terms.

But anyway, what does al-Ghazali go on to comment?

"This is the least of the degrees; to look with the eye of equality. Perfection lies in seeing the greater merit in the brother."

S: Do you think this is actually genuinely possible? Does one in fact? Can one sincerely do this? One can't really do it deliberately, to try and see him as better than yourself. It means perhaps being more absorbed in the other person than in yourself, paying more attention to him generally, that you are much more conscious of his good qualities than you are of your own, because you are not paying any particular attention to yourself or particularly looking at your good qualities. You are much more absorbed in the thought of his. Not that you literally, arithmetically, think that he is better, he has more good qualities, than you have.

Tejamitra: What struck me in regard to that is a good friendship might be between people who have got slightly different temperaments, so that some of the qualities you see and appreciate in him may be slightly lacking in yourself. Whereas you can get a combination of people who might not develop better and better.

S: But then of course you could theoretically contemplate your own different good qualities and conclude: 'I am just as good as he is'. You would only tend to think that the other person was better than you were, in whatsoever respect, if you concentrated more upon him and therefore more upon his qualities than you did on yourself and your own.

Tejamitra: Do you think that from that point of view for some people there are some other people who it wouldn't be suitable for them to have close friendships with, because of the temperamental differences or similarities?

S: It would depend on all sorts of factors. Sometimes people of different temperaments make very good friends. It's difficult to generalise.

Kulananda: It wouldn't be good for people to become friends on the basis of bad qualities which they don't recognise as such.

S: Well, that is distinct from a difference of temperament.

"Sufyan said:

- If you are called 'O worst of men!' and you get angry, why, you are the worst of men.

That is, you must be convinced of that in yourself always."

S: Is this to be taken literally, do you think? In the light of what I've said, you think you are the worst of men because you pay least attention to yourself, not that you literally do think that you are the worst of men - I assume; at least, I would like to understand it like that - but that you are just much more conscious of other people and therefore of other people's good qualities; you never think about your own. Not that you are spending a lot of time thinking about yourself and examining your various qualities and then coming to the conclusion that you are the worst. I don't think it is to be taken in this way, at least I hope not. That would be excessively legalistic.

Subhuti: In a sense, you are not comparing at all. It's just that you are absorbed in your brother's good qualities.

S: Yes, indeed. I don't think the point is here that you should make an elaborate comparison and then come to the conclusion that you are the worst. It can't be objective, because everybody is supposed to do this, and if it's objective then how could you all be right? There must be one who objectively is the worst. You can't all regard yourselves as the worst, but you can all equally give more attention to others than you do to yourself. I think this also is an example of the situation where literalism can work havoc.

Again, in connection with, I remember I was in some distant village somewhere in Maharashtra, and early in the morning I asked the master of the house where the toilet was. He said, 'All right, I'll show you', so he took me to the back door, and there was a great open stretch of moor; and he waved his hand and said, 'There's the toilet!' [Laughter] In other words, there wasn't one. You could go anywhere you pleased.

Nagabodhi: We arrived somewhere one night quite late, and we were rushed off for a meal. You were being sorted out in your quarters, and I turned up with Purna just dying for a pee, and suddenly found myself in this room full of people being served fruit. I said to Purna: 'I can't last, I'll have to do something.' So he had a word with the guy whose house it was, there was a quick discussion in Marathi between various people, it comes back to Purna: 'What do you want to do?' 'He just wants to make water'. They all laughed - 'Ah, no problem', and led me off down the little corridor, out into the courtyard where all the women were cooking, and he just pointed at the wall. [Laughter] So I just carried on

S: One of the very limited advantages of the ex-Untouchables, one might say, in comparison with other Hindus, [is] they have absolutely no inhibitions where anything of the nature of human excretion is concerned. They are so familiar with these things - having been, of course, many of them, sweepers and so on. Though when one goes among these people one mustn't regard their behaviour as being characteristic of that of Indians or Hindus in general. It's very different. In South India, they certainly in many cases just don't have toilets within the house. If they have toilets at all they are at the bottom of the garden. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

There are 'several verses of poetry'. This seminar is going to have to be well edited. [Laughter]

"Several verses of poetry have been uttered on the subject of humility and looking up to one's brothers:

- Be humble to those who thank you for it, and do not think you a clown.

Do not make friends with anyone who on all his friends looks down.

Another said:

- Many the friend I have met through a friend, to find him closer than the old friend in the end.

I meet many a mate, as my way I wend, to find him the friend who will never pretend."

S: Sometimes it does happen that through a friend you meet a friend who in the end becomes closer than the first or the old friend. Sometimes this does happen.

Subhuti: Why is this brought up here? It doesn't seem to be -

S: Because, I suppose, it's on account of that last phrase, 'to find him the friend who will never pretend'. It's all illustrating informality, putting one at ease. It's not easy to find that sort of friend; that sort of friend is comparatively rare. Presumably he becomes even a better friend than the friend through whom you met him because of his greater capacity for putting you at your ease and being informal in his relations with you. Because we are concerned still with the eighth duty of 'relief from discomfort and inconvenience'.

"Whenever you see yourself superior to your brother, you belittle him, and this is blameworthy among Muslims in general. The Prophet (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:

- The believer can do no worse than belittle his brother."

S: You may be superior in a certain respect to someone else, even to your brother. You can't, in a sense, especially if challenged about the matter, refuse to acknowledge that; but at least you must not dwell upon it, you must not be conscious of it; you must forget it, so to speak, as far as is possible.

"The completion of comfort and freedom from embarrassment includes consulting your brothers in all you plan, and in accepting their suggestions. He (Exalted is He!) said:

- Consult them in the matter! (Qur'an 3.159)

None of your secrets should be hidden from them."

S: All right, This question of 'consulting your brothers in all you plan, and in accepting their suggestions.' This would seem to be the sensible thing to do; they are your brothers, they are your well-wishers. It is natural that you should want to consult them in all that you plan. It is natural that you should accept their suggestions if they have any to make, as they have your well-being at heart. They want to you to succeed in your plan. This again seems to counter the tendency towards individualism and doing things by oneself, off one's own bat, in accordance with one's own ideas. At least consult your brothers. Maybe they do have some worthwhile suggestions to make. Don't think that you know everything and can necessarily go it alone.

Sometimes another person's opinion or advice is very useful. I just remember an example of this. I had a friend in Kalimpong who was very fond of firing off letters to the papers down in Calcutta, and usually these letters were on highly controversial, not to say delicate and sensitive, political matters. So one day this friend had fired off a letter and I happened to see her in the evening, and she was really pleased with this letter, really proud of it, and showed me the carbon copy. So I read it through, and I said, 'Aha, you have laid yourself open to legal proceedings here, haven't you?' So she said, 'Have I? Have I?' And she went through it, and she still didn't see the point; and I pointed it out - 'Look, this is what you've done.' And she was horrified, and at once got on the phone to the editor to stop publication of the letter.

Fortunately she had shown me the carbon copy; if she hadn't done that, she would have been in trouble. So, especially in any matter of this sort, just take your friends into your confidence. In this particular case she was a lawyer, she was a barrister; she knew - I was going to say far more of the law than I did; I didn't know any of the law, but I did have a certain amount of common sense. I think her passion in this particular matter blinded her for the moment, and she hadn't seen what she was letting herself in for, but she was so pleased with the idea of harming the other party that she had altogether overlooked the harm that she might be doing herself.

So sometimes a friend can be useful in this way, because sometimes you are blind in what you do, for one reason or another. So always, if you possibly can, take other people - especially your friends, your well-wishers, your brothers, - into your confidence; especially when you plan something of importance. Never hesitate to show the draft of a letter or the draft of some kind of plan or undertaking, to other people and ask for their opinion before you finalise things, before you take action. Even the Bible says, 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety'. That is standard, ordinary worldly wisdom, nothing very spiritual about it. But from a spiritual point of view, if you can do this freely with your brothers it shows you have great confidence in them, there is trust between you, and this itself is of great spiritual value and significance.

Prasannasiddhi: This line, 'None of your secrets should be hidden from them' - does that tie up at all with the previous chapter on secrets?

S: Which one was that? There wasn't a chapter on secrets.

Subhuti: Keeping silent.

S: Well, the keeping silent was about keeping silent about matters which would be unpleasant to your friend or your brother.

Subhuti: It was keeping silent if in consulting you they let you know something confidential, then you should be capable of keeping it silent. That would presumably be the application of that here.

S: Yes. You should respect their confidence. This is quite a strong statement - 'None of your secrets should be hidden from them'. This is really a mark of brotherhood, that you don't keep anything back at all. Though there might be exceptions to that, you might consider that one duty might conflict with another, you might consider it better that you keep back a secret which might cause them great worry on your behalf. You would do that out of consideration.

Anyway, there's a story illustrating this - a longer one than we usually have.

"Consider the story of Ya'qub, the son of Ma'ruf's brother, who said:

- Aswad ibn Salim came to my uncle Ma'ruf, whose brother he had become, and said to him, 'Bishr ibn al-Harth wishes to take you for his brother, but he is shy of speaking to you about it face to face, so he sent me to ask you. If a bond of brotherhood is made between you and him, he will honour and respect it. Only he makes certain conditions: he does not want it to be publicised, nor for there to be any visiting and meeting between you, for he dislikes much meeting.' Ma'ruf said to this, 'As for me, if I take a brother I do not like to be parted from him night or day. I visit him at all times. I prefer him to myself under all circumstances.' Then he mentioned numerous Prophetic Traditions on the virtue of brotherhood and love for the sake of God, saying, 'One tradition has it that the Messenger of God (God bless him and give him Peace!) took Ali as his brother, making him his partner in knowledge and sharer in his body by giving him in marriage his most excellent and dearest daughter. This privilege he bestowed on him for the sake of his brotherhood. I now call you to witness that brotherhood is contracted between this man and me, and that I have bound myself in brotherhood to him for God's sake because of your message. As for the question of his visiting me; if he does not like that, well and good, but I shall visit him whenever I wish. Tell him that he will meet me in places where we shall meet. And tell him that he will not hide from me anything about himself, and that he will inform me of all his circumstances.' Ibn Salim reported this to him, and he agreed and was pleased about it."

S: The tail end of the story illustrates this question of not having any secrets: 'And tell him that he will not hide from me anything about himself, and that he will inform me of all his circumstances.' Apart from that little relevant conclusion, what is the drift of the story as a whole, do you think? It seems to be quoted for the sake of those last few lines - one person being rather shy or reluctant to enter into brotherhood, but nonetheless accepting the conditions, or the position, rather, of the other party when he actually did enter into brotherhood. It seems to suggest that with some people you have to take the initiative. It's expressing he is shy, he is approaching the prospective brother through an intermediary, he is laying down all sorts of conditions, doesn't want too much visiting; but the other person disregards that and says, 'No, I am going to visit you - you needn't visit me if you don't want to, but I'm certainly going to visit you.' And the first person, in the end, is pleased with all that. So it's as though the person who was approached to be a brother had a certain insight; perhaps he understood what that other person really wanted or really needed, didn't take his words at their face value.

Perhaps when - I'm only hypothesising here - when the intermediary said: 'He does not want it to be publicised, nor for there to be any visiting

and meeting between you, for he dislikes much meeting' - perhaps he couldn't really believe that anyone would want to visit him, so therefore he was pleased when the person whom he was approaching through the intermediary showed his very great willingness to visit him, but without expecting, so to speak, any visits in return if the other person didn't want to make them. One could perhaps look at it in that way.

Nagabodhi: Is the point of that story about Muhammad that the marriage was arranged to give a kind of reason for Ali and Muhammad to come together, that otherwise Ali might have been shy of getting to know Muhammad?

S: No, I don't think so. As far as I remember, Ali was a close friend of Muhammad's, and he gave his daughter in marriage to him as an expression of brotherhood to bind them even by ties of marriage as well as by ties of friendship.

_____ : I don't see how it links -

S: As I said, I think the story is quoted for the sake of that last bit: 'And tell him that he will not hide from me anything about himself, and that he will inform me of all his circumstances.' That connects with 'None of your secrets should be hidden from them.' I think it all is leading up to simply that statement. The rest, I think, is incidental.

But, in former times, to give your daughter for instance or your sister, say, to someone in marriage, was a sign of friendship, an expression of your wanting to have an even closer tie with that person; not just a tie of friendship but a tie of kinship as well.

Anyway, we've come to the end, really, of the duties of friendship. I think we'll keep the remaining couple of pages for tomorrow, and then there's the Postscript, which is only three and a half pages - we can do that tomorrow - so that will probably take us up only to the break tomorrow morning, and maybe after that we can just have a more general discussion. Meanwhile, anything remaining this morning, for a few minutes?

Tejamitra: I'm quite interested in the significance of the women not being seen in that society. I can't help thinking that it would be very beneficial if that was the case for us.

S: I don't think it's anything which is especially peculiar to Islam. I think it occurs in many traditional societies. It certainly occurs in Hindu society, though in a somewhat different way. Hindu women aren't veiled, but they none the less do seclude themselves from men. It's as though, speaking very broadly, both men and women have a sense of needing to develop separately from the opposite sex, or they have a sense that they can develop better in their own way if there is a certain amount of distance between the two sexes; if they have within each sex various common activities which people of the opposite sex do not share in. This is the common pattern in all traditional civilisations.

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I think it predates any conception of spiritual development - that women have got certain concerns that they are best allowed to follow together;

men have got certain concerns that they are best allowed to follow together; and among those eventually there emerges the concern of religion and spiritual life, with which men in fact do seem more concerned and more preoccupied than do women.

There is of course the whole sexual issue. In the case of Indians, in the case of Hindus, they do recognise sex as a factor, as a force of great importance, and they feel it is not to be played about with. They certainly believe in sex, so to speak; they believe in marriage, and the normal pattern is that everybody gets married and you have sex within marriage, that being the normal thing. But they feel quite strongly that married people should be, so to speak, true to each other, and they also feel that it's not right and proper - not convenient, one might even say - for people who are not married to have sex together, so they should be kept apart, because if they are not sex is sure to take place. That is their view. So they carefully segregate young unmarried people, and even in the case of men and women who are married they don't associate very freely with people of the opposite sex unless they are closely related to them. That is the standard pattern. The same in Islam, perhaps to an even greater degree.

Devaraja: Why is it so different, then, in our society? Why don't women feel that need to be away and separate?

S: I think they do to some extent, but for some reason or other - I'm not able to trace the exact historical causation, but perhaps one could - women seem to have much less confidence in the West in themselves than women have in the East. I would say that Indian women, Hindu women, do not consider themselves inferior to men really; they don't feel inferior. They might admit, if they were asked, that women were in fact inferior, but it wouldn't bother them, they wouldn't really feel it - do you see what I mean? So they don't seem to depend on men in the same way as women do in the West for their feeling of self-esteem. They seem to esteem themselves independently of what men may think about them. They feel as though they've got their sort of god-given place in life, in nature, in society. They don't seem to look to men to bolster them up in that way. Whereas in the West it seems that women find it difficult to keep away from men; they are very concerned with what men think about them. They want to be with men, to be reassured by men, to have a man with them all the time, to feel wanted and needed.

Nagabodhi: It's quite recent, isn't it? - this century?

S: It is comparatively recent. It might be something to do with childlessness, because if a woman has a child, especially if she has a number of children, it would be very difficult not to feel needed or not to feel wanted, not to feel that she had a role and a place and a function.

Indian culture in a way encourages women to think of themselves positively. For instance, the sight of a married woman is considered an auspicious sign, especially a woman whose husband is still living. If when you go out in the morning or if you start on a journey, you happen to see a married woman whose husband is still living - you can tell that from her garments and the mark on her forehead - that's a sign of good luck. For instance, the mode of address or style of address for a married woman - they don't have 'Mrs.', they have Subhagyavati(?), which means 'the happily auspicious one'. She is happy and auspicious because she is married and her husband is alive, or if she's got children too. So it's as though nature is fulfilled in her or nature is fulfilling itself in her, and women feel this.

Also, I don't know to what extent this influences them, but there are many goddesses in Hinduism, who are of course worshipped. For instance,

there is the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity; she is regarded as the goddess of the home, and very often the wife is referred to as a man's domestic Lakshmi, or someone says of somebody's wife, 'She's a real Lakshmi', a real goddess of wealth inhabiting the home, she's so good. So all this encourages women to think well of themselves, and they do think well of themselves. They are not dependent on what men think of them for their self-esteem. So they are quite happy to follow their own activities, quite independent of the men; they don't want the men around all the time, or to be around the men themselves all the time. Though, of course, obviously sex, sexual life, married life, is very important to them; but it has a definite place, it doesn't get in the way of other things.

Kulananda: Western woman is so impoverished by comparison - in a very sorry state.

S: I get this impression, say, around the LBC, as though the vast majority of the women around are sort of clinging on. They don't think of going away on their own or of doing a bit of pioneering. It's very difficult to get a few women to support Sanghadevi in this venture of a women's retreat centre: they don't want to leave the ambience of the LBC. It's not an attractive prospect. And I'm sure it's got something to do with their relations with men - if not individually, well, collectively - or this collective security of the Centre, so to speak.

Devaraja: It's almost oppressive to a man, isn't it, that sort of collective security? Most guys who've got a bit of spunk want to get up and leave and set up something somewhere else.

S: I think that's why there is quite a widespread resentment against women, expressing itself in extreme cases in rape, which is increasing: because men can't get away from women, and some of them get quite exasperated on account of that fact. They are always around, always provocative, etc.

Devaraja: Why would it take the form of rape? - which seems to be -

S: Well, according to recent studies, rape has very little to do with sex, and is more an expression of anger and resentment against women in general. So I'm suggesting one possible explanation, which is that - not that that excuses or condones rape, by any means; no explanation ever excuses something which is unskilful in itself - but it would perhaps go towards explaining if one understood that men sometimes felt that they couldn't get away from women and therefore felt a bit negative towards them.

Devaraja: It's quite early days to draw that as a conclusion - [to] think of it as being just solely an expression of anger and resentment, because -

S: No, it is not said 'solely', but recent studies in this country, and in America especially, do indicate that men who commit rape are not usually motivated by sexuality; it is not a straightforward case of excessive sexual desire getting out of hand. It is definitely an expression of rage and resentment against either women in general or certain particular women, and the intention is to humiliate them and punish them, as it were.

I do notice generally, say, within the Movement - I think there is more good will between the sexes when there is a decent degree of separation. It seems to improve relations between them rather than otherwise.

But to go back to what we were talking about a little earlier: if you identify yourself with your physical body exclusively, then inasmuch as your physical body is of either the one sex or the other you identify yourself with your sexuality; and if your sexuality has obvious reference as it has to an opposite sex, then you yourself, to the extent that you identify yourself with your sexuality, identify yourself also with your relation to the opposite sex. In other words, you do not feel yourself as complete except in relation to the opposite sex. I think women tend to do this very much more than men. One thing I have come to realise more recently, talking to a lot of women or having talked to a lot of women, is the extent to which they almost experience themselves, experience their very being, as it were, only in relation to men, as though if they are not in connection with men - especially sexually, but even non-sexually - they don't really exist. They depend upon men to give them their very existence. I think this completely negates any individual development or spiritual development. I think this goes very deep in women; this is the conclusion I have come to. It is very difficult for them to feel that they have any real existence apart from men, even in the case of feminists: they can't stop thinking about men. They can't leave men alone. The difference is, of course, that they hate them; but hate is as much a connection as is love and attachment. They don't just go off quietly and do their own thing like Indian women often do, or at least do in certain respects. They have to get together to hate men or to express their hatred of men, or their wish to have nothing to do with men!

So I have really seen, in the case of some women I have talked to, that life without men is death for them. I put it as strongly as that. They are dependent on men for the sense of their very existence. Without men there is no life; life is meaningless. This is putting it very extremely, but in the case of some women at least this is what it amounts to. It amounts to this, at least to a considerable extent, in the case of quite a lot of women. This is why there is such strong resistance among many women, even within the FWBO, to the single-sex situation, the separation of the sexes. Most of them are not really reconciled to this, I believe. They go along with it to some extent, but they are not really reconciled to it. The only ones who seem able to be reconciled to it are those who have a more or less what one might describe as lesbian tendency - they don't care very much for men anyway, and perhaps get on with them quite reasonably well, therefore.

Abhaya: I was going to ask you about that - lesbian women getting together in a women's sexual - I did hear once that you thought this wasn't all that healthy. I wondered whether you actually did say that, and if you did why is that so?

S: I am aware that among the women connected with the Movement there is or has been quite a bit of lesbian activity, but I've also seen - and this is confirmed from what I've read and what I've even heard on radio programmes - that sexual relations between women are rather different from sexual relations between men, or at least so far as one has observed. They tend to get very intense, very what I call steamy, and they just seem to be relationships in the full sense, as though relationships in that full sense between women, sexual relationships, go even beyond what one sees in the case of sexual relationships between men and women. In some respects they seem even worse. I know about some of the relationships of this kind within the FWBO - actual relationships as distinct from brief encounters - and they just aren't very helpful; I know that, from my certain knowledge of the parties concerned, talking to them about that.

Abhaya: Would you relate that to what you've just said about men's dependence on women? (**sic**) Do you think there is a direct correlation, because maybe I suppose the woman treats the other woman as a man in some sense, becomes dependent in the same sort of way? - a sort of strange substitute, unhealthy substitute?

S: Well, they just become - whether they treat them in that way or not - they seem to become so dependent and so attached that it's very unhealthy, and sometimes of course there is a serious explosion. Jealousies can be very strong indeed. There was a quite painful episode recently in which one woman actually attacked another woman.

Kulananda: Surely this calls for some sort of response from the men. We can't just ignore the fact that there are all these women, say, around the LBC who are in this position, who are having an effect on our public face and having an effect on our activities, having an effect on us and having an effect on the young men coming into the situation. Surely some sort of response is called for. We can't just sit there and pretend that the situation doesn't exist. I think we should actually do something. But what one does is quite a question.

S: I suppose you mean 'response' in the sense of a collective policy?

Kulananda: I think we ought to -

S: I think the rudiments of that are beginning to be sorted out; that's the impression I got talking with men in London, especially those who are connected with the Sukhavati community. I think a common approach is developing. One must encourage the women to stand more on their own feet, I feel.

Kulananda: Certainly if you have a man around the situation and he's getting in the way, having a negative effect on the situation, you'd tell him: 'Either you must change or you must leave.' That's quite clear.

S: I must say, in fairness, that I think it very rarely happens that a woman individually has a negative effect upon a situation. If anything, it happens less with the women than the men, actually, to be quite fair. But I think the fact that you've got such a large number of women around the Centre does have a certain effect which may not be completely positive, just because of their overall attitude or even state of being, one might say. I think it's quite important that the men themselves are clear in their own ideas and their own attitudes; this is what I've stressed from the very beginning.

I don't like to speak in terms of, say, the men giving a lead or anything of that sort, but there is a sense in which it is true that the men need to give a lead - especially the men Order members around the Centre - need to give a lead to the whole complex. Some of the women are very good indeed, very good material indeed, especially some of the newer and younger women. I have great hopes for some of them. But I think those hopes will only be fulfilled if they are given the proper guidance and proper support, not merely encouraged in indulging what may well be weaknesses, or if they are encouraged to develop an unhealthy dependence upon the men either individually or collectively.

Devaraja: How do you take a lead without - how do you take that line between giving a lead to women and ?

S: I think one has to make it very clear, and all of you make it clear, that you disapprove of certain forms of unskilful activity. If women are

flirtatious, you disapprove of it. You all show your disapproval. If they dress or undress in a provocative way, you all show your disapproval. I think if you take a firm line like this they will definitely respond. But very often they just don't know, so it may be they are just experimenting or trying out, or trying on. But it's very regrettable, say, when women Order members disagree with, say, men Order members, or when men Order members disagree with men Order members.

Supposing, for instance, that women do come along to meditation classes in such short skirts that they cannot but indecently expose themselves when they sit down: this should not be overlooked. Ideally, the women around, the women Order members, should speak to those women. You've got to sort that one out with the women Order members first, really strongly; and if you don't get their collaboration, say you're going to say it yourself, you're going to make it clear, and you're going to ask the women in the class - next time they come would they please come decently dressed for meditation; that you're just not going to tolerate that sort of behaviour.

If, for instance, they say, 'We've got a right to dress in the way that we please' - then you have to go into this whole question of rights and duties: that one shouldn't think in terms of one's rights, even if one has any, but of your duties. What duty have you to the Centre? This is a spiritual Centre, you come here presumably for spiritual purposes; you have a duty to behave in such a way as to further those purposes while you are here or at least not be in conflict with them, not hinder them or obstruct them.

So I think first of all the men Order members have got to be very clear about these things, sort things out among themselves; then get together with the women Order members and sort out, where necessary, and make the position clear in these respects to all the women who come to the Centre. It should be done tactfully, as you said you dealt with that question of using the swimming pool on the mixed retreat.

Nagabodhi: I had to deal with that -

S: It doesn't have to be heavy or authoritarian, but just firm and clear.

Nagabodhi: This thing of exposure on retreat, I had to point it out in a meeting about that, and I was surprised people hadn't even realised that for me, sitting up at the front, I was exposed to all this, and they very quickly sorted it out.

S: Especially if you point it out nicely, I'm sure they in most cases will respond positively. I mean the odd feminist will challenge you and stand up for her rights and all that sort of thing. But it's good if you can convince the women Order members; in a few cases they may not be totally convinced, and you've got to get their co-operation. That would be best.

But if the men Order members are firm and clear about all these things I don't think you'll have any difficulty with the women. I think very often they are looking for a lead. In a way, basically, they want to please, usually, so one should use that so to speak in a positive manner, so that they please for skilful reasons, for reasons that are ultimately spiritual. They start perhaps by doing something to please the men, but after a while they realise that it's the skilful thing to do, so they do it not just to please the men but because it is in itself skilful.

In other words, what you've got to do is to make it clear to them that if they behave in a skilful way that will please you; but if they behave in an unskilful way that will displease you. Because they are affected by what men think about women's attitudes, even when perhaps they shouldn't be. Devaraja's evidently thinking something - he's smiling to himself.

But probably the women around the Centre have a much higher standard of behaviour than many women outside. It's not that it's especially bad - in fact it is very good by ordinary standards, but still no doubt there is some room for improvement by Buddhist standards.

Anyway, perhaps we'll end there for today. Tomorrow will be our last session.

[End of Tape 20 Tape 21]

NEXT SESSION

S: All right then we don't have all that much ground to cover this morning. It is more or less the tail end of the text. It's page 86. I suggest we read through a complete paragraph at a time and just pick out any points that need to be discussed. This is the conclusion of the text proper and then we come to a postscript on a slightly different topic, though related topic.

"Such then are the duties of fellowship. We have described them now in general, now in detail. But the matter is not complete unless they are taken to lie upon yourself and in your brother's favour - not to lie upon them in yours - and unless you put yourself in the place of their servant. Therefore you must bind all your faculties to their service."

S: So these are the duties of fellowship but the matter is not complete unless you take those duties upon yourself, unless you regard them as your duties, not as representing your rights so far as your brother is concerned. You are not in a hurry so to speak, to translate duties into rights. Also it says that you should not only take the duties of brotherhood upon yourself but put yourself in the place of the servant of your brothers. This is rather reminiscent of Shantideva isn't it, where he says about the bodhisattva being willing to be a servant for those who need a servant, and therefore you must bind all your faculties to their service, that is to say the senses. The following paragraphs go on to exemplify that.

*"As for **sight**: by looking on them with affection, so that they will know it from you, and by looking on their good points and turning a blind eye to their faults. Do not distract your attention from them when they approach you, or as long as they are with you. It is related that the Prophet (God bless him and bring him Peace!) used to give everyone who sat with him a share of his countenance, and that no-one sought his attention but thought him the most generous of men towards him. His sitting, his listening, his speaking, his kind enquiring and his attention were all for his companions. His company was a place of modesty, humility and confidence. Moreover, he (God bless him and give him Peace!) was of all men most given to smiling and laughing with his companions, and to marvelling at their tales. Following his example and doing him honour (on him be Peace!), his companions used to smile and laugh in his presence."*

S: So here Muhammad is upheld as the model or the exemplar of this kind of practice of the duties of brotherhood. I think probably some

historical justification though perhaps Islamic tradition has idealised the picture just a little bit, but any point here needing comment or discussion? You probably noticed that at the very beginning the author speaks of sight. First of all literally, but then metaphorically. By looking on them with affection so that they will know it from you and by looking on their good points and turning a blind eye to their faults. In a general way one should look at people when they speak to you. Sometimes people don't do that. They don't give you their full attention, so you should give your full attention and especially you should give your friend or your brother your full attention when he is with you or when he is speaking to you. Anyway no need perhaps to dwell upon that. It is pretty obvious, pretty straightforward. All right, hearing.

*"As for **hearing**: by listening to your brother's words with pleasure and by confirming them, showing them to be well-received. Do not interrupt their speech wilfully or contentiously or intrusively or contradictingly. If a distraction befalls you, apologise to them. Guard your hearing from what is distasteful to them."*

S: This too is quite clear isn't it. Much of it is just part of ordinary good manners, but one might say that that becomes all the more applicable in the case of a brother. Good manners not just in a formal sense but in a more genuine sense. All right let's go onto the tongue.

*"As for the **tongue**: we have mentioned its duties already, there being much to say. One thing is not to raise your voice against them, and not to address them with things they do not understand."*

S: What is the significance of that last clause do you think? Not to address them with things they do not understand. This reminds me of one of the Bodhisattva Vows. Do you remember that? One of the forty six vows.

_____ : (unclear)

S: No, I wasn't thinking of that, but not to teach the doctrine of *sunyata* to those who are not ready for it. It's the same general principle so to speak. You baffle and confuse people in this sort of way. You might bring it right down to earth and say that there is not much point in your addressing your brother on the subject for instance of anglo saxon prosody if he knows nothing about you may be in that particular topic. It's annoying to him to be addressed on that subject.

All right the next paragraph.

*"As for the **hands**: by not withdrawing them from assisting your brothers in all that the hand can do."*

S: Well that's pretty obvious and straightforward too. Practical, in a way physical manual assistance. All right let's go onto the last item.

*"As for the **feet**: by using them to walk behind like a follower, not striding out and not walking ahead unless they send you on in front, and not drawing close unless they summon you near. Stand for them when they approach you, and sit only when they are seated. Sit modestly when you sit."*

Kulananda: It seems to connect with conjunctions against formality.

S: This I think is dealt with in what follows. It's as though to begin with you should be a little cautious in your approach, even with friends, taking nothing for granted and sort of feeling your way. That it's better to be a little too formal than excessively informal. You feel your way into informality in a natural way, let's say an organic way. All right carry on with the next paragraph. This is the conclusion really of the whole work.

"When union is complete the burden of some of these duties is lifted (standing up, apologies and praise, for instance), for they are duties of fellowship and contain an element of remoteness and formality."

S: There seems to be a slight distinction between fellowship and brotherhood.

"When union is complete the carpet of formality is rolled up entirely, and you can behave with your brother as with yourself. For these manners of the Outer are only the title-page of the Inner and Purity of Heart. When hearts are purified there is no need of formality to display their content."

S: That's pretty clear and obvious too isn't it. You see the significance of the metaphor. 'For these manners of the Outer are only the title-page of the Inner and Purity of Heart.' This is the title-page which gives you some idea of the content of the book, so the Outer of manners gives you some idea of the mental state.

"He who looks to the fellowship of creatures will sometimes be crooked and sometimes straight. But he who looks to the Creator is bound to the Straight Path both inwardly and outwardly. His Inner is adorned by love of God and His creatures. His Outer is beautified by worship of God and service to His servants, for these are the highest kinds of service to God, since there is no way to them except by good character. The slave can attain by the goodness of his character to the degree of the upright keeper of fasts - and beyond."

S: The slave in the spiritual sense that is to say. It's as though al-Ghazali feels the need at the very end of the work to remind his readers of what one may call the sort of transcendental orientation point of the whole practice or discipline of being brothers at all. It's as if we would say at the conclusion of a similar work in Buddhistic terms, don't forget the aim of *kalyana mitrata* ultimately is to gain Enlightenment. It's somewhat analogous to that, not that I'm identifying or even comparing the concept of God with that of Enlightenment but there is a sort of functional parallel let us say.

Tejamitra: The thing that occurred to me in the paragraph before that one was to ask do you feel that there's the same sort of emphasis on actual development and growth in this as there is in Buddhism, because I'm not quite so sure if there isn't a feeling that if someone is a bad character then there's not much chance.

S: No, I think in Islam it is emphasised that even someone who is bad can change, but nonetheless I don't think there is the concept of religious or spiritual life as consisting in a process of change in the same way that there is in Buddhism. It's much more static so to speak, because the revelation has been known to you, you have simply to conform yourself to that once and for all as it were. You can be brought up as a good Muslim, perform all the duties of your religion; there may not be any change or development in your character at all throughout your life, but if you have consistently been a good Muslim then so I think on the whole in broad general Islam there is at least hardly any concept of development, human or spiritual.

But of course with regard to Sufism it is a very special form of Islam. Some of course believe it is not fully or perfectly Islamic anyway, there is quite definitely a conception of spiritual development and stages of the spiritual path are quite clearly marked out. But that is definitely with regard to Sufism.

It does occur to me just in passing that the symbol in a way of Islam is the Kaaba which is that - it's a meteorite embedded in the wall I believe, a niche in the wall of that cube, so that that enormous cube in a way which is the object of the () pilgrimage, seems very symbolic of Islam. It's a sort of square and it's very solid but it doesn't change, it's immovable, whereas say in the case of Buddhism the character symbol is the stupa, and the stupa represents a process of ascent from gross to subtle because it's based to begin with on the four elements. You've got the cube at the bottom. It's as though Islam has got only the earth element, although this is not really being quite fair. Perhaps it's got the fire element too but the cube by itself does not represent the idea of progression. It does represent solidity and four-squareness and determination, but it is quite static. But in the case of the stupa you've got superimposed upon the cube the hemisphere, superimposed on that the cone, superimposed on that you have the inverted bowl and superimposed upon that you have the accumulated sphere, and these represent a progression from a comparatively gross to a comparatively subtle element. In other words they represent different stages of the spiritual path; whereas in Islam it's as though there's just one stage, the stage of being a good Muslim. But again that is leaving aside Sufism.

Abhaya: What did you say the full symbol was - a cube embedded in a wall.

S: I'm not fully informed about this but as far as I remember the Kaaba is actually a stone, said to be a meteorite which is an object of worship of pre-Islamic, Arabian peoples, and that was taken over by Islam. Because inasmuch as that meteorite was there in Mecca, Mecca was a centre of pilgrimage and therefore of trade and business, and it was there Muhammad did a deal with the people of Mecca that if they adopted Islam - again I hope I'm not misrepresenting it - he wouldn't insist on the abolition of the worship of that stone and therefore of the pilgrimage to that stone and therefore not deprive all the local merchants who were very powerful of their business. So in this way the pilgrimage to Mecca became incorporated with Islam. Do you see what I mean? This is a very rough and ready version of the episode, but it's said that there is a cube shaped building in the centre of this courtyard in a complex of buildings and that is usually draped in black cloth - that's why you get to see all this black - with the cube standing in it, and I believe that in a niche on one side of this that original meteorite is preserved, and the climax of the () pilgrimage is the circumambulation of this cube. Sometimes that big black great cube is referred to as the Kaaba, but strictly speaking as far as I know it is that meteorite. It was enshrined by Muhammad so apparently it was not so big that a man couldn't pick it up and carry it. I've seen Islamic illustrations of Muhammad with the meteorite on a cloth in his hands enshrining a thing like that. Enshrining as we would say.

Devaraja: But actually put it there.

S: I don't know how it was kept before or whether they built a larger cubicle structure to accommodate it, I don't know.

Devaraja: According to the film, they had this cubic building which was a collective shrine for all the Arabic tribal gods and then there was this whole thing of them opposing this and Muhammad and his followers being kicked out of Mecca and then coming back, conquering Mecca, and him going in and throwing all the old tribal gods out.

S: Perhaps the meteorite was in a sense the last of the tribal gods and was acceptable because it was not in the form of an image. It was the least unacceptable, though there is a curious instance that among these tribal gods there were three goddesses and there was one point at which there was a revelation to Muhammad about these three goddesses, that they were in fact the exalted goddesses, and this was part of the Koran, and then there was a subsequent revelation to say that that verse had been inspired by Satan and was to be taken out of the Koran. So this might from our point of view represent some conflict in the mind of Muhammad himself as to the degree of recognition to be given to the pagan divinities and practices and so on. But in the end Islam was left just with the meteorite and with that cubical building.

Abhaya: How big is this meteorite?

S: Well as I've said I've seen illustrations of Muhammad carrying it on a cloth and it's about as big as a man's head. I don't know how correct that is, but I do believe it is embedded in a niche in one of the outer walls of the Kaaba but you'd have to check up on that. But it did occur to me again, just in passing just now, that perhaps one could do an interesting sort of comparative study on the three main visual symbols of the three main universal religions, that is to say the Kaaba as the symbol of Islam, the cross as the symbol of Christianity and the stupa as the symbol of Buddhism.

Suzuki has a little essay on a comparative study of the cross and the reclining Buddha. I don't know why he takes the reclining one but perhaps because it just contrasts with the standing cross and he had a lot to say about the vertical and the horizontal and so on and so forth, but one could say that the stupa was a much broader even more universal symbol of Buddhism besides being the more ancient. You could say - perhaps this is a little fanciful - the cross represents sort of conflict. You've got the horizontal crossing the vertical therefore you've got collision, you've got in a way violence, you've got tension.

Kulananda: There's a very clear demarcation of four areas.

S: Yes, one could say all sorts of things.

Subhuti: Christians usually put it the other way round don't they. It's the unification - the horizontal and the vertical.

S: Yes, you could say that but then that would mean - you see Buddhists have got that, you've got the mandala and then you've got the four gateways which are like the four arms of the cross, but the Christians have got as it were the four gateways with no mandala in them through the middle, so there's nothing to integrate those four, therefore the four sort of clash, they directly impinge on one another. You could argue like that.

Subhuti: There's Christ's suffering. The centre to integrate....

S: But it's as though he's sort of drooping under the weight of the burden. He hasn't got enough energy to integrate them. They've overcome him. You could argue in that way. They are too much for him.

Subhuti: I won't continue to play devil's advocate! [Laughter]

S: On the other hand it is interesting that in very early Christian representation of the crucifixion Christ is not represented as suffering in a dramatic way at all. It is merely a figure, a sort of standing in a way quite, if not happily, impassively with outstretched arms and a cross sort of behind him. The realistic details just sort of touched in in the faintest manner. This is Byzantine art, but it's only later on that the agony of the crucifixion is represented in naturalistic realistic detail. That no doubt suggests some kind of shift of emphasis within Christianity itself. It's also notable - again this is association of ideals - we'll come to the end of the topic in a minute - it's notable that Milton never referred to the crucifixion or describes the crucifixion in *Paradise Lost*. It's as though he avoids that. Apparently in Milton's thought and poetry he almost shrank from the idea of the bloody crucifixion, that was not pleasing to him, and that is why when he wrote *Paradise Regained* the centre of the whole poem is not Christ's victory on the cross but his victory when he overcame the temptation of Satan. Just as Adam fell when tempted Christ did not fall when tempted. So for Milton the temptation or Christ's resistance to the temptation is the central episode of his life, not so much the crucifixion, which so to speak confirms his determination to resist evil.

So it's as though Milton in a way reverted to that older conception of Christianity whether knowingly or not. Anyway that is all in passing.

Nagabodhi: I just wonder whether, to be fair to Islam, you said that there's really only one stage of the path for the Muslim - just to be a good Muslim - yes, in theory, but if you translate what we've been reading for example into practice, on a practical level I got the impression that it's something dynamic. That your friends are helping you to be a better Muslim and in terms of becoming, you could say - if somebody wanted to write us off you could say - well you've just got to be a good Buddhist.

S: Well no the parallel would be this; that you say well supposing you simply observe the five precepts all throughout your life and you repeat the three refuges, that's quite enough, when you die you will gain Nirvana or Enlightenment. That would be as it were the parallel.

Kulananda: No samadhi, no prajna.

Devaraja: There are quite potent - I don't know how these images reflect or to what extent the function in a Muslim's life. For instance there's the famous night journey or something, the ascent on the

S: Yes, well again this is significant for Sufism rather than for Islam at large. Muslims do generally believe that Muhammad made this night journey sort of miraculously from Mecca to Al-Medina - I'm not sure which, to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem up into Heaven. Orthodox Muslims don't place too much emphasis on this but the Sufis take that as a sort of paradigm of the whole spiritual path because he is supposed to have ascended up through a whole series of Heavens. These Heavens of course are not mentioned in detail in the Koran itself but the Sufis have elaborated them very greatly indeed. To some extent it would seem drawing on Neo-Platonic sources and so on, even Babylonian sources some say. I have in lectures described Islam as an ethnic religion with universal features rather than as a true universal religion. That certainly applies to, so to speak, orthodox Islam. It doesn't apply of course to Sufism. Sufism could be described as a universal religion with ethnic features perhaps. Sometimes of course it detaches itself completely from Islam, but then it starts getting into trouble.

Vajrananda: Do you mean with Islam or.....

S: With Islam, orthodox Islam. But anyway one can't generalise too much on these issues. They are really quite vast questions. Also there is the point as I said the other day that human nature is very resilient, it has great resources and it can make quite a lot of what would seem to be unpromising materials.

Let's go onto that Postscript and then maybe have our general discussion after that.

"Postscript

In which we give a general account of the manners of social intercourse and of sitting in company with the various classes of men - culled from the words of the wise."

S: Just so as not to lose it in case I forget it - this really belongs to what we've just been discussing - it does occur to me that the relation between ordinary Islam say and Sufism, or between ordinary Muslims and Sufis, is rather like that between lay Buddhists and bhikkhus in Theravada Buddhism. That's just a thought, so having uttered it we can know that it's safely on tape and pass on. Anyway this just gives an account of what the Postscript is going to be about - 'in which we give a general account of the manners of social intercourse and of sitting in company with the various classes of men - culled from the words of the wise.' Well you can see the connection between this and the subject of brotherhood, because brotherhood involves social intercourse and sitting in company and so on.

"If you wish for a good social life, then be well-disposed towards your friend and your foe, without undue humility or fear, with dignity free of pride and modesty short of abasement. In all your dealings take the middle way, for both extremes of conduct are blameworthy."

S: So the middle way you see! [Laughter] So 'if you wish for good social life, then be well-disposed towards your friend **and** your foe' If you meet someone who is an enemy in the course of your ordinary social life, well just behave in a polite, even friendly manner towards them. 'without undue humility or fear, with dignity free of pride and modesty short of abasement.' This is quite important even today in ordinary social

life. Don't be too shy, don't be too backward; on the other hand don't be too forward, don't be overbearing. Strike a happy medium. Don't talk too little, don't talk too much. Don't monopolise the conversation; on the other hand don't fail to make some contribution to it. This is all very ordinary and practical and you get the same sort of advice in the writings of some of the French novelists, don't you. Or in that well known work of the Spanish Jesuit, Lacassa, who wrote the Galatea, the famous work on manners in Italian.

Anyway carry on.

"Do not bear yourself haughtily or keep turning this way and that. Do not stand over assemblies, and when you sit down do not fidget. Beware of knitting your fingers, playing with your beard and ring, picking your teeth and poking your finger up your nose; of much spitting and nose-blowing and chasing flies from your face; of much stretching and yawning in people's faces - at the prayer and at other times."

S: They're all quite straightforward but advice which is still quite relevant in many ways. 'Do not stand over assemblies' This suggests a situation in which everybody else is seated, as in the mosque, and you are just standing up in the midst and just looking here and there. That doesn't look very good. So 'beware of knitting your fingers, playing with your beard and ring, picking your teeth and poking your finger up your nose.' I remember when I was in India Pandit Nehru was famous for this. He was well known as a regular nose-picker and you could even see him on news sometimes and this was always said about him. If he was on any public platform for any length of time he could be relied upon to engage in this particular activity, and it really was a blemish on him as it were. Anyway there's no need to enlarge upon all that.

"Let your sitting be still, and your speech ordered and balanced. Attend to the good words of one who addresses you without displaying excessive astonishment. Do not ask him to repeat himself."

S: Why should you not display excessive astonishment? What's the point of that?

Subhuti: It's a bit off-putting if you talk to somebody and they look startled.

S: Perhaps it's unbalanced behaviour. And do not ask him to repeat himself. Why should this be? It suggests either that you haven't listened to what he was saying and that is impolite anyway, or that you are suggesting that he is talking in a indistinct, mumbling sort of way, so that suggestion even is not very polite even though it may be true. So do not ask him to repeat himself.

"Abstain from telling jokes and stories. Do not tell of your fondness for your children, your slave-girl, your poetry or prose, or other personal matters."

S: So 'abstain from telling jokes and stories'. The suggestion perhaps is nothing but jokes and stories. You'll just get a reputation for being a buffoon. People won't take you seriously. The occasional joke or illustrative story, yes that's quite in order, but if in social life you are always just joking and telling stories well in the end no one will respect you. 'Do not tell of your fondness for your children' Well sometimes people are fond of their children, it's only natural but who wants to hear stories about the latest activities of your little darling, they're thoroughly boring for

other people. You have a long story about how your little girl is so clever and what do you think she said this morning etc., etc. Well don't tell of your fondness for your children. 'Your slave-girl' Well your girlfriend you could say translating it in modern parlance. [Laughter]

Nagabodhi: I'm not sure that the feminists would agree! [Laughter]

S: I think I'm sure the feminist would agree! [Laughter] If you're infatuated with a young woman and presumably the person would do the same with his slave girl (?) who wants to hear all about how wonderful she is and how cute and how quaint and how clever and how profound and [Laughter] all the rest of it, no one wants to hear. 'Your poetry or prose, or other personal matters'. You notice poetry and prose are regarded as (*Bhante chuckling*) personal matters, not something to be produced in public. So why inflict your wretched poetry upon your friends, except by express invitation!

Devaraja: It's a bit like *Shabda* isn't it, the sort of painful exercise in *Shabda*. I just don't understand how people have got the gall to actually put those things in.

S: Well, [Laughter] I think we'd better drop the subject. [Laughter]

Prasannasiddhi: This is actually a quite relevant thing in some ways, because you do get a lot of people publishing their poetry and things like this, so in a way do you have any comment?

S: Well [Laughter] *Shabda* is an unedited monthly magazine of the Order so it's up to people's own good taste and sense of what is right and proper what they send. What they send will be printed whether in prose or in poetry, so one has therefore to exercise a sort of self-censorship, have some sense of self discipline. I'm not very happy, not only with some poetic contributions, even with some contributions that we might, for the sake of courtesy, call prose, if you see what I mean. In some reportings-in, but then if one is going to have an unedited Order newsletter well this is what one has. Perhaps it's just as well that one should know what people actually do think and how they do express themselves. Sometimes one isn't really very happy with the result. But if one is to have an edited newsletter or magazine well who is going to edit it? I don't think I'd be able to find the time to do it, possibly not the inclination.

Prasannasiddhi: This in a way does seem to point to - not only in the *Friends* but people in society who not only publish books on poetry but actually get up in various places and recite their poetry.

S: Well that's all right if people go to such places knowing that that is what they are going to get. Here one is concerned with ordinary social life. You don't want to go to an ordinary social gathering and then quite unexpectedly have someone produce his latest epic out of his pocket and start reading it to you. One of the things I notice about *Shabda* reportings-in, that people tell you about the state of their health. Well, or that I'm feeling better this month. There's not so much of this as there used to be but this also - personal matters of this sort - I would have thought are not really of much general interest. Maybe people do find them interesting. Perhaps I'm wrong.

Anyway the very least one can say as regards ordinary social life is that don't take it for granted that people are interested in personal matters. They may be of great interest to you but because they're interesting to you, it doesn't follow that they're of interest to other people, or that they should be, so to speak, forced on other people's attention. Anyway carry on.

"Do not affect the manners of women in adornment. Do not ape the extravagant manners of the slave. Beware of using too much kohl and excessive oil."

S: So 'do not affect the manners of women in adornment'. What do you think this means? What are the manners of women in adornment?

[End of side one side two]

Devaraja: Don't sort of package yourself up, don't dress yourself up.

Subhuti: For display rather than for.....

S: But should a man not display himself? Or is there a way in which a man displays himself which is appropriate, which is different from the way in which a woman displays herself.

Abhaya: You shouldn't flaunt oneself.

Kulananda: Women do strange things to themselves. They paint their faces.

S: Well men have started doing this. Men have started dying their hair which is really weird.

Kulananda: That is beginning.....

S: Even to paint their fingernails in some cases. You could question well whether one can speak of a characteristically female mode of adornment and a characteristically male. Is that not just a matter of cultural convention. One could ask that question.

Kulananda: The problem is it's not a matter of cultural convention than that of general animal conditioning.

Subhuti: Isn't there a difference between adorning yourself out of a sort of love of yourself and an adorning yourself in order to try to get other people's attention and attract other people.

Kulananda: Usually sexual.

Subhuti: Yes, usually sexual attention, or to make some impression on people in a manipulative sort of way.

S: So presumably this is what is referred to when it is spoken of the manners of women in adornment, that women adorn themselves to please men. The men should not adorn themselves in that sort of way, whether to please women or to please other men.

Kulananda: It is interesting to note how much of what is considered adornment is in fact of a sexual nature. To see how large a part that plays in your general social aesthetic sensibilities. So if we were to consider adorning ourselves in a healthy way we wouldn't put so much emphasis on the sexual aspect of it.

Devaraja: I notice with Spanish women they are very good, even if they're very poor they really make sure their appearance is good, and it's very much a thing of self esteem and not..... you don't find people in Spain often as shabbily dressed as you'll find in Britain.

S: 'Do not ape the extravagant manners of the slave'. What does this mean?

Subhuti: The slave presumably is not acting from his true feelings often. He's trying to pretend to be serving.

S: Yes, he's fawning and all that sort of thing. Do not behave in an insincere sort of way. It seems to suggest that. And 'beware of using too much kohl and excessive oil'. It says too much kohl and excessive oil. These things are all right in moderation but don't overdo it. I remember when I was a young man it was fashionable to use *Brylcreem* and some men used to actually soak their hair in this *Brylcreem* and it would be dripping down their necks.

Devaraja: Kohl in Middle Eastern countries is used for keeping flies off around the eyes.

S: They use it quite widely in India, especially in the case of babies. Perhaps I should say a word here about make-up. I think the use of make-up by women should be discouraged. It is a sort of pretence in a way and also a lot of cheap make-up is quite bad for the skin and the skin I think is even gradually poisoned by habitual use of some kinds of make-up. A lot of women also apply it very inartistically, especially their lipstick. I think within the FWBO the use of cosmetics by women, and of course by men too, should be discouraged. Of course it's a great waste of money. I think several billion pounds are spent every year in Britain, mainly by women, on cosmetics which would seem to be an incredible waste.

To give them their due most women within the FWBO don't actually spend very much on cosmetics, some don't spend anything at all. Well a few of them don't seem to spend money on soap! There's not much of that now. There's aly scruffy look on the part of few slightly feminist women, but it seems to be on the way out now. Anyway let's carry on.

"Do not press your needs. Do not encourage anyone to do wrong."

S: Don't press your needs. If you're talking about ordinary social life, don't just press your needs, don't insist that you want this or you want that. You can no doubt express a need for something initially, but if it's ignored or forgotten don't sort of press your need. 'Do not encourage anyone to do wrong' Presumably anything which is wrong in that social context, or even morally wrong. Anyway carry on.

"Do not let your wife and children, much less others, know the extent of your fortune. For if they consider it small you will seem mean in their eyes; if much you will never succeed in satisfying them. Put them in fear without cruelty, and be gentle to them without weakness."

S: A different conception of family life from that to which we are accustomed. According to surveys quite a number of working class women, even now, don't know how much their husbands earn, don't know what percentage of his wage they give them, the wife, for housekeeping.

Abhaya: My father used to come back from work in fear, give his wage packet to my mother and she'd take out his spending money and give it to him! [Laughter]

S: Yes one has heard of this too.

Kulananda: I think there's something to be said for that, letting women handle the finances of the home.

S: I remember Vangisa talking about this. He said his wife always used to be complaining that he didn't give her enough etc., etc. In the end in exasperation he handed the finances over to her, he gave his wages or his salary, whatever it was, every week, every month, to her and he said he just told her to give him whatever she thought he needed, and he said once he had that he would just make do with it and he'd never ask her for anything extra, and he said he was free from all financial worry after that! From his point of view as a Buddhist it worked extremely well. But yes this is a different conception of family life. Do you think there's any truth in this? 'If they consider it small', that is to say your fortune, 'you will seem mean in their eyes; if much you will never succeed in satisfying them'.

Kulananda: It's very difficult to be satisfied in financial terms. I seem to find that every day. What would ever be enough money for someone who is interested?

S: Especially if they think that their brother isn't all that rich.

Subhuti: It's interesting to 'put them in fear without cruelty'.

S: 'And be gentle to them without weakness'. Because you have to keep discipline as it were. You have to keep those unruly children in order.

Kulananda: What does this put them in fear without cruelty about. Isn't putting people in fear a cruel action in itself? Isn't it cruel to inflict fear on someone?

S: I think this depends on what one means by fear here. For instance if you say to a child, 'well look if you behave like that you will not go to the party next week', are you putting the child in fear? Are you being cruel?

Kulananda: Right. I was thinking more of a state of continued fear.

S: It would seem very difficult - I don't speak from personal experience, only from observation - to keep children in order, so to speak, only by means of love and reason. It does seem sometimes at least, if there's not to be total anarchy in the family, then force, so to speak, has to be used. There's only one parent here so far as I know, I don't know if he has anything to say on this subject.

Abhaya: I think they have to know where they stand and if they go beyond a certain line, that's it.

S: Well what is the sanction? What happens if they do go beyond that particular line?

Abhaya: Well depriving them of something, some little pleasure. Not taking them somewhere that you usually take them.

S: They have to understand clearly the cause-effect relationship between the two things. What about physical punishment? Can that be dispensed with altogether do you think, at least physical restraint? For instance if a little girl wants to hit her little brother or something like that and you can't reason her out of it well do you just have to shut her up in a room maybe for half an hour sometimes? Even put the very small child into the play pen to prevent them say from just wrecking the kitchen or whatever.

Abhaya: Sending them up to their bedrooms used to be.....

S: So then it would seem then that this is still true, 'put them in fear without cruelty, and be gentle to them without weakness'. That would seem to sum it up.

Tejamitra: it does seem as you say a different sort of concept. Obviously a lot more of the openness that you have is with your brother rather than with your wife which is totally different from ordinary society.

S: Well ordinary middle class society anyway. Perhaps we should make that proviso. I mean according to some recent survey quite a few working class wives even now do not know how much their husbands earn, whereas he probably tells his friend.

Nagabodhi: My memories of friends at school was that ones who seemed to be the most mature for their age who were the sort of leaders and in a way the most relaxed in terms of the authority structure of the school, they are not necessarily rebels. If I went back home with them for tea or whatever they used to be the ones who had the most, well you could say in modern terms, 'liberated' relationship with their parents. They might use christian names or..... I got the feeling that they hadn't been brought up in fear.

S: Not even in this very limited sense?

Nagabodhi: This was when I was 13, 14, 15 and they would.....

S: But if they had been brought up in this way I would say when they were 2, 3, 4 and 5, then you don't need to think in terms of punishment so to speak at the age of 13, 14 or 15. You can by that stage appeal to their reason or sense of fair play or justice.

Nagabodhi: Yes maybe it happened earlier. They just seemed to have not a relationship of equality but something approaching that. They were friends, which really.....

S: Yes because the parents no doubt 'put them in fear without cruelty and were gentle to them without weakness'. One could argue in that way. But can you imagine any child being brought up in total freedom and total lack of discipline. What would be the result. You'd probably have a very undisciplined person. Anyway let's carry on. One could probably discuss this topic indefinitely. I must say that I'm in some ways glad that I don't have the responsibility of bringing up children. Not small children anyway. One might say the big ones are difficult enough. [Laughter]

"Do not joke with your slave-girl or your slave, for if you do you will lose their respect."

S: We don't usually have slave-girls or slaves these days. Nonetheless if you want to keep people's respect, especially those who are, as it were, in a subordinate position in relation to yourself, you must be careful how you behave to them in this respect.

Nagabodhi: You sort of diffuse your relationship with them.

"If you litigate, keep your dignity, be on guard against your ignorance, avoid undue haste and think of your proof. Do not make too many gestures with your hands, and do not turn around to those behind you. Do not squat on your knees. When your wrath has subsided then speak."

S: So 'if you litigate, keep your dignity, be on guard against your ignorance'. Don't rush into litigation without knowing what you're really about. 'Avoid undue haste' - this is still very applicable, 'and think of your proof'. Ask yourself whether your case is really strong enough and whether you can prove it. 'Do not make too many gestures with your hands'. Well this could apply to your behaviour in the court itself or it could be of more general significance. 'And do not turn around to those behind you'. That is to say in the course of your address or your giving witness and so on. Don't appeal to the people behind you, turning your back therefore on the people in front. 'Do not squat on your knees'. I'm not sure what the significance of this is, whether squatting on your knees is considered impolite in Islamic circles. I hadn't thought so actually but... I mean very often in Islamic art saviours and Sufis are seen seated in this way rather than squatting on their haunches. Do not sit in a way that is socially unacceptable.

'When your wrath has subsided then speak'. Well again this is common sense.

"If a ruler approaches you, be with him as if on the tip of a spear. If he is familiar with you you have no guarantee that he will not turn against you. Be nice to him, as you would be to a little boy, and say things to please him, so long as it is nothing sinful. Do not let his kindness towards you induce you to enter his household among his wife and children and servants, even if he considers you entitled to do so. For the fall of one who becomes between a king and his wife is a fall from which there is no rising, and an unspeakable slip." [Laughter]

S: Here the ruler who is spoken of is an absolute ruler. You really have to be careful of people with that sort of autocratic power. Anything may happen. In English history if you read any account of life at the court of King Henry VIII he was a very autocratic ruler indeed. Perhaps one can understand something of what al-Ghazali was getting at. Well Cromwell in a sense came between the King and his wife didn't he? That is how he fell. Wolsey and the enmity of Anne Boleyn, that is how he fell.

Nagabodhi: Alexander the Great killed one of his great friends and commanders over just a drunken comment at some party.

S: Yes I don't think a woman entered into it. He is said to have destroyed what city was that? - Babylon - at the instigation of a harlot. No not Babylon, Persepolis. Someone's been reading Mary Renault! [Laughter] Anyway carry on this is all very general advice.

"Beware of the fair-weather friend, for he is the enemy of enemies."

S: You all know what a fair-weather friend means, don't you. Carry on then.

"Do not rank your wealth above your honour."

S: Do not sacrifice honour for the sake of money for fear of advantage. There could be a long discussion about the nature of honour but I think we'd better pass it over.

"If you enter a session, the correct form is to give a salutation first, to yield to one who takes precedence, to sit where there is room and in the humblest place, to greet with 'Salaam' those next to where you sit. Do not sit in the path."

S: A session is a sort of assembly, possibly even in the mosque where people are sitting together in a circle or in rows. So when you enter the correct form is to give a salutation first to those who have arrived before you, 'to yield to one who takes precedence', to allow somebody who is more distinguished than yourself to occupy the more distinguished position. 'To sit where there is room', not to sort of push and shove to make room, 'and in the humblest place', the lowest place, and 'to greet with 'Salaam' those next to where you sit' and 'do not sit in the path' - this is quite important, even today in India, there's a sort of gangway. You mustn't just sit in the gangway. Sometimes you see people doing that at meetings and they have to be shifted. That's inconsiderate to sit in the gangway. Path here means gangway.

*"Once seated, the correct form is to lower the eyes, to help the wronged, to support the distressed, to aid the weak, to direct the lost, to return the greeting, to give to the beggar, to enjoin good and forbid evil, to find a place to spit and not to spit towards the **qibla** nor to the right, but only to*

the left or under the left foot."

S: In desert places people may experience a need to spit constantly, if they're getting rid of the dust. In India, especially in the sandy areas people are always spitting. So it's the same kind of situation here presumably. Find a place to spit. Don't just spit anywhere. Don't spit if you're in the mosque towards the *qibla*, the niche which marks the direction of Mecca. Nor to the right, which presumably is the auspicious direction, but only to the left or under the left foot. Under the left foot means you just shift your left foot to one side, spit in that place and then put your left foot back to hide what you've done. This is the proper etiquette so to speak.

"Do not sit in the company of kings, but if you do, the manner is to abandon slander and avoid untruth, to guard the secret, to have few wants, to polish your words and converse in fully-inflected Arabic, to discourse in the style of kings, to show little frivolity and much caution - even if affection is shown to you. Do not belch in their presence, and do not pick your teeth after eating."

S: Well one is unlikely to meet kings these days, or at least kings of this sort, so perhaps it's not really of any relevance here. Yes, if you happen to be one of the people living in a particular country in which there are dictators.

*"It is the king's duty to suffer everything except the divulging of secrets, **lèse majesté** and sacrilege"*

S: That's quite interesting, the Islamic conception of kingship. The king should put up with everything except the divulging of secrets, that is to say state secrets, secrets of government, defence, military preparedness and so on. *Lèse majesté*, any sort of indignity or insult offered to the person of the king himself which would undermine the whole basis of authority, and sacrilege, any notorious offence against religion, one might say. Any public disrespect shown to religion. The king is regarded as the upholder of religion of course, of Islam.

"Do not sit in company with the mob, but if you do, the correct behaviour is to avoid engaging them in conversation, to pay little heed to their false-alarms, to ignore the bad language current among them, and to confine intercourse with them to the necessary minimum."

S: Some people would regard this as an elitist attitude but I think there's great truth in it.

Prasannasiddhi: The mob is just any group? [Laughter]

S: No, it's a sort of confused unruly group, maybe like in the marketplace, everybody milling around. An assembly of people with not a very high standard of behaviour, not very civilised, not very cultured.

Kuladeva: I found this to some extent when I was working as porter during the summer. I didn't sort of ignore people but they did have a different pattern of behaviour there. I didn't particular want to take part in it.

S: 'Pay little heed to their false-alarms'. A sort of wave of panic might sweep through the bazaar and people might start running in this direction

- just don't get caught up in such things. And 'ignore the bad language current among them' . I think in the FWBO people do this instinctively. You don't find much bad language within the FWBO, but perhaps we could be even more careful about this than we actually are. One shouldn't really feel any need to swear or use indecent language and so on. Some people still do. It's a bad habit they've picked up in some cases way back in the 'sixties. And 'confine intercourse with them to the necessary minimum.'

"Beware of jesting with the intelligent or the unintelligent, for the intelligent will feel rancour towards you, while the profligate will be emboldened against you. Jestings punctures respect and causes loss of face. It leads to rancour and takes away the sweetness of affection. It mars the understanding of the perceptive and emboldens the profligate. It lowers one's standing with the wise and is disliked by the godfearing. It is death to the heart, and sets one apart from the Lord (Exalted is He!). It earns neglect and an inheritance of abasement. Hearts are harmed by it and minds are killed by it. It multiplies faults and makes sins apparent."

S: What do you think is meant by jesting here?

Ratnavira: Is it more to do with making light of something which shouldn't be made light of rather than just joking.

S: Yes, I think this is what it is, making light of things which shouldn't be made light of.

Kulananda: Is it also frivolous.

S: Frivolity. Or even treating people in a joking sort of way. [Pause] I remember an instance of this. I forget the exact circumstances. It was not long after I came back from India. I think it was the Reverend Jack Austin who was involved. We were together somewhere at some sort of meeting or gathering. Someone sort of came along or someone came up to us who may or may not have been a Buddhist, so Jack enquired of him, 'Do you share this madness? Are you a Buddhist?' so that was a sort of jesting approach to the subject which I felt was quite inappropriate and that person I remember just didn't know what to say when it was put to him in that sort of way. So as I said this was an example of jesting. It's more like jocularly perhaps. Maybe jocularly is the word. Do you know what I mean? There's a terrible kind of English jocularly; of treating certain things with apparent lightness, or perhaps actually with lightness, which really does sometimes get up the backs of other people. But you know the sort of thing I have in mind?

Ratnavira: It can be very frustrating to be on the receiving end of it because you've got a point to make.

S: Yes, you don't really know what to say, you don't like to change the style of the conversation and if they've spoken in a jocular way to reply very seriously. On the other hand you feel serious about that matter and you don't feel that you can reply in that same jocular sort of manner. Or maybe you are on a retreat and someone comes up to you and says, 'are you also involved in this meditation racket' or something like that. This is the sort of language that people often use. This sort of jocular or pseudo-jocular language. Sort of making light of things.

I've often wondered why people do it. It's a bit akin to - I call it the English kind of humour. It often seems very odd to me having not heard this

kind of humour, and sometimes I read reportings-in in *Shabda* where this sort of style of English humour comes in and I really wonder what our Indian friends make of it, because they would take it quite literally and it would read as very strange to them. It wouldn't appeal to their sense of humour. It wouldn't occur to them unless they knew English people very well, that it was meant in any sort of humorous fashion. I've got on to Nagabodhi sometimes about this sort of thing in connection with the *Newsletter* saying, 'remember the man in the rickshaw in Hong Kong' sort of thing.

Nagabodhi: Or words like the man in Helsinki actually.

S: But do you know what I'm getting at? I just wonder why people do it. Sort of like a nervous habit in some cases.

Subhuti: It's to cover up unease.

S: Just social unease do you think?

Kulananda: It protects you against any comeback. If someone wants to attack you on the subject say of Buddhism, if you approach them in that way, 'do you share this madness?' - they disapprove. That's OK, you have that option open.

S: Yes, you can say well yes you're leaving it open to them to take it that you don't take Buddhism very seriously.

Kulananda: It keeps open an option of retreat in all circumstances.

Ratnavira: It seems to imply a lack of confidence or a lack of belief in what you are talking about. Sometimes it can be quite closely related to cynicism. It's as though it's a sort of halfway house.

S: Yes indeed, that is very true.

Prasannasiddhi: It's also sort of trying to be too informal too quickly. You're trying to sort of hurry the situation.

S: Even to try to be too clever. To be sort of witty in a pseudo sophisticated sort of way.

Prasannasiddhi: There's one interesting thing that you said to me the other that sometimes it takes a while for a situation to gather momentum, and that sometimes you go into a situation and there's nothing really happening, but it might take a while for something to develop, and some people try to hurry that by making jokes and it's quite the wrong way to go about it.

S: Anyway I have spoken on this topic before so maybe there's no need to press the point.

All right the quotations underline the point. So continue with those right to the end.

"It has been said:

-There is no jesting but from folly or insolence.

One who is afflicted in a sitting by jesting or babble should remember God when he gets up. The Prophet (God bless him and give him Peace!) said:

-He who sits in a session and babbles a lot should say before he rises from that sitting, 'Glory to Thee, our God! With Thy praise I testify that there is no deity save Thee! I ask Thy forgiveness and I repent to Thee!'

Surely he will forgive him for what happened in that session of his."

S: So in the Islamic context to say that 'I testify that there is no deity save Thee!', is the most important act that you could possibly do, that is to say testify to the unity of god, which is the central part of Islamic creed. So if you do that as it were well you are sort of restoring the balance. You are putting things in a right perspective. You're recalling your mind to what is fundamental, and of course you are confessing your sin and asking for forgiveness.

Anyway what does one think of that little *Postscript*? The manners of social intercourse and of sitting in company. There's some of it which is relevant generally isn't there, but there are some items which seem relevant more to that particular age and that particular religious context.

All right let's have our tea or coffee and then have a bit of general discussion.

End of Tape 21, Tape 22 (starts after coffee break)

S: general points that anyone wants to go into? It did occur to me to ask initially whether this was the first Islamic text that anyone had actually read. Anybody who has read at least one Islamic text before - anybody?

_____ : I read the Koran when I was a Mitra.

Kuladeva: The only thing of an Islamic nature or flavour that I've read is *The Thousand and One Nights*.

S: I can think of one Islamic text - not exactly an Islamic text but work of literature produced by someone who was a Muslim - that I think most of you have read.

_____ : Are you thinking of the *Rubaiyat*?

S: Yes, Omar Khayyam. But perhaps that doesn't quite come into - But it does show how little actually we know about Islam; perhaps that is surprising, because geographically Islam is the religion which is closest to us, and it does enter into the history of Europe, doesn't it? At one time

- well, first of all Islam enters into the history of Spain and then it enters into the history of Venice. There was the clash between the Turkish empire - the Ottoman Empire - and many European nations. The Turks advanced to the walls of Vienna at one point. It is surprising we know so little about Islam.

Kuladeva: Part of Turkey still is in Europe.

S: Yes, indeed.

Kulananda: It's interesting, I've read books like *The Dagger of Islam*. I naturally took it quite seriously. It recently occurred to me, after your saying that we'd got to look at it more on its own terms, that would one read a book like Waddell's book on Lamaism and thereby judge Buddhism? Very unfair. So we should look more at the originals.

S: Well, see the whole picture. I am quite sure that the information contained in *The Dagger of Islam* is correct, but it's not the whole story.

Kuladeva: I found in myself a certain amount of resistance to Islam - not that I've ever really thought about it very much, but maybe there have been in the past clashes between the Islamic world and the European Christian world -

S: Yes, indeed. So maybe one inherits a sort of resistance to Islam by virtue of the fact that one is European and ex-Christian. I mentioned some days ago Dante's putting Muhammad down in hell, which is pretty extreme, and maybe we still are affected by that to some extent. Because, if you look at it, it is rather surprising that so many people should take a lot of interest in Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, but that Islam, even Sufism, should be passed over completely.

Nagabodhi: Isn't that because people are rejecting God and religions that - ?

S: Not necessarily, not in all cases; certainly not in the case of those who have become interested, say, in Hinduism, or even in Buddhism.

Devaraja: Do you think that is also perhaps there are a lot of people who are interested in Hinduism as a reaction against a more Protestant, monotheistic background?

S: It could be, possibly. It could be also that people want something even more remote, something more exotic, and Islam is not sufficiently far removed.

Kulananda: It does appear to be highly ethnic as a religion. Hinduism also is highly ethnic as a religion, but in Islam you get much more of this issue, it would seem, on the purely social - well on the legalistic, as it were, on manners and deportment.

S: Well, you get that in Buddhism too; you get it even in Hinduism, you have the caste system in Hinduism.

Kulananda: In Islam there doesn't seem to be a lot more besides.

S: I think perhaps it's our Protestantism that makes it more difficult for us to understand Islam, because Protestantism rejects tradition (putting things very extremely), rejects authority, rejects the authority of the church, places all authority in the conscience of the individual believer studying the Bible by himself; whereas in Islam there is the Shariat, there is the religious law which is binding upon you as a member of the Muslim community. And our individualism, which is in a way our heritage from a decayed Protestantism, resists that sort of collective pressure, as it were. Do you see what I'm getting at? I think it's impossible to be a Muslim all on your own; it's impossible to be a Muslim and just practise Islam all on your own, you are a member of a religious group. Putting it in favourable terms, you could say of a spiritual community - though that is probably pitching it rather too high. And a lot of people in the West who are looking for something other than Christianity don't want to be a member of a group individual, not to say individualistic.

But I think that is beginning to pass, because it's interesting what the translator says in his Foreword, which you should have read. He says: *'It was Islam that I chose to embrace'* - first of all because of *'the directness and blazing simplicity of its doctrine..... The second consideration was the Islamic emphasis on brotherhood.'* But, as ordinarily practised, this amounts not to an increase of spiritual community in our sense but more brotherhood in the group sense, almost in the ethnic sense. For instance, you are not allowed to leave the Islamic community, you are not allowed to apostasise. The penalty for apostasy is death; it still is, in some Muslim countries. Whereas from a Buddhist point of view membership of the spiritual community is essentially voluntary. As you are free to enter, you are free to leave. In fact, if your behaviour falls below a certain level, you have in fact left, even if you are physically still around. That would be the Buddhist view.

But it's as though, reading this Foreword a bit between the lines, there are some people in the West suffering from social fragmentation who are looking for a group to belong to, and Islam may appeal to such people. But certainly in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, people weren't looking for a group to belong to; their approach was more individualistic, so perhaps Islam didn't appeal to them at least partly for that sort of reason. I'm being a bit speculative here.

Kulananda: Interesting that with all the world at their disposal, and with an inbuilt missionary fervour, they don't seem to have made the kind of impact on, say, British culture that they could, or that one would assume that they could -

S: I think one must also consider, in the case of immigrants, their social and cultural level. Most immigrants are very poor; they come over in search of - well, money, jobs, and often from the very lowest social class. This applies, for instance, to the Bangladeshis that one finds around Bethnal Green. They are probably, even from an Islamic point of view, not at all well versed in their religion; there are just some manners and customs and so on. So one can't really expect those sort of people to be thinking in terms of spreading Islam - they've got a living to make, and perhaps they haven't got a very strong cultural sense anyway. Just as you can't really expect much from the Ambedkar followers who are in Britain: their connection with Buddhism is in fact very tenuous, though they call themselves Buddhists. You can't expect them to be thinking in terms of spreading the teachings of Nagarjuna and all the rest of it.

I'm sure if you went around, say, Brick Lane and went from one Muslim shop to another asking 'Have you heard of al-Ghazali? Who was al-Ghazali?', I think hardly anyone probably would ever have heard his name. That's my guess. So one can't really expect these ethnic communities, immigrant communities, to take up this sort of responsibility. I think whatever initiative is being taken now - and it is being taken - is being sponsored by the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries, or Nigeria too.

But I think one must expect to see much more Islamic propaganda, so to speak. Islamic literature is much more freely available, even in the course of the last ten years. All sorts of Persian and Arabic classics have been translated: some very good material is available now, there are some very good books by scholars in Islam. There has been an outburst in this respect, just as there has been in respect of Buddhist texts and Buddhist classics. It is quite distinctly comparable. There is a lot of Sufi literature available now.

Subhuti: Is there not also a danger in that Islam is looked on more favourably by Christians, and many Christians who are dissatisfied with orthodox Christianity may find Islam more congenial because it is clearer and purer?

S: I am not sure about that. It could be; I'm not aware that that has happened yet, but it is significant that when Islam initially spread many of those who embraced Islam were not exactly forcibly converted - there might have been a bit of arm-twisting - but they were often Monophysite Christians, who had difficulties with the Trinitarian theology and difficulty believing that Christ was the incarnate second person of the Trinity. Islam appealed to them as a sort of simplified version of Christianity. And also Islam does give a definite place to Jesus as the greatest of the prophets who preceded Muhammad.

Subhuti: Islam does seem to be monotheism at its most stripped down and clean and pure, in a way.

Kulananda: It's a fascinating thing, really, that an entire religion could be based on almost nothing but the idea of monotheism; that it could set itself up in opposition to pantheism [polytheism?] and that be almost its main tenet - that it is monotheistic.

S: These are the two great declarations of Islam, that God is one and that Muhammad is his prophet - that is to say, the last and greatest of his prophets.

Kulananda: It's remarkable that that can be the foundation of a philosophy - that in itself -

S: I think in some ways it isn't, because after all, when one speaks of a religion one is speaking really in practice of a mass phenomenon; and so far as the majority of people are concerned they need that things to be presented in simple terms. A lot of people would be bewildered by subtle philosophical discussions, especially trinitarian discussions. If you read some of those sort of discussions, the points that are argued over, you can imagine even quite well-educated people being really puzzled and confused and in the end getting quite fed up with the whole business and preferring the simplicity of Islam.

Kulananda: I was thinking about pantheism by comparison, which in some ways, if one goes back to the time at which monotheism overtook

it, seems to be so much more sensible. It seems to make so much more sense. It actually seems to speak as it were from the soil and from one's environment, whereas monotheism is so abstracted from -

Kuladeva: (interrupting) I'm not sure that's really the case, actually, because in the Roman Empire, when Rome became an empire, various religious cults entered Rome mainly through the slaves, and there were just so many different religious cults circulating in Rome in the late centuries BC and early centuries AD, that it's not terribly surprising that Christianity did develop -

S: Yes, because if there is a lot of confusion you need something which is strict and takes a definite stand against all the confusion, and sweeps all these other gods and goddesses and creeds and beliefs away, and says 'This is the only way. This is the only truth.' That sort of simplicity and, in a way, intolerance appeals to people - I mean people in general.

Nagabodhi: If you're just an ordinary everyday Arab or Roman you've got to think all the time, 'Which god should I be appeasing now, and for this project whose favour do I need to seek?' It really must get so complicated, just on a very practical day-to-day level. Someone comes along and says, 'This one god will do the lot' [Laughter] - the economy can't take it (?).

Prasannasiddhi: I think it depends. I think that if things are very confused you do need one god to clear the whole lot away and set up a clear system. But I think if a society is stable for a long period of time, then it is probably more likely that it will start to expand and take on and grow in richness.

S: This is why it is said, say, in the case of India - India could afford to have diversity of belief and not bother what philosophy you followed, because the caste system was so strong and established that that provided the necessary steel framework for society. Some Indian thinkers have pointed out in modern times that in the West you had religious intolerance and social tolerance, whereas in India there was social intolerance and religious tolerance; and they have pointed out you can't really have both. You must have one or the other to give stability to your society. You could say in Islam you've got both, because you've got a very strict doctrine, a very strict theology, very simple, but at the same time a very strict social order too, governed by the religious law.

Therefore, if, say, as under the early Roman Empire you've got a very stable government, you didn't need to derive your sense of stability from your religion; you could afford to have a diversity of beliefs. But as the Roman Empire broke down and everything fell into confusion and was fragmented, you needed something very definite that you could cling on to. So therefore one central religion became all the more important; you couldn't afford to have religious toleration as well as social fragmentation.

Kulananda: So from that analysis it would seem that we are heading in the West either towards social intolerance or towards religious intolerance.

S: Yes. You also see in India where the caste system breaks down people seize hold either of Christianity or Islam or Buddhism; because you can't have a free-for-all both socially and as it were religiously or philosophically.

Nagabodhi: Not all people, though; it's the ex-Untouchables who -

S: One is speaking in terms of big groups of people, the masses, so to speak. They need some definiteness, some structure as it were, something positive.

Subhuti: It seems to suggest that for Buddhism to succeed on any wide scale it's got to present a very clear and simple message, without betraying its essential -

S: assimilated by the average man without Buddhism also thereby being betrayed. In the Theravada countries they try to solve this by confining the ordinary person to ethics and to supporting the monks, which is very simple and clearcut, and which works, but which doesn't really do justice to Buddhism, or doesn't really involve the ordinary person, one might say, in Buddhism itself to a sufficient degree.

In Mahayana countries, including Tibet, they involve the ordinary man by involving him in a lot of ritual, which he often doesn't understand but which he feels is doing him good or conferring a blessing in some semi-magical way. You get a little of that, of course, in Theravada countries too.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose in the Mahayana - or was it, you said, the Tibetan or whatever? - you worship the gods, in a sense, because you don't have to worry about the philosophy.

S: Well, in Mahayana Buddhism they often worship Bodhisattvas, and Bodhisattvas in a sense take the place of gods and goddesses. You pray to Avalokitesvara, for instance, if you want a child. This is the case in China.

So this really does raise the question - well, I even wonder to what extent can the masses follow a universal religion? This is why in a way I favour a sort of pluralistic society, based on broad ethical humanistic principles, which permits the existence within it of spiritual enclaves, spiritual communities which are all the time exerting an influence on their surroundings and gradually bringing up the level of the whole population to that of the spiritual communities themselves.

But I think you can't any longer think in terms of converting whole peoples to religions in any real sense; not all at once.

Kulananda: But there would seem to be a conflict in general between monotheism and the notion of genuine spiritual community, since monotheism tends towards authoritarianism.

S: I'm not sure, because there have been Christian monastic communities which were, as far as one can see, spiritual communities.

Kulananda: Yes, but so many of them have been attacked and wiped out.

S: Well, the same with Buddhism.

Kulananda: It began by monotheistic - in the case of individuals -

S: Some Buddhist monasteries have been wiped out by people who didn't believe in any god at all, not even in one god, not to speak of many. Or believed only in incarnate Mao.

Tejamitra: Did you not think it possible, for instance, New Zealand to become a Buddhist country?

S: Well, yes, I do think that possible; but what does one mean by that? I have spoken of New Zealand in this respect, partly because it is a sizeable country with a very small population which one could perhaps influence individually, within not too many years, if there were a sufficient number of spiritual communities planted in that country; and also where tradition isn't very strong, where people would perhaps be more prepared to consider alternative ways of living and organising society.

Finland is a comparable country, but then they've got a much longer tradition of quite rigid Lutheranism, going back several hundred years; and also there is Big Brother right on their doorstep.

Abhaya: When you say that what you envisage is more like a pluralistic society with enclaves of spiritual communities gradually exerting influence - how do you see that working out? Surely those spiritual communities would have to have an effect in some social work. That's the way I'm beginning to think.

S: Well, we're already providing an example of that through our single-sex communities and our co-ops - on a small scale, but a beginning has been made. For instance, suppose you think in terms of - just take the London Borough of Tower Hamlets: supposing you had say 100 large single-sex communities, and maybe 50 or 60 quite large co-ops, you would begin to have some effect on the whole borough. And this is not an impossibility, within, say, 20 years.

Kulananda: Do you think with that you'd start to have an effect on London?

S: Yes, very likely. You'd be a sort of showplace, as it were - or the opposite. And you could begin to have an effect upon local government.

Nagabodhi: Plus implicit in those sort of statistics is the fact that thousands and thousands of people had passed through classes. They maybe never come back after a couple of visits, but at least they are favourably directed towards us.

S: Yes. We could have an effect upon, say, street conditions. You could, if you had sufficient influence with the borough council, have more and more areas declared pedestrian areas, traffic-free areas; maybe you could do more about pollution and rubbish dumping and removal, and

things of that sort. The Maharishi has got this idea of world government - I think he is starting at the wrong end. There was an advertisement in a recent *Time* magazine - I don't know if anyone saw it - inviting governments who wanted help and advice to apply to their headquarters.

Subhuti: They are laughing at this, really.

S: Yes, this is ridiculous. You must start at the other end, according to me anyway.

Subhuti: That was his original tack - that he tried to get 1% of the population in any area meditating, and that would have a discernible influence.

S: I think this is true, even if they were doing only Transcendental Meditation; I think, yes, it would, if you had an appreciable percentage of the population. Therefore I have always, to a limited extent, spoken well of the Maharishi: that at least he has got tens of thousands of people meditating, and this is quite a considerable achievement. So all credit is due to him for that. But he seems to have got a few rather fantastic ideas as a result of this success of his.

Devaraja: somebody else comes along I saw a pamphlet talking about places where they effectively altered the political atmosphere, or the atmosphere of the country - stability, peace, and so on and so forth - by getting 1% of the population meditating. I think Nicaragua at that time was included on the map. And I think within about two or three months the whole business -

S: I think if one isn't careful this can degenerate into just power fantasies. For instance, my friend in Bombay, Dr. Mehta, who believed himself to be guided by God, was seriously convinced that he could affect political affairs in India and different parts of the world by just dwelling on certain things in his mind while he meditated; and he seriously believed that, that he was almost in control of the destinies of the world, or at least exercised a very great influence upon them. This becomes very dangerous, and one can develop megalomaniacal tendencies very easily in this way: I saw this happening in his case, though he was a very genuine and sincere person.

Kulananda: He's making a very bad job of it, if that's what he's doing.

Tejmitra: It's quite interesting, going back to East London, to consider - I think this is the case - I read Hackney is supposed to be the least Christian borough in England, with the least number of churches and the least number of churchgoers.

Kulananda: The most cosmopolitan.

S: It has got the highest percentage of single-parent families in Britain and the poorest housing in Britain. Well, obviously, because they've got the least Christianity - so clearly there's a connection: the more Christianity, the better housing! I couldn't help thinking, reading the articles that appeared in *The Sunday Times* about the borough of Hackney, that we ought to go right into Hackney, have a definite project there. Just get another great big building like Sukhavati, and have a big centre right in Hackney as well, and start up communities and co-ops and so on.

Kulananda: *Phoenix* is in Hackney. All our *Phoenix* houses are from Hackney.

Subhuti: But why particularly there? - just because of the extent of the problem, or do you think there is an opportunity?

S: Partly because it is contiguous and would represent a geographical expansion, and also perhaps - who knows? - we would be able to show that Buddhism can help in areas of this sort. Because, in a way, a certain amount of attention is on that borough. But I think perhaps we don't have enough people. I wouldn't mind, say, half our women moving into Hackney and setting up even institutions for women there - because most of these single-parent families are women living on their own in quite miserable circumstances, a bit isolated; sometimes I think why don't all - or at least some of - our women move into that area and start working among other women in this way?

Kulananda: Generally social work would be a very good way of involving people like that in -

S: Social work from a spiritual basis, of course. Do you see what I'm thinking? We've even got a number of women who are trained social workers.

Nagabodhi: Though they would have to be quite clear of feminist influence.

S: Yes, indeed.

Nagabodhi: Women social workers are usually quite strongly susceptible to feminist ideology.

Kulananda: And there's a strong Marxist tendency

Nagabodhi: Could you just be a bit more specific about the sort of things that they could do - social work from a Buddhist point of view?

S: I haven't thought it out - these are just ideas that have passed through my mind - but it struck me that if there are so many one-parent families, that is to say one woman living alone with a child or two children, the very least that, say, a group of women could do would be to call upon these women, just go along and see them and get to know them; maybe invite them along to something or other - depending on what they found. Maybe a group of women living in a strong women's community, a closed community, in that area, just going out among these sort of women who were in some kind of distress or social isolation or whatever; and eventually maybe involving them in meditation, yoga or whatever else might help; giving them some prospect of a better kind of life or human development, some sort of hope, and so on.

Kulananda: Organisation - I mean social organisation, so that people aren't so isolated; so they can get to meet one another, provide mutual crèches, mutual babysitting, things like that.

S: I think most of our women don't seem very interested in anything of that sort.

Kuladeva: Some of the women that do come along to the Centre actually have come from that situation in Hackney - single-parent families.

Kulananda: I think it would be well worth suggesting - I wonder if it just hasn't occurred to them to work in that way; whether they mightn't be very interested if it did occur. Because I think in many cases work in a co-op seems to be -

S: There's not enough work, not enough co-ops. We've got quite a lot of women who aren't doing really very much.

Kulananda: It also seems to be quite unsatisfying to them.

S: And I think they need to work - at least some of them - much more on their own, independently of the men; not leaning on the men all the time.

Devaraja: There's a danger, though, in that they can often appeal to a particular stratum of the single-parent field, and that's usually middle-class, ex-college or university. The classic example of that is *Four Corners Films*; that's a really extreme example of that, and also the *Half Moon Photography Gallery*.

S: You could even in a way say that *Jambala* was an example of that, because it was transformed - no doubt rightly - from a second-hand shop dealing in furniture, which actually there was a demand for among very poor people, to a boutique which would really appeal to middle-class people.

Voices: Not really. I don't think that's so.

Nagabodhi: I'd say it's got a much, much bigger working-class - just ordinary local -

Prasannasiddhi: It's much more handleable for the women. They couldn't handle furniture because they were just being - there was all this furniture -

S: This is what they said: it was difficult to handle furniture, but -

Kulananda: The clientele isn't quite middle class. I don't think there would be sufficient middle-class clientele to keep them going.

S: Well, some people have been saying recently - apparently some Bethnal Green people said - that the population of Bethnal Green was no longer working class.

Kulananda: It's quite a contentious issue, really.

S: Well, one end of -

Nagabodhi: I think it's on its way up. I think over the next 10 years it will upgrade itself into a

S: Well, perhaps *Jambala* is a symptom of that, in a way.

But anyway, the general point is, yes, we should be very careful that our activities, whatever they are, aren't almost automatically oriented to a certain social, if not social [then] educational, class or, if the word class isn't appropriate, stratum of society.

Kuladeva: I've always thought that that problem at the LBC would be helped if there was a bigger Centre somewhere in the centre of London which would - Because a lot of people go to the London Buddhist Centre from all over London, so you get people coming down from Hampstead and -

S: I've often felt we really do need a big Centre somewhere more like Holland Park, or Kensington.

Kulananda: Covent Garden? - think it's too - ?

S: Well, maybe yes, I don't say we shouldn't have one in Covent Garden, but I was thinking more in terms of the semi-residential areas in West London. Kensington, Holland Park, around there.

Kuladeva: I think a lot of working-class people from the East End get uncomfortable at the LBC. Not very many of them actually come back.

S: I think that is also, I must say, partly their fault.

Kuladeva: Yes, I'm not saying that it isn't, but the fact that a lot of middle-class people come from elsewhere in London helps to exacerbate it.

S: Also we should have as soon as we can a really big Centre somewhere up in Hampstead, say. When I say big I mean at least as big as the LBC. (**Voices:** Phew.) Well, it isn't much in a city the size of London, is it? The LBC is nothing, it's a drop in the ocean, nothing at all, really, in comparison with the size of the problem.

Kulananda: difficult to move on to more LBC-sized centres.

Devaraja: Even though it's only a drop in the ocean, don't you think there is a danger of localising ourselves in London, putting almost all the efforts and energy of the Movement into London, whereas we should be thinking in terms of perhaps spreading things a bit more thinly over

Britain at large?

S: Well, yes and no. I think the significance of Bethnal Green, as was the significance of Archway, is that we have created a neighbourhood. I think that is quite important, though of course again it has its own associated problems; that's another matter. But I think it is quite important we create neighbourhoods, and that is dependent on the availability of cheap housing. Originally, of course, we got it by squatting; now the situation is being helped by *Phoenix*. So I think we should probably start up, if we do start up, say, outside London or in other areas of London, in those areas where there is not just a possibility of a Centre, but also the possibility of creating a neighbourhood around that Centre. I think that is quite important.

For instance, in Croydon there are limitations because that isn't possible around the Croydon Centre, I think. It's office blocks and shops and so on.

Kuladeva: That would be a bit of a problem in a place like Kensington, I would have thought.

Kulananda: Perhaps it would attract some wealthy people into the Movement.

S: Yes, in that sort of area, maybe you will have wealthier people. I am thinking more, for instance, of, say, cities like Liverpool with lots of houses. In a lot of these northern cities there's lots of cheap rundown housing available, and I think one should think in terms of setting up one's Centre in such an area of such a city, so that you can have people gathering around you, and you create a neighbourhood, and that does create a definite atmosphere. You start having a Buddhist locality, almost, and then you can start showing what a Buddhist way of life is like, and what sort of difference it makes in social terms to be Buddhist.

Subhuti: There are certainly quite a lot of Order members round the LBC now - 60.

S: I think they are not all over-employed, by any means [Laughter]

Devaraja: I think sometimes there may be too many Order members in a locality, they just start tripping over each other. Things are more effectively done if you've got a small -

Subhuti: I don't think that's by definition, I think we should avoid thinking that a large number of Order members necessarily trip over each other's feet.

S: They have to be moving about, to begin with, to trip over one another. [Laughter]

Subhuti: Certainly when they're lying - it's when they're not moving about that they tend to trip over each other.

S: They shouldn't be lying across the threshold. [Chat.] too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Around the LBC I think chiefs and Indians have got out of proportion.

I have sometimes said in the past that a proper proportion would be like one Order member to 10 Mitras to 100 Friends. You've got something more like that in India. There you've got perhaps five Mitras to one Order member and 1,000 Friends to an Order member.

Kulananda: That seems to go against your idea of the ideal Mitra contact ratio.

S: To some extent it does, but what I'm thinking in terms of is we don't want too much of a gulf between the spiritual community on the one hand and the general population on the other, the general public. There must be more of intermediate grades; I think that's a great weakness of ours in this country, even around the LBC. We need many more Friends, with a capital F, and quite a few more Mitras. And maybe if you had more Mitras and more Friends, quite a few of them could be doing the sort of things that at present Order members are doing, leaving the Order members free for more dharmic activities and personal contacts.

Kulananda: Much more of our routine work should be done by Mitras and Friends.

S: One should be careful what one means by 'routine work' - very careful that one doesn't think in terms of leaving all the dull, boring work to the Mitras and letting the Order members do all the exciting, up-front things. Mitras sometimes feel that, I think. Be careful not to leave the dirty work to the Mitras, and Order members have all the nice, clean, comfortable jobs. Something of that was developing in respect of the co-ops; I think the corner has been turned now, but it was almost, at one point in the LBC, as though Mitras were expected to run the co-ops and it almost wasn't a responsibility of Order members; Order members didn't seem to want to be involved at one stage. And Mitras started feeling that.

Anyway, we've got quite a long way away from Islam, haven't we?

Devaraja: What about - I know you have talked in the past - quite a few years ago, it must be about 11 years ago - about aiming to have virtually a small community or Centre on every street or locality, and also thinking in terms of involving more in local government and things like that; the idea of people becoming local councillors as Independents.

S: I still have that in mind, but we are not in a position really to implement it. The nearest that we got was when Kovida and one or two others used to attend meetings of the Surlingham parish council. But that is doing it along the right lines, because we started at grass roots, so to speak, with the smallest administrative unit. I think that's the way we do have to start. But we are a long way from even that, as regards local government in London. But, yes, I still have that idea. It is one thing for me to have ideas, and another thing for other people to carry them out. I have lots of ideas.

But it is interesting to see the extent to which we do have a little Buddhist neighbourhood or locality around the LBC. People do say that the atmosphere or the character of the area in the immediate vicinity has changed over the years which I think seems

[End of side 1, side 2]

Prasannasiddhi: It is interesting to think that say around the LBC you've got quite a lot of Order members who are capable of taking classes, yet they don't think about taking them because they think of the LBC and they think 'All the positions are full, all the classes have got leaders' and things like that - so they think that there's no scope for class leaders at the moment, so they don't bother.

S: Does that in fact happen?

Kuladeva: I think at the moment there's tendency for people to go out and set up meditation classes in parts of London,

S: This is being done under the auspices of the Council, and very few people, in fact, are involved to any extent.

Kuladeva: I think it's only really just beginning.

Nagabodhi: There are opportunities like, say, on the Wednesday class - there are times when I'm away or Amoghacitta's away - there are talks every week - there's quite a chance for people to come and get experience.

Devaraja: I'm looking for an Order member to work as well at the university, and that means we are sharing the responsibility for taking the classes. I did that with Prajnananda last term. He hadn't previously had much experience in taking meditation classes.

Nagabodhi: The difficulty is - just to put the boot on the other foot briefly - that a lot of people aren't prepared to come along and support a class unless they can lead it, and so I can't go to somebody and say, 'How would you like to lead the class when I'm away next week?' if they've never been. I can only do that -

S: position of leadership by supporting, so that when the leader is away, quite naturally you take over and already the people in the class know you, so there is no trouble or difficulty in that way.

Nagabodhi: I can only ask somebody to give a talk or take over if I trust them and know that they were in touch with the class, what it was about.

S: So what you are really saying is that there is a bit of individualism around, people wanting to lead prematurely, perhaps, without the necessary experience.

Nagabodhi: I don't know if it's as conscious as that, but in a way that's what it comes down to, I think.

S: Well, perhaps this question has to be thrashed out more openly within the Order.

Kuladeva: I think sometimes people have the idea that when you become an Order member you can be at the front in the limelight taking a class. Maybe people when they become Order members expect that they will have an opportunity to -

S: Have we gained that impression, say, from Tuscany?

Subhuti: In the briefings in Tuscany that's gone into quite thoroughly. In fact, we usually say that people shouldn't expect to lead classes for at least a year.

S: Yes, but should gain some experience supporting. Perhaps you have the difficulty more with people who have been around longer.

Nagabodhi: And people from Tuscany, in fact, seem to be the best. It's them who are supporting, like Amoghacitta and Harshaprabha now take quite a leading part in the Wednesday class because they have been consistently supporting them for a long time.

Prasannasiddhi: And although you are expected to - they do say at Tuscany that you can support. The briefings that you are given are sufficient that you could lead a class should it be necessary. So there's that side to take into account as well.

Kuladeva: I'd have thought the best thing for anybody, if they do want to get involved with classes, is to join a class team, because there always are class teams, certainly around the LBC, and that way you get involved, and eventually when there's a -

S: Years ago in Archway we did have a situation in which an Order member - now an ex-Order member - had a class of his own which he wanted very much to have as his own class, and even keep other Order members out of.

Subhuti: It's not uncommon.

S: So one has to watch this.

_____ : Where was that?

S: This was at Archway. You remember what I'm referring to?

Anyway, back to Islam. If people don't have much to say about it, perhaps through just lack of knowledge.

Abhaya: One thing that has struck me - I went to India five years ago, and I went to Aurangabad and Bombay. Those are the only places I went to. And I noticed, on both those occasions, moving into distinctively Muslim areas, what I picked up was a sort of very slightly threatening feeling. And I've come across - there's quite a few Muslims in Norwich, and just seeing, just passing them together, not so much there but very very slightly that sort of not angry but slightly threatening feeling.

S: In India one could say that Muslims always feel themselves to be in the minority in comparison with the Hindus, and there is the whole background of India and Pakistan and so on; a lot of Hindus don't really believe that Muslims - that is, Indian Muslims - are loyal citizens; they believe in their heart of hearts they are loyal to Pakistan and have Pakistan's interests at heart. A lot of Indian Hindus don't trust Indian Muslims, and Muslims are aware of that.

Abhaya: Slightly aggressive, very slightly.

S: Yes. So, because Muslims feel that they are on the defensive, that tends to make them a bit aggressive. On the other hand, according to traditional Islam, for a Muslim to live in a state where he is not in the majority and doesn't exercise rule is an unnatural state of affairs, a wrong state of affairs. So Muslims seem always to feel that if they have any sort of Islamic consciousness at all - that they ought to be the bosses, they ought to be the rulers, but they are not, they are under the rule of non-Muslims. In fact, some Muslim writers have even gone to the extreme of saying that it is a disgrace for a Muslim to live under a non-Muslim rule. So they feel in a way angry, perhaps, because according to them they are living in an unnatural situation. They are living under the rule of people whom they ought to rule. I think that also has to be -

Also, in India at least and maybe other countries, Muslims see all round them things which to them are deeply offensive. They see, for instance, image worship, idol worship. In other words, from their point of view they see God being blasphemed daily by everybody around them. So that doesn't put them in a very agreeable frame of mind, you might say. So sometimes they take revenge on their Hindu neighbours in India - and Muslims can be very unpleasant, so can Hindus - by deliberately killing cows or leading processions past Hindu temples in a way that will be offensive to Hindus; Hindus retaliate by leading processions past Muslim mosques. You are not supposed to play music near a mosque, but the Hindus will take a procession past a mosque with instruments blaring away and annoy the Muslims, or even infuriate them. Under conditions like these, what are called communal riots in India very easily occur.

The Muslims are not very easy or comfortable people to get on with; and neither are the orthodox Hindus, very often. The Sikhs, too, can be a bit difficult.

Nagabodhi: Did you have many close Muslim friends while you were in India?

S: It is significant that when I was in India I hardly ever had any contact with Muslims; hardly ever. I think I can recollect only two contacts with Muslims - I believe. One was through the film world, which is of course a cosmopolitan world. Through a friend of mine who was a film writer I met a well-known Indian novelist; actually he was a communist by belief. He was born into a Muslim community, he was a well-known writer; I met him. You couldn't really call him a Muslim, but anyway I met him; he was by birth a Muslim. And there was a young Ismaili

coming along to some of Dr. Mehta's meetings, and he came to one or two of my lectures. I got to know him, much to his mother's distress. She was a very orthodox Muslim, but a widow. He brought her to see me one day; he was a rather wilful young man, thoroughly spoiled by his widowed mother; he usually - to get her to do what he wanted - he brought her along to see me. So she came along shrouded in layers upon layers of - what do they call it, this white material? chicken something or other?

Devaraja: Muslin?

S: Is it called chicken weave, or something like that, chicken work? White muslin embroidered in white. So she came along swathed - a great stout woman about so fat, you know, swathed in layers upon layers; she was quite distressed her son was associating with non-Muslims. But they were Ismailis, and Ismailis are pretty unorthodox anyway. But that was the sole extent, I believe, of my contact with Muslims. The worlds are as separate as that. You can't altogether blame the Muslims, because orthodox Hindus won't eat with them for caste reasons, they are *mlechchas*; there is very little social contact between Hindus and Muslims except at the very highest social level and the very lowest. The very lowest includes, of course, the ex-Untouchables, and they are quite friendly with their Muslim neighbours; they are in and out of one another's houses.

Nagabodhi: I didn't notice much sign of Islam in Poona.

S: If you go to the area where Dharmarakshita and Dharmalocana live - Camp - Buddhists and Muslims live all mixed up together. It's an ex-Untouchable neighbourhood, it's also a Muslim neighbourhood, and the two communities are on quite friendly terms. Buddhists will invite Muslims to marriage ceremonies and vice versa, and they will eat together on such occasions. So there is no problem in India between Buddhists and Muslims.

Kulananda: There are very distinct differences in the Muslim neighbourhoods - you notice in India -

S: But Muslims can generate a strange atmosphere. They are surly, they are hostile, they are potentially aggressive, all the time. But then again, I don't know, because my experience is limited, to what extent this is peculiar to India; because some of our friends, say, going to Morocco, say that the Muslims there are very friendly, hospitable people. I don't know.

Subhuti: I remember it very strongly in Nigeria, because the northern Nigerians were Muslims and the southern Nigerians were Christians or animists. And there was a very very different atmosphere and behaviour between the two groups.

S: In what respect?

Subhuti: The southern Nigerians are much more friendly, easy-going, a bit more volatile in the immediate emotional way; the northern Nigerians are very aloof, dignified, slightly threatening, and a bit cold. And there's always an atmosphere of arrogance and a sort of slightly suppressed violence.

S: This is definitely my feeling in India, any sort of even distant contact I have had with Muslims.

Subhuti: I remember my father saying that they are very easy, good to deal with; they are much more clear in their -

S: Their yea and their nay.

Subhuti: Yes. But the southern Nigerian is notoriously fickle and volatile. The northern Nigerian you could rely on absolutely.

S: It does seem that Muslims are quite arrogant, very often, in their behaviour, especially with non-Muslims; but then the question arises: to what extent is this distinctive to Islam? Or is it not perhaps distinctive of all monotheistic religions? Christianity is a bit like this; Christians are a bit like this, and one might even say Jews are a bit like this, because if you believe in the One True God and you are the one true believer in the One True God, you are the chosen people, and the Christians inherited this concept of chosen people and applied it to themselves. They believed that inasmuch as the Jews had rejected Christ they had forfeited all the promises of God as it were to the chosen people, which had been transferred to the Christian church. And Muslims seem to have that sort of idea of themselves - not exactly as the chosen people, they don't have that, but as the true believers; and they look with contempt on non-believers, usually. So I just wonder - this is a point I brought up with these Christian visitors when I had my dialogue with them - whether monotheism is not inherently intolerant, and therefore followers of monotheism cannot be anything other than intolerant.

It has also been argued that Marxism continues the same tradition; that the Communist Party is as it were -

Kulananda: The One True Party.

S: The one true party, yes.

Kuladeva: It's almost a reaction to Christianity, really, isn't it?

S: Which?

Kuladeva: Marxism seems to be: it's so dogmatic. Certainly its practice is dogmatic.

Kulananda: But if you see Westerners travelling in India, it's very interesting to see their arrogance, which they don't display in relation to each other, but which they certainly display in relation to Indians, so when we talk about other cultures being arrogant, we are not actually seeing our own culture from without. And in fact the arrogance of Westerners travelling in India is quite hideous.

Kuladeva: Do you think some of the violence and aggression Islam has got is related to the fact that Muhammad seems to have encouraged the

propagation of Islam through the sword, whereas it didn't actually come from Christ and Christianity, it might have come later on with the Crusades etc., but it isn't in Christ's teachings?

S: That would seem so. Some Muslim apologists do say that Islam learned to be violent from Christianity at the time of the Crusades, and that up until that time Islam was very peaceful; but that doesn't really hold good of the early ages of Islam, certainly not of the first 100 years. Islam was, I think one can say quite honestly, spread to a great extent by the sword, though other factors may well have been at work too. Sometimes conquered peoples were given the choice, either the Koran or the sword.

Subhuti: At least in the text that we've just read there is almost no mention of universal loving-kindness.

S: No. 'The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim.'

Subhuti: You get the impression almost as if their religious conception of brotherhood has arisen out of the tribal warrior band, the sort of brotherhood that would exist there.

S: Yes, indeed.

Kulananda: The infidel is the enemy.

Subhuti: It is obviously more refined than that, but it hasn't overcome an essential differentiation between the friend and the enemy.

S: It is very clear that Buddhism has overcome that, and in fact Buddhism does quite clearly maintain you should get rid of all thoughts of enmity towards whomsoever; that your mettā should be universal. It may be quite impracticable for many people, but at least that is the ideal, and resentment and anger are never justified under any circumstances.

Kulananda: This is theoretically the same in Christianity, except that you do see Christ behaving quite badly towards people in temples and things. Theoretically, nonetheless, one is supposed to love everyone, and -

S: Yes, one is supposed to love one's enemy.

Kulananda: Nonetheless, Christianity does end up with this highly intolerant behaviour. It's not just in the doctrines of Islam that this kind of intolerance springs from. There's a further cause.

S: As I say, if you are trying to be a monotheist and to have love towards all human beings you are trying to do almost two contradictory things at the same time.

Kulananda: I wonder if that could be unpacked more clearly and the mechanics couldn't be demonstrated, because it's hard to see it does seem to follow.

S: Well, in the Old Testament Jehovah says: 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.'

Kulananda: But how would one reveal it in Christian terms - this form of intolerance? Because they do seem to have safeguards against it, in theory.

S: I think the whole trouble starts from binding up, so to speak, the Old Testament with the New Testament that Christianity has historically bound up. There were, of course, some gnostic Christian groups or churches that refused to do that and would take their stand only on the New Testament; and they had this broadly gnostic belief that the God of this world was an evil god, and they identified him with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. And therefore they believed that Christ was the representative of the other God, the higher God, who was not the god of the Jews, and that Christ therefore came to overturn all the works of the god of the Jews, including things like violence and hate.

So it would seem [that] to resolve this issue you have to go right back to the beginning and separate the Old Testament from the New, and in fact Christianity would have to abandon the Old Testament. Then, of course, I think the position might well be much simpler. That might be very difficult to do at this late stage.

Kuladeva: Do you think anything's got to do with the sacrifice of Christ? I've wondered whether there were two reactions to that, either on the part of the Christian he tries to emulate Christ's sufferings, but on the other hand those that don't believe are guilty of - that Christ died for their sins as well, and they are not doing anything about it. And also partly, they crucified him because of that.

S: Well, it's only recently that the Jews as a race, as a people, were collectively absolved from blame by the Catholic church; only in very recent years, about five or six years ago, I think it was; or not much more.

_____ : Gosh.

S: Otherwise the reference to that and the condemnation of the Jews on that account was included in certain prayers of the Catholic church. Those prayers have been edited to remove those references only a very few years ago, under Paul VI, who was rather keen on relations with Jews, and Muslims too; it's all monotheists getting together.

Kulananda: Even if Christianity does abandon the Old Testament you are still left with a form of monotheism, and the suggestion that monotheism leads to intolerance.

S: Well I don't know, because if you abandon the Old Testament you are left with the God of Jesus, and you could interpret that in almost any way you wished, perhaps.

Kulananda: Humanistically, perhaps.

S: Because, if the god of the Old Testament created the world, the god of the New Testament did not create the world, you could argue. Some gnostic Christian teachers did argue that: that the world was not created by their god, so to speak; he was a higher god, not concerned with mundane things at all, or even bothering to create the world. That was done by a very inferior deity, the one worshipped by the Jews; even done out of malice, or at least through a mistake.

Perhaps it would help if Christians would disown the Old Testament, but I think it's historically very difficult, because traditionally the Old Testament is seen as foreshadowing the New, even foreshadowing Christ, and they've got this whole science of typology whereby things in the Old Testament, specific items and references, foreshadow corresponding things in the New Testament - Christian teaching. For instance, Adam foreshadows Christ, Eve foreshadows the Virgin Mary, the three visitors to Abraham - the three angels - foreshadow the three persons of the Trinity, Noah's ark foreshadows the church as a symbol or type of the church, etc. They are bound together, the two traditions, very strongly in that way.

Devaraja: You are suggesting, then, that, properly presented, a monotheistic tradition - say, as could be presented through the medium of the New Testament or perhaps through the Cathar tradition - is not necessarily a negative thing, it's a positive thing?

S: No, I'm not saying that at all. I'm actually saying that if you disowned the Old Testament you might be able to interpret the god or heavenly father of the New Testament even in a non-monotheistic way.

Kulananda: Even in a non-theistic way, if you pushed it hard enough.

S: Because even some Christians are nowadays talking about non-theistic Christianity.

Kulananda: The idea of the ground of being.

S: No, that's different. But what in effect they are doing is trying to dissociate themselves from the Old Testament. The gnostic Christian who was most responsible for this line of thought, dissociating the Old Testament from the New etc. was Marcion, who founded a whole Marcionite church which was very popular and influential at one time, but gradually wiped out by the Roman Catholic church, as it became.

We're still a long way from Islam - we seem to keep straying away from Islam. I am not sure why that should be.

Tejamitra: Going back to Islam, we were talking about its potentially spreading, say, in the West.

S: Yes, perhaps by oil money especially, or knowledge about it spreading, at least.

Tejamitra: I can't help thinking there is still this problem of it being essentially ethnic, Islam itself. I suppose Sufism could take on -

S: Yes, because there are people in the West who have become interested in Sufism, and even regard themselves as following Sufism, without any connection with Islam. This is the sort of thing that really annoys Muslims, including Muslims who are followers of Sufism or Sufis who are also Muslims. They regard the two as inseparable.

Tejamitra: I can't see many people just converting to Islam, because there's going to be that racial -

S: I'm not sure about that. I would have agreed with you ten or even five years ago, but recently I have been wondering. Because a lot of people who have some sort of religious feeling express it in such terms as 'There is a God of some kind, somewhere. You've got to believe in God.' This is the point that Islam makes: one God. And, two, there are people in search of a social group: and there you've got the Islamic brotherhood. And that is exactly the position of the translator of this text: what was it in Islam that appealed to him? - 'the blazing simplicity of its doctrine' - just one God, there's just God - and also Islamic brotherhood. So if you get a lot of people who do have this residual belief in God, God of some kind, and who are in search of a strong social group, you could get a lot of people embracing Islam. I see that as a possibility now which I think I wouldn't have done even a few years ago. And especially when you get the Arab countries, with their oil money, going out to meet such people halfway, so to speak, or more than halfway.

Tejamitra: They'd still have quite troublesome racial differences within -

Kulananda: Not if they're intelligent. They could dress it all up -

S: You see, one of - Islam has never been racist; well, not classical Islam, let us say. You had even in Muhammad's time black Muslims as well as brown ones and white ones, and so on.

Nagabodhi: It's as geographically and culturally spread as Buddhism - more so.

S: Yes. You've got Mongol Muslims, you've got Muslims in Central Asia and so on.

Devaraja: But apparently Saudis really look down on Muslims from the Philippines and south-east Asia.

S: Ah, there is a bit of pride of birth on the part of Arabs, because it was among the Arabs that Muhammad himself was born. But it's not really in accordance with Islamic doctrine, one might say, so you can theoretically correct the practice by the doctrine.

Prakasha: Which countries do you think Islam might spread to, or be influenced.

Subhuti: Africa, I think it's sweeping through.

S: Oh yes, it's spreading much more rapidly among animists and polytheists than is Christianity now, mainly on account of its toleration of polygamy; whereas Christians have taken a strict line. But I was going to say that if - I tell you what will stop the spread of Islam in Europe to any extent, if anything: feminism. Let them fight it out. [Laughter.] Let us send feminist missionaries to Islamic countries. [Laughter]

Kulananda: I think this calls for a Movement Bhante!

Nagabodhi: No, the feminist movement collapsed in Iran, didn't it? There was resistance to, but it crumbled.

S: Yes, Muslim women just changed back. But they could change again. So I think those people in the West who tend to change their religion, for right or wrong, are people who are on - usually - the pseudo-liberal fringe. I think one has to admit that. And people who are on the pseudo-liberal fringe are usually with feminist sympathies, therefore they will be least likely, I think, to be attracted to Islam. They would be much more likely to be attracted, rightly or wrongly, to Buddhism or to Hinduism or something of that sort.

Kuladeva: I would also have thought that built-in resistance to Islam and also the fact that it is still a monotheistic religion might also be a factor in

S: That would affect some people. Because if you have any doubts about theism at all you will just not go anywhere near Islam; because it is so definitely theistic.

Kuladeva: I'd also thought that if Islam did spread in Africa that might represent a threat, because at the moment Islamic power is based on oil; whereas Africa, I would have thought, was an up-and-coming developing continent that would be more powerful, let's say, in 100, 200 years' time. And if that became -

S: I don't know if their oil is going to last that long.

Kulananda: African riches will begin to replace oil as the motivating principle

S: At present, the richest African state is Nigeria, isn't it? It's rich mainly on account of oil, not on account of anything else.

Kulananda: It might run up against Marxism in Africa.

S: Ah, that's also true. The Soviets are very uneasy about their Muslim minority, because that Muslim minority is growing at a faster rate than all the non-Muslims. The Asiatic Russians are increasing more rapidly than the Western, Caucasian Russians. This is one of the internal problems of Russia. I think they've got at least 40 million Muslims in Russia, mainly centred in those areas adjoining Muslim countries; and that

40 million minority is growing more rapidly than the rest of the population. And Islam is still quite strong among them.

Devaraja: The whole population of Russia is, what? about a couple of hundred million?

_____ : Three hundred.

S: Anyway, it's a very big minority, the Muslim minority, and expanding out of all proportion to - catching up.

Prasannasiddhi: Is that that they are expanding in birth, or they're expanding in conversions?

S: No, expanding through births. They have a higher birth rate. Or maybe because of the emphasis of Islam, so to speak, on such things, it being largely an ethnic religion.

Kulananda: All the indications would seem to show that we are heading for an era of greater intolerance.

S: It would seem to me to be so.

Kuladeva: Even if there is a battle between the forces of Islam and the forces of Marxism in parts of the world, one of those will probably eventually come out on top.

S: Yes, indeed. And neither is likely to be very tolerant towards Buddhism. The Marxists will not like you because you are a religion, and the Muslims won't like you because you're a non-theistic religion. So you will have the worst of both worlds. So if one is thinking in terms of success and popularity, Buddhism is not the religion to join, actually; at least, not in the short term.

As I've said before - I've said it repeatedly in India - there are only two bright spots in the Buddhist world, as far as I am concerned, at the moment. One is India, and the other is Britain. It is only in these two areas that Buddhism does seem to be on the upsurge rather than the other way round.

Kuladeva: Not in America?

S: I don't really know, I'm very dubious about America. I recently heard that Trungpa was quite dissatisfied with his work there, and was thinking of coming back to England.

_____ : Really? - that's very interesting.

Devaraja: That's all you've heard about it?

S: Yes, I just heard so much, no details; that he was dissatisfied with the quality of his work there or the quality of response he'd got, though he'd been in many ways successful; but he wasn't satisfied. And the suggestion was that not being satisfied with - well, with Americans, almost, or with America, or with what was possible in America; and he had started wondering whether he couldn't achieve more, really, in England. And he was therefore thinking about it.

_____ : I thought he'd moved to Canada?

S: Is that so?

Subhuti: Newfoundland. Yes, I think he has. For two reasons: one is a disillusionment with the American scene, and the other is fear of nuclear -

S: Why Newfoundland?

Subhuti: It's said to be relatively safe, because the Canadians have given up their nuclear deterrent.

S: Oh. That's quite interesting. Because I've been having talks about Canada recently.

Kulananda: It's a lovely country, a great country.

Subhuti: A big country.

S: But then if there was a nuclear attack, let's say - indulging in quite unpleasant thoughts for a moment - on the States, vast areas of Canada would be affected, if only by way of nuclear fallout -

Kulananda: And the ravening hordes.

S: And all that sort of thing.

Nagabodhi: If there was a nuclear attack on America, you can bet your life there'd be a nuclear attack on Mildenhall and places dotted round here.

S: But I don't know to what extent Trungpa is affected by those considerations, but it's interesting that he has moved. A move to Newfoundland in a sense is a move in the direction of Britain, culturally speaking, inasmuch as Canada is closer to Britain culturally, I think, than -

Kulananda: Newfoundland is remarkable because it has There is a lot of ocean between it and the mainland, so it's almost as if he is retiring from operations

S: Still, there must be quite a few people there. I've flown over Newfoundland - landed in Calgary in Canada, on my way to New Zealand. It's very interesting; it's very bleak, oh, it's so bleak! So vast, and snow-covered much of the year, of course; covered with ice. Perhaps Trungpa feels at home there. Perhaps now he's getting on in years he's feeling a bit homesick for Tibet, so he's settling in an area which is more like Tibet. If he has in fact done that, I think it is really quite courageous of him to think in terms of spreading the Dharma in that sort of bleak environment, as I imagine it would be, both geographically and culturally.

But Newfoundland wasn't, until a few years ago, even part of Canada; it was in a separate Dominion, wasn't it? It was joined on to Canada, I think, only 30 or 40 years ago. So it must have its own separate traditions.

But again we've got away from Islam, haven't we? I think we are not going to be allowed to get away from it; in a way, I think we are going to have to face it in one way or another more and more in coming years, in coming decades.

Kuladeva: I can remember reading an article in one of the Sundays a few years ago, saying that numerically speaking, in terms of actual practice, Islam was the biggest religion in this country now.

Kulananda: In this country?

Kuladeva: Yes, either the biggest or the second biggest. Dividing up the different Christian sects, I think. In fact, a lot of the immigrants are practising - well, nominally, at least - Muslims.

Subhuti: There are a million Muslims, aren't there, in this country?

S: There's quite a lot.

_____ : How many Jews are there?

Kulananda: Not so many.

S: Well, the Muslims in this country on the whole are quite poor. They've migrated to this country from Pakistan and Bangladesh mostly out of poverty, in search of work, in search of maybe a higher standard of living and all the rest of it. They are not all elegant sheikhs from the Middle East, by any means; they are pretty scruffy specimens, most of them. Well, like the Hindus too; perhaps even more so than the Hindus. There are quite a lot of Hindu businessmen from Gujerat and Bombay.

But in a way there is no common ground with Muslims; they won't discuss things. Well, there was that group of Muslims of some kind round Norwich who used to go along to *Oranges*; their behaviour was quite interesting, wasn't it? And it was arrogant - I remember hearing that said by a number of people, Jayamati among others.

Nagabodhi: What kind of Muslims are they?

Abhaya: Western Muslims.

S: Mostly Western Muslims, yes, though they had imbibed that sort of arrogance almost immediately; just as we hope we imbibe something of Buddhist tolerance.

Abhaya: I've heard - I'm not absolutely certain - that they got planning permission to build a mosque in Norwich, near the Theatre Royal.

_____ : Yes, that's right.

Abhaya: Which brings me actually - I've always been a bit taken by Islamic architecture. I've thought it more beautiful than what I know of Buddhist architecture.

S: I'm afraid I used to have those sort of thoughts in India. I really did like Islamic architecture. Not all of it, but of certain periods, especially early Moghul architecture, where they use a combination of white marble and red sandstone. Very effective contrast.

_____ : Hanamaya's tomb.

S: Yes, that's a very good example of that kind of thing. It is really very beautiful architecture.

Devaraja: It's very striking in Spain, also, the old mosque in Cordoba; absolutely very beautiful, very beautiful; and the use of things like gold mosaic.

Nagabodhi: Yes, I wouldn't mind a few of those dotted around England.

S: Without Muslims, eh?

Kulananda: It's interesting to see the mosque in Regents Park: it's so out of place. It's actually not a very good example of Muslim architecture in the first place. But it really just doesn't fit.

Devaraja: It's probably because it's designed by Sir Frederick Gillard actually!

S: There are a lot of things around central London that don't fit, in my opinion. Some people say that the bird cage in Regents Park doesn't fit, either; some people say that the Post Office Tower doesn't fit. And some heretics even say that the new *NatWest* building doesn't fit, not to speak of the Barbican building. But the Old Fire Station fits. I'm afraid a lot of London no longer fits; half of London doesn't fit the other half. So one more out-of-place building won't really make much difference.

I've just seen it in passing. I thought it looked rather elegant, actually - the mosque in Regent's Park. I only saw it passing by in the car, but I thought 'yes'

Kulananda: It's strangely shabby when you get close to it.

Nagabodhi: Can you go inside.

S: Oh dear. Oh, yes, it's a tourist attraction. I have heard that there is a sort of regular tourist bus that goes around. It goes to - well, organised parties; you visit - I forget what the Christian centre is, but anyway you visit a Christian place of worship, it might be St. Paul's Cathedral, the mosque in Regents Park, and the LBC. [Laughter]

Kuladeva: I don't know whether they've been given planning permission to have an onion dome.

S: It's time we had a new temple, with a great big Buddha image, at least 30 foot high.

Subhuti: Just a stupa on top of the tower would do.

S: Yes, indeed.

Kulananda: Do you think that's appropriate, Bhante, to start importing that extent of ethnic symbolism, as it were?

S: In what sense is it ethnic?

Kulananda: Well, let's say that initially a stupa would be definitely a product of the non-Western culture.

S: Well, you have to make a start somewhere. Maybe you've got -

[End of Tape 22, Tape 23]

Kulananda: people an impression of exoticism which isn't true to our ideal -

S: We can't avoid, I think, giving people a wrong initial impression. Suppose we have a completely modern building, all concrete and steel - that will give a certain impression. All right, you have a Gothic building, like the Old Fire Station to some extent; that will give a certain impression. And an Eastern building will give a certain impression. I don't think you can avoid that, really. This place, *Padmaloka*, gives people a certain impression.

Kulananda: But the impression in most of these cases is accurate, i.e. that we are Western Buddhists working within our own culture, without rejecting it. If we start putting up stupas and -

S: Yes, but I think you can't have a building which conveys 'Western Buddhist' without having something traditional; because you don't have anything that is recognisable as Buddhist which is not also traditional. Otherwise it's just another building, which is not recognisable as anything.

Kuladeva: If you look at art that has gone from one country to another, like if you look at early Buddhist sculpture in Gandhara, for instance, the Indians eventually made that totally Indian; and if you look at the same thing when it went to China - I've looked at some Chinese sculptures in the Guimet, and some of them come under the same influence of Gandharvan Indian art, which has also got Greco-Roman influences. But eventually, if you see that develop, it becomes something definitely Chinese.

Kulananda: I was just suggesting that, while I'm not against this tendency in the long run, culturally speaking, but I'm saying that in the short run it might be tactically inappropriate in terms of public relations and giving an impression that we are something we are not.

S: Well then, what does one do? Because you have a building, and you don't want it to look like an Eastern temple - well, what does it look like? It looks like a department store, it looks like a block of flats, or it looks like an office.

Kulananda: Well, the LBC can look like a converted fire station. The Brighton Centre can look like a converted terraced house. That way you retain a certain integrity with the local environment.

Devaraja: I'm not quite sure what you are saying -

Kulananda: People do come to the Centre and react. We get a lot of beginners who - you actually hear of people being put off because they don't want to go under the arch, they can't associate with the windhorse, they don't understand it; they find certain images quite exotic. There was a survey done, with quite a few responses on these lines: 'When I first came here, I felt quite uneasy because of this, because of that.' And you hear of people who won't go to it for that very reason. appropriate to the way we believe and the way we behave. And we have to eventually make an adjustment between these things and what we are.

Devaraja: A worse impression is that you give them a completely bland - you don't give them anything, which is worse.

Devaraja: You just have to accept that people are going to feel their toes trodden on a bit -

Nagabodhi: They'll feel uneasy when they arrive, anyway. It's new, it's different, they don't know what to expect. They'll find something to project that unease on to.

S: We haven't tried the experiment of having a completely modern building. I'm not against this, but if we start up in, say, some northern city maybe we could have an architect-designed building which was completely modern, maybe just with the lettering - 'Liverpool (or whatever it was) Meditation Centre', and just see what happened, whether that did make any difference.

Devaraja: I don't think the argument is really about modern or ancient, but the degree -

S: Between non-exotic and non as it were foreign.

Devaraja: Or to what degree do we introduce recognisably Buddhist symbols, that appear to be imported from -

Tejamitra: The stupa isn't particularly an Eastern - well, it is a universal symbol, and there's no reason why we shouldn't have a Westernised version of it.

Kulananda: That we no doubt will have in due course.

S: Well, that arrangement of geometrical elements.

Abhaya: It's a universal symbol?

Tejamitra: Yes, it's not a Tibetan symbol, it's not an Indian symbol. It's universal.

S: The elements of it are universal: the cube - and so on.

Prasannasiddhi: Even the origins arose out of the earth mound, which is a common thing throughout India, Europe....

S: There are lots of them in Britain - well, you've got Silbury Hill, haven't you? And horses - horses are very traditional; even windhorses, in a way. You've got them carved out on the Berkshire Downs, haven't you? - Pegasus. Yes, I was told in Finland the windhorse went down very well, because there Pegasus is a recognised symbol of the arts and so on. So they could very easily take it in, even the Finns.

I think one of the windhorse symbols on somebody's letterhead or other is very much like the Berkshire Downs horse.

Nagabodhi: it is associated - I think they've just changed it for a few years.

S: You know the sort of thing I mean, just a very rough sketch. Make local connections wherever one can, obviously. It has been suggested that whenever we did take over St. Paul's Cathedral it would make a very nice stupa. The mandala-type shape. [Laughter]

Anyway, again we've got away from Islam. People seem to be quite reluctant to stay with Islam; well, perhaps it's understandable in some ways.

Devaraja: What other areas do you think we should consider? We've talked about it in terms of its underlying ideas and its impact on our society; whether it's a threat to us. What other headings do you think we can consider it under?

S: I think one can consider it under the heading of its intrinsic truth or otherwise, and be quite clear what in Islam one rejects as well as what one accepts. Some of the basic, fundamental things like one rejects. Monotheism etc. So much does follow from that.

Kulananda: So what might one accept?

S: Well, there is also the whole question of Sufism. Most Muslims would not agree that Sufism can be dissociated from Islam, but it does seem that certain forms of Sufism, at least, can be dissociated from Islam, even dissociated from monotheism. Some Sufis have been accused by Muslim authorities and critics of being pantheistic and so on.

Kulananda: It's clear if they dissociate themselves from monotheism that they are not Islamic; it's the absolute primary tenet.

S: Well, it isn't really quite so straightforward as that, because different philosophers and some thinkers within Islam have had different interpretations of what is meant by monotheism, and some of them are quite interesting. They don't quite amount to monotheism in the crude popular sense.

So ultimately one has to think of Islam, from a Buddhist point of view, in terms of basic doctrinal-cum-spiritual agreement or disagreement, and be quite clear about that.

Kulananda: Is that thinking, in terms of the relationship between Buddhism and Sufism? - because it seems clear that Buddhism and fundamentalist Islam just don't agree.

S: There seems to be much more of overlap between Buddhism and Sufism than between Buddhism and Islam in general. I think one can say that. It is very difficult to tell how important Sufism is for the Islamic world as a whole. In modern times, in Muslim countries, especially as they became Westernised, Sufi brotherhoods were suppressed, and the sort of Islam that is dominant now, say, in Iran would not seem to be the type that is at all sympathetic to Sufism. It would seem to be the opposite way, the legalists.

Kulananda: Did you not have contact with Pir Vilayat and Inayat Khan?

S: Not really, no. I've known people who were in contact with them, one of whom used to come to my lectures at Centre House. She became their main organiser. I forget her name now. (*prompted*) Joyce Purcell, that's right. She was a very pleasant woman, but Inayat Khan preaches a rather bland form of universalism with Sufi colouring.

Nagabodhi: It's Vilayat Khan.

S: Yes. A lot of Muslims, and even eastern Sufis, would not recognise that as the genuine article at all. So when you are in contact with them I think you are not really in contact with Islam; just as when you are in contact with the Quakers you are not in contact, say, with the Catholic church.

But yes, I think Islam is becoming increasingly a force in the modern world, not only on account of oil; and I think one has to at least take some account of it, and be clear in one's mind as to where it stands in relation to Buddhism and where Buddhism also stands in relation to Islam; or at least doctrinally and spiritually. The fact that, for instance, in Poona Buddhists and Muslims can fraternise shouldn't blind one to the fact that Buddhism and Islam would seem to be fundamentally incompatible.

Kulananda: An aggressive Islam would turn on Buddhism quite quickly.

S: Yes, indeed, quite easily. And therefore it is not in the interests of Buddhism that Islam should spread or be part of -

Kulananda: It does seem, just extrapolating forward, more likely that we are going to have to think of ways of going underground rather than opposing.

S: That might well be so. Certainly not directly opposing, but maybe if possible one should look ahead and oppose indirectly when opposition is still possible.

Kulananda: Look ahead - you mean now?

S: For instance, if one has any say in the granting of planning permission for the building of mosques. Perhaps if one had a vote one would cast it against, in view of the fact that it was likely to breed social and religious disharmony.

Kulananda: Refusal of planning permission is likely to create disharmony.

S: Well, in the short term, but it might save a lot of trouble in the long term. I'm just giving this as an example, don't take it too literally.

Abhaya: How does this fit in with the whole idea of religious tolerance? I find this a basically

S: Does one tolerate the intolerant? Does one even facilitate the advance of the intolerant? In other words, does one really cut one's own throat? Need you sharpen their razor if they are going to use it to cut your throat? That is what it really amounts to.

Kuladeva: The only thing that crops up in my mind about this is trying to oppose planning permission throughout -

S: I only gave that as an example.

Kuladeva: That sort of thing might actually backfire.

S: Well, of course you have to consider that too. I only gave it as an example

Kuladeva: It does seem, though, that it is quite a powerful symbol that people can see; it reminds them of Islam itself. Well, it's an advert.

S: One might even have to think in terms of saying something against Islam. It might be that if it comes sufficiently to people's notice they'd want to know where they stand with regard to it. Whether it is a viable spiritual option, well, then one has to speak up. I might have to do this in India, because some ex-Untouchables have been converted to Islam recently; allegedly, with the help of oil money - allegedly. Three thousand of them in south India, while I was there.

Kulananda: It was blown extremely out of proportion, that episode. It's interesting to see how that episode rapidly grew into something much larger than it was in itself.

S: Well - can one really say that? Can its significance be confined to itself?

Kulananda: Recently I saw a report breaking down individual instances. There's been a lot of reconversion back from Islam to -

S: Is this because orthodox Hindu bodies took very prompt and vigorous action and a lot of money was poured into that too?

Kulananda: That was a very interesting factor, that the whole thing was working out very much on a sociological basis; it was to do with who would provide the facilities. In that way, need one necessarily oppose it, because it's going to raise up the - ?

S: Well, that's true, but it depends who provides the facilities. It's always dangerous to call in the devil to help, even though the help is help. Some countries have found that who invited the communists in 'to help'. It's not so easy to get rid of them once they come in to help.

Prakasha: Is that the first case of ex-Untouchables being converted to Islam in India?

S: Not absolutely the first. Well, no, there were many examples under the Moghul empire. Most of the Muslims in India today are descended from people who were converted, not from the invaders. Often they like to pass themselves off as descended from Arabs, but they were clearly not. No, they were converted mainly from the lower castes, lower communities. And some of them haven't forgotten that. That's one of the reasons why they can fraternise with ex-Untouchables; they are from the same basic substratum of society.

But Hindus have been very alarmed by this conversion To Islam, and from their point of view quite rightly; perhaps even from any point of view quite rightly, because Islam is an intolerant and militant faith, and some orthodox Hindus are quite worried already that there is such a large Muslim minority in India. I think the population of Muslims in India is probably larger than the population of Muslims in Pakistan, or something like that.

Kulananda: If it pushes the Hindus to do something to raise the level of the Untouchables -

S: Oh yes, because then the Hindus are entirely at fault and one cannot sympathise with them. They have ignored and neglected the ex-Untouchables and worse, for centuries. And here the Muslims step in, some other religion steps in and offers them facilities and they extend the hand of brotherhood and convert them, and then you object. The position of the Hindus is absolutely untenable and illogical.

Devaraja: From our point of view, I wonder how we could effectively oppose things like, say mass conversions into Islam and so on.

S: In India there is a law against proselytising by - what would it be called? - by dubious means, that is by offering material inducements and so on. Christians, of course, have been guilty of that and the laws are directed mainly against Christians and Muslims.

Kulananda: How would we oppose them in the rest of the world, say? - India apart.

S: It would be different from country to country.

Kuladeva: I would have thought on the whole it wouldn't be too difficult to convince people in this country of the intolerance of Islam.

S: Yes. I think these are the two great things: first of all, from a Buddhist point of view it's untrue; it's a monotheistic faith and we don't believe in monotheism. We don't believe in the arguments which support monotheism. And, in practical terms, one can point to the record of Islam in terms of intolerance. And what we are concerned with in the world today is peace, above all; and Islam would not seem to have much of a contribution to make to that, other than that everybody should become Muslim. In that respect they are comparable to the Marxists.

Kulananda: They might say that that was a way of peace: by eradicating all these unnecessary religious differences and by converting everyone to Islam peace will eventually arise.

S: Well, you could say that the Muslim God was the lowest common factor or highest common denominator, if you like. But you could say that if you had no god at all that would be even more of a higher or lower common factor or denominator as the case might be, and that means Buddhism. I think sooner or later one will have to say something about Islam. Sooner or later one will have to give some account of it from a Buddhist point of view. Sooner or later, one is going to be asked questions about Islam from people coming to beginners' classes. So one will have to be prepared with some sort of answers, and that means some degree of knowledge. So is that one reason, perhaps, why we've had this particular study, which is on a quite agreeable text, on the whole, but one can see almost the shadow sometimes of Islam falling across it.

Ratnavira: Bearing that in mind do you think we could encourage people to read the text, study it?

S: Yes, as part of their study of comparative religion. I think you need to know something about other religions as well, especially those that you may actually be confronted with in the course of your life and work.

Prasannasiddhi: There's just a point that I'm not sure if we've brought up before. Considering that Christianity and Islam are both monotheistic, couldn't one say that as they are quite similar in that respect people in the Christian West would be more inclined to stick to Christianity because of their upbringing and their cultural roots with it, and therefore not to accept Islam?

S: I don't think there's any question of very big mass conversions to Islam in the West, I don't see any possibility of that at the moment. But if people do believe in God at all, the chances are that they will stick to Christianity. But some Christians and Christian churches, some fringe ones at least, are watering down the whole idea of God, even; so some people in those churches might turn to Islam. But to the extent - if you were a Christian and continued to believe in God - I think it unlikely that you would take to Islam.

It would be interesting to see why people in the West do take to Islam, those who do. Well, the translator here mentions the simplicity of its doctrine, and brotherhood.

Kulananda: Also its clear intolerance can be seen as quite attractive.

S: That's an aspect of its simplicity.

Prasannasiddhi: Some people like that violent -

Kulananda: Just that it can provide a focus for this cloud of negativity that

S: Yes. And some people like to be associated with whatever smacks of success. The oil money tells its own story, sings its own song. Islam is surrounded now by an aura of prosperity, success, and no doubt there will be people to climb on that particular bandwagon. Maybe there will be special stipends for people who want to study Arabic or get involved in Muslim studies; it's a good career for academics, and some might

become Muslims and go the whole way. There is that sort of possibility too.

Kulananda: But you don't see it as a potential mass movement?

S: I don't, no. As a potential mass movement, I think, in the West, Marxism is probably much more of a danger than Islam.

Devaraja: I just wondered in what areas do you think we would encounter Islam as a mass movement and a threat to us, other than India - if it could become a mass movement in India? Where else do you think it might be - ?.

S: It is a mass movement in India, in the sense that there is a large Muslim minority. They might start up some conversion activities. But I think it might be a danger in this country to the immigrant population. They might be; because Muslims can be really bad and really nasty. They can be very difficult, very obstreperous. For instance, I give you the example of the sort of thing they do; they've done it all over India. They will assert what they consider to be their right at everybody else's expense. For instance, you will get a little traffic island, say, in Bombay, and you'll find a Muslim will be sitting there for a while, year after year. He gradually puts a few bricks and stones together, and actually before you know where you are, after a few years he's built a tomb there to some, right in the midst of the flow of traffic, and seriously inconveniencing the public; but then that becomes a sort of holy place and you are offending Muslim religious sentiment if you do anything about it, and they try to expand it and expand it, and there are clashes and demonstrations, and they stick to their rights. Then they say they are being persecuted by the Hindus; they started the whole thing up quite deliberately. This is what they do. They are socially very divisive.

Nagabodhi: Is that how they, making little mosques, crammed into traffic islands? I saw a few in Bombay.

S: Oh yes, a lot, oh yes. Asserting themselves and demonstrating their presence and all the rest of it, yes. It is not that they were there, built centuries ago and they've built the town [round them] - oh no, the other way round, in almost all cases. They do this again and again.

Anyway, we'd better conclude here, otherwise we won't have any lunch and you won't all get back to your Centres.

Devaraja: And stop the threat of Islam! [Laughter]

S: Well, in Brighton you are overshadowed by it. You've got all those minarets! [Laughter]

Nagabodhi: In the shadow of the dagger! Your memoirs!

Voices: Thanks very much Bhante.

S: I hope no one's ended up converted to Islam!

Devaraja: Converted to brotherhood, anyway.

S: A rather better kind.

Nagabodhi: And congratulations to the transcriber, for you have come to the end of your long day's labour. May God be pleased with you!
[Laughter]

END OF SEMINAR

Seminar Transcription completed 28th April 1993

Partially Hand Transcribed by numerous volunteers

Rest of Transcribing and Typing by Joyce Mumford

Final Checking, Contenting, Layout and Printing by Silabhadra

Copied and distributed by Margje Perla-Zeef