

Appendix No. 2: Extract from *'Meditation: The Expanding Consciousness'*¹⁶⁴

Thirdly, we come to the Five Basic Methods of Meditation. And you may ask: Why five? And there are five basic methods of meditation because, in this arrangement, the methods of meditation correspond to the five mental poisons. Enlightenment or Buddhahood is within us all, but it is obscured, it is covered over, just as the sky by dark clouds, but it is there behind them or underneath them all the time. And this obscuring factor; this cloud or this darkness; of ignorance or avidya, can be looked at in a number of different ways, from a number of different points of view. We can analyse it, we can split it up. So if we analyse it, if we split it up, we find that this obscuring factor consists of what we call the Five Mental Poisons which stand between us and our own innate Enlightenment.

And these five mental poisons are: first of all, distraction or distractedness; multiplicity of wandering thoughts; inability to concentrate; mental confusion and so on. And then, secondly, anger, or aversion, or hatred. Then, thirdly, lust or craving. Fourthly, ignorance, in the sense of ignorance of spiritual things, of our own conditionality. And fifthly and lastly, conceit or pride or ego-sense. So these are the five mental poisons. (As some of you are writing them down, let me just go through them again quickly: distraction, anger; craving; ignorance; conceit; the five mental poisons.)

Now, each of the five basic methods of meditation is designed as an antidote for one particular poison. So let us now just briefly describe these five basic methods and refer also to the poison of which they are meant to be the antidote. Now first of all, the first of the five basic methods is one with which we are already acquainted, and perhaps acquainted very well: that is to say, the mindfulness of breathing practice, which we have done this morning and which we do in our meditation classes. This practice – mindfulness of breathing – is the antidote to the mental poison of distraction or distractedness. It eliminates wandering thoughts. That is one of the reasons why we practice it first, why we learn it first before any other method: because we can't practise any of the other methods, or any method at all, until we have learned to concentrate. And concentration means unifying our attention, eliminating wandering thoughts. I am not

going to describe this method in detail because most of us know it, and in any case we have already practised it this morning. So this is the first of the five basic methods; mindfulness of the breathing process, leading to concentration and elimination of distraction in the sense of wandering thoughts.

Then, secondly, our second basic method: the development of what we call metta or maitri; friendliness, loving-kindness, or as we may say, not very exactly but giving the spirit of the thing, universal love. And this, of course, is the antidote for anger or hatred. Some of you have practised this method, others haven't; some are expecting to practise it in the weekly classes in the course of a few weeks time; so I shall just briefly run through the five main stages of this practice. It will also help to refresh the memories of those who have done it, but have maybe done it some time ago. In the first stage of this practice we develop love towards ourselves: something which many people find very difficult indeed; they don't seem to be on very good terms with themselves for one reason or another. So we develop love first of all towards ourselves. If you can't love yourself you will find it very difficult to love other people; you will only project. Then in the second stage, we develop love towards a near and dear friend; someone of the same sex (because if we think of someone of the opposite sex, craving may arise), someone of the approximately the same age (within ten or fifteen years) and someone still living. So we visualise – if we can visualise – the image or figure of this person and we develop love towards this person; the same love that we developed towards ourselves or even stronger we now develop – and actually feel – towards that near and dear friend.

And here I must emphasise, as I always emphasise because it is so necessary, that what we are trying to develop in this type of practice is not a thought about developing a feeling but the actual feeling itself. And lots of people when they practise find that they are as it were all dry inside; they can't squeeze out even a drop of feeling, but, in the course of time, if they practise hard, they begin to feel. It's as though, before, they were all numb, all insensitive, they can't feel, but in the course of this practice they begin to generate an inner warmth, a sort of glow, towards themselves, first; then towards this near

¹⁶⁴ Lecture No. 33, Dharmachakra, or dharmatranscripts.

and dear friend. And usually this second stage is the easiest, for obvious reasons. Then, in the third stage, we think of a neutral person; someone whose face we know very well; whom we've seen often; but towards whom we've no particular feeling either positive or negative; we neither like them nor dislike them. So the same love, that we felt towards the near and dear friend, we now direct, we now develop, towards this neutral person. And then, in the fourth stage, we think of someone whom we dislike, even an enemy; someone who has done us harm or an injury; and the same love we develop towards that person, too. These are the first four stages and they are as it were introductory.

Then, at the beginning of the fifth and last stage, we as it were line up all these four persons in front of our mental vision: self, near and dear friend, neutral person, enemy; and we develop the same love equally towards all. Then we go a little further, we spread a little wider: we develop the same love, we direct the same love, towards all the people in the room where we are meditating; all the people in the locality; all the people in the city, the country. Then, continent by continent, we go all the way round the world. We think of all men, all women, all nationalities, races, religions; even animals, even beings, maybe, who are higher than human beings – beings which the Buddhist tradition calls devas, deities – or even, higher than that, spiritual teachers like the Buddha, Milarepa, Hui Neng and so on, even non-Buddhist spiritual teachers: whoever is eminent for any good quality; and we develop love towards all of them.

And in this way we feel, we find, as though we are being carried out of ourselves in ever expanding circles; we forget ourselves, sometimes quite literally, and we become enfolding in an ever expanding circle of love. And this can be a very tangible experience for those who practise, even after a comparatively short time. One does find, here, the matter of temperament rather important. Some people take to the metta practice like ducks to water and they enjoy it immensely within a matter of minutes, but others have to strain and struggle before they get that little spark of love and before they start radiating that metta; many of them feel that to talk of radiating metta is just a joke! They don't see how they are ever going to do it! But they can. They do, in the end, with a bit of practice, a bit of perseverance; after all, it's all there! If even Buddhahood, if even Enlightenment, is within, why not just metta? That's surely even simpler! So this is the second type of practice, the second of the five basic methods of meditation: metta bhavana –

development of universal love.

Now, thirdly, we come to a much less popular method, which is known as the contemplation of impurity or decay. And this counteracts lust or craving or attachment. It is not a practice which many people care to take up, though it is popular in some quarters in the East.

The first type of practice – there are three different ways of practising it, but the first, and the most radical, as it were, is to go to a graveyard or a burning-ground (and in the East one gets these things) and to sit there among the corpses and half-burned bodies – I know it sounds drastic, but the our craving is very strong – and just to sit there and look at these bodies one after the other and just think: "Well, this is what will happen to me one day!" After all, this is common sense! Nothing of Buddhism here, even. One day you will be like that! One day your head will be off or your arm will be just lying to one side; you will be a little heap of ashes in somebody's urn – cherished, somewhere, we hope! – but this is how you'll end, so why not fact the fact? Why not admit it? And if necessary orient one's life accordingly? So in the Eastern countries, very often along goes the bhikkhu – I had almost said 'gaily'! – to the burning ground – and some of them do go, I would say, gaily, happily – and they sit and they look at one corpse after another: this one just ready to be burned, just dead; another one, a bit swollen; another one, well, in rather a mess. And they go on until they get to just a skeleton, a heap of bones, a heap of dust; and they just reflect, they turn over in their own mind: "One day, I too shall be like this." And it's a very salutary practice and it does tend to cut down, to reduce, craving or lust or attachment to the things of the body, the things of the senses, the things of the flesh.

There's another way of practising which is less drastic: that is, simply contemplating death. Not going literally to the graveyard, which is rather radical, but just reminding yourself, reflecting on the fact, that one day you must die, one day you must be separated, your consciousness must be separated from this physical organism. One day you will no longer see, you will no longer hear, you will no longer taste, or feel, or sense in any way. One day your body will just not be there, your senses will not function, you will be a consciousness on its own, you don't know where; spinning, perhaps bewildered, in a sort of void; you don't know. So one must bear this in mind.

Or, if even that is a bit too drastic, a bit too harsh,

well just think about impermanence. Now Autumn is beginning, it is a very beautiful time of year to think about impermanence; if we even look out of the window we see the leaves on the trees are turning yellow, some of them are falling. We see chrysanthemums are in season now. So: everything fades, everything passes away, everything is impermanent; if we dwell upon it in this gentle melancholy sort of fashion, reflectively, poetically, quoting Keats and so on; even this will help if these more drastic methods are too terrible for us to face. But one can say, as a result of experience, that even the more drastic method can be intensely exhilarating; it certainly isn't depressing! If one takes it up at the right time. It certainly isn't a depressing experience to remind yourself that one day you'll be free of the body. Some people who practise find this very, very exhilarating.

I remember once, in my very early days, when I was just beginning as a monk in India, one day I did do this. I went along to a burning ground at night and I sat there. And it was a very beautiful scene, because it was on the banks of the river Ganges; there was a great stretch of silver sand, and at intervals funeral pyres had been lit and people had been burned, and there was a skull here and a bone there and a heap of ashes somewhere else, but it was very beautiful, because the moonlight was over it all – the silvery moonlight of the tropics – and the Ganges was gently flowing by, and one felt not only in a contemplative, not only in a detached mood, but one felt in a very free, one might even say, exhilarated, mood.

And it is significant that this sort of practice overcomes fear. It is said that the Buddha himself practised in this way to overcome fear. If you can stay alone in a graveyard of this sort at night, well, you'll never be afraid of anything again; because all fear, basically, is fear of loss of the body, fear of death, fear of loss of self. So if you can come face to face with this and overcome it or resolve it or go beyond it, then you'll never be afraid of anything any more. But this sort of practice, at least in its more drastic form, is not for beginners. Even in the Buddha's day, we are told, some monks, who practised without proper preparation, became so depressed that they committed suicide. So normally one is advised to practise mindfulness of breathing first, then metta bhavana, and only when one is full of lots of metta, to go to the graveyard and practise in the more drastic way. But all of us can practise to some extent, recalling the impermanence of things, remembering that one day we too will die, we too will fade and perish even as the flowers or even as

the grass of the field.

Then, fourthly; the contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas. This is the fourth basic method of meditation: contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas, or twelve links in the Chain, as it is called, of Dependent Origination or Conditioned Co-production, as Dr. Conze calls it. And this contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas is the antidote for ignorance. Those of you who have seen pictures of the Wheel of Life – the Tibetan Wheel of Life – will remember that the Twelve Nidanas are depicted in the outermost, fourth, circle of the Wheel of Life.

The first Nidana is ignorance, represented by a blind man with a stick; the second: the Samskaras or karma-formations, volitions, depicted by a potter with a wheel and pots; then, thirdly; consciousness, shown by a monkey climbing a flowering tree (because that's what our minds are like, most of the time: little monkeys climbing up into the branches of this world and plucking little flowers here and there); and, fourthly: name and form (that is mind and body), a ship with four passengers, one of whom, representing consciousness, is steering. Then the six sense organs, represented by an empty house; contact, represented by a man and woman embracing; then feeling, a man with an arrow in his eye; craving, a woman offering drink to a seated man; grasping, a man gathering fruit from a tree; then coming-to-be; development; represented by a pregnant woman; then birth, represented by a picture of childbirth; and then old age and death; men carrying a corpse to the burning ground.

So these Twelve Nidanas, illustrated in this way, represent the whole process of birth, life, death and rebirth. As a result of our ignorance and volitions based upon ignorance in previous lives, we are precipitated again into this world with a consciousness endowed with a psycho-physical organism, endowed with six senses which come into contact with the external universe. As a result of this contact, we experience feelings – pleasant, painful and neutral – we develop craving for the pleasant feelings, we cling on to the things which gives us the pleasant feelings; in this way we condition ourselves in such a way that inevitably we have to be born again and have to die again. So these Twelve Links, in this way, (and I'm describing them very briefly because we are not really concerned with this subject today), are distributed over three lives, but are also, at the same time, all contained in one life; even in one moment. And they illustrate – whether spread over three lives or a day or an hour or a minute – they illustrate the whole process, or way in which we condition ourselves;

how we make ourselves what we are by our own reactions to what we experience.

If we like we can contemplate not only the Twelve Nidanas forming the outermost circle of the Wheel of Life, we can contemplate the whole Wheel of Life itself, in all its circles and all its details, because this is really not a picture of something outside of ourselves: this is a picture of ourselves. When we look at the Wheel of Life we are just looking in a mirror. There's anger; that's in me. There's greed; that's in me. There's ignorance; that's in me too. There are people going up from a lower to a higher state; well, I sometimes do that. On the other side, people slipping from a higher to a lower state; well, I sometimes do that. And then different aspects of existence: a happy state like that of a god; a painful state like that of a devil; a hungry state like that of a tormented ghost; an animal state; an aggressive state like that of an asura: all these are depicted. And how the whole process goes on, well, that's depicted, as we've just seen, in the Twelve Nidanas of the outermost circle.

So when we contemplate the Wheel of Life, we are really contemplating our own conditionality; we are really seeing ourselves, as in fact we are most of the time, as just a piece of clockwork! We are really no more free, no more spontaneous, no more alive than a clock or a watch or an engine! We're mechanical. Because we are unaware, we are conditioned. So in this practice we become aware of our own conditionality, our own mechanicalness, our own un-free-ness, our own lack of spontaneity; our own death, if you like: our own spiritual death. And the contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas only provide a sort of traditional support for this sort of awareness. So contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas we may say – restating and rephrasing it – means rather, the becoming deeply aware of our own conditionality. How we simply act and react; how we are not free, not really originitive, not creative, not spontaneous, not spiritual, but bound hand and foot to the Wheel of Life, the wheel of Samsara. So this is the fourth method, the fourth basic method of meditation: contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas.

Then, fifthly and lastly: analysis of the Six Elements. And the practice, the method, of analysis of the Six Elements is the antidote for conceit or pride: that is to say, the feeling that I am I, and this is mine, and this is me. And in this practice, in this method, we try to realise that nothing really belongs to me, that we are, in fact, spiritually (though not empirically) just nothing: that what we think of as 'I' is an illusion; it doesn't exist in reality. Now the Six Elements of

this practice are: earth, water, fire, air, ether or space, and consciousness; and here they are arranged in an ascending area of subtlety. Now I'll briefly explain the practice. First of all we sit, of course, (as is usual for meditation) and we think of the element earth. Earth. The earth upon which we're standing, and the earth in the form of trees and houses and flowers and people, and our own physical body. And we think: "Well, our own physical body is made up of certain solid elements. Where did these elements come from? These elements came from food. Where did the food come from? It came from the earth. So I have, as it were, incorporated a portion of the earth in my physical body. It doesn't belong to me. I just borrowed it; if you like, stolen it for a while. It does not belong to me at all. One day I have to give it back. So this is not me. It doesn't belong to me. It goes". So we relinquish, as it were, hold on the solid element in our physical body. Then we go a bit further. We think: "Well, in the world there is so much of water; great oceans and rivers and seas, streams and lakes and rain; and in my body also there is water: there is blood, there's bile, there's pus, spittle and so on. This is a liquid element, but where did I get it from? I borrowed it. I've taken it – on loan, as it were – from the water element of the whole world. It doesn't belong to me. I have to give it back one day. This also isn't me." So in this way 'I' begin to disappear; 'I' begins to vanish.

Now we come to a still subtler element: the element of fire. In this stage we reflect, as it were, that there is in the universe the sun, the source of light and heat for the whole solar system. And we think, we reflect, that whatever heat, whatever warmth, there is in our own physical body, which we can feel within us, this all ultimately derives from the sun, and that when we die, when the body lies cold and immobile and stiff, all heat will have left it, all heat will have been given back to the earth, given back to the original source of light and heat. Then, the next stage; the contemplation of the next element, which is air. In this stage we reflect that our life is dependent upon air; that is to say: we live and we breathe, we breathe in and we breathe out, and whatever air there is in us in our lungs in the form of breath, this belongs to the wider circumambient atmosphere, as it were. And when we die; when the last breath passes from our body; then we give back that air into the air and we cease to identify ourselves with it, we cease to think that 'this is my breath': we are quite dissociated from it.

The next of the elements is what is called in Sanskrit and Pali: akasa (akasa Pali sp.). Akasa is

translated sometimes as 'space' and sometimes as 'ether'; it isn't space in the ordinary mathematical sense, we may say, it is rather the 'living space' within which everything lives and moves and has its being. We reflect, we think, that our physical body occupies so much space – our physical body, made up of earth, air, fire, water – it occupies so much space. And when those elements are resolved back into their sources, then there is, as it were, an empty space left which the body formerly occupied, and this empty space merges back into universal space. At this stage we are dissociated altogether from the physical body.

Sixthly and lastly, we come to the element of consciousness. At present, our consciousness is associated with the physical body through the five gross physical senses and through the mind, but when the body goes, when we are no longer conscious of the body, when we are no longer conscious of earth or water or fire or air, when consciousness is no longer bound up with these, when it's no longer bound up with physical existence at all, then consciousness dissolves – or re-solves – itself into a higher and a wider consciousness: that which is not identified with the physical body. Here, of course, there are so many levels. We can go to the individual consciousness, free from the body; from that to a wider and more universal, even collective, consciousness; from that to what we call the Alayavijnana (Alayavinnana in Pali), the repository or store-consciousness; and from that we proceed even to the fringes of what we call Absolute Mind. And in this way our own petty small individuality, our own petty small individual mind, is dissolved or resolved into the ocean of the universal consciousness. And in this way, too, we become free from the sense of 'I' and the sense of 'mine'.

Now these are the five basic methods of meditation. And I think we may say it is axiomatic that everybody who takes up the practice of concentration and meditation at all seriously should have some experience at least if not of all of these, certainly of two or three. If one isn't able to practise all five to the very limit, at least one should have some acquaintance with them – at least with the theory – but one should have a very definite practical acquaintance with and experience of at least two or three out of the five. Usually what we do in our own meditation classes is to start people off with the mindfulness of breathing, and then to get them on to the development of love, and only after that to take up, if they feel so inclined, one or

another of the three remaining practices. But quite apart from the five basic methods, there are a very large number indeed of more advanced methods, more advanced techniques, which are known in the Buddhist tradition: techniques, for instance, of mantra-recitation, visualisation and so on, but into these it is not necessary for us to go today.

Now if we look at the five basic methods which I have explained and described, we shall see that they fall quite naturally into two great groups. They fall in the first place into a group concerned with tranquility: a group which helps us to develop tranquility or shamatha; and the second group is that of those concerned with the development of insight or understanding of reality. Now the tranquility group consists of mindfulness – that is to say, the mindfulness of breathing – and the development of love. These calm, tranquillise and expand the mind. And the insight group consists of the contemplation of impurity, of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination and of the Six Elements. This is the insight group, or the group connected with the development of insight. Now there is, obviously, some overlapping between these two groups, but broadly speaking we can say quite definitely that they can be classified in this way.

And this brings us to the fourth and last of our topics this afternoon: the Stage of Meditational Experience. But before we go on to that, just one or two words about this very important question of 'technique'. All the five basic methods of meditation involve making use of certain techniques, and these techniques very definitely must be learned, must be practised, we must be thoroughly familiar with them if we are to make any progress in the meditation at all. But here a danger – or at least a difficulty – arises: there is always a great temptation, as it were, to think that the practice of meditation consists simply in the manipulation of the technique. But this in fact is not so. We must say, we must emphasise, quite emphatically, that the practice of meditation does not consist merely in the operation of a technique, even though the technique very definitely has to be learned, has to be mastered. We may even say that meditation is not so much a science as an art, and in this art, as in all others, it is the inner experience rather than the technique which is all-important. It is even possible, sometimes it does happen, to master all the techniques of meditation – at least of concentration – to be able to go through all the exercises, but one may remain very far indeed from the real spirit of meditation.

Appendix No. 3: **Extract from *Sangharakshita in Seminar: 'The Precious Garland'***¹⁶⁵

S: I was just thinking this morning before we actually go into the verses, it might be useful to, to consider what are the principal stages of the Spiritual Path in practical terms, because in Buddhist texts not only sutras, but in all kinds of books on Buddhism which are being produced nowadays one finds different descriptions of the Path: some of them very good descriptions, very inspiring descriptions, but they don't always agree. Sometimes, in fact, they're very, very, different. At times of course they do overlap. Some of these descriptions are very detailed and we sometimes rather get lost in the detail, and you can't help wondering exactly where we are and what exactly we have to do to get to the next stage or substage or even sub-substage. So I thought it might be useful at this point being about half way through the seminar just to outline what in fact are the main stages – so far as we're concerned – and also to indicate some, some connections with some sort of traditional formulations, some of the traditional descriptions of the Path.

It seems to me that we can regard the whole Spiritual Path as consisting of five great Stages. These very roughly correspond to the five Paths of the Indian Buddhist tradition but I won't go at this stage very much into that comparison. I don't want to be as it were, comparative description but just a quite straightforward one in terms of our own needs and own experience.

So I can say that the first stage is really the Stage of mindfulness and awareness. This is really the first thing that one has to do, to develop mindfulness and awareness. (pause) One can of course think of mindfulness and awareness in terms of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness or in terms of the Four Dimensions of Awareness but that is, as it were, a detail. So the first thing that one has to do, the first stage that one has to traverse is the Stage of Mindfulness and Awareness – which means especially developing self-awareness, which in turn means self-integration. So in a way mindfulness is also the stage of integration; we bring all our scattered bits together – we integrate ourselves, we overcome conflict within ourselves, disharmony within ourselves: we get ourselves functioning as a smoothly working whole, not a jumble of bits and pieces, and fragments of selves all struggling and

jostling for supremacy. So you can begin to see that this quite a big task in itself, practising mindfulness, practising awareness and becoming integrated in this sort of way. But this is the first stage. It really means giving birth to oneself as an integrated person, as a self-aware individual.

(voice): You appear not differentiate between mindfulness and awareness. Is there a significant difference between them?

S : Not really. In this context I use them quite loosely as meaning the same thing. (pause) I think you understand what I mean by not being integrated; and mindfulness or awareness is the chief instrument of that integration. This is why it's so important and why we can call this not only the stage of mindfulness or stage of awareness but also the stage of integration. It's a bringing of ourselves together into a whole instead of having ourselves as simply a collection of disparate parts.

Then comes what I can describe as the stage of Positive Emotion. (pause) By Positive Emotion of course I mean friendliness, compassion, joy, equanimity and faith and devotion. So in as much as positive emotion is something that moves, not something static – this is also the Stage of Energy. So in this stage one tries to make oneself as emotionally positive as possible. One overcomes all negative emotions. One not only tries to develop one's emotions but to refine them. One develops not simply positive emotion but even spiritual emotions. And here the whole question, the whole subject of spiritual beauty becomes of importance. (pause) So in this stage one develops the positive, even spiritualised, emotions to a very high pitch of intensity indeed. This is also the level of meditation – Samadhi because these positive emotions and the energies that you generate carry you through all the levels of dhyana. But it's not the stage of meditation simply in the sense of the stage of sitting in meditation. It's the stage of being emotional positive, if possible in a highly spiritual sense, whatever you are doing, whether you are sitting and meditating, or working, or talking, or just being quietly by yourself. (pause)

In the third stage one could say is the Stage of Vision. In this stage one sees the Truth – not, of course regarding Truth as a thing out those to be

¹⁶⁵ Sangharakshita, *The Precious Garland*, Unedited Seminar On, dharmatranscripts, pp. 337 – 342

seen, you know, like an ordinary object. One could say that this is the stage of openness to truth. Guenther talks in terms of the dimension of openness to Being with a capital B he means Sunyata; but though his expression is a bit roundabout it's quite expressive at the same time the dimension of openness of Being. So this is also the stage of openness: openness in the direction of ultimate reality not holding back on the progress of expansion; not opening up so far – that is to say opening up as regards positive emotion – but then refusing to open up any further. No, it's indefinite openness to the ultimate or, in terms of sight, a vision of reality, vision of truth.

This is also, incidentally, the stage of death we might say. It's the stage of spiritual death because it signifies that the death of the old self, the death of the ego howsoever much refined and the birth of what I mean. It's the birth – if you like – of the seed of buddhahood. Not that in the sense that that seed wasn't there already, but the seed has now become as it were visible and from that seed the new being as it were, the Buddha will eventually develop and will eventually spring. So the Stage of Vision is also the Stage of Death because when you see the Truth as it were, you die; or, even, when you die then you can see the Truth. (pause) Among actual practices of course, this is covered by the Six Elements practice and the meditation on Sunyata except you don't meditate on Sunyata as though it were a thing out there on which you are meditating; that would just be an idea, a concept a vague image of Sunyata not Sunyata itself. So that's the Stage of Vision, or if you like the Stage of Reality or Stage of Death – whatever you like to call it – the Stage of Spiritual Rebirth.

Then comes what we can call the Stage of Transformation. This is when the vision that you have seen, or if you like, you experience reality starts, as it were, descending and transforming every aspect of your being. It is not just in the head, not even in your spiritual being; it pervades all parts of your being, all parts of, as it were, your spiritual body. (pause) This is also the stage of meditation in a sense but not the meditation in the sense of the meditation with the help of which you gain Enlightenment but the meditation that you practice after Enlightenment. When I say enlightenment I really mean Pre-Enlightenment I mean this initial visionary experience. The practice of meditation in the sense of dwelling on that visionary experience, that glimpse of reality

so as to deepen it and broaden it and to bring it down, as it were, so that it pervades and transforms all the different aspects of one's being. (pause)

And fifth and lastly we've got what we may call the Stage of Compassionate Activity. (pause) This means that having completely transformed oneself in accordance with one's original vision – vision of reality – one is then in a position really to help others. One could say that this is also the stage of spontaneity – true spontaneity where if you don't sort of take thought, don't think what you're going to do to help others – at least not in the ordinary way – you just spontaneously function, you do what needs to be done. There's a sort of overflow of your fully Enlightened being. (pause).

(voice) : Presumably, Bhante, there is going to be something of an overflow into (reaching)? between these various stages.

S: Well, I'm coming to that. (pause) So these five stages, the series, that is to say one after the other in regular order. So if one traverses these five stages then one traverses the whole Spiritual Path. (pause) But, as you know there is a path of regular steps and there is also a path of irregular steps. You could conceivably start work on the first stage – that is to say the Stage of Mindfulness, Stage of Awareness or Stage of Integration and then complete that, and then go on to the next, that is the stage of Positive Emotion, and then complete that, and then go on to the third stage. Conceivably you could do that but I think very few people would actually function in this way. Most people I think for sometime at least will follow or will have to follow the path of irregular steps. So that means they will be working now on one and now on another of these steps. So that means they will be working now on one and now on another of these stages. One could even go so far as to say that one can think in terms of working on all five stages simultaneously. The first would be perfected first – that's where the path of regular steps comes in – the second would be perfected second. That is to say the first, the second, cannot be perfected before the first has been perfected and so on but one can work on all simultaneously so that the first becomes perfected and then you are just working on four; second becomes perfected; you're just working on three; the third becomes perfected and then you're just working on two; the fourth becomes perfected, you're working on one; the fifth becomes perfected and you've perfected them.

So what does this mean? It means that all the time that is to say everyday one has got five things to practice as best you can. That is to say one has to keep up the effort to be mindful and aware and to be as together as possible as integrated as possible; one remains in as positive a mental state as one possible can; one does not lose sight of one's ultimate goal at any time one tries to apply this to practice at every level whatever you've realised or discovered or seen on the highest level of your being at any time, and you do your best for other people, you do what you can to help people. But all these five simultaneously. This is your spiritual life and this is your spiritual practice. These are the things with which you are basically concerned. You can, as it were forget about all the other formulations, all about the Four Noble Truths, the EightFold Path. On the practical side, this all that you really need or all that you really need to think in terms of. Whatsoever has been said by all the different you know Buddhist teachers in the course of several hundred years of development is all really contained in this in principle. Whatever they've had to say about the different stages of the Path – you can get, as I mentioned at the beginning some very elaborate descriptions indeed, which will quite confuse you, even mislead you – well this is essentially, this is basically what it is all about.

You can also think of these if you like in terms of the Five Spiritual Faculties which are both successive and simultaneous. First stage corresponds to the faculty of mindfulness. The second corresponds to the faculty of faith. The third corresponds to the faculty of wisdom. Fourth to the faculty of meditation. The fifth to the faculty of virya. (pause)

If you want to think of any particular Buddhist virtue and understand its sort of place in the total scheme we~ you can do that by just allocating it to one or another of these five stages. For instance dana. Where does dana come? Dana clearly comes in stage two because, you know, when you're overflowing with love and joy in a highly positive emotional state your natural tendency is to give; you can't help it. I mean, you're giving yourself all the time. You're flowing out all the time. The dana comes there dana is an aspect of that particular state. But perhaps we need not go into that too much but just think in terms of these five principal stages. These are the stages that one is trying to get through and these are the aspects of the spiritual life and the spiritual path that one will be cultivating all the time. So if you just try to do these five things all the time you can forget all about making progress or where exactly you are along the path. One just intensifies one's effort in those five directions as it were, all the time. One simply can't go wrong then, (pause). Now is that reasonably clear?

S: Hm. (pause) You notice that three and four correspond to the path of vision and the path of transformation as described in connection with the Eight-Fold Path but unless you've got a scholarly mind you need not worry too much about these sort of connections. (pause)

Now that sort of introduction is not exactly introductory to this particular chapter but just introductory to one's as it were general understanding of the path because sometimes it seems that the traditional formulations, traditional descriptions don't square very closely with our own actual experience or our own actual needs.

Appendix No. 4: The Nature of 'Sadhana' and its relationship to Going for Refuge in the Context of Ordination into the Western Buddhist Order¹⁶⁶

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to clarify our understanding of sadhana and its significance in the context of ordination into the WBO/TBM and specifically to show that sadhana is not exclusively to be identified with visualisation practices.

In this paper, the word 'sadhana' is used (perhaps loosely) in accordance with its common usage within the WBO/TBM, i.e. to refer to the meditation practice(s) that an Order member takes up at the time of ordination.

Background 1: Ordination in the WBO

In the early days of the Order, Sangharakshita customarily gave a mantra to new ordines at their private ordination. He did not always, however, give them a visualisation practice as such.

Sometimes there was a practical reason for this; for example the bodhisattva chosen might not have been one for whom Sangharakshita had access to a formulated visualisation practice. However it does seem that, in addition to this, Sangharakshita did explicitly recognise right from the start that visualisation as such was not intrinsic to Going for Refuge. It seems that his awareness of this fact was reflected in other early decisions of his. There was, for example, his inclusion of the Heart Sutra mantra (which we often erroneously refer to as the Prajnaparamita mantra) in the eight concluding mantras of the Sevenfold Puja. He did this precisely because he realised that not everyone would have a strong response to bodhisattva figures and some people would be drawn to 'formless' practices.

Although Sangharakshita recognised this as a theoretical possibility, in practice it became the norm to give new Order members a visualisation practice at ordination and we have continued this until the present time. It is true that we have simplified the practices themselves and recognised that an Order member's taking up of such practices may be gradual. At the same time as simplifying

them, we also reformed them in certain ways so as to detach them from their Tibetan Vajrayana context and bring them more firmly within the scope of our own perspective on the Dharma. However, the very fact that ordines are routinely given specifically a visualisation practice (and not any other kind) as an integral part of ordination does suggest that we are still not completely free of a tendency to see ordination in the terms of a Tantric initiation.

There is thus a degree of inconsistency between our 'philosophical' view of the centrality of Going for Refuge and our practical emphasis on visualisation. But apart from this issue of inconsistency, our stress on visualisation has always been problematic to some degree because experience has shown that quite a few Order members have not really 'taken' to visualisation practices.

Background 2: Visualisation and Going for Refuge

In fact, it is very clear that there are some very good, deeply committed Order members who have serious problems with visualisation for one reason or another. For example, they may just find it a difficult form of practice that produces an unnecessary and unproductive strain in their daily meditation. Again, they may respond to the Three Jewels much more strongly in other ways, or they may have inhibitions about deity figures because of negative associations in their cultural and psychological background, e.g. as a result of previous Catholic or Hindu conditioning. Placing too much emphasis on visualisation per se makes it needlessly difficult for such people to Go for Refuge within our Order.

To say this is not necessarily to go back on all that has been said in the past about the importance of the archetypal or 'imaginal' aspects of practice. We do however need to recognise that, whilst for many people

¹⁶⁶ Subhuti, *The nature of 'Sadhana' and its relationship to Going for Refuge in the Context of Ordination into the Western Buddhist Order*, Shabda, October 2001, p. 71 ff

meditation on a bodhisattva form may be the best way to activate this archetypal dimension, such practices may not be the only – or even the most appropriate – way to do so for everybody. After all, not all forms or phases of Buddhism have placed emphasis on visualisation practices: we can hardly assume that the traditions that didn't stress visualisation were, for that reason alone, invalid or ineffective. In fact, it doesn't even follow that such non-visualising traditions were thereby entirely lacking in an 'imaginal' dimension, since we cannot equate the 'imaginal' with visualisation in a simple, one-to-one correspondence.

The development that has really highlighted the need to think about this area again is the ongoing evolution of the ordination process and the growing number of Private Preceptors. Some of the individuals who have been proposed as Private Preceptors over the last two years or so are Order members who, whilst conscientious and regular meditators, do not consider meditation to be their forte, especially as far as visualisation is concerned. Some of them found themselves wondering whether this fact should in some sense disqualify them as Private Preceptors

The Private Preceptor as witness

Discussion of this topic with Sangharakshita has led to a useful clarification of the whole area. It seems we have been giving the transmission of visualisation practice too central a place in our conception of the role of the Private Preceptor. The function of the Private Preceptor is to witness the Going for Refuge of the ordinee. As part of this, he or she also witnesses the commitment an ordinee makes to a particular image of the spiritual Goal. Of course, the Private Preceptor must him or herself have a strong connection with the Goal, but this does not necessitate his or her having a connection with whatever archetypal image the ordinee may be committing him or herself to, or indeed to any such image.

The image is only one of many 'points of entry' or 'doorways' into the Goal. The Preceptor's ability to witness the act of Going for Refuge derives not from his or her commitment to any particular doorway but to the Goal itself. He or she may have such a commitment without being an advanced meditator or even without having any particularly strong feeling at all for archetypal bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

Developing our understanding of the ordination ceremony

All this suggests that, although there need be no changes to the ordination ceremony, our understanding of it does need to develop somewhat. The development suggested below will make the relationship between ordination and sadhana more 'principial' but at the same time more complicated and variable in practice. Our present conception of it is certainly inflexible and to some degree inconsistent with our principles, but it does have the advantage of being straightforward! The new complexity will demand a lot more from the Private Preceptors.

Each ordinee should still, at the time of ordination, choose a Buddha or bodhisattva figure that represents the Goal for him or her. The figure represents, as Sangharakshita has put it, the ordinee as he or she will be 'at the end of the higher evolution'. The figure should be identified through discussions between the Private Preceptor and the ordinee prior to the latter's ordination. For ordinees who do not feel drawn to any of the 'archetypal' figures, a common choice might be Shakyamuni, although some other figure may emerge unexpectedly in the course of discussions with the Private Preceptor.

At ordination, the role of the Private Preceptor is to witness the ordinee's commitment ultimately to become what that figure represents. As we have already seen, this does not require the Private Preceptor to have any particular affinity with that figure him or herself. The ordinee's commitment to realising the ideal represented by their chosen Buddha or Bodhisattva figure would be symbolised by the threefold repetition of the mantra appropriate to that figure, in the usual way.

The discussions between the Private Preceptor and the Ordinee before the ordination would include consideration of how the ordinee's sadhana, i.e. his or her meditation practice after ordination, will help to realise the Goal represented by the figure. However the question of undertaking a commitment to a specific form of practice will be separate from the choice of an embodiment of the Goal. This means that the discussions might or might not conclude that visualisation of the figure will be part of the ordinee's future sadhana. The commitment to a particular figure should entail no commitment on the part of the ordinee that he or she will ever 'visualise' that figure as part of his or her meditation practice. In fact, the

ordinee's sadhana, as agreed between him or her and the Private Preceptor, might focus on any of the practices current in the Order. These include, for instance, the six element practice and also the 'basic' practices, i.e. the mindfulness of breathing and the mettabhavana.

In this way, ordination will entail undertaking a sadhana, i.e. making a firm but not inflexible commitment to some specific form of meditation practice, which is understood as deepening the ordinee's connection with his or her chosen figure, whether or not the practice actually involves visualisation of that figure.

An ordinee may commit him or herself to a 'basic' practice that has no explicit element for developing Insight in the way it is taught at basic level. In such a case, the Private Preceptor may wish to agree with the ordinee (before ordination) how he or she will develop the Insight aspect of the practice after ordination. However, this is a matter for discussion between them.

Furthermore, the form of practice to which the ordinee commits him or herself need not be a matter of a single meditation practice. It may include a range of practices, and one of these may be a visualisation of the embodiment that he or she has committed him or herself to, but in this case, the ordinee's commitment would not necessarily include daily performance of the practice.

As we have seen, the threefold repetition of the mantra will continue to be an important part of the ordination ceremony and the Private Preceptor should certainly encourage the ordinee to say the mantra, but this should not constitute a 'requirement'. Moreover, if the ordinee wants to do an entirely 'impersonal' mantra, such as the sunyata mantra or the Heart Sutra mantra, this need not be ruled out. Whichever Buddha or Bodhisattva they chose to see as the embodiment of the Goal for them is then represented by that mantra, since the mantra is itself the embodiment

in sound form of the inner experience of all Enlightened beings.

It will be incumbent on the Private Preceptor, after the ordination, to help the ordinee progressively to deepen his or her engagement with whatever sadhana he or she has chosen. However, this does not require the Preceptor to be a 'meditation master'. If the ordinee has problems that the Private Preceptor feels require more specialist advice on meditation, he or she can refer the ordinee to another senior Order member, or recommend attending relevant retreats. He or she will of course 'follow up' on the outcome of such advice or referral.

Conclusion

I believe that this development of our understanding of the relationship between ordination and sadhana will strengthen the integrity of ordination by basing it more squarely on Going for Refuge, rather than on any particular form of practice. At the same time, it will remove an unnecessary burden from those who want to Go for Refuge in our Order but for whatever reason face serious obstacles to the daily performance of visualisation practices. On the other hand, such a development will require the Private Preceptors to assume a more active responsibility in relation to the people whom they ordain. Yet this is in itself desirable for reasons I have discussed in another paper. Once again this demands greater understanding and spiritual effort on the part of Private Preceptors.

Subhuti (drafted by Subhamati in accordance with Subhuti's instructions, revised and approved by Subhuti 18th June 2001)

Appendix No. 5: Notes on a forum on meditation between members of the Preceptors' College and Council and the Vajraloka teaching team, Madhyamaloka, June 2000 ¹⁶⁷

This forum was instigated by Subhuti at Sangharakshita's suggestion for the clarification of issues around meditation and meditation teaching. The Preceptors' College and Council members on the forum were Subhuti, Suvajra, Kamalashila and Kovida, plus Chandrabodhi and the Vajraloka team members Vajradaka, Bodhananda, Anomavira and Tejananda (who wrote up these notes). In the forum we discussed at length detailed notes on meditation teaching and questions prepared in advance by members of the Vajraloka team. Much of the main import of the discussion was encapsulated or summarised by Subhuti, and this is mainly what the following notes are based on.

We also had two sessions with Sangharakshita in which he responded to our questions and suggestions. Though both the forum discussions and the sessions with Sangharakshita went into many similar areas, Sangharakshita did not comment directly on some of these areas at all. He commented directly on section 1 below.

Elsewhere, I've extracted notes on Sangharakshita's related comments and appended them to the appropriate areas of the forum summary in italics. The sessions with Sangharakshita were not taped – all summaries of Sangharakshita's comments are from my notes, checked where possible against those of Kamalashila and others. However, this document has been checked by Sangharakshita, Subhuti and others who were present at the forum.

The discussions clearly have implications for meditation teaching and practice throughout the Movement, so this summarises the main areas which should be of interest to Order members generally. Please note that this will be an ongoing forum, so what follows should not be regarded as necessarily 'the last word' on all the matters discussed. Certain matters of principle were clarified, but in some cases the details of practical application will probably continue to be worked out for quite some time.

1. Just sitting

Since the appearance of Sangharakshita's letter concerning just sitting in December 1999 Shabda, further discussion took place on a meditation teachers' forum at Rivendell in spring this year. In a question and answer session with Sangharakshita on that occasion, his emphasis was that, as he had made clear in his letter in Shabda, he did not regard just sitting as a 'practice'. On the Madhyamaloka forum, it became evident that just sitting had been taught as a 'practice' by Order members since at least the mid 1970s (e.g. in Kamalashila's book on meditation, just sitting is outlined in this way). Sangharakshita had pointed out that he did not necessarily object to the practice which was being taught as 'just sitting' (he hadn't been informed as to exactly what was being taught), but wanted the nomenclature restricted to his original usage.

In this meeting, for the sake of clarity, we referred to the original 'non-practice' that Sangharakshita outlined in December Shabda as 'just sitting' and to the 'practice' as 'formless meditation'. As will become clear below, both of these terms have to be regarded as provisional. To clarify the nature of 'formless meditation', we used part of Tejananda's notes on 'just sitting' from Articles Shabda (May 1998), and a brief outline of the practice by Prakasha.

The forum meeting came to some conclusions about just sitting and formless meditation, and then we put these to Sangharakshita. The summary of our conclusions which follows is as we gave it to Sangharakshita, and notes of Sangharakshita's comments in the question and answer session are appended (the summaries of our conclusions have been slightly edited to make them clearer for those who weren't there, but the content is unchanged). a) In his Shabda article on 'Just Sitting', Tejananda described 'just sitting' (i.e. formless meditation) as a 'spatial' or 'non-bhavana' type of meditation and of metta bhavana and mindfulness of breathing as 'temporal' or 'bhavana' kinds of meditation. This

¹⁶⁷ Tejananda, *Notes on a Forum between members of the Preceptors' College and Council and the Vajraloka Teaching Team, Madhyamaloka, June 2000*, Articles Shabda, November 2000

distinction does not hold up very well as all meditation (and indeed all spiritual practice), including just sitting and formless meditation, involves bhavana in the broadest sense of bringing into being qualities that are not already present. In the case of formless meditation, it is primarily the quality of awareness which is brought into being or enhanced. So there are not two distinct 'equal' approaches. Rather, formless meditation is subsumed to bhavana, but is methodologically distinct from meditations such as the mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana.

b) What mainly distinguishes formless meditation from mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana in terms of method is the nature of the object. In the mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana, there is a single object of awareness (i.e. the breath, or another person, i.e. the person towards whom the metta is being directed). In formless meditation, there is not a single object of concentration, but rather an ongoing awareness of whatever presents itself to the senses (including the mind considered as a sense) from moment to moment. Formless meditation is thus not an alternative to bhavana but a practice which involves cultivating awareness of whatever arises in the mind rather than of a stable object. As such, it is essentially a form of mindfulness (satipatthana) meditation in which one simply sits in concentrated awareness of the arising of whatever arises.

c) All present at the forum agreed that, in general, formless meditation (as distinct from and in addition to the two kinds of just sitting delineated by Sangharakshita) would be useful as a recognised part of our 'meditation armoury'.

Sangharakshita just said 'ok' to sections a) – c)

d) Formless meditation is not suitable for beginners in meditation. Above all, to do the practice effectively, concentration is needed, and to acquire this, a practical understanding of the principles of working in meditation through practising the mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana need to have been acquired. Formless meditation could be taught (as appropriate, especially in retreat situations) when people have developed sufficient concentration for it to be useful and practicable. This might be done collectively on retreats, but perhaps more usually could be communicated individually, to whoever is clearly ready for the practice, by an Order member who has a good 'feeling for' and experience of formless meditation. (The main thing in meditation teaching generally being that Order members should be communicating their experience of meditation to others).

Subhuti observed that there needs to be more awareness in the movement of the fact that not all Order members are necessarily suited to teach meditation at all. In addition, even among Order members who do teach meditation, not all will

necessarily have the subtlety of practice be able to teach formless meditation. This will clearly include those Order members who teach meditation but who do not themselves meditate regularly or at all (an unfortunate and unsatisfactory situation which needs to be addressed), but will also probably include other less experienced meditation teachers as well.

Sangharakshita said that if Order members teach meditation but don't meditate themselves it means they are just teaching it as a technique – it may be useful, but only to a very, very limited extent. As a general principle, you teach as an expression of your experience of meditation.

e) What we are calling formless meditation could well be taught in conjunction with just sitting as defined by Sangharakshita. [Sangharakshita: This is pretty obvious.] This could be done in terms of three levels (with a fourth indicating its fullest expression or realisation):

i. Just sitting in the first sense taught by Sangharakshita, i.e. just 'calming down' at the beginning of a meditation class. This is of course quite suitable for complete beginners onwards. In this case, there is no need to say 'we are going to do just sitting' – e.g. people could be directed to sit quietly and settle down for a few minutes. Thus this is not a 'practice' and it does not necessarily need a name – it's just part of setting people up for meditation, an expedient at the disposal of meditation teachers. The same applies to [one element of the second sense in which Sangharakshita used 'just sitting' in his original teaching, i.e.] a short period of just sitting for 'assimilation' at the end of a session of metta bhavana or mindfulness of breathing.

Sangharakshita commented that perhaps one doesn't need to give [either of the 'expedients' outlined in this paragraph] a label, so to speak. The second sense here [i.e. 'sitting on' at the end of a practice] is sometimes needed at the end of a puja – an atmosphere is generated that shouldn't be disturbed too quickly.

i.b) This expedient could also be used as a way of helping people who tend to engender strained or forced concentration to correct this unhelpful tendency.

ii. A separate period of just sitting on a retreat, after, say, a double period of mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana – this is the other element of the second sense in which Sangharakshita used 'just sitting' in his original teaching. This is also an expedient. It would be introduced as 'a period of just sitting', and perhaps with a very minimal comment, such as Sangharakshita apparently used sometimes to say in these circumstances, e.g. 'neither try to

make an effort nor not to make an effort'.

Sangharakshita remarked that when you do this, people will need little, or very little guidance. If they have practised meditation properly, the 'experience' will be there and remain. This is an opportunity to 'rest' in that and enjoy it, so to speak.

iii. Deliberately teaching the approaches to formless meditation, in an appropriate context where the above is already happening (much as in appended notes).

iv. The 'absolute' state or stage of formless meditation – here you are not 'doing' anything, it's just a matter of continuing in an insightful samadhi, or in a 'samatha-vipassana' state which is 'spontaneously present'. This could of course be realised through other means, so cannot, as such, be called a form of 'formless meditation' or 'just sitting'. Sangharakshita said that the rest [i.e. iii. and iv.] is ok, he had nothing to say about it.

f) Nomenclature: we suggested that i. above does not need to be referred to as 'just sitting' at all, as it is an expedient which meditation teachers could use as suggested, and that ii. and iii. could *both* be referred to as 'just sitting'. This would also serve to bring our usage into line with common Buddhist usage, i.e. 'just sitting' is the usual translation of *shikantaza*.

Sangharakshita commented that, as regards nomenclature, e) i. doesn't need to be referred to as 'just sitting'. He was not sure that we want ii. And iii. referred to as 'just sitting' as in 'shikantaza' because of the cultural baggage [associated with the term as used in Zen]. If people [asked to do this as 'just sitting'] were familiar with shikantaza they would assume that it meant 'sitting as a Buddha' or the like. He thought that the term 'shikantaza' should be avoided, and if 'just sitting' conveys that, then we need to find another expression instead of 'just sitting'. So ii. and iii. do require a common term, but not 'just sitting'. It needs thinking about clearly – we want a term unique to ourselves.

As there was no further opportunity during this forum to discuss this last point of Sangharakshita's, the question of a unique new term for 'just sitting' and/or 'formless meditation' has been deferred to next year's forum.

2. Insight practices within the Order

This is based on a summary of the discussion by Subhuti: By an 'Order insight practice' we mean the set of three core insight practices of which we recommend all Order members to have experience (i.e. the six element practice, nidana chain meditation and contemplation of the root verses of the Bardo Thodol). The principle is to keep this set of practices as the 'core', and Vajraloka is a 'guardian' of these insofar as these are what it

teaches on order insight retreats [the same set presumably being taught on the women's Order insight retreats]. But those who teach the Order insight retreats don't have to restrict themselves exclusively to the 'core' practices alone, as long as – in the case of other insight reflections – the connections to our basic principles are made clear to those coming on the retreats. (For example, a systematic reflection on the five skandhas would not be one of the core practices, but its relation to the basic principles which our insight practices embody would be quite clear.)

There is a latitude for individual Order members to practice pretty well whatever they want in terms of insight practice, as long as this doesn't compromise their going for refuge within the WBO by undermining the centrality of Going for Refuge, for instance through Tantric initiations or establishing relationships that superseded their ordination. Within the Order, the main thing is that we have a common basic vocabulary of practices, that most people can do.

Sangharakshita was asked: What are your thoughts about Order members doing other (traditional) insight reflections such as [reflection on the three laksanas, five skandhas etc.]? Is there any objection, in principle, to Order members taking up such practices in preference to one or more of the three recommended ones (presumably in consultation with their preceptors)? He replied that he did not see any objections – in the broader context they are all subsumed under the three laksanas so it all comes to the same thing. He added that one should not reflect on all three laksanas in the same session. One could concentrate on just one of them for a whole period of one's life. Also one should bear in mind the corresponding samadhis and reflect on those. The samadhis are not the subject of much discourse – the sunyata samadhi is most of all, but the other two are neglected. You would have to reflect on how to get from the laksana to the samadhi. All insight practices have the laksanas as 'background'. It's important, both in and outside of meditation, that people do reflect seriously on the laksanas and the samadhis.

He was also asked: to what extent are we free to explore new kinds [i.e. topics] of insight reflection altogether [e.g. a reflection on the 5 jnanas]? He replied that this is fine. He thought he recollected doing a reflection on the 5 jnanas years ago. It's a possible alternative to a meditation on the 4 sunyatas.

3a. Insight meditation / reflections for non-Order members

This part of our discussion arose from questions regarding the teaching of 'insightful reflections' to non-Order members on the 'Meditation and Insight' retreats at Vajraloka. It is clear that the three core 'Order insight practices' are not to be done by non-Order members, except with very rare exceptions (see below) and with the more regular exception of those about to be ordained doing the six element practice on their ordination retreat. However, there has been quite a lot of inconclusive discussion in the Order as to what extent any kind of 'insight' or 'reflection' practice is appropriate to non-Order members. The paragraphs below are based on Subhuti's comments and summaries of the discussion, except where otherwise indicated.

Anyone who connects with the Dharma must have a cognitive or reflective element in their practice. So how do we get them to engage with this in a way which will enable increasingly deeper realisation (that is, initially realisation in the nature of *sradha*, ultimately of *prajna*)? if non-Order members are in a setting which enables them to reflect in a meditative context – generally meaning a retreat – and they have sufficient understanding of basic dharma principles and enough concentration to be able to do it, then it is fine for them to do so. But it's important that you, as teachers, also have confidence in the general sanity of the people, meaning you must be clear that they have sufficient general emotional positivity. This is because to a weak or distorted mind, what seems straightforward and obvious to us may be seen in a very distorted way. I agree we're trying to help people move towards a realisation of the true nature of things, and that this needs to be built in to our teaching and our approach to meditation and practice generally, from the beginning. But there need to be plenty of safeguards to ensure things don't go askew. People do need a certain basic level of mental health before Ideas like impermanence and death can be tackled and this needs to be clear to the Order member who is teaching or leading.

But people at centres surely should be reflecting on broad Dharma principles. Rather than looking at reflection as 'watered down insight', it'd be better to look at insight as 'intensified reflection'. Deep reflection on Dharma is essential to Dharma practice at every stage, and a very helpful means of intensifying that, and building it in, is having it in your meditation practice. I think that people should take up reflection on, say, impermanence as an extension of the basic practices (e.g. at the end of the mindfulness of breathing, some simple reflection on the nature of the breath could be introduced in appropriate circumstances). I also think that perhaps in Dharma talks and study at centres we should be making it clearer that we're trying to bring about the conditions for

bhavanmayaprajna and give our talks and study sessions more 'bite', including at beginners' level – avoid the kind of blandness which can arise from trying not to 'upset' anyone.

Question: When is it appropriate for people to do a formulated insight practice (as in the Order insight practices)?

Subhuti: One of Sangharakshita's replies at the Rivendell forum suggests that if you have sufficient application to do these practices, you are ready to be ordained. In a movement such as ours, you have to make fairly 'blunt' decisions, and just say 'we don't do those types of insight meditations outside the Order' – otherwise, if you give people an inch they'll tend to take a mile. At the same time, of course, we can't absolutely prevent non-Order members from taking up such practices (which they can read about in Kamalashila's book or in the Guide to the Buddhist Path). It is always possible that it may be appropriate for one or two non-Order members, in consultation with the Ordination team, to do such a practice – this possibility cannot be totally excluded. The ability to benefit from general Dharmic reflection in meditation is quite distinct from readiness to take up a systematic insight practice such as the 'core' Order insight practices. The ability to sustain a systematic insight practice is probably, generally speaking, tantamount to readiness for ordination, so we wouldn't teach them to non-Order members or encourage them to do them.

Part of the problem in communicating this is perhaps that Order members (who teach) in general are not sufficiently aware of the nature of the connection between the general reflection on the Dharma that can be done by non-Order members and more systematic approach embodied by the Order insight practices. For example, we don't teach the 24 *nidana* reflection to non-Order members, but the underlying principle could at first be taught as an object of reflection in a very general way, e.g. by bringing attention to processes in peoples' lives. Then they could work in stages towards taking up the full practice after ordination from this basis. This would make it clearer that the Order practices in a sense 'emerge from' these more general dharmic reflections.

I think what the Vajraloka team have been leading for non-Order members on their 'Meditation and Insight Retreats' in terms of guided reflections is fine (e.g. simple reflections on impermanence, on Dharma texts, on the three marks and so forth.) Probably, some such reflections should be done much more extensively, even at quite early stages of people's involvement with meditation and the

movement. This would be relatively informal in terms of structure, but capable of being taken quite a long way, according to circumstances and the capacity of individuals to benefit from it.

The question arose as to what we can do about non-Order members who take up the Order insight practices. Subhuti commented that we can't stop them if they're determined, but we can communicate with them, for example conveying the benefits of getting a proper foundation, path of regular steps, and so on.

Sangharakshita commented that, as regards calling a retreat for non-Order members 'meditation and insight', he couldn't help feeling that 'reflection' is more appropriate and less liable to misunderstanding. In the Buddhist world today, 'insight' and 'insight meditation' have come to have very definite connotations that he would prefer us to avoid. He believed that often in the 'insight meditation' movement, so-called 'insight' cultivated in the absence of dhyana may be merely reflection. This is bound up with confusions about the hindrances and a disregard of the importance of overcoming them, at least temporarily. In the insight meditation movement there is also often a separation of insight from Buddhism itself. These are all the modern connotations that go with 'insight', so this term doesn't fit very well with our approach (which is the traditional Buddhist approach). He suggested that perhaps we could use the term 'vipashyana' (Sanskrit), rather than either 'vipassana' (Pali) or 'insight meditation' because of the associations of the latter two with the 'Insight Movement'. However, Chandrabodhi pointed out that in India the Goenka movement use 'vipashyana' as well as 'vipassana'. Sangharakshita suggested that we look for a completely different term, in Pali or Sanskrit, which embodies the principle but does not have the connotations of 'vipassana' / 'insight'. One suggestion made in the meeting was 'vidarshana', which has similar connotations to 'vipashyana' [This area is being researched – in the meantime in this document 'vipashyana' will be used to indicate 'our' approach.]

Sangharakshita commented that it is possible to do reflection without dhyana, but of course the more concentrated you are, the more effective it is. There is no sort of force behind vipashyana unless there is some fairly substantial experience of dhyana. Yogi Chen goes into this, speaking of dhyana as the 'concentrated force' needed to fuel the vipashyana experience. Sangharakshita said that reflection becomes vipashyana only with considerable experience of dhyana in-between. Formally, the test of vipashyana is change of behaviour. [On a point of clarification of Sangharakshita's terms here, he agreed that 'reflection' as he was using it could also be rendered 'cultivation of insight', and that 'vipashyana' could be rendered as 'arising of insight'.]

Sangharakshita's impression was that dhyanic experience is not so unusual among people in the Movement. Subhuti replied that his own impression was that it's relatively rare, (though maybe people could achieve dhyana under certain circumstances). Sangharakshita commented that the reason people don't get into dhyana is – obviously – because they don't overcome the hindrances. However, they cannot overcome the hindrances unless they attempt mindfulness in their everyday life and avoid circumstances which give rise to the hindrances in their everyday actions. So it is not a question of only tackling them in meditation – all day, every day, you have to be on the alert for the hindrances and counteract them.

On the general question of 'insight practice' for non-order members, Sangharakshita commented that 'reflection', as we're using that term, is not inappropriate for them. Vipashyana on the whole is inappropriate for a particular reason: an Order member is committed to enlightenment, the transcendental, by virtue of going for refuge, and vipashyana aims at transcendental realisation. But people can only aim at that if they have faith in that goal – which, normally, non-Order members do not have. This is not to rule out the occasional exceptional person who could possibly be taught on an individual basis, but with regard to such exceptional people, teachers would have to exercise discretion and know what they were doing.

3b. Summary of subsequent discussion arising from above points by Sangharakshita

Subhuti: Regarding Sangharakshita's emphasis on the 'dhyana-centred' approach, this was very much a reemphasis of his essential perspective. Sangharakshita's main concern is that our approach to meditation and mindfulness doesn't become 'contaminated' by the more limited view of insight and mindfulness often found in the 'new insight' ('Vipashyana') tradition – that this should not undermine what he thinks is fundamental.

Questions arise around the issue of forcing or straining attention in order to get into dhyana, rather than working appropriately 'where you are' – a great many people don't think they have much if any experience of dhyana. [Subhuti] was struck by Sangharakshita's emphasis that people are not getting into dhyana because of hindrances, and they're in the hindrances because of doing little to avoid getting into situations which exacerbate the hindrances in everyday life. E.g. getting involved in romance (and many other kinds of distraction) makes people's minds very turbulent – the way they live in their ordinary

life circumstances is very distracted and they just give themselves up to it.

Bodhananda: the whole thing of everyday mindfulness needs engendering by training people to overcome their habitual way of doing things.

Subhuti: it still doesn't quite hit the nail on the head. Sangharakshita's concern is really more to do with consideration of others. The FWBO is quite good at this on the whole. But nevertheless, we're dealing with the general decay of manners and appropriate formality. People often just don't know how to behave in a considerate and sensitive way. It brings in issues such as neatness, aesthetic awareness, cleanliness, etiquette. It's a lot to do with the whole atmosphere you create. Sangharakshita constantly refers mindfulness to issues of consideration, smoothness and non-forgetfulness. For mindfulness retreats and the like, it's a question of doing what we're already doing in a context of these broader issues. For instance, you may need to pick up on an item of etiquette and keep on talking about it until it gets through.

4. Mindfulness Retreats

Subhuti commented that we need to be cautious not to get involved in teaching mindfulness and the foundations in the kind of narrow, stylised way that they are sometimes taught elsewhere in the Buddhist world. Mindfulness is a term whose denotations and connotations cover almost the whole of the spiritual life. In the FWBO it often tends to be reduced to a) mindfulness of the breath, and b) of the body and its movements. Our teaching needs to take into account not only sati (smṛti) and sampajanna (samprajanya), but also the implications of appamada (apramada), which brings out the ethical dimension of mindfulness.

Sangharakshita commented that there needs to be a much greater awareness of mindfulness in a general, ordinary sense. He notices still that people are very unmindful in everyday activities and emphasised that we need to put much, much more emphasis on this. One should be able to see the difference, [in the department of Order members] – there should be no gross unawareness or unmindfulness. Especially at centres, Order members should take care of how they speak, move and behave.

5. How could 'peripheral practices' ultimately become 'core practices'?

A recurring feature of our discussions was the relationship between 'core' practices in the FWBO and WBO and 'peripheral' ones – e.g. ones that may possibly only be done in that particular form by a single Order member. The core practices of either the Order or the Movement as a whole are not a fixed and finalised set – new core practices

could well emerge over time. Subhuti summarised this by outlining how he thought a peripheral (insight) practice might, ultimately, develop into a core practice. Subhuti: This involves a progressive series of issues: a) Whatever new practices an Order member wishes to do personally should be worked out in discussion with his or her kalyana mitras, private preceptors, and so on. The main thing to be aware of here is that any new practice taken on does not tend to lead the individual to lose contact with the Order as a whole and breach fundamental principles. b) The Order member may then want to introduce this new practice, personally, to other Order members. This is all right as long as the Order member makes clear the basis on which it is done, i.e. that he or she developed the practice, that it is not one of the core practices and that it does not replace the core practices. c) The Order member may then wish to make the practice more generally available within the Order. In this case, he or she should ask around, especially discuss it with preceptors, kalyana mitras, etc, keep people informed, and then do it. d) The Order member may then think that the practice deserves to become part of the 'core curriculum' within the Order. This would require a much clearer process of consultation within the Preceptors College and Council before it could be adopted. e) If it was proposed that the practice also be used within the FWBO, this again would need clear ratification by the Preceptors' College and Council.

6. Introduction of 'new' pujas

Sometimes, 'non-standard' pujas are used for special purposes at Vajraloka and elsewhere in the FWBO. The question has been raised as to whether, and to what extent, the use of non-standard pujas is acceptable within the FWBO. Subhuti felt that what is being done in this area at Vajraloka, at least, seems unproblematic (this consists in the use of several pujas on retreats, compiled from various sources, mainly to particular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in combination with the 'standard' ones). This general area is flagged for further discussion and clarification at a future date. Subhuti noted that we need to maintain a living reference to what we could call the 'core pujas' – i.e. they need to be a 'real' core that all in the Movement know and practice. The Sevenfold and Short (Threefold) pujas are those that should be consistently done.

7. Mantra chants

The question also arose as to how we should regard the introduction of new and different chanted tunes to the mantras we commonly use in our pujas and so on. Subhuti did not think there was any need to regulate the introduction of 'new' chants, as it tends to be self-regulating. Dreadful chants appear from time to time and then tend to disappear! Order members should just be clear that the standard mantras in the Sevenfold Puja are those of Avalokitesvara and Padmasambhava, but occasional variations on this (as in special pujas) are ok – i.e. different mantras can be used.

8. People who have received practices from outside the FWBO

The question here was: If people have come to the FWBO from after practising with other Buddhist organisations, should they be encouraged to stop doing practices they have previously received (assuming these are considerably different from the practices we do in the FWBO)? Subhuti felt it would be best if they did what everyone else is doing. However, if they had very strong feelings, he felt we should not make a big issue about it. Of course, there is no way that people can be forced. Vajradaka noted that if they were doing practices (such as inner tantra completion stage yogas) that are completely outside the experience of most Order members, it would be better if they could be persuaded to give these up on the basis that Order members simply would have no experience on which to give them help or advice.

9. Metta bhavana

Sangharakshita responded to the following point: "People can reflect on the fact that when you develop metta you are wishing not just mundane happiness which changes and ends, but ultimate happiness, which only arises from insight". He said that this is quite an important point. You cannot bring this element in with people whose interest is only psychological. At least some mitras – and even Order members – have a very subjective, psychological view of metta as "feeling good". In the Shabda before last, for example, an Order member quoted a letter from a mitra or friend where [the mitra or friend] stated his opinion that you practice metta bhavana to increase self-esteem. Sangharakshita said that we should be on the lookout for those sorts of wrong ideas. There is too much emphasis on a subjective idea of metta. It is self-referential. Metta, in the long run, is concerned with one's attitude to other people. Some mitras and friends lose sight of this. So make sure that it is not seen in those terms.

Subhuti reported on other comments that Sangharakshita has made concerning metta recently. Apart from the example just above,

Sangharakshita also heard more recently that a mitra had been doing the metta bhavana with all the stages devoted to himself, and that a number of people had been doing just the first stage.

Sangharakshita's comments above apply to these examples as well. Sangharakshita had also remarked that the 'classic' phrases which he originally used to teach people were not all being taught now. These are not only "may I / they be happy, may I be well", but also "may I be free from suffering", and "may I progress", the last of which should lead to reflection on "where do my true interests lie"?

Sangharakshita went further: really everybody cherishes themselves, even if they lack confidence or self-esteem. Real self-hatred is very rare indeed (Sangharakshita was not sure that he had ever encountered it). Even this is still probably underlain by a feeling that "I'm uniquely despicable" or the like, i.e. a sense of one's own uniqueness and importance. In the first stage of the metta bhavana what you do is to identify your already existing self-cherishing or self-love. Metta is taught too much in terms of having a 'nice feeling'. In fact, you want to identify the natural self-love you have as a human being. Then, on this basis, you consider those you bring to mind in the other stages as dear to themselves in the same way, and therefore you can begin to sympathise with them, which is the beginnings of metta. Sangharakshita's point is that metta, from a mundane point of view, comes from recognising your already existing self-love (even if you're rather perverse about it), i.e. self-cherishing. So this means teaching metta less from a psychological point of view and more from realisation of one's existential position.

Suvajra pointed out that people often don't make the distinction between self-cherishing and self-esteem. Subhuti: The other (more psychological) approach could only be secondary – you may have to work on your self-attitude, but that is not what metta bhavana is about. It's better even for people who lack self-esteem and self-confidence to work on cultivating metta in the way Sangharakshita describes. This way it is less easily sentimentalised, and there is also more of a reflective element to it – you're asking people to think more fully about the implications of metta. [Subhuti recommended the Karaniya Metta Sutta and Ti Ratana Vandana seminars, which go into some of these areas.]