DR. MERCHANT: I don't exactly remember the day on which Samuel Lewis walked into my office at the Sigaram college.

WALI ALI: This was in Bombay?

DR. MERCHANT: In Bombay; it could possibly be '59. But before that he had written a letter addressed to my professor, Professor Wadia and myself, who had written a book on Economics called "Our Economic Problem."

WALI ALI: I know he always spoke very highly of his work.

DR. MERCHANT: And he spoke well too, he had written a very appreciative letter regarding that book; that is how I came to know of him first. We jointly replied to him also at that time, that was in 1956, then of course there were one or two letters in between, I don't exactly remember, but in 1959 he came to my office, introduced himself to me, and I immediately remembered that letter that he had written to me, and then we had quite a long chat on all the problems of the world, especially world brotherhood, peace, non-violence etc. Then I took him to Professor Pir Wadia, my guru and I introduce them and then I had to go away from my office—and Samuel, Sam, stayed with Professor Wadia for two hours. He talked with him on all sorts of things as Professor Wadia was an all-rounder; he was such a fine man, he was like my father, see. He was my professor, I learned under him in the college days and since then I have been in touch with him and we became joint authors of three books. Now Sam was so much impressed by the old man. In fact later on he wrote a letter to me and called him Maestro, and occasionally we exchanged letters. I used to always send him Christmas greeting cards. One of the letters he showed me was a reply to my letter. I retired from the college in 1965, then I joined the Delhi Commission as a member appointed by the Government of India, and I received a letter from him. Now that letter must have been, I think in '67 or perhaps '66, I am not sure, and then he was planning to come to India, and he had some problem about some friends, and he had asked me as to what he should do. Some friend of his had asked him to send something and he was worried about that because of customs and all that—I don't exactly remember. I hope I will be able to find that letter. And I replied to him. I wrote a letter to him in March, 1970. He replied to me after a few days, and he wrote about Beorse, Bryn Beorse, Shamcher; then Shamcher wrote to me and sent me a book about Professor—Deepak what was that book, do you see? that one book that he wrote? And under the Kennedy government he had prepared that report—and he wanted to get it published, so he wrote to me, and he informed me that Sam was no more. I didn’t know, because I had sent a letter, and I didn’t hear from him and I was unaware that he had passed away. Then Bryn Beorse wrote a very nice letter to me about him, and since then I have been occasionally writing to Beorse, and from him I learned quite a lot about Samuel Lewis. As a matter of fact, I didn’t know about all the theory of Sufism etc. He never talked about himself, he talked about what were my
interests: economics, sociology, philosophy and business, but he didn’t tell me much about Sufism. And he was the most impressive person that I’ve come across—most self-effacing, a very simple sort of man and I was very much impressed by him. It was a great experience for me to meet him and to correspond with him, but it was unfortunate that I couldn’t get in greater touch with him. It would have been a pleasure and a privilege, but he was so much taken up by Pir Wadia for whom he had a very high regard. Professor Wadia had written a book in 1935 called "Wealth of India," with another man called Joshi and that book he had read. It seemed that he was a very, very learned man and his interests were very wide; it was not merely religion, not merely Sufism, but philosophy and—

WALI ALI: Science—

DR. MERCHANT: And trying to tackle with the world problems. There is a matter in one of these letters that is that copy, you’ve got that letter. I also took a wider outlook, and I was always discussing in my letters to friends etc, about problems—world problems, the problems that are agitating my mind. At that time in one of my last letters—(interruption here)—

SABIRA: I want to just say that something that Samuel Lewis said to Prof. Merchant was, "I should like to be accepted because of achievement, not of personality. Just as previously rejections came via personality, not because of knowledge or achievement." He was always rejected because of the way he appeared, and he also wanted to be accepted for the way he was—

DR. MERCHANT: Yes, not a man of word, but a man of action.

SABIRA: Yeah, right.

DR. MERCHANT: He only wanted to mold the policy, therefore he always met the people who counted in every country—

SABIRA: That’s what he tried to do—

DR. MERCHANT: He had written—and was in touch with—Professor Radhakrishnan who became the President of India—

SABIRA: Right.

DR. MERCHANT: Also he was in touch with—who also later became the President of India—

SABIRA: Who was this?

DR. MERCHANT: Sam was in touch with various personalities who later became Presidents of India, the Republic of India: Professor Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Hussan and Dr. Giri, V.V. Giri—
SABIRA: Yeah, that's the one, and he mentioned, he mentions there about Dr. Giri wondering something about—what was it he said here about Dr. Giri? He said, "There is a question in my mind as to how—

DR. MERCHANT: (reading from excerpts of a letter from Sam) "There is a question in my mind as to how far he may actually believe in what he said—"

SABIRA: Can you comment on that?

DR. MERCHANT: (speaking to Deepak in Indian language) —Now here is a question about, "Thank you for your introduction to the Jain Saint—

DR. MERCHANT: I just remembered he was attending the Temple of Understanding Conference in Geneva—one of the Jain Saints in Bombay Chitravani, who is now in New York was also there, and you must have met him when you were there. You must have also gone to that Conference—

WALI ALI: No, I didn't go to the Conference, but I met him at—

DR. MERCHANT: But you met him at the Temple of Understanding in the other Conference?

WALI ALI: Yes, I met him some—he has been traveling to a lot of conferences—

DR. MERCHANT: So I had written to Sam that this man is coming to Chitranvani, and that he should meet him, and then this correspondence.... Now here there was the question, "I am also carrying an address by your esteemed vice-president, V.V. Giri, although there is a question in my mind as to how far he may actually believe in what he said, and how far he intends to implement this. Words are so easy. This country is full of dualists."

Now it is quite true, because after all Giri was and is a politician and politicians are always making words—they give a rosy picture, they put up ideas—they are never sincere. It is true all over the world; I have no faith in politicians at all. Politicians are politicians by nature and they do not distinguish between means and ends. For them, any means is good enough. Now, I do not believe in that. As Gandhi has taught us to achieve a noble end, your means must also be noble, because if you use ignoble means for achieving even a noble end, the result is not-good. Non-violence must be not merely in speech, in heart and action also, in heart particularly, because I may appear to be non-violent, I speak about non-violence but if in my mind there is evil or violence then that is no good.

WALI ALI: What we are doing now in the Middle East is we are trading with all the parties involved. We are over there doing business with the Israelis, we do business with the Arabs of all kinds. We are in Egypt, are in Syria, we’re making people to people contact with these people and just by commerce; understanding, and I think this is—he was very, Murshid—Sam was very practical, you
know, and he wanted to do things, to make something happen, not talk about it.

DR. MERCHANT: He was essentially a man of action—

WALI ALI: Yes, right—

DR. MERCHANT: And not merely a man of ideas and ideals—

WALI ALI: He had a great deal of knowledge in areas of soil reclamation, and desert reclamation, reforestation, and the salinity problems, and he wanted to deal with—in India—the whole Indus River complex and take it up into greater and more proper understanding using some of the scientific methods that were available, and the same in the Middle East dealing with the problems of the people in the area, not trusting to the politicians to solve it and use some problems as political football.

DR. MERCHANT: Now here this touches me—I am reading his letter—he said that our outlook is the same and you are the same policies etc, but "I do not know how far your government will accept you," and putting this letter in the hands of the Consul for India, possibly in San Francisco, I don't know,

WALI ALI: Yes—

DR. MERCHANT: "But I do not know how far it will be helpful," Now I must say that I do not know to what extent our books had any influence, I cannot say that, but the economic problems—the book was written in 1943. We were perhaps the first to preach for a planned economy for India. In those days the war was going on and the British Government was there, and we never imagined that we would be independent so soon, but as a result of the second World War conditions all over the world changed, and India became independent. Then in 1950, the planning commission was appointed and a sort of planning did take place in India, but the way in which the planning developed is quite different from what we had thought and we had written. Professor Wadia and myself wrote two books on planning, one criticism of the Bombay plan which was published in '44 by seven top industrialists of the country and then the government Planning Commission took up the first five year plan, and for that also we had written a criticism, and then we had something very doubtful about the way in which the planning was initiated in that plan, and it was sort of a mixed economy and we thought it might be a mixed up economy. And instead of getting the best of both worlds you might get the worst of both the governments. And to a great extent that is true. And the third five year plan I was appointed a member of the advisory committee of the panel of economists, but I found out that we didn't have much impact. See, at that time economists were popular all over the world, and therefore economists, as one of my friends put it, "have come into the world." But later on you find that economists prove to be false prophets and today we are in disgrace everywhere. Today
in America, for example the problem is of inflation and rising unemployment, a problem that cannot be solved by any economists. When Nielson, who is a Noble Laureate in Economics raised up his hands and said that we have no solution to that because if you try to contain inflation you increase unemployment; if you try to reduce unemployment, you increase inflation—it is a vicious circle. So all over the world these problems are there, but despite all these things our country has been able to contain inflation in the last year and a half and that is a sort of an economic miracle I would say. But the new—I do not want to talk about, there are some affairs and problems but one thing is certain—

WALI ALI: I think this is very interesting because I wanted to draw out what your economic theories were, and so on, because this is quite relevant. You know in the early 1930’s Sam wrote a book along with Luther Whiteman called, "Glory Roads," dealing with some of the early economic experiments in California which were very—the social credit and the cooperatives and the various kinds of—

DR. MERCHANT: No that was the cause in 1930 of the great depression and the huge problem of unemployment. Now that’s where new theories came up and gave means to our book, this was published in 1935, and when Roosevelt applied that theory to this country, then there was the New Deal, though later on the New Deal was declared to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The New Deal was that, a method of financing to solve the problem of unemployment, but this theory applied to developed countries, not to developing countries, and we in Indian College made a mistake in taking up the Western concepts and the Western theories and trying to apply them improperly, and in conditions for getting that—our conditions are different from those of the Western countries. That was one our greatest problems. In one of the editions of "Our Economic Problem," we had pinpointed this fact that a new economy should develop an economic theory to give to (?) developing countries, and Gunnar Myrdal who was the first Swedish economist, and one of the first to write a book on the economics of underdeveloped countries has mentioned us in that connection, but we have not been able to develop that—and a number of books have been written about underdeveloped countries. Yet the main thing is that the economic forces have to work in a particular social..

WALI ALI: Would you have any comment to make on how the Chinese situation is relevant?

DR. MERCHANT: Right. Unfortunately we do not have mulch information about China, much less true information about China. Another thing is that unfortunately there is a war between China and India and this has shattered our relations. Now relations seem to be improving, and therefore we have neglected the study of Chinese experiment. But I do believe that the Chinese experiment perhaps is more adaptable to our conditions, because one phenomenal fact about our country is a very great population—

WALI ALI: That's right—that's one reason why I brought up the Chinese situation—
DR. MERCHANT: The population is increasing at the rate of 2.2% per annum, perhaps more, and we had warned against this increasing population as of 1943. And we have said that however high the tempo of industrialization may be, unless we check the growth of our population, we will not achieve, we will not move forward. Now we just proved that when we wrote, we were thirty gross; today we are sixty gross, and despite all the development that has taken place in the last five year plan—25 years—conditions have not improved and the method by which we accrue development has left us with distorted patterns The condition of wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer people, and this has had repercussions on the political situation. I would not like to discuss the present political situation, for that is a different issue altogether, but I do believe that the conditions conspire to develop the emergency—what is called the emergency. Now many people have the wrong notion that emergency has led to the country’s destruction of democracy and loss of liberty etc., but so far as I am concerned I do not believe in this form of democracy from the very beginning because Democracy of a formal type: election, parliament, etc. does rot solve the problem. You must tell Democracy as a Way of life, it must be social democracy where the people ultimately raise up to the high levels, because ultimately what is Democracy? Democracy is the rule of reason; if the common man is allowed to rule by reason then you get the high level of society—high level of social life, social consciousness, and then automatically the country will improve. What happens when politicians take advantage of that, look at, for example, elections that take place in Democracies. You require funds for elections, and funds lent to the government by some political party or when some industrial tycoon gives millions of dollars—he expects a return, and therefore the government machinery, the political machinery parliaments and what not passes bills, passes laws that are compatible to these individuals. That happens all over the world, it happens in America also, and so now we see so many scandals that are coming up about various politicians and having taken up money for elections etc. Apart from the other things that have come up—and so there is the root problem of our Democracy, is how do you solve this problem of elections?

WALI ALI: I know he was quite—Murshid Sam was quite impressed with some of the economic solutions as they existed in the genuine Ashrams situations in India where the dedication was spiritual and religious and where all the money was pooled in a very Communistic way, but at the same time very smooth.

DR. MERCHANT: The Communistic way is also not the solution. Only good solution to economy is Gandhian, it is the simple life. Now what it requires is—today what it is—the main thing—accepting life should be plain living and high thinking. Today we have got high living and plain thinking!!

WALI ALI: This is why I am so encouraged with the present Governor we have of California. He is the first person that has had anything sane to say in politics. He says that you have to reduce your expectations. This is this insanity of always wanting more and more—

DR. MERCHANT: And more and more and more—
WALI ALI: That's what makes (two voices here—)

DR. MERCHANT: That is what you call the revolution of the rising expectations. Now for the poor, developing countries that type of revolution is a curse, not a blessing.

WALI ALI: It is not effective for everybody, it is only for the few—

DR. MERCHANT: Right, you see what happens is, when you have a small population and you grow, even though here the common man has a high style of living, but in a country like ours where 80% of the people are living religious—there is no standard of living, there is a standard of existence, even minimum needs are not available. People are starving, millions of people are starving. There you can't talk like that, there you can't talk about liberty and political liberty and parliament, etc. nobody—the common man is not interested. It is true that man does not live by bread alone, but he must have bread to exist, if you do not have enough to eat to exist, there is not much use living, so in a country like India there is a problem of existence, a problem of starvation. Now how do you solve this problem? That is the main thing, and therefore all these theories are not working and therefore what Gandhi had, of course what you might say, in the modern technological world, perhaps he was a Utopian, but I think from the logical (?) point of view with the world economy and development, ultimately we will open Gandhian methods. Ultimately! Now the economies are always talking about zero growth, what is the idea of zero growth? They are already talking about saturation of population! They are always talking about exhaustion of resources—we are living beyond our means, and I am taking the world as a whole, and if that is so then what is the solution? And with the nuclear armaments and the rivalry of great powers (?) it is just under God (?) that something might ignite the war, and the whole thing might be destroyed. It is the fear that is keeping the super powers in check. It is not that they don't want, but the fear of annihilation and so we are again in the political circumstance of coming back to the idea of balance of power. Now this is also a very dangerous thing: now look at what is happening in Lebanon, According to my analysis, it is not the Lebanon people, nor is it Christians and Moslems, now it is not a fight to include religions—(?)

WALI ALI: Oh I know that!

DR. MERCHANT: No, it is not that, it is a fight of the super powers for getting either—they call it Leftists and Rightists, but these are all nomenclatures, these are all shibboleths, there isn't a thing today in the world, there is nothing like left and right. You must have a proper perspective and that what is really missing. I don't know—and politicians are, of course, making a mess of it—one doesn't know how the world is going to—now today I feel very sad, and I am almost at the end of my life that I should say that; I will be 70 in next February, and when I look back in the year 1921 when I was a young boy studying in school, the call from Mahatma Gandhi came. And I left the school for two years—and I thought in those days that we were inspired by Gandhi and we had such talks of the future of India. We did become independent and the way we developed has saddened me
completely. And Mahatma Gandhi was murdered, as you know, in 1949 and he died a broken-hearted man because he knew that whatever he had built up had gone. These very disciples of Gandhi-ji had betrayed Gandhism, his idea. And that is one thing I can say about Sam, he wrote to me, "I should like to be accepted because of achievement not of personality just as previously rejections came via personality and not because of knowledge or achievement. Now, as I told you earlier, he impressed me terribly as not only as a very colorful personality that way, and it was knowledge and achievement, but as a self-effacing man; he never thought about his own achievement; he never boasted about that. Of course he was always a man of action, these ideas were that (?), but that's why he met a number of big people who counted so that he could influence policy, and I think in one of the letters he had referred to me that his teachings—his books were accepted as a course by the University of California for credit. So to that extent his work was a sort of achievement which would influence the policy.

WALI ALI: I want to tell you just a little bit about what we are doing. One of the things he started were these—he called them Dances of Universal Peace—he said he got the inspiration when he was meditating in Fatehpur Sikri. So we do these dances which he started which involve sacred phrases from all the world's religions. They are spreading all over; they have spread all over America and Europe and now there is going to be a camp in Israel where we are bringing together Muslims and Christians and Arabs and Jews and—all together, all together—one party won't believe that the other person has something good in them—

DR. MERCHANT: Everybody has something good—

WALI ALI: And so we find these ways of bringing people together by dancing together and doing these various things, so I think it is—right in the midst of this troubled area to bring this kind of meditation and concentration of peace and joy, I feel like this is the mission of Gandhi in the Middle East to work in this way.

DR. MERCHANT: Ultimately I believe some good will come out of this—

WALI ALI: I believe there is a lot of hope now in the young people—

DR. MERCHANT: My teacher Wadia used to tell me, he said, "Merchant don't be a pessimist."

WALI ALI: Yeah.

DR. MERCHANT: We are not pessimistic, there are millions, there are generations and nations to come, and ultimately Jerusalem will be there also. He always used to tell me that, and when I used to be in a bad mood, I was in a depressed mood, I used to go to him and I would talk with him for ten minutes and all my blues would run away—
WALI ALI: And Shamcher, you know, is like this, an inveterate optimist he is always, he is always ready to believe in changing the world

DR.: My friend is a great optimist (two talking at once here).

WALI ALI: Why not? You know—people can feel your (two tallying at once).

DR. MERCHANT: Of course Sam was a very, very big optimist, I know that I used to feel that when I talked with him—I remember now not too much because it was 1958 '59, but it is quite a matter with Beorse also, I am writing that, and I will express my blessing but he is also quite an optimist. He is a very active man, and I hope that before I leave that I will be able to meet him.

WALI ALI: Yeah, I'm sure that he would like that.

DR. MERCHANT: I wrote him that we are destined to meet. Therefore I am coming here, then he was to remain in New York to meet me if I could come on the tenth; I came on the fifth. I rang him up and he could not get in touch with us earlier, then I told him that I am coming to Calif. and I said I would come to L.A. and as soon as I came to L.A. I rang him up and I told him that I am coming to S. F. and which would be more convenient to him? He said, S.F. would be more convenient. This was about ten days back. And yesterday after we came we rang him up and he rang up Sabira and we are here, but I hope that I am here until the end of Sept. I will be going to Indianapolis and then to Rochester, and I am staying with him until the end of Sept. So I hope that I will—

WALI ALI: I am sure that you will have a meeting with Beorse before you leave.

DR. MERCHANT: I think we will—

WALI ALI: He is very active, you know, especially he is trying to influence certain thinking in economics and politics and—

DR. MERCHANT: Yes, I know, I am very in touch with him. He has sent me books, and he wrote that novel—

WALI ALI: Yeah.

DR. MERCHANT: "Island of Happiness," he has sent me a copy of that and there are two. Out of about him, He told me, he wrote to me, I don't know why and we have missed; as a matter of fact I was worried about that, so I went to the library and looked up this reference work and found out that I was right because he was a much learned man than what I am. I have very little knowledge as compared to him—my knowledge is very little, I tell you very frankly, I am a student of everything, but philosophy I don’t know very much, and Sufism I know very little of, and about religions—only
the last 3 or 4 years I am devoting myself more to Upanishads and all that, philosophy. I was interested because of the influence of Prof. Wadia – but I have not been deeply into that, the only book that impressed me terribly was the Bahagavad Gita.

WALI ALI: Yes—

DR Merchant: You must have heard about, Neem Karoli Baba of India, the Gandhi’s teacher and disciple, the best man today from a certain point of view; now he has written a discourse on Gita and that I have read and re-read because for suddenly I have come to believe that there are better books than Gita for a person to guide in his life.

WALI ALI: I certainly agree with that; I think we should go up; supper is soon so that we will be in time—

DR. MERCHANT: And during my last year's depression (?) because of my wife's death this Gita impressed me terribly, I can say that, and I have been reading that, but I have not been able to read any other thing. I want to give up all my research work and all that, and give myself an opportunity to read and write. He sent me a lot of materials and—

WALI ALI: What is your field?

DEEPAK: Business Administration, Operations and Economics.

WALI ALI: Very good.